



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #5 — OCT. 28, 2011**

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Oakland OWS Vet / Republican Candidate Update

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Oct. 28, 2011)

Some days, I have noticed, the news of the day provides just about everything that needs to be said about a subject...except, of course, what all of us think about it. Today is such a day, so I will mainly get out of the way today and let the news tell the story.

I only wish to comment about Scott Olsen, the young man who received a skull fracture at an Occupy Wall Street rally in Oakland, CA. Now, I don't know the details of what happened. I don't blame Scott. I don't blame the police. These kinds of tragedies are what can happen when people must fight in the streets to be free. What a shame our political system has stopped functioning because one entire party refuses to talk or think.

Regardless, I love this young man!

"He felt you shouldn't wait until something is affecting you to get out and do something about it," a friend said.

He's a hero to me, if not to all Americans, as he should be.

1. "Injured Vet Spent Days at Work, Nights at Protest" by MSNBC/AP/Reuters

Oct. 28, 2011, (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45071048/ns/us_news/t/injured-vet-spent-days-work-nights-protest/#.UAmObRYuRQ)

(Olsen suffered a fractured skull in clash between police, demonstrators in Oakland.)

(OAKLAND, Calif.) The Iraq War veteran injured during a clash between police and anti-Wall Street protesters this week wasn't taking part in the demonstrations out of economic need.

The 24-year-old Scott Olsen makes a good living as a network engineer and has a nice apartment overlooking San Francisco Bay. And yet, his friends say, he felt so strongly about economic inequality in the United States that he fought for overseas that he slept at a protest camp after work.

"He felt you shouldn't wait until something is affecting you to get out and do something about it," said friend and roommate Keith Shannon, who served with Olsen in Iraq.

It was that feeling that drew him to Oakland on Tuesday night, when the clashes broke out and Olsen's skull was fractured. Fellow veterans said Olsen was struck in the head by a projectile fired by police, although the exact object and who might have been responsible for the injury have not been definitively established.

Rallying cry

Now, even as officials investigate exactly where the projectile came from, Olsen has become a rallying cry for the Occupy Wall Street demonstrators across the nation, with Twitter users and protest websites declaring, "We are all Scott Olsen."

In Las Vegas, a few dozen protesters held a vigil for him. A handful of police officers attended, and protesters invited them back for a potluck dinner Thursday night.

"We renewed our vow of nonviolence," organizer Sebring Frehner said.

Another round of vigils were organized for Thursday night, including one in Oakland.

Oakland organizers said they would stage a general strike over what a spokeswoman called the "brutal and vicious" treatment of protesters, including the former Marine.

Elsewhere across the United States, officials took steps to close some of the protest camps that have sprung up in opposition to growing economic inequality.

In Nashville, Tenn., officials imposed a curfew, saying conditions at a camp at the state Capitol were worsening. In Providence, R.I., officials told protesters they were violating multiple city laws by camping overnight at a park.

The group Iraq Veterans Against the War blamed police for Olsen's injury. Oakland Police Chief Howard Jordan said officials will investigate whether officers used excessive force. He did not return calls seeking comment Thursday.

Police have said they responded with tear gas and bean bag rounds only when protesters began throwing bottles and other items at them.

2. "Romney Waffles on Anti-Union Law in Ohio" by Philip Elliott, AP/MSNBC

Oct. 26, 2011, (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45050553/ns/politics-decision_2012/)

(FAIRFAX, Va.) A day after he refused to endorse an Ohio ballot measure that limits public employee union rights, Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney said Wednesday that he is "110 percent" behind the effort.

3. "Cain: I Don't Need to Know the Foreign-Policy Details" by Andrew Rafferty, NBC

Oct. 27, 2011, (<http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/news/2011/10/27/8508055-cain-i-dont-need-to-know-the-foreign-policy-details>)

(CORPUS CHRISTI, Tx.) Former businessman turned presidential frontrunner Herman Cain continued his attempts to calm voters concerns over his lack of foreign policy experience during a campaign stop here Wednesday night.

"Relative to foreign policy, I don't need to know the details of every one of the issues we face."

"We've got plenty of experts who can fill in the details," Cain said at dinner held by the Nueces County Republican Women.

4. "Perry Camp Defends Stance to Possibly Forgo Debates" by Carrie Dann, NBC

Oct. 27, 2011, (<http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/news/2011/10/27/8511570-perry-camp-defends-stance-to-possibly-forgo-debates>)

Rick Perry spokesman Ray Sullivan set off a flurry of punditry yesterday when he said on CNN that the campaign may skip some of the upcoming debates in favor of retail politicking.

Here's what Sullivan told NBC News today in defense of the campaign's decision to consider skipping future debates:

"We are committed to CNBC Nov 9th. We haven't declined any to date. There have been eight GOP primary debates to date, with 16 more scheduled over the next 12 weeks. We need to determine on a case-by-case basis whether and how these fit into our schedule given the pressing need to meet actual voters in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida and other early voting states."

He didn't answer specific questions about what criteria would need to be met to participate in a given debate. But asked to respond to critics who say this strategy essentially avoids rather than confronts an obvious weakness for the candidate, Sullivan said:

"We have done five debates and will do more. We have had tough questions at the debates and will at future debates. The voters and media of Iowa, NH, SC and FL ask tough questions too and we need time to campaign on the ground in those early primary states."

The campaign has been frustrated with the intense schedule of debates to date — a venue in which their candidate has notably underperformed. Aides are fond of noting how much practice other candidates — including Mitt Romney and, even, Ron Paul — have had in past presidential debates compared to Perry, who largely avoided debating his opponents in past races.

5. "Can Perry Afford to Pass on Debates?" by Martina Stewart, CNN

Oct. 27, 2011, (<http://us.cnn.com/2011/10/27/politics/perry-debates/index.html>)

"(T)hese debates are set up for nothing more than to tear down the candidates. It's pretty hard to be able to sit and lay out your ideas and your concepts with a one-minute response," Texas Gov. Rick Perry said earlier this week.

Editor's note: Gloria Borger is CNN's chief political analyst, appearing regularly on shows such as "AC360," "The Situation Room," "John King USA" and "State of the Union."

(WASHINGTON) Call me crazy, but I recall when presidential candidates ran for the high office because they had things to say. The notion went like this: I have ideas that I think will be great for the country. I have thought about them, vetted them with experts, spoken about them throughout my career. I have refined them, many times, even changed some. And now I think it's time to run for the presidency, armed with those ideas to present to the nation.

So imagine my surprise when, at a recent debate, Texas Gov. Rick Perry turned to Mitt Romney and, with a certain amount of disdain, sniffed, "Mitt has had six years to be working on a plan. I have been in this for about eight weeks." In other words, I'll get back to you.

"The Perry Approach — Campaign First, Have Ideas Later" by Gloria Borger, CNN

Oct. 27, 2011, (<http://us.cnn.com/2011/10/27/opinion/borger-perry-ideas-campaign/index.html>)

So, is it really a bad thing that Romney spent years working on ideas — changing some, obviously — to prepare for another presidential run? Or is it actually worse that Perry first had a team of consultants and strategists, and then got to work on the ideas part of the program?

Ronald Reagan didn't have to cram a belief system into a new 10-point plan to save the country, because he knew what he believed — and refined and road-tested his plans — before he ran. Neither did Bill Clinton, who did have a 'Putting People First' plan, which contained ideas on welfare reform and education that he had spoken about for years. Both men had beliefs — and of course, ambition — before they had presidential campaigns. How quaint.

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20111027-01	08:54	Jim	TED Talk: Richard Wilkinson: "How Economic Inequality Harms Societies"
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For those of you who are not familiar with TED.com it is a forum that invites (mostly) academics who have done interesting research to share it with an audience and, through recorded archives, with the whole internet.

This talk (http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson.html) is about a study of the effects on the society/quality of life on a disparity in income that gives a number to an area that reflect the ratio of the income of the top 20% compared to the bottom 20% which is little different that the 1%/99%.

He does it for countries and for the states of the United States and provinces of Canada.

There are a lot of other neat talks on TED and if I am not careful I end up spending a lot of time browsing and letting one topic lead to another.

20111027-02	10:57	Art	Do We Have a Problem?
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A few days ago I asked some questions in trying to get to the bottom of how seemingly reasonable and bright people can disagree so vehemently on the political issues of the day. Below are some stats I pulled from an e-mail that I think are pretty accurate. Assuming for the minute that they are, it is not a matter for argument, but rather a matter of, do these statistics indicate a problem in the USA?

If they do not, discussion over for those folks at least. If they do, then the next discussion I guess is to frame a description of the problem. From there we could go on to discuss how to solve the problem.

So, do we have a problem?

- From 1948 until 2007, the average duration of unemployment was 13.5 weeks. Today, it's 40.5 weeks.
- In 1952, corporate taxes were 6.1% of GDP, and employment taxes were 1.8% of GDP. In 2009, corporate taxes were 1% of GDP, and employment taxes were 6.3% of GDP.
- Tax evasion has added \$3 trillion to the national debt over the past decade.
- Health care for an average family now runs \$19,393 a year. It was about half that much in 2002.
- California will spend \$5.7 billion on its public universities this year, and \$9.6 billion on prisons.
- 5.5 million Americans are unemployed and not receiving unemployment benefits. Last year, that number was 1.4 million.
- The U.S. government provides health care for a minority of its population (elderly and poor) at a greater cost per citizen than many European countries spend on universal coverage.
- The percentage of Americans covered by health insurance fell from 86.9% to 83.7% in 2000-2010. It has declined in eight of the past 10 years.
- CEOs of S&P 500 companies are entitled to receive an average of \$22 million upon being fired.
- One percent of households captured 52% of all income gains from 1993-2008.
- Just 400 people earned 10% of all capital gains in 2007. Between 2000 and 2007, the top 400 taxpayers captured ~2% of all growth.
- Cash flow among S&P 500 companies set a new record last year - \$1.2 trillion.

20111027-03 11:31 SteveB Re: Do We Have a Problem? (reply to Art, above)

Well, I think we have a problem, but, you are right, we don't seem to be able to get anyone from the right to admit this or anything else. I too sincerely wonder why. Maybe one of them will answer your question.

20111027-04 13:56 Pam "Occupy Wall Street & the Pope Agree: It's Time to Tax Speculators"

"Occupy Wall Street and the Pope Agree: It's Time to Tax Speculators" by John Nichols, *The Nation*/NationofChange

Oct. 27, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/occupy-wall-street-and-pope-agree-it-s-time-tax-speculators-1319723776>)

The Catholic Church has for many years raised objections to the patterns of globalization, concentration of wealth and economic equality that have encouraged the massive redistribution of wealth upward that has made the rich richer, the poor poorer and the middle class more vulnerable than at any time in generations.

And, now, as the Occupy Wall Street movement raises the issue of economic inequality, the church is stepping up with a proposal to begin to address the extreme injustice of a system that taxes working people for necessities but allows speculators to avoid even the most basic responsibilities.

On the eve of the G-20 leaders, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has endorsed a series of reforms to the global economic financial and monetary systems that features as its centerpiece the development of a financial transactions tax.

From the note on financial reform from the Pontifical Council:

Specific attention should be paid to the reform of the international monetary system and, in particular, the commitment to create some form of global monetary management, something that is already implicit in the Statutes of the International Monetary Fund. It is obvious that to some extent this is equivalent to putting the existing exchange systems up for discussion in order to find effective means of coordination and supervision. This process must also involve the emerging and developing countries in defining the stages of a gradual adaptation of the existing instruments. In fact, one can see an emerging requirement for a body that will carry out the functions of a kind of "central world bank" that regulates the flow and system of monetary exchanges similar to the national central banks. The underlying logic of peace, coordination and common vision which led to the Bretton Woods Agreements needs to be dusted off in order to provide adequate answers to the current questions. On the regional level, this process could begin by strengthening the existing institutions, such as the European Central Bank. However, this would require not only a reflection on the economic and financial level, but also and first of all on the political level, so as to create the set of public institutions that will guarantee the unity and consistency of the common decisions.

These measures ought to be conceived of as some of the first steps in view of a public Authority with universal jurisdiction; as a first stage in a longer effort by the global community to steer its institutions towards achieving the common good. Other stages will have to follow in which the dynamics familiar to us may become more marked, but they may also be accompanied by changes which would be useless to try to predict today. In this process, the primacy of the spiritual and of ethics needs to be restored and, with them, the primacy of politics—which is responsible for the common good—over the economy and finance. These latter need to be brought back within the boundaries of their real vocation and function, including their social function, in consideration of their obvious responsibilities to society, in order to nourish markets and financial institutions which are really at the service of the person, which are capable of responding to the needs of the common good and universal brotherhood, and which transcend all forms of economist stagnation and performative mercantilism.

On the basis of this sort of ethical approach, it seems advisable to reflect, for example, on: a) taxation measures on financial transactions through fair but modulated rates with charges proportionate to the complexity of the operations, especially those made on the "secondary" market. Such taxation would be very useful in promoting global development and sustainability according to the principles of social justice and solidarity. It could also contribute to the creation of a world reserve fund to support the economies of the countries hit by crisis as well as the recovery of their monetary and financial system...

The G-20 gathering in Cannes November 3 and 4 is expected to discuss a financial speculation tax, with strong encouragement from French President Nicolas Sarkozy and German Chancellor Angela Merkel—whosays, "We must ensure that financial market actors share in the costs of fighting the crisis. I will push for this until it happens, at least in Europe, even better worldwide.

Sarkozy and Merkel have work to do; there is opposition within the G-20 even to an exceptionally modest 0.1-percent speculation tax. That opposition is coming from the United States and Canada, in particular. But there will also be pressure for the tax from outside the G-20, as unions from around the world rally at Cannes to agitate for the proposal.

The culture-jammers at Adbusters, who issued the "Occupy Wall Street" call, are calling on activists worldwide to rally October 29 for a "Robin Hood Tax" on all financial transactions and currency trades. National People's Action (NPA), which refers to the financial transactions tax as a "take from the rich and give to the poor" initiative, is urging Americans to join October 29 rallies to "Rise Up and Fight for the Robin Hood Tax."

Arguing that "Wall Street and Big Banks must pay their share for our economic recovery," NPA says that a financial speculation tax "would tax short term and often speculative activity—the sort of thing that helped create the crisis—

and generate billions of dollars of revenue. For ordinary investors, the cost would barely be noticeable, but for Wall Street traders' activities, it is estimated that such a tax could generate up to \$150 billion a year."

U.S. unions, especially National Nurses United (NNU), are in the thick of the initiative. NNU has been working closely with international unions to encourage global campaigning on behalf of the tax. But it is also working domestically to promote a U.S. version

On Thursday, Congressman Peter DeFazio, D-Oregon, and U.S. Senator Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, both long-time supporters of taxes on speculators, will introduce legislation that would impose a modest tax—less than the 0.1-percent tax proposed in Europe—on financial transactions. The Harkin-DeFazio proposal, though small in scope and narrowly focused on specific types of transactions, would raise tens of billions of dollars that could be used to address budget shortfalls and domestic needs.

The Harkin-DeFazio plan would, as well, place a bit of the tax burden on those most able to pay.

"This is an absolutely essential step to address the 99 percent problem," said Damon Silvers, director of policy at the AFL-CIO, referring to the Occupy Wall Street claim that the movement represents the 99 percent of Americans whose economic prospects are limited by the 1 percent who control most of the nation's wealth.

"The financial sector in the United States and worldwide is profoundly undertaxed," Silvers said. "Inherently, any tax on the financial system is a progressive tax."

The linkage between the Occupy Wall Street agitation and the push for a financial transactions tax is being made by several groups that were early and enthusiastic supporters of the protest movement.

National Nurses United, which has launched a "Tax Wall Street" campaign, will rally on the doorstep of the U.S. Treasury Department November 3, calling on Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and the Obama administration "to end lobbying efforts at home and abroad against a Wall Street tax."

"It is long past time for Secretary Geithner and President Obama to get on board with other world leaders in supporting this common sense approach to raise badly needed revenues to help fund the critical programs we need to revive the U.S. and other global economies," says NNU executive director Rose Ann DeMoro.

Along with the NNU; the AFL-CIO; the Service Employees union; the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees; the National Education Association; Demos; Rebuild the Dream; National Peoples Action; and Americans for Financial Reform are signing on with BanksterUSA's petition to members of Congress with a simple message:

The deficit issue that we face today was in large part created by the world financial crisis, a crisis caused by Wall Street speculation. Now it's time to call upon Wall Street to start paying its fair share to help us out of the hole they dug.

A small tax on financial market transactions has the potential to raise significant revenue and simultaneously limit reckless short-term speculation that can threaten financial stability. We are writing to ask you to support such a tax, and to request that it be part of any new budget plan.

Financial transaction taxes have a long track record both in the United States and globally. The United States had a transfer tax from 1914 to 1966. The UK levies a transaction tax on stock transfers and has done so for many years. The European Union is on the verge of approving a small transaction tax, including ten cents per \$100 on stock transactions. The tiny transaction tax they are working on is estimated to raise over \$70 billion annually. A similar transaction tax in the United States would raise even more money, as our financial markets are larger.

We join over 1,000 economists who recently signed an open letter advocating a financial speculation tax as "technically feasible" and "morally right."

Technically feasible.

Morally right.

And necessary if we are ever going to get serious about raising the revenues that are needed—from the people who need to pay.

[20111027-05](#) 16:02 SteveB Energy Saving Cooking

SteveG, we were talking about conservation the other day, in the vein of “tiny houses”. Today I had an idea that was new to me and wanted to see if anybody else has heard of anything like this.

Now, my Dad was an energy conserver! I swear he followed everybody around the house just to turn off the lights, but that may be an exaggeration. When we bought them their first microwave and VCR years ago, they kept both unplugged except when in use, because they didn't want the displays using electricity all the time. I can remember burning coal in our furnace when I was a little kid.

But my Dad never thought of this one.

Marci is working on a case now, so, before she came home for lunch today, I wanted to boil a few potatoes to have with some other stuff already in the fridge. But I was working and it was really too early...so I hit upon a plan in the same way the Koran came to Mohammed, only a little smaller...maybe more like the way God told several of the Republican candidates that they must run. I guess that would be better than being told to build a boat.

I brought the potatoes to a heavy boil (with the lid on), then TURNED OFF THE GAS AND LEFT IT OFF! I left the lid on and decided I would wait 40 minutes—2X the usual 20 if the gas were on all the time, pretty much full bore.

40 minutes later, Marci got home. The potatoes were still hot and perfectly cooked.

Now this wouldn't work with everything. And maybe it wouldn't work if ambient temperature were cold—which it sure isn't here. But people boil a lot of potatoes, eggs, and vegetables. If everybody cooked like this in the whole civilized world, it could save a lot of energy.

What do you think? Old idea? Anybody ever hear of such a technique?

Of course, I also had the stupid idea of bringing water to Texas from the Mississippi in a huge pipeline, like I now read China is going to build for one of their own God-forsaken dry places like Texas.

[20111027-06](#) 17:20 SteveG Re: Energy Saving Cooking (reply to SteveB, above)

That is the exact process we use for boiling eggs and the process for corn on the cob. Never thought of it for other foods.

I had an aunt – this was back in the 50's – that always told everyone that they needed to unplug everything that wasn't being used, even if there was not a lit display. Her kids, now in their 70's and one in the mid 60's use to laugh at her. She contended that the electricity was continuous to the appliance and would run up your electric bill.

I have also heard at some point we will be selling the Middle East barrels of water from the Great Lakes for \$100 a barrel.

[20111027-08](#) 18:30 Art Re: Energy Saving Cooking (reply to SteveB & SteveG, above)

Watch out where the water goes. Look what has happened to the Aral Sea.

20111027-07 17:37 SteveG "Increasing Gloom as Super Committee Deadline Looms"

Question: In regards to the U.S. deficit and the paralysis in Washington toward resolving the issues and relying on a "Super Committee" to get us out, could the group of us come to an agreement on an appropriate process resolving the debt issues? If this group is too progressive or conservative leaning, add the appropriate number of the other & could we resolve the issues before the super committee???

"Increasing Gloom as Super Committee Deadline Looms" by Wolf Blitzer, CNN

Oct. 27, 2011, (http://situationroom.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/27/blitzer's-blog-increasing-gloom-as-super-committee-deadline-looms/?hpt=hp_t2)

It was sort of lost in the headlines, but Democratic members of the so-called super committee proposed some major changes in Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid spending – something Democrats in general strongly oppose.

As part of their effort to revive the failed Barack Obama-John Boehner budget negotiations of earlier this year, the super committee Democrats put forward a \$3 trillion package in deficit reduction over the next 10 years.

That package included about \$1.2 trillion in tax increases – a nonstarter as far as the Republicans are concerned. They oppose any tax hikes and have made it clear during the past 24 hours that they reject this latest Democratic offer.

Also included in this week's Democratic plan were some other ideas that President Obama put forward in April just before his talks with Boehner collapsed.

At the time, Obama proposed saving at least \$200 billion in Medicare over 10 years and another \$100 billion in Medicaid. The president also proposed changing the way the government considers annual entitlement cost-of-living increases, which would have amounted to smaller Social Security checks. And finally, Obama was open to the possibility of increasing Medicare eligibility from age 65 to 67.

Democratic members of the super committee say they did not support increasing the Medicare eligibility age in their latest offer to the Republicans.

What they do say, though, is that any cuts in Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid spending would have to be balanced by at least some tax increases on the rich. That would be necessary to mollify the Democratic base, which opposes tinkering with entitlement spending for seniors, the poor and the middle class.

The six Democratic and six Republican members of the committee have until November 23 to come up with a plan to cut at least \$1.2 trillion over ten years. Congress would then have until December 23 to approve the plan. If that doesn't happen, across the board budget cuts would be triggered, including domestic and Pentagon spending.

I haven't given up hope yet on a deal among the 12 members of the panel, but I am becoming increasingly gloomy.

20111027-09 20:49 SteveG Is This the Best Congress We Can Buy?

Congressional approval rating at 8% and scheduled to be in session 109 days in 2012. Best we can buy?

20111027-10 22:05 SteveB Re: Is This the Best Congress We Can Buy? (reply to SteveG, above)

These are amazingly bad numbers. Maybe some kind of revolution is in order. I know I am about completely fed up!

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

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