



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #1 — OCT. 24, 2011**

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

INDEX: Click here.

Friends of the Middle: Who We Are

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Oct. 24, 2011)

Welcome to our first "official" publication! This is part of our effort to expand, while reducing the number of emails in your inbox. Starting with this first issue, all the fascinating discussions will appear, daily, in this one email publication. Normally (starting tomorrow) our provocative and informative daily op-ed article will appear here, in place of this introduction. Further below, you will find yesterday's piece, along with the comments and replies of group members. This will be our usual daily pattern, but this first issue requires some introduction.

Soon, almost all of our past and all of our ongoing and future discourse will appear on:
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>.

Who We Are

In early 2007, a lively online political discussion developed among myself and several of my friends. The subject was the candidates, political parties, and how the differing approaches might help solve America's problems. Some of us were Republicans, some Democrats, some more independent. What we shared was a concern about the state and future of America and a passion to learn the truth, wherever that might lead us.

That tradition has continued and grown to the point where we have outgrown simple emails. Hence, our new, more official organization, newsletter, and website. Many of our current group members have some tie to Indiana. Some of us are from there, like myself, some of us live there, and some of us went to college there. For some of them, all three apply. What is important to us is that we are a diverse group of Americans seeking a brighter tomorrow for our beloved, oft-maligned, and troubled nation.

As the group grows, now that we have a more assured path for growth, this sort of Indiana center will probably become lost. But I hope that practical, friendly, open, Hoosier way of dealing with the world will continue and flourish.

We don't believe one person, or one group, or one political party or philosophy has all the answers. We believe all of us have a lot to learn by sharing information and ideas, so that each of us can reach our own, informed conclusions. We reject radicalism on both ends of the spectrum and deplore the current movement in American politics toward non-communication, non-consensus, and non-functionality. We seek common ground and agreement. We seek practical, reasonable, working solutions that do not pit class against class. While we are not afraid to be led by the facts in unusual directions in order to find creative answers, in general, we prefer tweaks to revolutionary turnabouts.

We are most focused on seeking to restore the American Dream as a real possibility for as many of our countrymen as possible.

Our Concerns (in no particular order)

Several subjects, out of the entire political, economic, and social spectrum, have gained particular prominence in our ongoing discussions. While we try to place as few constraints as possible on group activities, these are the subjects that appear to be near and dear to current group members:

1. The 2012 primaries, elections, and candidates
2. Education (at all levels)
3. Taxes
4. Jobs—their loss & how to regain them
5. Campaign finance reform
6. Un-electing all members of Congress in
7. "Free" trade
8. The influence of big money on politics
9. Lobbying & lobbyists
10. Term limits
11. Amending the Constitution
12. Government regulations
13. Third party possibilities
14. Present and recent Administrations
15. Affordable healthcare (incl. insurance, rising costs, socialization, Medicare, PPACA)
16. Social Security & retirement in general
17. Class vs. class in America
18. Energy
19. Global warming
20. Immigration, legal and illegal
21. War, the wars, veterans affairs
22. Deficit spending and budget cuts
23. Welfare
24. Capitalism
25. American small business
26. World markets, the housing bubble, and bailout
27. China, Europe, etc.
28. 2012 voting and election issues

Express Your Two Cents Worth

We cordially invite your replies and comments to anything you see written here. The simplest method is to simply reply to this email. In the future, you will have the option of subscribing, commenting, etc., from the website.

We hope that as many members as possible will take advantage of the opportunities presented to speak their minds. This could be in the form of a reply, comment, or question or you could write a lead op-ed article of your own for publication. Many of our members prefer to simply read. We love them equally! ☺

For your comments or writing to be published, we need you to choose a user name. If you wish to write a reply to a specific group member (by user name), let us know so we can group threads together.

Whenever you quote another writer or article, please cite your source or we will not be able to use the quote because of possible copyright infringement.

Everything submitted by members will be published the following day (with the possible exception of personal attacks or indecency, those take a while longer, haha). It's OK to insult public figures or philosophies or

organizations (they're people too, right?), but not individuals in the group or other private citizens. The price of fame is that public figures are fair game. Definitely politicians!

We do not share email addresses except in the one case where two group members notify us that they wish to communicate with each other external to the group.

FotM NEWSLETTER #1 (Oct. 24, 2011)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

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20111023-01	05:35	SteveB	"LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus"
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The subject of the article below—8000 homeless vets in LA, alone—makes me very angry. At least maybe they are finally doing something about it (a new VA project), but funds will probably be cut after the Super Committee deadlocks, the US suffers further credit rating cuts, and, as I understand it, across the board cuts will be made to "discretionary spending".

I know Bill Gates does a lot, and so do many other of the now famous 1%, but despite their increases in wealth, they don't seem to be taking care of these problems, even though most of them seem to support the wars, or at least did support them. I don't necessarily blame these folks, though. It just isn't getting done. A lot of us help the veterans and veterans organizations, especially we veterans, I hope. But it must not be nearly enough. Right? If not now, when? The rich are richer and the poor are poorer and need help more than at other times. Taxes are low. Why not now? We help even our enemies, like Pakistan?

I know the problems are big, but we are told we can cut all this money for the poor and charitable donations will pick up the slack. It doesn't seem to be happening and I, myself, wouldn't expect it to. This is, unfortunately, the legitimate role of the government and it is not fulfilling its obligations to its own most cherished.

But, I don't know, maybe the plight of these veterans is their own fault. What's wrong with them that they can't just try harder? Why don't they get off their lazy butts and look for jobs? Maybe they'd be better off if they paid more taxes? Why don't they fulfill their mysterious responsibility to society? I rest my case.

More lies: Michelle Bachmann (paraphrase), "My NH campaign staff has not resigned en masse. The other candidates are spreading false rumors to try to destroy me." The truth: it looks like all 5 quit and at some have

gone to work for other campaigns. The chief said he called the national organization at least the day before the above response she gave to a questioning reporter. Even if she and her staff didn't lie, how could they be so ignorant as to what was going on in their own campaign? How can a person like this be POTUS?

"LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" by Dr. Sanjay Gupta and Caleb Hellerman, CNN

Oct. 22, 2011, (<http://edition.cnn.com/2011/10/22/health/homeless-veterans/index.html?npt=NP1>)

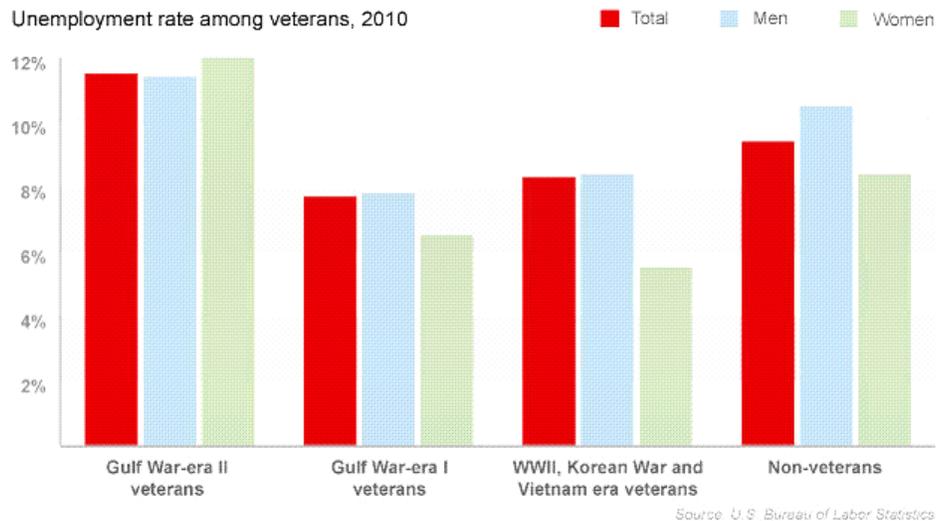
(Los Angeles) The connection seems obvious: nearly 400 acres of land set aside to house veterans and thousands of veterans who need a place to call home.

But Los Angeles' estimated 8,000 homeless vets have been barred from living at the sprawling campus for decades. The West Los Angeles property — some of the most valuable in the nation — was donated in 1888 to "establish, construct and permanently maintain" a branch of a national home for veterans, according to the original deed.

And for nearly a century, that's what happened: permanent veterans facilities sprang up, including a post office, a trolley system and housing for as many as 4,000 vets, said American Civil Liberties Union lawyer Mark Rosenbaum.

But "beginning with the Vietnam War era, vets were kicked out," said Rosenbaum, who's leading a class-action suit over the property against the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Now, a generation after Vietnam, the facility's abandoned buildings are off limits to the veterans they were intended to serve.



"It's a shame," said Carolina Barrie, a descendant of the heiress who donated the land. Veterans should be "given every single opportunity to rehab their lives — and if they have no place to live, a place to live."

The VA saw fit to lease parts of the property to several businesses. In September, the VA canceled three leases after rising criticism. But other entities remain on the property including a public golf course, a college baseball stadium, a theater and practice fields for the exclusive private Brentwood School.

CNN's initial requests to the VA for its side of the lawsuit were referred to the Justice Department, which said it wouldn't comment while the case is still pending.

Vet: "I just wanted to die or go to prison."

Iraq war veteran Robert Rissman, 22, isn't part of the lawsuit, but he has spent years battling addiction, post-traumatic-stress disorder and homelessness.

As an 18-year-old high school senior, Rissman signed up with the Army intending to "go to college and make something of myself," he said. "And the Army said they'd pay for it."

He was deployed to Iraq for a year as part of a quick response unit that saw constant action. Upon his return to Colorado's Fort Carson, Rissman was diagnosed with PTSD. Nightmares and paranoia haunted him.

It got worse. According to Army papers, he once spent a day drinking and sitting on his bed pointing with the barrel of an illegal sawed-off shotgun in his mouth. "I just wanted to die or go to prison," he said. "And that was where I was headed and I knew that was where I was going and I was OK with that."

After leaving the Army, Rissman ended up homeless in Arizona and later Los Angeles, where he "was doing a lot of methamphetamines" and "smoking a lot of dope."

Study: PTSD signals long-term health problems.

Accurate figures are hard to come by, but the VA in its most recent report estimates about 107,000 veterans find themselves homeless on any given night. Mental illness plagues 45% of homeless vets and 70% suffer from some kind of substance abuse, according to the VA.

Washington has OK'd \$35.5 million to renovate various buildings on the campus including "Building 209 for housing facilities for homeless veterans," according to a bill signed by President Obama this month.

The facility would provide vets with 70 permanent housing units, far short of the living space needed to house LA's homeless vets.

The VA has launched an aggressive national plan with an ambitious goal: eliminating homelessness among veterans by 2015.

Under the joint program with the Department of Housing and Urban Development, homeless veterans get federal vouchers to help them pay rent.

This summer the VA granted nearly \$60 million to nonprofit groups that help veterans, including more than \$7 million to aid an estimated 1,800 vets in California. The money aims to prevent veterans and their families from slipping into homelessness by helping with basic expenses such as rent, utilities security deposits and moving costs.

Occupy the park?

Ron Kovic, whose story was made famous in the 1989 Tom Cruise film "Born on the Fourth of July," said the \$35.5 million isn't enough.

Paralyzed in the Vietnam War, the former Marine has been working to improve VA treatment of returning troops since his own homecoming in the late 1960s.

Kovic is calling for an occupation protest of the West LA property, not unlike the current Occupy Wall Street movement.

"If that land was given to veterans and if we were able to put at least a small percentage of what we're spending on these wars in Iraq and Afghanistan toward building a facility for homeless and disabled veterans," Kovic told CNN, "I think it would be one of the most honorable things we could do as citizens and one of the most honorable things that the VA could do to make up for the mistakes of the past."

U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein of California, told CNN via an email statement that she's concerned about the rising number of homeless vets in Los Angeles and believes that "updated and new facilities are needed at the West LA VA ."

"I intend keep working to make sure that Congress doesn't stop" with the latest improvements, she said. VA Secretary Eric Shinseki "has told me he is committed to renovating two additional buildings on the campus, and we intend to hold him and the administration to that commitment."

Meanwhile, VA attorneys have asked a federal judge to throw the ACLU lawsuit out of court.

"In fact, according to Rosenbaum the Justice Department attorney said, 'We don't believe that the VA has any authority or any responsibility to provide housing.'"

But Dr. Dean Norman, chief of staff of Los Angeles' VA health care system seemed to contradict that. "I think we have the resources with the community to end homelessness for veterans in Los Angeles," Norman said.

Norman said new housing is being created for homeless vets and those who need help should call 1-877-4AIDVET (1-877-424-3838) to start the process that will put them in safe housing.

As for Rissman, he's currently living at a halfway house in hopes of leaving his homeless life behind. He thinks the West Los Angeles property could help many more homeless vets win their personal battles. "It would get a number of people in off the street and get them doing what they need to be doing to get their life together," said Rissman.

Meanwhile, the judge has refused to throw out the case and has appointed a mediator to try and resolve the situation beginning this week.

"I promise you that these gates will be open," said Rosenbaum. "We will win this case."

(CNN's Danielle Dellorto, Thom Patterson, and Curt Merrill contributed to this report.)

[20111023-02](#)

06:18

Charis

Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to SteveB, above)

I think vets have a special place in our society. They are upstanding citizens who put their lives on the line for us and make sacrifices (along with their families) for us in manners unlike any others. They secure for our country what no one else can - our freedom. In my book, freedom is so priceless we cannot even put a true dollar value on it so I personally have trouble relating this subject to others we've discussed concerning taxes, jobs and responsibility. The way I see it, they've more than paid any dues our society could possibly expect from them. I'm personally upset that Obama has decided their benefits should be slashed and I'm pissed off that Congress is voting on that now. I think this kind of sarcasm is unnecessary.

But, I don't know, maybe the plight of these veterans is their own fault. What's wrong with them that they can't just try harder? Why don't they get off their lazy butts and look for jobs? Maybe they'd be better off if they paid more taxes? Why don't they fulfill their mysterious responsibility to society? I rest my case.

[20111023-03](#)

07:27

SteveB

Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to Charis, above)

You are probably right about the sarcasm. I guess I just don't know any better way to express my frustration at how things are going in our country.

And, the entire time this forum has been in existence, though I and others on the left have repeatedly offered real criticism of the left, its politicians, and even its policies and goals, I have yet to hear one person from the right (I consider you to be firmly from the middle, Charis. I think you see both sides.) admit that there is a part of society that we the people, via the hated government, owes an obligation to.

If not these vets, then I guess no human in dire straits should ever be helped. Right? Sure would be cheaper government.

But maybe with such an admission of an actual responsibility, we could move the discussion forward to the plight of the middle class, the jobless, etc. But, of course, that is why the admission is not made, right? It might be a slippery slope down the path to spending their tax dollars on helping people who need it.

Maybe a little of the dreaded "redistribution of wealth" might be necessary!!! OMG!

I haven't even heard any Republican admit any kind of equality as even a goal. I find that so extreme.

Does it ever happen in America that people need and deserve help (even from the government)? I think this article points to an answer.

20111023-04	08:05	Charis	Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to SteveB, above)
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I guess I don't understand why people hate the government so much. It's not like Americans live under a dictatorship. The people in our "hated government" are there because Americans put them there.

I don't believe that just because someone is poor they should be given everything. I'm more of a "teach to fish" rather than a "give them a free fish" kind of person. As to vets, they've done and sacrificed more than anyone else. They've done their duty. Should they be given a free ride for the rest of their lives? No, I don't think so. But are they in a league all of their own? Definitely. Like police and firefighters. A league no one else comes near to. Anyone willing to give their LIFE for us is. You simply CANNOT give more to someone than your LIFE. You simply can't compare that to anything else Steve.

20111023-05	11:45	SteveB	Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to Charis, above)
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I don't think hardly anybody gets a real "free ride" from the government. I don't think any of us want that for anyone. Of course we want to make productive citizens of anyone we can. Unfortunately, some people are mentally deficient or have serious mental problems and can't be productive, or not very.

We take the middle way here. Should people get a "free ride"? No one here has ever said that. Are there people we must help? Surely! But I'm having a devil of a time getting that admitted. I don't understand how we cannot all be on the same page on this one issue to help those "willing to give their LIFE for us."

These vets were good enough for the Army, though. But the right doesn't not seem to think they are deserving. The left does, but has a lot of trouble getting the funding passed. Same old story.

Of course we're not talking about everyone, or those who can but don't (largely eliminated from the rolls in the 1990's, so why the big deal now?). But we are talking about real people who really exist. Don't we owe them something? Can't it be admitted government has a place in this? No alternative is working, as I pointed out yesterday.

I use "hated government" satirically because Republicans don't seem to think the government has a place in these matters that involve redistribution of wealth. I disagree. I don't hate the government myself. I just hate corruption and greed.

20111023-06	15:11	Pam	Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Well said. I don't see how anyone can argue with this either.

20111023-07	19:23	SteveG	Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to SteveB, above)
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We have never really taken care of vets. Vietnam vets did have the opportunity for Project Transition to gain civilian occupation skills before they were discharged - I used that for 4 months to take graduate classes - only time I went to the army during that time was to get paid. Shell shock wasn't really treated after WWII. GI bill issues for education have been a long standing problem. During WWI they did start rehabilitation for wounded vets - mainly to get them back to combat. Reagan cut funding for services to the mentally ill and substance abusers creating a whole new class of homeless.

There was a good news piece on a doctor and a small team that walks the streets providing medical treatment and assistance to the homeless...

20111023-08	21:37	Art	Re: "LA Vets Demand Housing at Giant VA Campus" (reply to SteveB, above)
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For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' "Chuck him out, the brute!"
But it's "Saviour of 'is country" when the guns begin to shoot;
An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' anything you please;
An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool — you bet that Tommy sees!

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." —Edmund Burke

20111023-09	22:14	SteveG	UUSC Action: Support the Occupy Movement!
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from UUSC:

Open Letter of Support for the Occupy Movement

I stand with people around the country and the world who are calling for economic justice.

My values affirm that each person has inherent worth and dignity; that justice, equity, and compassion should be the guiding principles for human relationships; and that all people deserve access to the democratic process.

My recognition of the inherent worth of every person compels me to speak out against policies that privilege the demands of corporations over the human rights of people. I support the Occupy movement in its affirmation that protecting workers' rights and ensuring that basic human needs are met must take precedence. All people have a fundamental right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of themselves and their families.

I also join the Occupy movement in decrying the wealth disparity that leaves millions struggling for economic security. Policies and legislation that promote economic marginalization are morally unacceptable. Everyone is entitled to a government that recognizes and promotes basic economic rights. Justice, equity, and compassion should be foremost in our government's decision making.

Economic oppression is not only a violation of fundamental human rights, it is also a blow to democracy. When economic power is concentrated in the hands of a few and when corporations are awarded the same status as actual human beings, the democratic process is fundamentally compromised. Basic fairness requires that all people have equal opportunity to participate in political debate and to be represented in government.

I envision a powerful and radically inclusive movement for economic justice. I recognize economic justice as a right that is due to all people, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, immigration status, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status or distinction.

I sign this letter as an expression of gratitude to all who are working for economic justice in the United States and around the world, as an affirmation of my hope for fair and compassionate economic reforms, and as a renewal of my commitment to help make it so.

http://actnow.uusc.org/site/PageNavigator/occupy_open_letter.html

20111023-10	22:44	SteveG	"FDR's Economic Bill of Rights"
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"FDR's Economic Bill of Rights" by the Franklin D. Roosevelt American Heritage Center

date unknown, (http://www.fdrheritage.org/bill_of_rights.htm)

On January 11, 1944, in the midst of World War II, President Roosevelt spoke forcefully and eloquently about the greater meaning and higher purpose of American security in a post-war America. The principles and ideas conveyed by FDR's words matter as much now as they did over sixty years ago, and the Franklin D. Roosevelt American Heritage Center is proud to reprint a selection of FDR's vision for the security and economic liberty of the American people in war and peace.

"The Economic Bill of Rights"

Excerpt from President Roosevelt's January 11, 1944 message to the Congress of the United States on the State of the Union

It is our duty now to begin to lay the plans and determine the strategy for the winning of a lasting peace and the establishment of an American standard of living higher than ever before known. We cannot be content, no matter how high that general standard of living may be, if some fraction of our people—whether it be one-third or one-fifth or one-tenth—is ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed, and insecure.

This Republic had its beginning, and grew to its present strength, under the protection of certain inalienable political rights—among them the right of free speech, free press, free worship, trial by jury, freedom from unreasonable searches and seizures. They were our rights to life and liberty.

As our nation has grown in size and stature, however—as our industrial economy expanded—these political rights proved inadequate to assure us equality in the pursuit of happiness.

We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence. "Necessitous men are not free men." People who are hungry and out of a job are the stuff of which dictatorships are made.

In our day these economic truths have become accepted as self-evident. We have accepted, so to speak, a second Bill of Rights under which a new basis of security and prosperity can be established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed.

Among these are:

- The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation;
- The right to earn enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation;
- The right of every farmer to raise and sell his products at a return which will give him and his family a decent living;
- The right of every businessman, large and small, to trade in an atmosphere of freedom from unfair competition and domination by monopolies at home or abroad;

- The right of every family to a decent home;
- The right to adequate medical care and the opportunity to achieve and enjoy good health;
- The right to adequate protection from the economic fears of old age, sickness, accident, and unemployment;
- The right to a good education.

All of these rights spell security. And after this war is won we must be prepared to move forward, in the implementation of these rights, to new goals of human happiness and well-being.

America's own rightful place in the world depends in large part upon how fully these and similar rights have been carried into practice for our citizens.

Sources:

The Public Papers & Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt (Samuel Rosenman, ed.), Vol XIII (NY: Harper, 1950), 40-42.

—Friends of the Middle,
Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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Welcome to all our new members who may be here for the first time. We want to hear from YOU! To submit your comment, you can use the form on our website or blog, or reply to this email with your two cents worth. Be sure to sign with your desired user name.

Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

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