



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #3 — OCT. 26, 2011**

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

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Clarence Thomas Should Not Be Above the Law

(posted by Pam McRae, Oct. 26, 2011)

I am appalled by Clarence Thomas and have been ever since he was appointed to the Supreme Court. He's the "silent but deadly" judge. Despite the evidence, I doubt this petition for an investigation will go anywhere. Can you imagine the uproar if a Supreme Court Justice were hauled into court, or even sanctioned? I don't know what should be done about his financial shenanigans, but I'd hate to see the country thrown into even more disarray than it already is, to say nothing of the charges of racism that would undoubtedly arise. I guess I'd say, publish the facts and let them speak for themselves. And hope the next appointees to the Court are honest and beyond ideology.

(posted by SteveG, Oct. 26, 2011)

from CREDO Action:

Clarence Thomas is not above the law. One of the bedrock principles of democracy is that nobody is above the law — not even Supreme Court justices like Clarence Thomas.

Thomas has flouted the law for years by failing to disclose his wife's substantial income despite being legally required to report it.

That is why U.S. Representative Louise Slaughter is demanding that the Judicial Conference, an administrative arm of the court, uphold the Ethics in Government Act by referring Thomas' apparent misdeeds to the Attorney General for further investigation.

Rep. Slaughter has written a letter to Chief Justice John Roberts, who is the presiding officer of the Judicial Conference, about this, and she has invited Americans to add their voice by co-signing the letter (which you can read below).

It's inconceivable that a Supreme Court justice like Clarence Thomas would be unable to understand how to fill out the simple disclosure forms. And now information has come out showing Thomas accurately filled out the form for years before abruptly failing to do so.

Failure to disclose is a serious breach of the law, and the Ethics in Government Act requires the U.S. Judicial Conference to refer any judge to the Attorney General whom the Conference "has reasonable cause to believe has willfully failed to file a report or has willfully falsified or willfully failed to file information required to be reported."¹

We need to make sure Chief Justice Roberts knows the eyes of Congress and the American people are on him, and we need to raise our voices and demand he take action.

[Co-sign Rep. Slaughter's letter demanding action on Clarence Thomas. Click here to automatically sign the petition. \(http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/slaughter_letter/\)](http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/slaughter_letter/)

Here's the text of Rep. Slaughter's letter:

Dear Mr. Chief Justice:

We write you today in your capacity as Presiding Officer of the Judicial Conference. We call your attention to the letter sent to the Conference by members of the House of Representatives on September 29, 2011, requesting an investigation of possible violations by Justice Clarence Thomas of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978.

Evidence that Justice Thomas failed for 13 years to accurately disclose his wife's employment has been submitted to the Conference and we believe the Conference is required by law to refer the matter to the Department of Justice for further investigation.

In January, Common Cause and Alliance for Justice alerted the Judicial Conference to Justice Thomas's repeated failure to make accurate financial disclosures as required under the Ethics Act. Justice Thomas then amended 21 years of his financial disclosure forms, explaining that he had, "misunderstood the reporting instructions."

Since we sent our September 29 letter, important new information concerning this matter has come to our attention. Disclosure forms obtained by Common Cause and Alliance for Justice show that Justice Thomas accurately filed his financial disclosure forms, including his wife's employment, for as many as 10 years beginning in 1987 when he was Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Justice Thomas continued to file accurate disclosure forms concerning his wife's employment when he was a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. He also accurately filed his financial disclosure forms regarding his wife's employment for the first five years he was a Justice of the Supreme Court.

In 1997 however, Justice Thomas stopped disclosing his wife's employment on his annual form, instead marking the box labeled "NONE," to indicate his wife had no employment that year. Other public documents show that Justice Thomas's wife was employed in 1997 by the Office of the U.S. House Majority Leader.

Justice Thomas continued to omit his wife's employment from his disclosures for the next 12 years, marking the "NONE" box on his annual forms. Other publicly available documents indicate that Justice Thomas's wife did have employment in every one of those twelve years. Her employers included the Office of the U.S. House Majority Leader, the Heritage Foundation and Hillsdale College.

Documents obtained by Common Cause and Alliance for Justice show that Justice Thomas's wife earned over \$1.6 million from these sources. We understand that Justice Thomas is not required to disclose those earnings but we include the number here to show that his wife's earnings were very substantial and that their omission is unlikely to have been a mere oversight.

It is very difficult for Justice Thomas to make a credible argument that he understood the filing instructions for ten years but then misunderstood them for the next thirteen years.

Section 104(b) of the Ethics in Government Act of 1978 requires the Judicial Conference to refer to the Attorney General any judge whom the Conference "has reasonable cause to believe has willfully falsified or willfully failed to file information required to be reported."

We believe these facts easily establish reasonable cause, and as a result the Judicial Conference must refer this matter to the Attorney General for further investigation.

Sincerely, Louise Slaughter

¹"Clarence Thomas Should Be Investigated For Nondisclosure, Democratic Lawmakers Say," Jennifer Bendery, Huffington Post, September 29, 2011.

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<u>20111025-01</u>	06:26	Pam	Re: "Surveillance Under the Patriot Act" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #2)
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Every time I write something here, I am aware that if the U.S. ever had a right-wing coup, my words would get me in a heap of trouble. I find it incredible that I would ever think that, but I have to say, I do. Something just occurred to me. My husband and I like to watch "crime" programs on TV—like "Law & Order", "Castle", "Prime Suspect". The police in those shows are always getting into suspects' "financials," phone records, emails, and even track them with GPS. All this is to catch the bad guys, who are, of course, always dangerous, murderous, evil people. I wonder if all these shows somehow inure us to the kinds of government activity described in Steve's attachment. I never watched "24", but I understand it showed torture in a positive light. I think Americans are being brainwashed without being aware of it. What we see as entertainment is actually a not-so-subtle message about the government's right/ability to abuse our privacy. I hope this doesn't come off as a wacko conspiracy theory, because I promise you I am not a wacko. (Well, not too much.) Does anyone else think there's anything to my theory?

[20111025-02](#) 06:59 SteveB Re: "Surveillance Under the Patriot Act" (reply to Pam, above)

But I'm not going to give-up my right to free speech in America nor in Bolivia just because I could be jailed and tortured. If they don't like what I say, they can come and get me.

Yet, for the future, I worry. Maybe Pam has something here. She's read Marshall McLuhan (another Canadian, not that Pam is, but we often marvel at how many prominent Canadians there are for such a small country).

I firmly believe that commercial advertising, especially on television, where we are bombarded with ads for thousands and thousands of hours of our lives, starting very young, has a great deal to do with the Greed problem we are experiencing in America. When we are told that we must have more and more things to be happy, it has to be very difficult mentally not to internalize that somehow. "Ah... [I would now think as a little boy] I don't want to be the Lightning Kid any more... [that's who I "really" was in my imagination, my Mom even embroidered a special handkerchief for me that I still have] I want to be rich." Not productive in some way, not moral, not out to save the world or damsels in distress (my personal favorite), he wants a Ferrari!

So, though I don't see a true conspiracy either, the invasions of privacy we see, though not often exactly condoned on TV and in the movies, could have an effect. Regardless, for some reason, people, even the Tea Party, don't seem to mind more and more government intrusion into our private lives. Where is the outcry?

You do understand one of the problems, though? And this is why I say working to amend the Constitution could open up a bag of worms—it needs lots of changes—THE RIGHT TO PRIVACY IS LITERALLY NOT IN THE CONSTITUTION!

This is all I can figure: We have a lot of Americans who are like Mr. Perry (including me), who love their guns and the Second Amendment, but don't cotton to the First (and I am certainly not one of this second group).

[20111025-13](#) 10:50 Pam Re: "Surveillance Under the Patriot Act" (reply to SteveB, above)

I can't help thinking about totalitarian systems where not only every word is monitored, every thought is suspect. Fortunately, I think we've seen the last of Stalinists and Hitlerites; their tactics look heavy-handed (to say the least) and unsophisticated compared to what is possible today. We face something far more subtle and incremental, I fear. I think Steve B. is right about how advertising brainwashes us from day one. I see it in my 6-yr old grandson. He WANTS, with a capital WANTS. I saw a little boy on the news last night who races little cars (child-size) to raise money for kids with cancer. I was quite touched by that. We have a population of two-year olds, whose mantra is "me, me, me." And those with the most seem most tenacious in holding on to their goodies. I shouldn't slam the rich. The rich are people too; I've known a lot of rich kids (at DePauw) who were terrific people. A lot of them were Republicans too. The thing is, we think in terms of Us and Them. Hemingway said, "The rich are different from you and me." In America, I think that's true.

We don't have as much of a class system as Britain (there is a fantastic article in this week's Harper's magazine about Britain giving away the "family silver." It's aimed at the Brits, but it applies equally to us. I tried to get a

link, but I couldn't. You'll have to buy it or go to the library. It's worth the effort.) but we all know there is a fair degree of suspicion among the classes in this country. The rich don't trust the poor—did you see where Eric Cantor cancelled a speech when he found out 300 seats were open to the public? Brilliant move, Eric.)—and vice versa. De Toqueville said that one of the faults of democracy is envy. I can't argue with that. You have more than I do, ergo, I hate you. I have more than you do, ergo I'm better than you. Maybe that's the price we pay for social mobility. In the Middle Ages people believed they were born into their station in life and didn't chafe against it.

But back to Big Brother. The Middle Ages had the Inquisition. We have the Patriot Act. We may be softer around the edges, but the underlying impulse is the same. That's why we have to keep speaking out. When we can no longer speak truth to power, when we can no longer mock our leaders, that will be a darker day than any of us can imagine.

20111025-08	10:10	SteveG	Re: "Surveillance Under the Patriot Act" (reply to Pam, above)
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Brainwashed is a good word. If you spin it into our safety depends on it, our national security, people tend to roll over and give up anything. Our worst enemy is us.

20111025-03	07:08	SteveG	Re: "Surveillance Under the Patriot Act" (reply to SteveB, above) & Housing
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I have owned one gun, a single shot 22 made in the 30's – it was my Dad's. See no reason to own a gun. Do own a mouth and it has been busy and will continue so. There does seem to be a movement toward minimalism in living, downsizing. We downsized from a 4 bedroom house to a 2 bedroom apartment – it is like us, old and comfortable. Moved here with what was in the car, if it didn't fit in the Impala, it didn't make it to Washington. Stuff is stuff.

We are the ones that allow the invasion of privacy – basically we said OK and we still say OK even though we have no idea who is listening/looking at what you are doing. Same with Citizens United. Apathetically we sit on the side lines and let the government do what they want.

20111025-04	07:31	SteveB	Re: "Surveillance Under the Patriot Act" (reply to SteveG, above) & Housing
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I know exactly what you mean. Our apartment here is about 750 sq.ft. and we love it more than Marci's big house in the country, which we have rented and may sell. It helps a lot that we're in the heart of the city and can walk to almost anything, otherwise we take a \$1 taxi ride.

Have you seen the stuff on the internet, since Katrina and with Tokyo being so crowded, about the "tiny house" movement? Google it. Some of them are so cool, and some of them are tree houses. I like the Scandinavian designs, have you seen those, Gary? Some have maybe 100 sq.ft. A little small for me, but I think Marci and I could do with 500.

I'm working on a long poem right now about exactly this subject—what are the things we really need and what does it take to be comfortable. Surprisingly little. Most of my stuff is sitting in my storage area in Lafayette, IN, and most of it will stay there forever...well, maybe not that long. The things we own own us, they destroy the world, and we don't need them.

But, you know, I do truly love very many of them! I did get to drive a new Ferrari once. And this is, after all, the times in the history of man here on Earth that I call "the crown of the crown of creation", to paraphrase Gracie.

We are placed here now, are we not, to enjoy it...and maybe to save it...but we sure hope not...because we are so obviously not the Greatest Generation. We are the Greedy Generation, are we not? And I admit to my part! I'm guilty! Brainwashed by television (and that ain't a lie!). "Bring me my slippers, *joven!*"

[20111025-14](#) 10:57 SteveG Re: Housing (reply to SteveB, above)

I like the homes made of storage containers – link/stack 2 or 3 together and you have it made. 7-800 square feet is enough for 2 people – utility costs are low too. Agree also on the Scandinavian designs. 2 pubs, a Thai restaurant, a pizza place, gas station, a Mexican restaurant, and place to get your hair cut are all within 2 blocks – a mile or so to grocery and drug stores. No cable, no satellite TV – rabbit ears and internet. Not a bad deal. Priorities are the simple life – living totally off social security and saving money too. Go figure Took all investments out of stock market and looking to stuff a mattress to stay away from the banks – maybe a credit union.

[20111025-15](#) 10:59 Pam Re: Housing (reply to SteveB, above)

We live in a small house too. Some Greensboro neighborhoods (newer ones) are full of McMansions. They are big enough to be an embassy for a small country. Unless you have eleven children, why would you need all that space? I hear what you're saying about our stuff owning us; maybe it does. But I agree with you in that I love my stuff—a lot. We have a lot of art; my husband collects American Art pottery and old books with designer covers. Some friends gave us a huge flat-screen TV, and we love it. I think it's a matter of proportion, taste, and discretion. I've never bought into the Buddhist idea that we should all let go of everything and want nothing. That's just not human. William Morris (Arts and Crafts Movement & socialist in late 19th c.) said, "You should have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or beautiful." (The double negatives were his, if I've got this quote close to right.) I think those are words to live by.

[20111025-16](#) 11:14 Pam Re: Housing (reply to SteveG, above)

Credit Unions are great. Our State Employees Credit Union is wonderful. Yeah, the Scandanavians seem to have figured out a lot of stuff. I love their sense of design and their social structure. I also think neighborhoods should be like Steve G.'s, with the places you need within walking distance. The city planners who put the suburbs miles away from supermarkets and designated neighborhoods for single-use purposes did us a great disfavor. We too have a bar, three restaurants, and a grocery store within walking distance. Another nice thing about that is that it draws the neighborhood together. Every time you go to one of these places, you see people you know. Neighbors become friends, and we all have a sense of mutual identity—in a good way. I had some friends (very rich) who wanted to buy a house in a neighborhood where their kids could play with neighbor kids. They bought a humongous house in one of those fancy new areas, where they knew lots of kids lived. Once they moved in, they discovered that they never saw those kids. The immaculately landscaped lawns were never disturbed by children building forts or playing tag. The children were all off at their ballet lessons or soccer practice. (I'm not against those activities at all; I am against over-scheduling kids.) My hunch is that in neighborhoods like that neighbors don't even know each other. Everyone has their own little castle. Am I being prejudiced?

[20111025-17](#) 11:48 SteveG Re: Housing (reply to Pam, above)

Not at all – most of us grew up in neighborhoods – I know I did – neighborhood grocery store – when we were in Terre Haute within 3 blocks there was everything from grocery, drug store, restaurants, church, banks, park, x rated movie that changed to a family movie house, hardware store, dime store – great place.

[20111025-19](#) 12:07 Pam Re: Housing (reply to SteveG, above)

Sometimes less really is more. Our little neighborhood is teeming with kids—and dogs. The young ones all go to the same school, then they see each other after school and on the weekends too. It makes me so happy to watch my grandsons grow up in this neighborhood. They have so much fun! I know a lot of us grew up that way and treasure the memories. Alas, my own kids didn't live in a neighborhood like that. I've always regretted that, but I think Saskia appreciates what they have even more. At least, that's what she tells me.

I have a question. I read an article yesterday about how the military (Pentagon) spends money. It described an IED defuser who worked basically with string and a can opener. (Not really, but close.) The gov't. has spend billions trying to come up with technology to combat these things, and none of them has worked worth squat. This one guy was able to defuse many, many bombs, just by being good at it. It was an interesting article, all about drones and who qualifies as a combatant. Here's my question(s). Do we really spend too much (or not enough) on defense, and do we spend that money in the right way? Are there other interests than efficiency and cost-effectiveness that influence the way things get done? If so, what can the ordinary person do about it?

[20111025-18](#) 11:58 SteveG Fw: UUSC Action: Tell Hersey to End Child Labor!

From UUSC:

<https://secure2.convio.net/uusc/site/Advocacy?pagename=homepage&page=UserAction&id=274&AddInterest=1023&JServSessionIdr004=roffo03tb2.app210a>

[20111025-05](#) 09:35 Pam Re: "'Millionaires' Are Now Expected to Shoulder Much of the Burden of Balancing the Budget" (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #2)

Cinders and ashes! The rich might have to pay more taxes! Back when the tax rate on the wealthy was 70%, we had a robust economy. Will the top earners really "lose" money, or will they just make somewhat less? Will the wealthy really stop taking vacations in the Keys if their taxes go up? I doubt it. But even if there is some readjustment in the luxury business, haven't we already seen a severe readjustment in lots of other businesses, schools, hospitals, clinics, social programs? I find the alarm expressed in this article a slap in the face of teachers, nurses, fire fighters, social workers, and ordinary folks who count every penny. An out-of-work factory worker has a lot more right to complain than an investor who has enough money to play around with.

[20111025-06](#) 09:59 SteveG Re: "'Millionaires' Are Now Expected to Shoulder Much of the Burden of Balancing the Budget" (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #2)

Usually the tax rates of 70% were placed on earnings above \$500,000 or so. One can also see historically that the rate was 90% at one time.

[20111025-07](#) 10:07 SteveB Re: "'Millionaires' Are Now Expected to Shoulder Much of the Burden of Balancing the Budget" (reply to SteveG, above)

And, as GaryC could tell us, there are a universe of loopholes...

[20111025-09](#) 10:12 SteveG Re: "'Millionaires' Are Now Expected to Shoulder Much of the Burden of Balancing the Budget" (reply to SteveB, above)

Aw, the devil is in the loopholes. The rich, the corporations have a bevy of lawyers/accountants to find the loopholes.

[20111025-10](#) 10:36 Pam Re: "'Millionaires' Are Now Expected to Shoulder Much of the Burden of Balancing the Budget" (reply to SteveG, above)

How many loopholes does the average taxpayer get?

Better to work from the inside. Last night I got invited to a local Republican town hall. Love to hear what they say and ask good questions at the right moment. They hate it. It is why Cantor canceled his speech as Wharton.

Not sure about the third party, but what we do need is a resurgence of honesty in politics. Think the problem is the fundamental nature of the business is so slimy, no good person wants to get involved. Do we really think Perry, Bachman and Cain are the best America has to offer? I mean, really now.

As for Singapore, I have been going in and out of there for 40 years. They have nothing except the people and they are probably one of the most prosperous societies on earth. Lesson to be learned there.

Of course, it is the death penalty to chew gum on the street, so I supposed there are some prices to be paid.

I'll try to comment on Pam's Defense spending issue tomorrow. Complicated. Golf early so later in the day.

Do you have this on Ricky's Texas??

- #1 in the Emission of Ozone Causing Air Pollution Chemicals
- #1 in Toxic Chemical releases into the Air
- #1 in use of Deep Well Injectors as method of Waste Disposal
- #1 in counties listed in top 20 of Emitting Cancer Causing Chemicals
- #1 in Total Number of Hazardous Waste Incinerators
- #1 in Environmental Justice Title 6 complaints
- #1 in production of Cancer causing Benzene & Vinyl Chloride
- #1 Largest Sludge Dump in Country

Perry grew up a Democrat. He was elected a state rep as a Democrat & supported Al Gore for president ,,,In 1988. In 1989, he joined the GOP. Elected Lt Governor in 1999, he became governor when Bush resigned to run for president. That year, the state debt was \$13.4 billion, By 2010, it was \$37.8 billion, an 281% increase. Texas state debt grew at a faster rate than the federal debt.

"Bill O'Reilly Admits That Fox News Is Waging a War Against Occupy Wall Street" by Politicus

Oct. 21, 2011, (<http://www.politicususa.com/en/bill-oreilly-fox-ows>)

Video: "Sign of the Times - Arrests in the WI Assembly Gallery; 10 Cops, Really? (Part 2)"
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCx-3VoT9JE&feature=share>.

I think the Republicans, and I am one, have been doing nothing but politicking since Dec., 2010. They certainly haven't been seriously trying to govern. Anything that might help the country and thus make the president look good by connection, they have automatically opposed, period.

As for the President, he has had his hands tied so completely, that I think he has largely given up trying to work with the opposition, which unfortunately leaves us going nowhere.

One other thing. I am on Speaker Bonehead's mailing list. I keep asking what is the Republican jobs plan, but all I get back is bills (doomed to failure I hope), to cancel worker safety standards in the mining industry, allow more pollution, and more tax breaks for the super rich, all of which will supposedly create more jobs. The connection of these actions to jobs is more of the "hope" school of planning.

Finally I missed the last discussion but whoever said mining, farming and manufacturing are the only things that create wealth. Ever been to Singapore?

[20111025-20](#) 13:12 SteveB Re: Current Political View (reply to Art, above)

I think that stuff in Singapore just moves the money around, doesn't it?

I've been on an Obama list since, like, 2008...I keep writing stuff, but almost never even get a computer to answer. Responsive government at its best. Reminds me of Microsoft.

[20111025-21](#) 13:43 Pam Re: Current Political View (reply to Art, above)

A question for Art: why are you still a Republican? As they say, this does not compute. I've been a lifelong Democrat, but I'm reconsidering my options. Never thought I'd go for a third party, but I just might. And not a Ralph Nader party of 16 true believers. (Though I like everything Nader says.) I mean a third party made up of millions of Americans who are fed up with this ramshackle mess we call a government. (Hyperbole, but what the he--.)

[20111025-12](#) 10:41 Art Republican Politics

Seen this? Admittedly from the DCCC so perhaps a wee bit prejudiced.

The minute House Majority Leader Cantor learned that his speech at the Wharton School of Business about America's growing income disparity would be open to the public, he canceled it.

A Cantor aide previewed the speech, saying, "The speech will zero in on how Washington could [...] make sure the people at the top stay there."

Like so many of his fellow Republicans, Cantor just doesn't get it. He continues to push Tea Party Republican policies that protect Big Oil and the people at the top while blocking programs to create middle class jobs and help small business.

—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.

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>
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