



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

NEWSLETTER #7 — NOV. 1, 2011

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Love Life! / Steve Jobs

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Nov. 1, 2011)

We went to a party recently with friends and hadn't met a lot of the other people until that night. At one point, our host, a man from Colombian, told my wife and I a very interesting story. Ten years ago, he was kidnapped by FARC guerrillas, tortured, and held in the jungle for two month. Finally, someone (the government? his family?) paid \$1.5 million and he was released.

But he didn't tell the story simply to relay those facts. What he was passionate about was the effect the incident had on his life. He said, as bad as it was, the kidnapping was the best thing that ever happened to him. It taught him to appreciate life and what he has. More than anything, he said, it taught him how very important and under-appreciated are our family and friends and the little time we have together. He said the painful incident was the greatest gift he could have been given, because it made him truly understand life and death, and now he was more than OK with both, where he had not been before.

As I watched him, his wife, and two young adult children going around the party, being the perfect, caring, happy hosts to 80 guests, I knew that he was as good as his word, and that he had taken the time and trouble, with people he hadn't known until that night, to give us the special gift of his story.

You will never go wrong in this life to take your death as an advisor...even though you already know the advice—
LIVE!

Everything else, believe it or not, has been designed to take care of itself. You don't need to worry about it.

LIVE!

"Steve Jobs' Final Words Shared in Sister's Eulogy" by Kevin Dolak, ABC News

Oct. 31, 2011, (<http://gma.yahoo.com/blogs/abc-blogs/steve-jobs-final-words-shared-sister-eulogy-060321674.html>)

Steve Jobs' sister Mona Simpson shared in the eulogy she delivered at the late Apple CEO's memorial service that his surprising final words from his deathbed were, "Oh wow, oh wow, oh wow."

In the eulogy, which was printed in The New York Times on Sunday, Simpson describes Jobs' final days and moments in a Palo Alto hospital, which was spent surrounded by family as his breathing gradually became shorter.

His breath, she said, "indicated an arduous journey, some steep path..."

Delivered at the October 16 service for Jobs at Stanford Memorial Church, Simpson, an accomplished novelist, began by describing her initial meeting of her brother for the first time when she was in her mid-20s. Simpson was born in 1957, two years after Jobs, who was given up for adoption as an infant.

"Even as a feminist, my whole life I'd been waiting for a man to love, who could love me. For decades, I'd thought that man would be my father. When I was 25, I met that man and he was my brother," Simpson said.

Simpson went on to describe her strong relationship with the man now known for revolutionizing the computer world, while explaining Jobs' work ethic and capacity for love — particularly for his wife Laurene and as a doting father to their three children.

"Steve was like a girl in the amount of time he spent talking about love. Love was his supreme virtue, his god of gods. He tracked and worried about the romantic lives of the people working with him," she said.

In describing his illness from pancreatic cancer, which Jobs was diagnosed with in October 2003, Simpson paints a picture of Jobs as an enduring, "intensely emotional man."

She concluded her eulogy by sharing Jobs' final moments, which were spent staring lovingly at his family, and his final three monosyllabic words as he stared into the distance past their shoulders: OH WOW. OH WOW. OH WOW.

Simpson is currently a professor of English at the University of California, Los Angeles and was a finalist for the PEN/Faulkner Award. She has written five novels, and won the Whiting Prize for her debut, *Anywhere But Here*.

FotM NEWSLETTER #7 (Nov. 1, 2011)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

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20111031-01

11:42 SteveG

Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security!

Tell Harry Reid and the Democratic senators on the Super Committee: Absolutely no cuts to Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security benefits:

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/supercommittee_mms/?r=231765&id=29670-3891339-JJRRGLx.

It's official: There's now a bipartisan consensus on the Super Committee to cut Medicare and Social Security benefits.

The Republicans have a longstanding desire to dismantle Medicaid, Medicare and Social Security. But according to recent news reports, a majority of Democrats on the Super Committee just proposed their own plan to reduce the deficit that included slashing Medicare benefits by \$200 billion¹ and dramatically reducing future Social Security benefits.²

It's hard to image how the Democrats on the Super Committee could be any more out-of-touch or wrongheaded.

In the face of massive unemployment, rampant foreclosures, a sputtering economy and widespread anger that the country is systematically prioritizing the needs of the ultra-rich and wealthy corporations over the needs of the other 99% of us, the Democrats who support this plan think the best thing to do is make it harder and more expensive for seniors and the less fortunate to get medical care or pay for their basic living expenses.

We need to make sure Democrats understand that rather than supporting benefit cuts, it would be better if the automatic cuts specified in the legislation that created the Super Committee are triggered. But we have an uphill fight.

Reportedly, the benefit cuts plan proposed by the Democrats on the Super Committee had been agreed to by President Obama in negotiations with John Boehner over raising the debt ceiling.

This means we can't rely on President Obama vetoing a bad deficit reduction bill that makes it out of the Super Committee and passes Congress.

It also means the best way to stop a bad deal is to build so much political pressure at the outset that it never gets off the ground.

The Democrats' plan was rejected by the Republicans because it included some tax increases. But the proposal demonstrates an alarming willingness to cave on core economic issues despite the vital role Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security play in our society and the widespread unpopularity of benefit cuts to these programs.

And recent history has shown us how Democrats intent on cutting a deal with Republicans will move from a bad deal to one that's worse.

It's more important than ever that we speak out and draw a line in the sand on benefit cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. We can't wait until a bad deal is cut in the Super Committee. We need to speak out now.

Current Campaigns: <http://www.credoaction.com/?r=11&id=29670-3891339-JJRRGLx>

Matt Lockshin, Campaign Manager

¹"Medicare Eligibility Age Increase Not Part Of Dems' Super Committee Presentation," Sam Stein, *Huffington Post*, Oct. 26, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/10/26/medicare-eligibility-age-n_1033097.html?ncid=edlinkusaolp00000008.

²"Read the Dems' 'Super Committee' Proposal," RJ Eskow," *Huffington Post*, Oct. 28, 2011, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rj-eskow/disabled-kids-and-the-dow_b_1034181.html.

20111031-02	11:45	SteveB	Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to SteveG, above)
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Ah...Congress wants to sell us down the river again!

20111031-03	11:58	SteveG	Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to SteveB, above)
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In Washington State, there is a 2 billion dollar budget shortfall, 8.2% sales tax, no income tax. The governor has proposed cutting all Medicaid funding of medications (developmentally disabled, some chronic mentally ill, and some poor elderly depend on Medicaid for medications); cut 16% in higher education; poor school districts to have their funding cut by 50%. There are a few more cuts, but these are the ones that stand out.

Central Washington University through the Board of Regents is offering the current university president a \$500,000 bonus if he stays for five years. The thinking is that is what "big corporations" do.

To cut education makes no sense to me – that is our future.

To cut funding to poor schools makes no sense – especially 50%. Most of the poor school districts have a high concentration of Latinos and Native American.

To cut the medications for the elderly, chronically mentally ill, and to the developmentally disabled seems heartless.

Please point out the shortfalls in my thinking.

20111031-04	12:19	Pam	Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to SteveG, above)
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You are absolutely right, SteveG. This just goes to show how deep the problem goes. \$500,000 to a university president is absurd, but that's what they're all making now. Coaches at big football schools, even assistant coaches, can make a million or more. It is unconscionable for those high earners to make that much money when middle-class and poor families are struggling to send their kids to college. People keep screaming, taking to the streets, and signing petitions, but nothing seems to be changing. I don't believe Eric Cantor for one minute when he says he can understand where OWS is coming from. He may say it, but he hates it. I wish someone would explain to my why Republicans have had as their mission for decades the elimination of Social Security, Medicare, and all the other social programs so many depend on. I know they want to shrink government, but why? If it's not so they can get richer, then what is it? And why do they think it's necessary to shrink government but not corporations and banks? Dale? GaryC?

20111031-05	13:07	SteveG	Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to Pam, above)
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Government size – number of federal employees as compared to the population – is the smallest it has been in decades. Fiscal conservatism I understand, but not on the backs of the chronically mentally ill, the elderly, the developmentally disabled. At the start of WW II we were 16th in military spending and now we outspend the totality of the next 8 or so countries. As others have stated we are 46th in infant mortality, 49th in health care measurements, and 1st in health care expenditures. We do not get our money's worth.

20111031-14

21:56

Dale

Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to Pam, above)

How about, let's break down your comments into components.

Just like there are all kinds of Democrats with varying degrees of opinions about a variety of topics, Republicans are not a monolith who all have the same "mission." If it helps anyone to get fired up by lumping all Republicans together, have at it, but that's neither accurate or productive.....except to further partisanship.

I believe most Republicans hold out that Social Security and Medicare are useful concepts and should be a part of our government and society. I also believe that most Republicans and Independents are concerned with the fundamental insolvency of the programs as now structured and are moving towards the conclusion that structural changes are needed. That's my opinion, which will probably be tested at the polls soon. In the last election American voters resoundingly chose smaller government, not larger. No doubt some of you will try to rationalize away the facts, but the mass outing of Democratic politicians speaks for itself.

Big government requires money to run. It takes money from people who are working to earn it, then it inefficiently messes with that money and gives back less of it in the way of benefits. The more government programs, the more government employees, the more waste and who pays for it? Taxpayers. Now, if you are one of the 50% who don't pay taxes, what do you care? Why not agree with that new government handout, whether it's for you or someone else...after all, it's not costing you anything. This is a perverse machine that takes money from the most productive earners, gives it to government employees, people who choose not to work, and finally, the legitimate needy. (I am not implying government employees are bad people or poor employees. I am saying that there are inherent inefficiencies and the bigger the government gets, the more they show up.)

In a weak moment, SteveB said he believes everyone should pay some taxes, even if it is only a token amount. Of course, in saying that he agrees that taxes will automatically go up for lower income earners. (We are assuming here that those don't earn anything will not pay any taxes.) There has been the knee-jerk objection to 9-9-9. Accompanied by wailing and hand wringing, opponents to broadening the tax base say, "not so fast, this will increase taxes on the lower income earners." Duh. Economists and even the Democratic leadership admits that simply raising taxes on "the rich" will not be enough to stem the rise in the deficit.

Just for once, I'd like to see some constructive conversation from the liberal side on how we increase the size of the economic pie, instead of how we divvy up the existing one.

Now for another revelation. 85% of companies are taxed at the "individual" rate. When tax rates for "the rich" are increased, it increases company taxes too. When the most important objective today is jobs, do you want to encourage the engine that creates jobs or dissect it? This is one more way that the current tax code is screwed up. Republicans, Democrats, liberals, conservatives, libertarians, socialists, unionists and all other "-ism's" will have their own opinion on how taxes should be assessed, but what we've got now isn't the optimum and needs reform.

Finally, big banks, banking regulation, and bank enforcement are not serving the public very well. This situation is not good for Republicans or Democrats; however, both parties seem incapable of either agreeing on or coming up with solutions. There are mid and small banks and a growing use of credit unions, so lending doesn't have to stop for individuals or smaller businesses, but it has. I don't believe the answer is necessarily to "shrink" corporations or banks, but to find ways to enable and control them so they run properly. Actually, to be competitive in world markets, we need big banks and big corporations. We just don't need big leeches...meaning the overpaid managements or the unethical practices.

Happy Halloween!

20111031-15

22:59

SteveG

Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to Dale, above)

Could someone please define big government? The information I see indicates the number of federal employees as compared to the population is smaller. Social Security investment return was diverted during the Johnson administration to the general operating fund rather than remaining in the Social Security fund. Democrats, Republicans, liberals, conservatives – it doesn't matter. All of us to one degree or another are in the same pickle.

Big government, small government it doesn't matter – it all takes money to run. It all depends on definitions. A good accountant can make dollars and decimal points say anything they want. A politician is the same.

Corporate loopholes need to be closed, only then can one start determining what the corporate tax rate should be. Companies move locations on a regular basis depending on the tax Abatements, training incentives, economic development funds, etc. that are made available by communities, counties, states, and countries. It is all based on the economic stimulates offered.

Can we agree that loophole closing would be the first step in increasing the economic pie? If not, then what is the suggestion?

[20111031-06](#) 13:37 Pam Privatization of Prisons / Greed & Avarice

I tried to post a couple of articles from Nation of Change yesterday, but I didn't do it right, so let me summarize one of them. It was about the privatization of prisons and the lobbying efforts the prison business exerts to criminalize more things and lengthen prison terms, all so these private prisons can make more money. This hasn't been going on all that long, just the last 20 years or so. Before that prisons were run by the government. America imprisons more people than any other nation. We have 5% of the world's population and 25% of its inmates. There are more black men in prison than in college. The vast majority are in prison for drug crimes, and most of those are for possession of marijuana. In California, the prison lobby worked to get three-strikes-and-you're-out passed, so that anyone with three convictions, even for something minor, gets sent away for 25 to life. Here is just one more example of how a private business has found a way to enrich itself, with the collusion of politicians.

The more I think about it, the more I believe a great American flaw is our love of money. It seems to eclipse all other values—at least for enough of us to make it an identifiably American trait. I'm not opposed to people having lots of money, but when accumulating simply in order to have more of what you already have enough of becomes paramount, then something is wrong. (That was a horrible sentence.) I don't want to set limits or interfere too much with the market, and I recognize the need for capital. My point is that it's our ATTITUDE that is wrong-headed. It's so deeply ingrained in our culture I don't have much hope that it will change, but attitudes can change sometimes: smoking is no longer an accepted fact of life. But so long as Donald Trump is the avatar of success and top athletes make more than neurosurgeons, we will remain a silly, shallow people. (I exclude all of us, of course. WE know better. Right?)

[20111031-07](#) 16:28 SteveG Re: Privatization of Prisons / Greed & Avarice (reply to Pam, above)

Agree wholeheartedly. Yakima County lost a 9 million/year contract for prisoners and has to lay off 76 jail employees. Major business. I know people in Indiana sentenced to 6 years for a drug offense, felony, and end up spending 2 years in the county jail – the state pays pretty well to local jails. Often times folks are offered to commute their sentences if they become an undercover snitch. Money grubbing is everywhere.

[20111031-08](#) 17:13 Pam Re: Privatization of Prisons / Greed & Avarice (reply to SteveG, above)

I watched the TED talk about how income disparity hurts everyone. It opened my eyes even more than they were already. When I hear people talk about class warfare and envy, I know that's really code for "I've got mine; you get yours, Jack." You either live by selfishness or by compassion. It's as simple as that. If you admire Ayn Rand, you're in the selfish camp. If you like George Eliot or Abraham Verghese, you likely are compassionate. Do compassionate people really want to cut funding for the developmentally disabled, the poor elderly, the chronically mentally ill?

My daughter works with families that have a developmentally disabled, mentally ill child. DD, or double diagnosis, they're called. The funding for the agency she works for is being cut, and she will likely lose her job in a few months. She's worked there for ten years. Some of her families have been with her from the beginning. What will they do when Saskia leaves, and no one takes her place? Her whole division of case managers is being eliminated. This sort of thing is going on all over the country, in schools, in hospitals, in agencies that serve people in need, in police departments, and on and on. I know you all know this, but why, why, why do politicians never emphasize the harm the cuts will do? All they can talk about is money, money, money.

20111031-09 18:30 SteveG Re: Privatization of Prisons / Greed & Avarice (reply to Pam, above)

Reagan gave us ketchup as a vegetable and cut funding for mental hospitals creating a new class of homeless.

I worked for 40 years with developmentally disabled, mentally ill, and welfare recipients to become employed and to live in their community. The programs more than pay for themselves in return on investment. When a person is taken out of a state hospital to live in the community the cost may decline from \$400 a day to \$200 a day – numbers may vary according to state, but it definitely is cheaper. Assistance in getting employment – costs are more than covered by the return in tax revenue.

20111031-11 19:42 Pam Re: Privatization of Prisons / Greed & Avarice (reply to SteveG, above)

My daughter has a friend—a woman I went to grad school with, actually—who has a rare form of muscular dystrophy. They thought she'd live two years. She's over 50 now. She is severely disabled, severely, but she lives at home with around-the-clock caregivers. The state wants to put her in a nursing home, which would cost about twice as much as if she remains in her home. She has a varied life with lots of friends, none of which would be available to her in an institution.

On the other hand, turning mentally ill patients loose to fend for themselves or rely on inadequate community resources is nothing less than cruel. All to save money? Bullsh*t.

20111031-13 20:56 SteveG Re: Privatization of Prisons / Greed & Avarice (reply to Pam, above)

Life, Liberty, and Pursuit of Happiness. Quality of life. Compassion, community, employees, our neighbors. I remember in elementary school I would go to Eiteljorge's Barber Shop for a haircut – a dad, two sons, and another guy. Once in a while Buster would come in – this was in the 50's. Buster would be dirty & smelly – they would send him to the back – he would shower, change clothes, and come back out front. A shave, haircut, some jokes, some ribbing, some laughing and then Buster would go on his way. In their own way taking care of some of Buster's needs, but not all by a long shot.

On the other side of town I would see Slappy slowly walking around in the spring, summer, and fall – odd jobs here and there, a bottle of wine more regular than not, gone to Putnamville for the winter. If it gets too cold out a brick through a window would get you three meals and a bed.

Same town in 2011 a homeless shelter closes from lack of funding – back to the streets, back up 60 years.

20111031-10 19:25 SteveG "Fourth Amendment Takes a Big Hit"

"Fourth Amendment Takes a Big Hit" by Leonard Pitts, Jr. *The National Memo*

Oct. 30, 2011, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/content/fourth-amendment-takes-big-hit>)

I have an adopted Black-Vietnamese son. There is a county in North Carolina that is famous (notorious) for stopping Blacks disproportionately to Whites. When my son comes to visit, he is invariably stopped. He was not speeding, did not have drugs, was, in fact, with his very respectable girlfriend. I would be devastated if that happened to me. Why would it be any different for any other innocent person? There are statistics, and then there are stories, which speak volumes.

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

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