



# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE**

## **NEWSLETTER #9 — NOV. 3, 2011**

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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### **Point (Right) / Counterpoint (Left)**

(posted by Dale & Pam, Nov. 3, 2011)

I love a good debate. Since we don't seem to be able to get a competent debate from the Republican candidates, maybe our own group members can show them how it's done. Move over Herman and Michele!

#### **POINT (reprinted from Dale, 11/1/11)**

Pam: I wish someone would explain to me 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?

Pam, 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 nor 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.

### **COUNTERPOINT (from Pam, 11/3/11)**

Dale, how about let's break down your response to my arguments and consider them one by one?

First, don't you think accusing me (I don't take this personally) of lumping all Republicans together is a bit like the pot calling the kettle black? I seem to remember you saying something derogatory about "you liberals" in one of your posts. Of course, there is a variety of opinions on both sides, but unless we can generalize, we will get bogged down in exceptions and lose sight of the big differences that separate us. Republicans tend to distrust government, Democrats look at its potential to do good. "Government is the problem" has been a rallying cry for Republicans ever since Reagan.

What would smaller government look like anyway? I know Repubs want to get rid of OSHA, the EPA, and other agencies that protect people. Is that what you mean?

Second, the mass outing of Democrats in the last election you claim is proof the people want smaller government, whatever that means. I would suggest it was a cry of discontent with Congress, expressed in the only way people have to express it (Repub. or Dem.) by voting. I also credit the Tea Party with stirring up and inflaming the very people who stand to lose the most under a Republican administration. There's a scene in Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" (I know I've alluded to this before.) where Mark Antony (I think it's he; it's been a while since I read it.) addresses the crowd. At first he persuades everyone to cheer for one point of view, then he changes direction and within seconds has them cheering for its direct opposite. People form herds, and it's possible to lead them without their even realizing it.

Third, you say that more government means more employees, and who pays? Yes, taxpayers. Then you lump these government workers with the lazy and the needy. I see evidence everywhere of the unemployed searching desperately for work. Please show me at least one instance of someone too lazy to work who is living on the government's dime. Who are these lazy layabouts? Where are they? The vast inequality of income distribution in this country is not only unfair; it is dangerous. Repubs. carry on about how the rich earned their success and should be allowed to keep its proceeds. How we should be grateful to them for creating jobs. What jobs? In what way does firing 50,000 Postal workers lessen the unemployment crisis? Gov't. expenditures "saved" will then have to go to unemployment insurance (which workers pay into; it's not charity). Oh, I forgot. Congress can put limits

on how long a person can collect, whatever his circumstances. Remember the Robber Barons? They have risen again.

Fourth, 9-9-9. I don't think even Herman Cain understands it. When asked probing questions about it, he refers to "a committee of economists" that came up with it. Then he claims state sales tax and federal sales tax are "apples and oranges." No. They're both money that comes out of your pocket. And if you're poor or middle-class, a greater percentage of your income is taken than is ripped from the "innocent" hands of the wealthy. I had a rich friend once, years ago when our kids were little, who didn't even know how much a loaf of bread or a box of diapers cost. She didn't need to.

Fifth, you say that raising the taxes on the rich isn't enough, by which I gather you mean taxing the rich is no solution at all. Maybe it's not enough all by itself, but it would produce more revenue that could be used to pay teachers, the police, the firefighters, etc. etc. A small rate hike on income above a certain level (\$5 mil, \$10 mil?) would not make a dent in corporate earnings. Most small businesses make nowhere near that and would not be affected.

Six, the people are again voting with their feet by moving their money into credit unions. I support that wholeheartedly. It's only common sense to bank where the fees are low or non-existent. I see that some of the big banks are scaling back their fee increases. That's the invisible hand of the market for you.

Finally, you say you disapprove of the gross overpayment of corporate executives and hedge fund managers and the unethical behavior that has been so disastrous for us all. I agree with you there. We do need reform and better regulation. What we do not need is a continuation of the status quo, the loopholes and inequities that give entities with lots of money the opportunity to rake in even more. We need not equality, but fairness. Elizabeth Warren is right. Those who succeed wildly have an obligation to give back. Many rich individuals do—Bill Gates, Bill Clinton and many others. Aren't corporations people now? Let them act with some humanity then. I see commercials on TV about how environmentally friendly fracking or coal mining are, but I don't believe them. Not when BP hemorrhages oil or rivers catch on fire. Not when lumber companies clear cut old-growth forests (or new-growth, come to that). Not when drug companies use illiterate Africans to test their drugs on. I may sound like I'm bashing corporations; I'm not. I'm just pointing out some of the injustices that the lust for power and money can lead to. Equal opportunity means more than running from the same starting line, which no one does anyway. That's like telling an amputee it's his fault for not winning the pole vaulting competition. Life is not fair, buddy. Suck it up. Quit whining.

You are welcome to show me (try to) the error of my ways.

### **FotM NEWSLETTER #9 (Nov. 3, 2011)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

<b>DATE-ID</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>FROM</b>	<b>SUBJECT/TITLE</b>
<a href="#">20111103-00</a>		Dale & Pam	<b>Point (Right) / Counterpoint (Left)</b> by Dale & Pam
<a href="#">20111102-08</a>	12:37	SteveB	Re: Point (Right) / Counterpoint (Left) (reply to Pam & Dale, above)
<a href="#">20111102-01</a>	09:57	Beth	The Republican Candidates
<a href="#">20111102-02</a>	10:58	Pam	Re: The Republican Candidates (reply to Beth, above)
<a href="#">20111102-03</a>	11:04	Pam	Re: "New Stock Index Lets You Invest in Occupy Wall Street" (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #8)
<a href="#">20111102-04</a>	11:07	Ben	"Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby"
<a href="#">20111102-05</a>	11:42	SteveB	Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to Ben, above)
<a href="#">20111102-06</a>	12:01	Pam	Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20111102-07</a>	12:02	Ben	Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20111102-09</a>	12:49	SteveB	Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to Ben, above)
<a href="#">20111102-10</a>	14:59	Ben	Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20111102-11</a>	22:10	Dale	"Top 8 Most Overpaid CEOs of Public Companies"

20111102-08 12:37 SteveB Re: Point (Right) / Counterpoint (Left) (reply to Pam & Dale, above)

Believe me! The two of you (Dale and Pam) are so much better than the Republican candidates at debating, it's not even funny (as we used to say in Greencastle).

I really like the way the issues have narrowed to very specific things.

I bet SteveG could put numbers to some of these points, based on what I've been reading in the group archives. How about it, SteveG?

I know for sure that the attempt to streamline the post office and/or put it out of business are complete BS. The USPS is doing fine, thank you, even with UPS and the internet and text messaging. Their problem, just as in the case of Social Security, is that the government has been stealing billions from them. The proof is in our Friends of the Middle archives.

Government can be very efficient and do wonderful things. I think we need to face that fact, just as we must face the fact that government must be efficiently monitored by professionals to ensure things stay on track. Just as in business. No different.

We've all seen well managed companies, where the top is aware of and in control of all aspects down to the bottom. This creates efficiencies. It can happen in government too. We have all seen poorly managed companies, where the top doesn't know or care to know of or regulate the layers of the company. Government can operate this way too, especially where the laws under which various agencies operate are crippled by special interests into self-serving, convoluted forms. Taxes? Healthcare? Education? Agriculture? FDA? USDA? Security? Banking and Financial System regulation? All crippled. All seemingly on purpose because the laws which form the very foundation for all of these activities have been corrupted by special interests.

And then Republicans preach about how government must be dismantled because it can't do anything right, except, I guess, make them rich. ;-)

It is amazing to me that government is as efficient as it is!

Efficient government is also crippled by buddy-buddy contracts and revolving doors for industry/lobbying/regulation, with both parties being culprits, but this is one of the areas where Republicans have staked their claim in the name of helping "free" enterprise, have they not?

Just thought I'd mention that.

**Maybe the cause of the problems is not bad government, or big government, or even inefficient government...maybe it's corrupt government!**

(I've been wanting to take a more active part in all the discussions, but am happy and feel I'm doing my part with the publishing. I think you'll see, in a month or so, that we've all, together, produced a truly valuable resource, no matter which side of the river you pitch your tent on.)

20111102-01 09:57 Beth The Republican Candidates

The unmitigated hubris of Herman Cain, Michele Bachmann, and Rick Perry, who are absolutely unqualified to be the president is appalling. I am so grateful they are all flaming out.

20111102-02 10:58 Pam Re: The Republican Candidates (reply to Beth, above)

I love what Ben Franklin says about fool's learning only from experience. Sometimes not even that. I agree with Steve that all the Republican candidates are embarrassing, except for maybe John Huntsman. When did you last hear his name? Cain, Perry, and Bachman are a joke—collectively and separately, they're a joke. Mitt Romney has the looks and the money—two very important qualifications for high office, I'm sure you'll all agree. Sadly, neither he nor anyone else knows what he truly believes. What we do know is that he's a political coward, who won't tout his successes and waffles on issues like abortion. The wind blows right through him. In a way, I find this all very entertaining. Perry's speech in NH was hilarious, you must admit. What a doofus. And poor old Herman. Talk about being out of your depth! Success has gone to his head, and it ain't pretty.

I look at all the Republican shenanigans as a side-show to the big event, which is a global crisis that is like nothing I've ever seen. OWS gives me hope, but where is all that money coming from? Maybe it all goes for food, which is fine. But somehow I think they have more than enough for that. It's crossed my mind that perhaps someone is trying to sabotage them with—money.

<a href="#">20111102-03</a>	11:04	Pam	Re: "New Stock Index Lets You Invest in Occupy Wall Street" (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #8)
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Once again, money is the standard.

<a href="#">20111102-04</a>	11:07	Ben	"Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby"
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I predict a big run on ammo and assault rifles. (Not really: I doubt anyone pays attention, and fewer understand...)

INSIDE the moon's orbit is pretty alarmingly close, though. And we are a strong gravitational well.

400 meters. Definitely would have a significant impact, at 20 miles per second, or whatever.

"Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" by John Matson, *Scientific American*

Nov. 1, 2011, (<http://www.scientificamerican.com/podcast/episode.cfm?id=asteroid-plans-close-earth-flyby-11-11-01>)

(On November 8th an asteroid will pass Earth within the moon's orbit, offering a rare opportunity for study.)

[Read more at Scientific American...](#)

<a href="#">20111102-05</a>	11:42	SteveB	Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to Ben, above)
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Maybe...what would it be?...surely not...SPLAT!? But...?

(There are some sci-fi nuggets in today's "Friends of the Middle" newsletter #8...)

Hopefully this asteroid thingee won't hit, so you nuts with your guns won't come out of the woodwork. LOL. Just kidding, of course, you know I like my explosives as well as the next guy, probably more, right? You'd better watch out for me if I'm in the laboratory or not out of ammo.

Anyway...here's what I have to say about this object hitting the Earth:

What a damn shame it would be...here at the crown of the crown of creation...when everything is really going quite well considering how damned stupid and stubborn we are...and I, for one, am enjoying the hell out of it, owning all my own time...a slave to no one...no responsibilities...comfortable...married to a

beautiful, intelligent woman who is so damned crazy she's crazy about me...my daughters and grandkids are indeed something to behold and to be proud of (which I am!)

...and then this damned, frickin' asteroid is gonna hit? And what if I happen to be inside the moon's orbit at the time? That would truly be bad, dude!

20111102-06 12:01 Pam Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to SteveB, above)

You jest, but the scary thing is, it could happen. The big smash, I mean. It's happened before. Just ask the dinosaurs. I know the government (yes, that dreaded beast) has its eye on what's floating around out there in the cosmos and will shoot down anything too big to land safely, but who knows what might happen one day. Part of being human, alas, is the capacity for worry. Evolution did not slight me there.

20111102-07 12:02 Ben Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to SteveB, above)

Yeah.

All of that.

'course, it would affect The Impossible among your goals: we would likely have a completely new slate of politicians, all at the same time. (Emphasis: "all"...)

Think I'm gonna go home and load a bunch of .223 tonight, and start hiding loaded guns around the house...Right.

20111102-09 12:49 SteveB Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to Ben, above)

"A completely new slate of politicians"? That would almost be worth it!

I would feel better, though, if you would not refer to that particular goal as "The Impossible", because it is, as you know, dear to my heart. Campaign Finance Reform & honest politicians? Now, that goal is probably the "Really Impossible" one, shy of open rebellion.

Don't shoot yourself, hot dog!

20111102-10 14:59 Ben Re: "Asteroid Plans Close Earth Flyby" (reply to SteveB, above)

I am not taking myself seriously. To anticipate doom is to invite it. Not me.

On the other hand, I know exactly where all those guns are, and could have all at hand in a minute or less.

20111102-11 22:10 Dale "Top 8 Most Overpaid CEOs of Public Companies"

This should send some of you into frenzy. Get all incensed. Go into a rant. But, don't shoot the messenger.

"Top 8 Most Overpaid CEOs of Public Companies" by Marlene Y. Satter, AdvisorOne

Nov. 2, 2011, ([http://www.advisorone.com/2011/11/02/top-8-most-overpaid-ceos-of-public-companies?utm\\_source=dailywire110211&utm\\_medium=newsletter&utm\\_campaign=dailywire&page=2](http://www.advisorone.com/2011/11/02/top-8-most-overpaid-ceos-of-public-companies?utm_source=dailywire110211&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=dailywire&page=2))

(When compared with their companies' performance, these guys fall short.)

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

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