



# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE**

## **NEWSLETTER #8 — NOV. 2, 2011**

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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## **Candidate Problems**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Nov. 2, 2011)

Today I'm thinking about the Republican presidential candidates a little bit. What a bunch of problems these people have! I can't figure out why any of them really wants to put himself through the process of performing a reality soap opera in front of the entire world. I can't help but get embarrassed for them—a most uncomfortable feeling—even though I can't identify philosophically with any of them, except maybe Mitt, because how can you not find something to agree with in all those shifting stances based on what he perceives the public wants.

We should learn a lesson from all this. The hunger for power is incredibly immense in a politician and must be controlled! Just like any other powerful force of nature, we must find ways to control and channel lust for power and greed.

"How Tea Party Could Drive GOP to Disaster" by David Frum, CNN

Oct. 31, 2011. ([http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/31/opinion/frum-republican-tea-party-scenarios/index.html?hpt=po\\_r1](http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/31/opinion/frum-republican-tea-party-scenarios/index.html?hpt=po_r1))

(Editor's note: David Frum, a CNN contributor, was a special assistant to President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2002. He is the author of six books, including *Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again* and is the editor of FrumForum.)

(WASHINGTON) A new CNN poll finds that about half of Republicans sympathize with the tea party movement. The other half either remain aloof or (5%) even express hostility.

That second group of Republicans has received remarkably little media attention this cycle. Yet their man — Mitt Romney — has held steady in first or second place for the past three years. Meanwhile tea party Republicans have bounced from Sarah Palin to Donald Trump to Michele Bachmann to Rick Perry to (now) Herman Cain, transfixing the media every time they lose faith in one messiah and search for another.

Yet sooner or later, the tea party Republicans must converge on a single choice. When they do, they will present the non-tea party Republicans with a troubling menu of possibilities.

Possibility 1: Romney is nominated, Romney is elected.

Romney's political gaffe or tactic?

From the point of view of non-tea party Republicans, this is the ideal outcome of the 2012 election. Yet it is also an outcome that looks worryingly out of reach. As we enter the final 12 months of the election countdown, Romney still cannot rise above 30% support in his own party. Worse, while it's easy to imagine (say) Herman Cain's voters shifting to Rick Perry or vice versa, it is very hard to imagine where Mitt Romney will find the additional Republican votes he needs.

#### Possibility 2: Romney is nominated, Romney loses.

For non-tea party Republicans, this second outcome opens all kinds of ugly, ominous possibilities. If candidate Romney loses, tea party Republicans will claim that the GOP lost because it failed to nominate a "true conservative." That claim may fly in the face of political math (how would a more extreme candidate win more votes?), but it will pack a lot of emotional punch. Intense partisans are always ready to believe that the way to win is to be more intense and more partisan. Back-to-back losses under John McCain in 2008 and Mitt Romney in 2012 will open the way to an ultra-conservative nominee in 2016 — and a true party debacle.

#### Possibility 3: A tea party Republican is nominated and loses.

From the point of view of a non-tea party Republican, the third possibility is the most tragic waste. A winnable election will be thrown away on an ideological adventure. Yet within the disaster might lurk a silver lining. At least the GOP will get the ideological adventure out of its system. For three years, Republican activists have lived in a fantasy world in which fringe characters like Sarah Palin and Herman Cain somehow "speak for the common sense of the common people." It seems incredible that anybody could believe such a thing. It seems crazy that anyone would actually need a presidential election to disabuse them of such notions. But as Benjamin Franklin said: "Experience is a hard teacher, but fools will have no other."

#### Possibility 4: A tea party Republican is nominated and wins.

This possibility has to be reckoned the most unlikely. But it cannot be excluded as utterly impossible, on two conditions: If the U.S. economy continues as weak and sick as it is today, and if tea party Republicans revert from the utterly unelectable Herman Cain to Rick Perry, who as governor of Texas possesses at least the paper qualifications for the presidency. Then - who knows? - anything might happen. Perry would be a much weaker candidate than Romney, but if the voters are determined to fire the incumbent, then even a weak challenger can prevail. (See Barack Hussein Obama, 2008 candidacy of.) In which case, not only tea party Republicans but all Republicans and all Americans will confront the problem: what next?

The tea party stands for a series of propositions that don't meet the reality test: that deficits matter more than jobs, that cutting deficits and tightening credit will accelerate economic growth, that high taxes and over-regulation are the most important reasons that growth has not revived, and that America still offers the world's best opportunity for the poor to rise. Tea party plans call for a radical shift in the burden of taxation from the rich to the poor — and promise big reductions in government spending without touching any of the benefits of current retirees.

If put into practice, the tea party platform is a formula for political and economic crisis.

Fortunately, it remains a long-shot outcome. If you're betting the odds, you want to put your money on possibility three. As for possibility one — that's just good government. And nobody seems to get much excited about that these days.

(The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of David Frum.)

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<a href="#">20111101-01</a>	09:01	Jim	Bank of America to Pay No Income Taxes
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I see where Bank of America reported \$6 billion in profit for the last quarter, which is okay if they earned it honestly, but the news article also said this is money on which they will pay NO TAXES. That part I do not understand.

<a href="#">20111101-02</a>	12:59	SteveG	"Bono, Lady Gaga, Usher, Stevie Wonder - Clinton Foundation Celebration at the Bowl"
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"Bono, Lady Gaga, Usher, Stevie Wonder - Clinton Foundation Celebration at the Bowl" by Ben Westhoff, West Coast Sound

Oct. 16 2011, ([http://blogs.laweekly.com/westcoastsound/2011/10/bono\\_lady\\_gaga\\_usher\\_stevie\\_wo.php](http://blogs.laweekly.com/westcoastsound/2011/10/bono_lady_gaga_usher_stevie_wo.php))

[http://www.clintonfoundation.org/?utm\\_source=103111enews&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=103111enews](http://www.clintonfoundation.org/?utm_source=103111enews&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=103111enews)

<a href="#">20111101-07</a>	17:09	SteveB	Re: "Bono, Lady Gaga, Usher, Stevie Wonder..." (reply to SteveG, above)
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That was a hell of a concert! I wonder if they do that every year, or if they're going to? Bill may be a dirty old man, but he rocks!

<a href="#">20111101-03</a>	13:57	SteveG	"Obama Acts to Reduce Prescription-Drug Shortages"
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A bill to rectify this situation has been in Congress since February and still no action. Don't care? Lobbyist? What is going on with this?

"Obama Acts to Reduce Prescription-Drug Shortages" by Nanci Hellmich, *USA Today*

Nov. 1, 2011, (<http://yourlife.usatoday.com/health/healthcare/story/2011-11-01/Obama-acts-to-reduce-prescription-drug-shortages/51023354/1>)

20111101-04 15:41 SteveG "20 Biggest CEO Pay Raises"

Take a look at the slide show. Fair wages?

"20 Biggest CEO Pay Raises" by CNN/Money

Nov. 1, 2011, ([http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2011/news/companies/1109/gallery.pay\\_raise/?hpt=hp\\_t2](http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2011/news/companies/1109/gallery.pay_raise/?hpt=hp_t2))

(Viacom's chief executive Philippe Dauman enjoyed a whopping \$50.5 million raise last year. What other top execs saw their pay jump tremendously in 2010?)

20111101-05 16:25 SteveB Corruption Correlation

I was thinking...I know, always dangerous...

But what if there were proof positive that almost every member of Congress is corrupt? Would that be enough to provide the impetus for "real change"?

Here's my theory: There is an incredibly strong correlation between the amount of money a politician takes from any given campaign donor or group of donors and the amount of favoritism shown to those same donors. This could take the form of bill sponsorship, votes, favors, even speeches—any overt, discoverable actions.

Here's my plan: some energetic young graduate student required! Maybe a small team paid for by a PAC? Haha. But, seriously, with computer analysis, wouldn't it be doable? Our group here has gathered quite a few statistics that point in the direction of this "corruption correlation".

They're in the archive I'm currently editing of all past emails going back to 2007. I've got it down to about 2000 pages now, but I'm not sure it will go much lower. There will be two volumes divided by date. I'm thinking about providing links from the FotM Newsletter and the website to both volumes, as well as past issues, and the actual blog. Any of you in the archive, even though only user names are given, will be given a chance to retract (or possibly edit) anything you wrote (just in case). I'll keep you posted.

20111101-06 16:34 SteveG Re: Corruption Correlation (reply to SteveB, above)

No wonder you are residing in Bolivia. Just kidding.

20111101-08 19:39 Jim Sci-Fi Trilogies by Robert Sawyer

A few people on this list have admitted that they have changed their minds about some things. Bless you for that.

Some of these people who get elected with their opinions set in concrete and firm statements that they will never change are saying that they cannot learn anything new and that they cannot adjust to new information and changing realities..."my mind is made up, don't confuse me with facts!"

For those of you who like thought-provoking science fiction I would recommend two fairly recent trilogies by Robert Sawyer. *www.wake*, *www.watch*, and *www.wonder* are about the internet developing intelligence and self-awareness. In the third one the government of China did a bunch of harsh things like wiping out every living thing in an area where a really bad virus was starting and then trying to isolate their people from contact with the rest of the web. Eventually the Webmind confronted the Chinese leaders and convinced them to abdicate and created a

way every Chinese could vote by cell phone on governance. A lot of other interesting ideas floating around, like why the US government was trying to kill this artificial intelligence, because they could not control it.

The second series is called *Hominid, Human and Hybrid* for the three titles. It involves a contact made between our version of Earth and one which is inhabited by Neanderthals which are both at high technical levels but very different worlds. The Neanderthal never developed agriculture and continued as a hunter-gatherer based economy. After they found out about us, they blamed agriculture for a lot of our bad behavior—like slavery and wars. But they have limited world population to about 185 million instead of 7 billion and have a very different method of birth control. There are a number of readers who may be upset by the fact that they do not have religion and that their society is bisexual. Again, there is an American who plots to wipe-out the Neanderthals so we could expand into the world that they have kept clean and green.

Both series have a lot of great ideas floating around in them.

[Makes me think of the way American corporations are chomping at the bit to get back into Cuba, which remains pretty much the way Castro found it in the '50's...“kept clean and green”, just waiting to be despoiled. –SteveB]

20111101-09 20:05 SteveB Re: Sci-Fi Trilogies by Robert Sawyer (reply to Jim, above)

Now I have a lot of reading to do! And it all sounds very cool. I wonder if Ben knows about all this stuff? Are you reading, Ban? Let me know.

Thank you for the references, Jim. It's interesting how enlightening it can be to look at this little planet from a future perspective...from a distance...

20111101-10 21:21 Dale “New Stock Index Lets You Invest in Occupy Wall Street”

“New Stock Index Lets You Invest in Occupy Wall Street” by Jeff Benjamin, *Investment News*

Nov. 1, 2011 1:15 pm ET, (<http://www.investmentnews.com/article/20111101/FREE/111109996>)

(Limited to companies that have drawn the ire of protestors.)

In perhaps the ultimate example of irony, the Occupy Wall Street movement now has its own stock index. Created by Minyanville Media Inc. columnist Michael Comeau, the tidy collection of eight stocks is designed to represent the kinds of corporate villains that have sent so many protestors into the streets.

“We're not making any calls one way or the other; we just want to see what happens” with the stocks in the index, Mr. Comeau said.

The list of companies was compiled by Mr. Comeau and his colleagues following research of the protests that included interviews with protestors, and the reading of blogs and other news reports on the subject.

The complete index includes BP PLC (BP), General Electric Co. (GE), The Goldman Sachs Group Inc. (GS), JPMorgan Chase & Co. (JPM), Lockheed Martin Corp. (LMT), News Corp. (NWSA), SLM Corp. (SLM) and Wal-Mart Stores Inc. (WMT).

Each company was added to the index for a reason related to what Mr. Comeau learned from the protestors.

“JPMorgan and Goldman Sachs were the biggest targets because they created mortgage-backed securities that were designed to fail,” he said.

General Electric, he explained, is considered a corporate tax dodger.

Wal-Mart is on the list because it has long been opposed to organized labor, which joined the movement shortly after it began.

News Corp., which owns and operates Fox News, was included "because we saw a lot of anti-Fox signs."

"They're really not buying the whole fair-and-balanced stuff," Mr. Comeau added.

When asked why he thought the protestors have not also included the bailed-out American automakers General Motors and Chrysler Corp. as targets, Mr. Comeau said, "Those companies are in Detroit and they employ blue-collar workers."

"It's easier to visualize an auto industry worker in trouble," he added. "But nobody really cares if a bunch of bankers lose their jobs."

Mr. Comeau, who said he developed the index not as a statement of his own but to reflect the sentiment that he is observing, acknowledged the absence of a centralized theme among the protestors.

"The whole thing is an expression of the fact that people see uncertainty about the future and they don't see any solutions," he said. "Everybody is showing up with whatever causes they're angry about."

As far as why such an eclectic list of issues is being protested in lower Manhattan, Mr. Comeau surmised: "Occupy Wall Street is an easy and memorable name, but it is almost a branding failure because most of the financial companies moved out of that area a long time ago."

Of the stocks making up the OWS index, News Corp. has performed the best so far this year, up 15.12% from the start of the year, and Goldman Sachs has done the worst, down 38.36%.

That compares with a 3.15% drop in the S&P 500 over the same period.

[20111101-11](#)

22:05

SteveB

Re: CREDO Action Petition: Don't Cut Medicare, Medicaid or Social Security! (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #7)

You talk about the inefficiencies of government, but, in my opinion, these are not our problem. It has been well established that government, without the need to siphon off profits, can often deliver services more efficiently than the private sector. As if efficiency were all that counts, which it is not.

I believe we are all the victims here of politicians seeking to privatize, so they can divert big contracts to their cronies. This has been the pattern in the past.

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

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