



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER 23 — NOV. 23, 2011**

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Last Night's Republican Debate

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Nov. 23, 2011)

After, what, fourteen debates? The candidates finally seem to have figured it out. Herman Cain still hasn't done much homework, so he really knows nothing about foreign affairs. He seemed very out of place, but didn't suffer any major screw-ups. Rick Perry has finally decided to crack the books himself, so has managed to memorize a few lines. He managed to state all three of them. Ron Paul is still the guy you have to like, stuck out there on the fringe. He's like on a space walk, while the other candidates are in the capsule. Mitt Romney appears to have peaked, but maybe he can maintain his momentum in the face of almost nobody in his party wanting him. Old Newt really stole the show, now leading in the polls (probably temporarily), and the only person on stage who has any real credentials for the job we used to consider important.

"The GOP Debate: 6 Takeaways" by: Maggie Haberman, Politico

Nov. 23, 2011, (<http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uuid=28829595-7CD1-4F5A-85AA-D37575E2C824>)

The GOP debate on national security Tuesday night raised far more questions — and exposed far more divisions — than it resolved.

While the topic isn't central to the 2012 nomination battle, it was nevertheless critical for candidates to meet a modest threshold to remain viable — at least a minimal level of fluency in international affairs.

Not everyone hit that mark. But there were no catastrophic moments or major brawls, leaving time for plenty of biting exchanges and opportunities to see who is well-versed in foreign affairs and national security policy —and who is not.

Here are POLITICO's 6 takeaways from the debate, sponsored by CNN, the Heritage Foundation and AEI:

On immigration, Newt's in general election mode

Newt Gingrich drew a clear line on the issue of immigration, declining to take a deport-them-all stand and saying it would be the wrong tack for the "pro-family" party to rip people apart from their loved ones.

This is clearly tricky ground — it remains to be seen whether the conservative GOP base will accept that stand in a nominee — and it was traveled to ill effect by Rick Perry not too long ago.

The difference in Gingrich's case is that, unlike Perry, he didn't use a term that conservatives associate with liberals — "heart" — and framed his stand in a conversation about "values." And Gingrich seemed truly confident in his position — again, unlike Perry.

How it plays out over the next few weeks could dictate the former Speaker's staying power. Mitt Romney and Michele Bachmann both dinged Gingrich as embracing what is tantamount to "amnesty." On the one hand, immigration has proved to be something of a paper tiger in past national races that GOP candidates (see Romney, Mitt, and Giuliani, Rudy, class of '07).

On the other, immigration has already seriously damaged one candidate already.

Gingrich, however, is far better known — negatively and positively — than Perry was months back when he wounded himself. And while Gingrich is on potentially rough ground, he declined to take the easy route on a hot-button issue.

Mitt Romney finally underperformed

The former Massachusetts governor did fine, and he made no real miscues. (Saying his first name is "Mitt," when it's actually Willard, does not quite count.)

But he also had no breakout moments at a debate that was about an issue where he is supposed to be far ahead of the field.

He offered up a predictable salute to Israel after somewhat muffing a question at the earlier CBS debate about zeroing out aid to foreign countries, saying that would be the first trip he'd make in office. He focused heavily on Iran — getting a bit tongue-tied at one point — and on China, as threats.

But he also repeatedly punched down, engaging Ron Paul over al Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks, in a move that echoed Giuliani circa '07. And he had a truly weird moment in which he turned a discussion about the automatically-triggered defense department cuts, due to the super committee's failure, into a slam on the cost of Obamacare.

For the most part, Romney mostly blended into the background of a field in which he's accustomed to being the stand-out.

The undercard overperformed

Bachmann and Jon Huntsman, in particular, used their time wisely Tuesday.

The Minnesota congresswoman used her spot on the House Intelligence Committee to good effect, getting the better of Perry in a back-and-forth about Pakistan and foreign aid. She made her points clearly and succinctly, and seemed like she belonged on the stage.

She may have had a rough moment when she twisted some of Gingrich's past language on immigration, but it likely won't stick with her.

Huntsman, whose foreign policy chops are supposed to be his calling card in this race, also by and large performed strongly. He handled a few exchanges about the Middle East well, reminding the room at one point that the U.S. interest in the Mideast "is Israel."

And he sounded authoritative on his major interest, China. There was one off-moment where he broke through the Fourth Wall and thanked the debate-hall crowd for applauding him, but in general he has improved over time in these formats.

The expectations were not nearly as high for Perry, and by those low standards he fared better than he has in the past. But the Texas governor failed to stand out or appear as if he could match policy familiarity with either Gingrich or Romney, who are really his main targets now.

Among the rest, Paul performed strongly, but within his predictable boundaries: fewer wars, less government intrusion and less aid to foreign nations (Israel emphatically included in that). He sounded authoritative and made his points clearly.

But at this point in the race, Paul needs to show he can expand his base — and Tuesday night didn't go toward that end.

As for the rest, Rick Santorum spent lots of time talking about his days in the Senate, but didn't have a commanding presence (and referred to Africa as a "country" at one point).

Herman Cain showed no mastery — and little familiarity — with the issues on stage, and generally answered with a version of his patented response — listening to the commanders on the ground, getting advice from policy advisers, maybe we'll join an invasion or maybe we won't. He also referred to Blitzer as "Blitz" instead of "Wolf" at one point (too many things twirling around his head?).

The Patriot Act and racial profiling still raise temperatures

The first question out of the gate was about the national security hallmark of the George W. Bush administration, long a contentious topic.

Apparently it's as highly charged as ever.

Gingrich suggested that he would support maintaining the Patriot Act, while Paul was — as he has been for years — emphatically against it.

Cain, meanwhile, said that he would like to thwart terrorists by killing them first, a surprisingly candid level of hawkishness at a presidential debate. And Santorum openly said he favors racial profiling to stop terrorism.

The moment was revealing in that it showed how divided the GOP remains on this topic, years later.

The debate crowd matters

Unlike most of the last 11 debates, where GOP activists made up some portion of the crowd in the room with the candidates, the CNN forum was populated mostly — and ironically — with Washington insiders.

The event, held in D.C., was co-hosted by the Heritage Foundation and the American Enterprise Institute. And instead of local voters, the in-the-crowd questioners were a former attorney general and a former Deputy Secretary of Defense, among others.

That meant less boisterous cheering for the candidates — and less of an opportunity for the GOP field to play to the audience.

No one has used the in-hall crowd to greater effect than Gingrich this cycle. His lather-rinse-repeat cycle of attacking debate moderators, calling questions stupid, demanding better from the press and waiting for his thunderous applause has helped revive his candidacy.

But he couldn't really do that Tuesday night, because it was a different crowd. His normal play didn't work, which he discovered early on when he tried testing how much time he would have on a question.

To Gingrich's credit, he was able to perform well despite that — keeping his familiar lecturing in check and answering with confidence, and at length, on international issues.

The moderator matters, too

This was Blitzer's second outing moderating a GOP debate this cycle, and he knocked it out of the park.

The longtime CNN host let the candidates engage one another repeatedly, refusing to cap their answers or stick to prescriptions about who would get how many seconds to respond.

It made for a lively back-and-forth, and something that has often been missing in the prior 11 slugfests — actual debating among the candidates.

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20111122-01	10:20	Pam	Re: "Open Letter to Chancellor Linda P.B. Katehi" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #22)
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I'd say Nathan Brown has a boatload of courage. I wonder how long he'll keep his job. If he doesn't already have tenure, he won't get it. If he does, they'll find a way to get rid of him. That is my prediction. This is how it begins. First, campuses erupt and the helmets and batons rush in. Then demonstrations explode at political venues, like a national convention, with helmets, batons, guns, and horses this time. How far will this go before we wake up from what is fast becoming a nightmare? I hope I am wrong. I hope the Occupy movement remains non-violent, and I hope the police and their handlers exercise restraint. That is my hope.

20111122-02	13:09	SteveG	Fw: Care2 Petition: Help Stop Toxic Coal Ash Spills!
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from Care2 Petitionsite:

Last month, the House of Representatives voted to prevent the EPA from protecting Americans from coal ash. A week later, a retaining wall at a Wisconsin power plant collapsed, spewing toxic coal ash into Lake Michigan. Talk about karma.

Tell the EPA that you support their efforts to regulate coal ash:

http://www.care2.com/go/z/e/AgY9_/zLQr/BZREP.

Coal ash is a dirty mix of toxic heavy metals that harm the health of wildlife and people. Yet there's almost no regulation, which makes spills like the one at the We Energies Oak Creek Power Plant not one-off catastrophes, but something that will happen again.

It's obvious the coal industry doesn't want regulation. They don't want anything that could cut into profits, even if the alternative is mucking up one of America's most beautiful landscapes, the shores of our Great Lakes.

The status quo simply isn't good enough. It's time for the EPA to step and in make the coal industry take action to protect our health and our environment.

Thanks for taking action! --Emily V., Care2, and ThePetitionSite Team

20111122-03	13:12	SteveG	"Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy"
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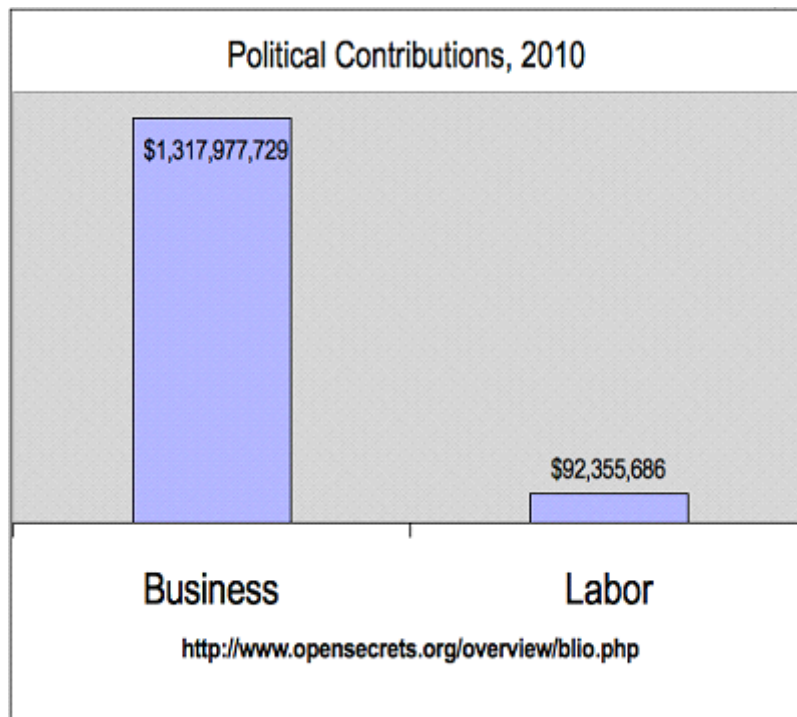
"Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy" by Les Leopold, AlterNet

Nov. 21, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153169/>)

Is democracy compatible with a financial system run by billionaires? Maybe not. Here are five ways that high finance is undermining democracy:

1. Billionaires replace one person, one vote.

Ask any American what's wrong with our country and they will say that money rules politics. And they are correct. It's obvious that major political donors and lobbyists for the super-rich have more political influence than we do. As the top 1 percent gains more and more of the nation's income, the 99 percent effectively become disenfranchised. And of course, the *Citizens United* Supreme Court decision makes it even easier for the rich to buy political power. Lopsided campaign contributions by and for the super-rich are making a mockery out of elections. In 2010, for example, business outspent labor by a factor of 14 to 1.



[\(click for larger version\)](#)

2. The stock market exercises an instant veto.

Virtually every economic decision in our democracy is now subject to an instant stock market veto. The first question asked by the White House and Congress *before* making a policy decision is "How will the markets react?" When the House of Representatives rejected the first TARP bailout bill on Sept. 29, 2008, the stock market fell by a record 777 points. After it passed, the markets were "calmed."

Now, the *New York Times* reports that if the deficit "supercommittee" doesn't get its act together by its Thanksgiving deadline, markets won't like it:

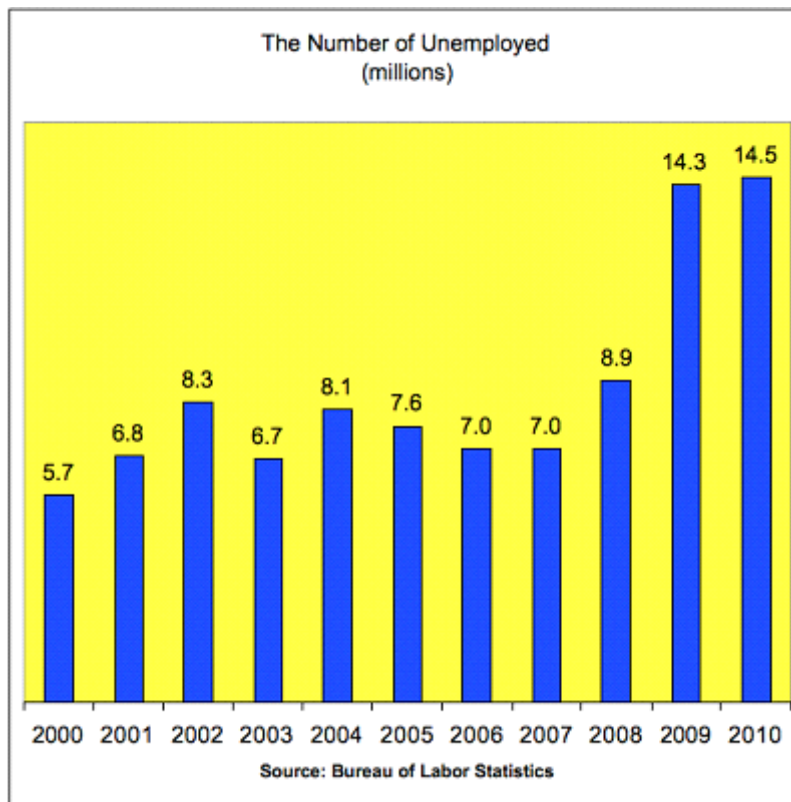
Some fear that such a failure could lead to the kind of stock market slide and loss of investor confidence that accompanied stalled efforts to raise the federal debt limit earlier this year.

Just who comprises "investor confidence?" Who makes financial markets dive in a matter of moments? Well, it's certainly not those of us who piddle around with our 401ks in E-trade accounts. It's not our slow-moving pension funds either. Rather, it's the proprietary trading desks of big banks and the giant pools of unregulated cash in hedge funds. These big-time players have a very keen sense of their own self-interests. They have made it perfectly clear to the supercommittee that they want massive debt reduction so that 1) their bonds and bets will stay valuable; and 2) they won't have to pay higher taxes on their outrageous incomes and profits.

Because of the skewed distribution of income, these money manipulations have enormous impacts on markets and therefore also on our 401ks. When they drive the markets down, we feel it as well. They're holding us hostage and counting on us to suffer from financial Stockholm Syndrome – that we'll side with our financial captors. Financial elites know we are likely to urge our politicians to avoid any moves that might drive markets down.

3. Governments are not permitted to create full employment economies.

The Wall Street casino crash killed 8 million jobs in a matter of months. It will now take more than 20 million jobs to get us back to full-employment (defined as an unemployment rate of 5 percent or lower.) At the current rate of recovery, it will take nearly a generation to get there. This is intolerable.



Why aren't the jobs there? Unless you've been blinded by ideology, it's obvious that the Wall Street crash killed effective demand in the economy. Without that demand, business won't hire and invest. It's not rocket science. With unemployment so high, consumers don't have the economic muscle to generate that demand. The obvious answer is for the government to step in to put our people back to work. The government needs to spend money – even if it has to go deeper into debt – to hire more public sector workers and to spend money on labor intensive programs like weatherization, higher education, infrastructure rebuilding and the like. We need a massive set of programs to create full-employment – which is supposed to be the key goal of our economy.

So why aren't we doing it? It's not just the Republicans who stand in the way. Behind them are a phalanx of financial elites who are putting forth an outright lie – that jobs will come from less government spending and fewer regulations. They claim – and with a straight face no less – that freeing them from regulations will create more business confidence, more investment, and therefore more jobs. They refuse to admit that deregulation led to the crash in the first place. Rather, they are flooding the airways with pious statements of concern about the how the government must clear up its debt by cutting all levels of government. They never explain how this is supposed to create jobs. They can't. That's because you can't create jobs by cutting jobs.

Our bankers are shrewd. They see a stalled economy due to lack of stimulus, so they call for even less stimulus. Why? Because, it's a perfect way to change the conversation from taxes on the super-rich to pay for job creation to cutting the big, bad government. Some even have the nerve to call for "tax reform" to further lower taxes on the super-rich and large corporations.

What would happen if a government really pressed for full employment? Stock market manipulators will start a stampede to drive down the markets. Politicians will run scared and you'll stay unemployed.

4. Hedge fund speculative raids replace elected leaders with technocrats.

Just take a look at Greece and Italy. In both cases, financial markets — not the country's citizens — are determining who will run the country and what those leaders will do. To placate financial markets and increase "investor confidence" both countries have replaced their leaders with economic technocrats who supposedly will rise above politics and get the country's finances in order.

But why is this happening now? Because those countries are being attacked by large hedge funds that are trying as hard as they can to create financial runs and profit from them. It's called a speculative attack. Here's how it works. Basically, these hedge funds try to start a stampede of selling to drive down the value of bonds of a given country. (When bond values decline, their interest rates go up.) They do this by finding a myriad of ways to bet against those bonds. They can sell bonds they own. They can sell bonds that others own, (shorting). They can buy default insurance to bet against the bonds. And they create many toxic combinations of the above using massive amounts of borrowed money to amplify their negative bets.

If they do it right, all that selling drives down the price of the bonds, and that in turn scares other large investors from mutual funds and banks into selling their bonds as well, thereby further driving down the price. The more the price falls the more the hedge funds earn. And we're talking a about "earning" tens of billions from this kind of stampede.



Meanwhile, the country involved sees the interest rates it must pay on new debt go up and up. At some point, that percentage hits a magic level – like 7 percent – which means they can't possibly pay back all of their debt. These high interest rates then cause an every larger stampede as bond holders rush to sell their bonds before they default (or as in the case of Greece before they "voluntarily" agree to a 50 percent cut in value – a "haircut.")

(In case you have any doubt about the raids, look at the chart above. The jump in interest rates didn't come about because of new developments in Italy. The jumps were caused by the hedge fund raids.)

If the hedge fund elites are really lucky, the stampede they induce can turn into what the press calls "contagion" – the spread of the crisis to another country. This happens because many of the Greek and Italian bonds are held by big banks in countries like France. So if Italy is in danger of default, then so are the banks in France, which means that France will have to bail out its banks, which means that France's bonds will look weaker and its interest rates will rise, leading to a new speculative hedge fund raid on French bonds. And so it goes with each new crisis leading to more profits for the hedge funds that ignite the stampedes.

To stop these hedge fund attacks, countries are given only one choice – do whatever high finance says. And what high finance wants is very simple – slash and burn all of your social programs so that you can pay back your loans – you borrowed from us and now you have to pay us back even if it means impoverishing your people. To get that done, financial elites want "regular" politicians replaced by technocrats as just happened in Italy and Greece. But most of all they want to see those cuts.

5. Financial markets are vetoing Social Security.

Perhaps the most popular democratic program in American history is Social Security. Everyone pays in and everyone gets a defined benefit pension from it –rich and poor alike. Republicans have been trying to dismantle it

for at least a generation, but the American public has expressed its democratic will in full support of the program again and again.

But financial elites also have Social Security in the cross-hairs. They tell us we can no longer afford it. It's too generous. We live too long and we are getting too many payments. It's going to bankrupt the country.

Why can't we afford it? Because we ran up enormous debts to save the economy from the Wall Street-induced crash. Because, we cap rates at \$105,000 of income instead of having the rich pay more. Because, the super elites are paying lower and lower tax rates in general.

No matter. The financial elites have the ear of both parties so that even President Obama, supposedly a liberal Democrat, has done what no Democrat has ever done – he put Social Security on the table to get a grand deficit reduction bargain.

But here's the grand bargain that Wall Street really wants, and they plan to get it no matter whom we vote for. To "save" Social Security we will be pushed toward private investment accounts – Wall Street's wet dream. Imagine the entire country paying fat fees to Wall Street to invest our Social Security money. We will be told we can only save Social Security if it ceases to be a defined benefit plan. We'll be sold the wonders of investing the money ourselves – of course with the help of our trusted investment advisers from every bailed-out bank in the country.

Will financial elites replace democracy?

It's happened before. When New York City almost defaulted in 1975, the Emergency Financial Control Board was established to take financial authority away from politicians. Imagine what might happen if Washington continues on its path to permanent gridlock and if the American people totally give up on their elected representatives. Imagine if the US debt gets downgraded by our whorish Wall Street rating agencies. Imagine if unemployment rises even higher and riots break out in the streets. Wouldn't it be possible for the congressional supercommittee to turn into the Super-Emergency Control Board run by kindly investors and corporate leaders like maybe a Warren Buffet? Doesn't having a benign financial emperor sound like a more "practical" alternative to a dysfunctional democratic system?

We're not there yet but we're headed that way...unless we dramatically curtail the power and wealth of our financial elites.

The threat to democracy isn't new to America. President Andrew Jackson identified the threat that elite bankers posed to our fledgling democracy when he vetoed the National Bank in 1832. Here's a small excerpt from his veto message:

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes.In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society — the farmers, mechanics, and laborers — who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their Government.

(Les Leopold is the executive director of the Labor Institute and Public Health Institute in New York, and author of *The Looting of America: How Wall Street's Game of Fantasy Finance Destroyed Our Jobs, Pensions, and Prosperity—and What We Can Do About It* (Chelsea Green, 2009).)

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20111122-06

17:00 Pam

Re: "Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy" (reply to SteveG, above)

I find the article on billionaires and democracy disturbing indeed. The idea of hedge funds and speculators manipulating markets in order to make profits for themselves and bring ruin to entire countries is almost unbelievable. I believe it because it makes sense to me, but I find it so hard to believe people would deliberately do such things. I would like to hear what some of you have to say about this article and the claims it makes.

When I listen to Republican rhetoric, I am appalled by their logic, or lack thereof. Cutting spending means cutting jobs. How then does that create jobs? Starving government by maintaining an unfair tax structure does not eliminate waste; it eliminates services people desperately need, like food stamps, unemployment insurance, support for the disabled, help for the homeless, just to name a few. Repubs come right out and say it: they want a society where people can get rich, but they don't want a society that takes care of its weakest members. It is a cold philosophy, and their religiosity does nothing to soften them. Gingrich says liberals are filled with hate and anger, but he's the one who's always chastizing people. I guess he figures that a strong offense is a good defense. Getting choked up because you or someone you loved was ill is a blatant plea for pity; when it happens on cue, it is manipulation of the grossest kind. Many people have suffered terrible loss; the Republican cadre is not alone, but the way they carry on you'd think they were the first and only people to face difficulties. I don't remember Al Gore parading his son's accident and serious injury before the American public. I don't remember FDR making a show of his disability to win sympathy. I don't remember JFK whining in public about his health or his bad back. Parading your private griefs before a crowd is a lot like confessing that you are a degenerate sinner in front of a congregation. Everyone gets to wallow in emotion, but it's the kind of emotion Chaucer made fun of. It's sentimentality, which is a substitute for genuine feeling. A cheap substitute.

I'm not arguing against displays of feeling when they are spontaneous and from the heart, but those candidates came to that debate in the church primed to turn on the faucets. Theirs is not a religion of love, forgiveness, and tolerance. It is a religion of vengeance (all those dead prisoners in Texas), intolerance (the refusal to see gays and lesbians as full human beings with the same rights as everyone else), selfishness (the accumulation of great wealth through connections and friendly legislation), and indifference to those whose "failure" they perceive as their own fault ("quit protesting and get a job"). They don't ask, How can I help?. They demand every advantage they can obtain for themselves and everyone else be damned. They say they want people to control their own money, so privatizing Social Security would be a good thing, but they ignore the fact that the 99% of us have no clue about investing successfully on our own. They call community involvement "socialism," as if public highways and public education were the spawn of the devil. Other entities that should be public, like health care, are rejected as government control of our lives. It is THEY who want to control lives according to THEIR values, THEIR ambitions, THEIR advantage.

I still don't understand it. Does Gingrich really believe all liberals are angry monsters? Do hedge fund managers really want to enrich their clients at the expense of the middle class? Do speculators really want to bring down governments? If they do want these things, how are they not evil? If they don't, then why are they doing it?

20111122-07	17:38 SteveG	Re: "Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy" (reply to Pam, above)
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When the Republicans openly state their goal is to make President Obama a one term president; when they openly sign a pledge that they will never raise taxes or face an all out campaign against their re-election; when the Supreme Court says a corporation is the same as a person; when the republicans use lies in "swift boat ads; when the inventor of the pledge against raising taxes openly states his goal is to return the tax structure to 1900 we should all head for the border.

People have talked of the "me" generation, I offer that there is a "ME" party high jacking American politics.

20111122-10	18:38 SteveB	Re: "Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy" (reply to Pam, above)
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Most CEO's I know would feel a lot of empathy for their workers during times of business shrinkage. Maybe it would just be lip service not backed-up by a wallet, but it would probably be genuine and expressed often. That's been my experience in companies when they are losing jobs.

But these Republican politicians don't even seem to have anything to say about the people who are suffering. They can't. They might develop a twinge of conscience over their totally unfair tax and jobs policies. They have to ignore the problem or they might be asked an uncomfortable question.

So the poor who seek solace have no solace, and America, which seeks nothing but practical answers, has no answers, only dogma.

20111122-11	18:49	SteveG	Re: "Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy" (reply to SteveB, above)
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How much is too much? How much money do we need? How many homes or square footage do we need? How many cars do we need?

John McCain in 2008 had 8 homes, but he did not know it. I do not need 8 homes. In my fantasies I have thought it would be nice to have 2, but if I really think about it, one is enough – I could stay in motels/hotels if I traveled. How many cars do I need. I used to have 2, but I only drove one at a time and if I really think about it – 2 would be nice but I get by just nice with one. Outside of moving to Florida from Indiana and then from Florida to Washington, typically I have not driven more than 4 hours at a time in years. I have taken the train for 46 hours one way, I have flown, but there is not that big of a need to drive that far anymore.

When I was working I had one closet, the wife had one closet. When either got full, we cleaned them out and went to Goodwill. Now we share a closet. I have 3 pair of jeans, 1 pair of dress slacks that I have worn one time in the past 2 years, 2 pair of shoes plus a pair of running shoes, 2 dress shirts (worn 1 in the past 2 years), 6 collar shirts, an assortment of t-shirts, and 12 pair of underwear – have to have clean drawers. We have one TV hooked to the internet and to an antenna plus a DVD player plus a laptop – no cable. Watched Butler play Savannah State in Indianapolis last night, watched part of Kansas City and New England play football last night – do not need cable.

Got some money in my pocket, some in the bank, some in investments – enough? I don't know if it is enough – I eat well, I pay my bills, we buy our grandkids things, we give some to charities – what more do we need?

I have worked with a lot of people during my life that have had very little and all they have ever wanted is a job and a little dignity. We should all jump on that bandwagon with both feet and yet Washington seems to argue over the tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. NBA players and team owners argue too while the people that do the laundry for the team, or the person that owns a restaurant close to where they play are jobless or their business is falling apart.

Pam has used the word empathy several times in various correspondence. I do not see that with the rich or the politically right.

The older I get, the simpler my needs become.

20111122-12	19:05	Pam	Re: "Five Ways That Financial Elites Are Destroying Democracy" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Well said.

20111122-04	13:12	SteveG	Friends of the Middle
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Is it possible to get a list of who is getting the emails sent to/from friendsofthemiddle@hotmail.com?

20111122-13 21:10 SteveB Re: Friends of the Middle (reply to SteveG, above)

I know you have nothing but the best of intentions, but I'm sorry, unfortunately, I can't release any names or addresses of group members without their specific permission. I have promised everyone as much anonymity as they want—hence, the user names, etc. Excluding much of our original group, of course.

I think this is working better than before (we're growing rather quickly, getting no more "too much email" complaints, and some quitters have returned). But the new scheme has its drawback and one is maybe whatever you have in mind.

What I can do is re-supply you with any of the original group's addresses, which you already have if you saved just an email or two.

The other thing I can do is this. If there is a particular contributor you would like to personally contact, it can be done in either of two ways: 1) a message (and possible reply) via FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com; 2) let me know the user name of the person you wish to exchange email addresses with, and I will send them your email address and your request that they contact you directly.

I guess that's the best I can do. I (and we all) really appreciate your very big contributions to the success of our little group of friends. Thank you!

20111122-05 16:10 SteveG "CNN Poll: Americans Favor Tax & Cut Debt Tack"

"CNN Poll: Americans Favor Tax-and-Cut Debt Tack" by Paul Scicchitano, NewsMax

Nov. 21, 2011, (<http://www.newsmax.com/US/tax-increases-spending-cuts/2011/11/21/id/418749>)

Despite the failure of the supercommittee to reach an agreement on \$1.2 trillion in budget cuts, most Americans say they favor a combination of tax increases on the wealthy and major cuts in spending.

Cuts in defense spending, however, are becoming less palatable among the general public as the likelihood of such cuts becomes more apparent, according to a new CNN/ORC International Poll.

Six in 10 Americans oppose major cuts to the military, according to the Nov. 18-20 telephone poll of 1,019 adults. Almost 60 percent of Americans also oppose major changes in entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare.

[Continue reading at NewsMax...](#)

20111122-08 18:25 SteveG Fw: USAction Petition: Stop Funding the F-35 Now!

from USAction/TrueMajority

You've probably heard the news. The supercommittee negotiations have broken down. On the one hand, this is good news for progressives because we have avoided massive cuts to vital programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

On the other hand, we know that the supercommittee was unable to reach a deal for one reason and one reason only. Republicans continue to refuse to make the wealthiest Americans pay their fair share — period. They put their oath to "Mr. One Percent Grover Norquist" ahead of their oath to the Constitution, to the other 99 percent, to the good of the country.

So what happens now? Congress, by its own agreement, is required to cut federal spending by \$1.2 trillion over the next decade. And here's the good news: Congress has to cut half a trillion dollars in wasteful Pentagon spending over the next decade. No law has ever required this to happen before.

You've worked hard over these past few months to tell Congress to do things like fund job creation, cut big oil subsidies and cut the wasteful Pentagon budget. Now it's time to make it happen. Pentagon spending must be reined in. We've been fighting together to end wasteful Pentagon spending for years, and this could be our best chance to really make it happen.

This budget fight is just beginning. Some Republicans already are threatening to back out on the negotiated agreement, particularly the nearly \$500 billion reduction in Pentagon spending. We have a bloated defense budget, which wastes hundreds of billions of dollars on programs that are outdated and obsolete and add nothing to our national security. We KNOW that spending on war and weapons is a lousy way to create jobs too, especially when compared to better ideas like hiring teachers, paying firefighters or investing in road and bridge repair. The President agrees with us, he says he will veto any changes to sequestration. But your Representatives need to hear from you.

Ask your Representatives to keep the Pentagon cuts and vote in favor of the 99% – not the war-monger corporate defense contractors:

http://act.truemajorityaction.org/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=281.

20111122-09	18:28	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Action: "Top 5 FOX Myths to Debunk This Thanksgiving"
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from MoveOn:

Americans are talking about the economy—a lot. They're talking about Occupy Wall Street and the Super Committee, about an economy that only works for the 1% and about unemployment.

But thanks to Fox News and Rush Limbaugh, lots of talk about the economy also means lots of misinformation about the economy.

So if you're spending this Thanksgiving holiday with friends and family, and want to be ready with the facts to *gently* correct any myths you hear (they are family and friends, after all), we put together a short guide with five common myths you might hear and easy-to-remember facts to respond to them.

Remember that you're the most important source of information for your family and friends, so check it out and then share it so everyone's prepared. Happy Thanksgiving, and of course, thanks for all you do.

–Daniel Mintz, Mark, Julia, Elena, and the rest of the team

"Top 5 FOX Myths to Debunk This Thanksgiving" by Angie, MoveOn

Nov. 21, 2011, (<http://front.moveon.org/top-5-fox-myths-to-debunk-this-thanksgiving/>)

MYTH #1: The congressional Super Committee failed because both sides refuse to compromise.

REALITY: The Super Committee failed because Republicans' number one, non-negotiable priority is to protect millionaires and billionaires from paying even one more penny in taxes.¹ Democrats repeatedly offered deep spending cuts (far deeper than most progressives would like) in exchange for raising taxes on the wealthy and closing corporate loopholes, only to be refused again and again.² So even though the vast majority of Americans say they want to protect Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits, and raise taxes on the rich and corporations,³ that won't happen until Republicans put aside their extremist stance.

MYTH #2: Nobody knows what Occupy Wall Street is about.

REALITY: Occupy Wall Street may not have a formal list of demands, but anyone who's been paying attention understands the core problems that occupiers are protesting—that corporations have far too much power in our political system, that Wall Street banks crashed our economy but were never held accountable, and that the richest 400 Americans have more wealth than half of all Americans—156 million people—combined.⁴

MYTH #3: Occupiers should stop protesting and just get a job.

REALITY: As anybody who's looked for a job in the last few years knows, there just aren't jobs out there. That's a big part of why occupiers are protesting. In September, there were *four times* as many unemployed people as job openings.⁵ And for those who are lucky enough to find a job, median wages today are lower than they were a decade ago.⁶

MYTH #4: Occupy Wall Street is intent on provoking violence, especially against banks and the police.

REALITY: Occupations across the country have committed themselves to nonviolent protest, in the greatest traditions of protest movements. Some of their protests have been met with acts of police violence—tear gas, pepper spray, rubber bullets⁷—but in many cases, protesters have reminded police that the police are part of the 99%, too.⁸ And in the few cases when people have shown up at occupations and committed acts of vandalism, other protesters have even repaired their acts of vandalism.⁹

MYTH #5: The biggest crisis facing our country is out of control government spending.

REALITY: The two biggest drivers of our deficit—by far—are the economic crash and the Bush tax cuts.¹⁰ We have millions of people out of work, corporations hoarding cash, and factories sitting idle. If we put all those people back to work—rebuilding infrastructure, educating our children, and researching new technologies—it'll shrink the deficit and make our economy stronger for the long haul. And we can easily afford it if we make sure the rich—who are taking home a larger percentage of income than any time since 1917¹¹—pay their fair share.

Sources:

¹"No, 'both sides' aren't equally to blame for supercommittee failure," *The Washington Post*, November 21, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268071&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=2>.

²"Workbook: In supercommittee, Dems moved right and Republicans moved rightier," *The Washington Post*, November 22, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268072&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=3>.

³"CNN Poll: What The Super Committee Produced Is...Exactly What We Don't Want," Talking Points Memo, November 21, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268073&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=4>.

"Medicare, Social Security & The Deficit," National Committee to Preserve Social Security & Medicare, September 2011, <http://www.ncpssm.org/pdf/poll.pdf>.

⁴"Michael Moore says 400 Americans have more wealth than half of all Americans combined," Politifact Wisconsin, March 10, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268074&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=5>.

⁵"Fact: 4 job seekers per opening in U.S.," CNN, September 12, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268075&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=6>.

⁶"Median household income," Wikipedia, Accessed November 22, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268076&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=7>.

⁷"Occupy movement: police reaction in pictures," *The Guardian*, November 21, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268077&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=8>.

⁸"Occupy Demonstrators Mark Two Months of Protests," NPR, November 17, 2011, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268078&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=9>

⁹"Occupy Oakland protesters assist in cleanup efforts," News 10 ABC, November 3, 2011, <http://www.news10.net/news/article/161383/2/Occupy-Oakland-protesters-assist-in-cleanup-efforts->

¹⁰"Economic Downturn and Bush Policies Continue to Drive Large Projected Deficits," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, May 10, 2011, <http://www.cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=3490>.

¹¹"Income Inequality Is At An All-Time High: STUDY," The Huffington Post, September 14, 2009, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268079&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=10>.

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https://pol.moveon.org/donate/donate.html?cpn_id=44&id=33162-18997482-PiW0eJx&t=11.

20111122-14	21:21	Jim	Joke: Politicians Are Like CHRISTMAS LIGHTS
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From Jim (9:21 pm) – ref: Politics

I love **CHRISTMAS LIGHTS—they remind me of politicians.**

They all hang together, half of the suckers don't work, and the ones that do aren't that bright.

20111122-15	23:12	SteveG	"FBI Claims It Does Not Have Any Documents on Occupy Wall Street"
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This is their way of trying to gut FOIA (Freedom of Information Act). When someone on the inside or WikiLeaks leaks a document that they are trying to hide, the whole thing will bust open.

In 50 years historians will find many FBI documents about Occupy...

"FBI Claims It Does Not Have Any Documents on Occupy Wall Street" by Jason Leopold, TruthOut

Nov. 22, 2011, (<http://www.truth-out.org/fbi-headquarters-says-it-does-not-have-any-documents-occupy-wall-street/1321994542>)

We were surprised the FBI provided us with a final response to our FOIA request within two weeks, given the agency's FOIA backlog and the lengthy wait times we have faced when filing other FOIA requests with the agency. We were even more surprised to learn the FBI was unable to locate a single document in which agency officials discussed Occupy Wall Street, a global movement which, in the past month, has resulted in violent crackdowns by local law enforcement.

[Continue reading at TruthOut...](#)

20111122-16	23:57	SteveG	"Where Does Occupy Wall Street Go from Here? ...a Proposal from Michael Moore"
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"Where Does Occupy Wall Street Go from Here? ...a Proposal from Michael Moore" by Michael Moore, OpEdNews

Nov. 22, 2011, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/Where-Does-Occupy-Wall-Str-by-Michael-Moore-111123-530.html>)

This past weekend I participated in a four-hour meeting of Occupy Wall Street activists whose job it is to come up with the vision and goals of the movement. It was attended by 40+ people and the discussion was both inspiring and invigorating.

Here is what we ended up proposing as the movement's "vision statement" to the General Assembly of Occupy Wall Street.

We Envision:

1. A truly free, democratic, and just society.
2. Where we, the people, come together and solve our problems by consensus.
3. Where people are encouraged to take personal and collective responsibility and participate in decision making
4. Where we learn to live in harmony and embrace principles of toleration and respect for diversity and the differing views of others.
5. Where we secure the civil and human rights of all from violation by tyrannical forces and unjust governments.
6. Where political and economic institutions work to benefit all, not just the privileged few.
7. Where we provide full and free education to everyone, not merely to get jobs but to grow and flourish as human beings.
8. Where we value human needs over monetary gain, to ensure decent standards of living without which effective democracy is impossible.
9. Where we work together to protect the global environment to ensure that future generations will have safe and clean air, water and food supplies, and will be able to enjoy the beauty and bounty of nature that past generations have enjoyed.

The next step will be to develop a specific list of goals and demands. As one of the millions of people who are participating in the Occupy Wall Street movement, I would like to respectfully offer my suggestions of what we can all get behind now to wrestle the control of our country out of the hands of the 1% and place it squarely with the 99% majority.

Here is what I will propose to the General Assembly of Occupy Wall Street:

10 Things We Want, A Proposal for Occupy Wall Street, Submitted by Michael Moore

1. Eradicate the Bush tax cuts for the rich and institute new taxes on the wealthiest Americans and on corporations, including a tax on all trading on Wall Street (where they currently pay 0%)
2. Assess a penalty tax on any corporation that moves American jobs to other countries when that company is already making profits in America. Our jobs are the most important national treasure and they cannot be removed from the country simply because someone wants to make more money.
3. Require that all Americans pay the same Social Security tax on all of their earnings (normally, the middle class pays about 6% of their income to Social Security; someone making \$1 million a year pays about 0.6% (or 90% less than the average person). This law would simply make the rich pay what everyone else pays.

4. Reinstate the Glass-Steagall Act, placing serious regulations on how business is conducted by Wall Street and the banks.

5. Investigate the Crash of 2008, and bring to justice those who committed any crimes.

6. Reorder our nation's spending priorities (including the ending of all foreign wars and their cost of over \$2 billion a week). This will re-open libraries, reinstate band and art and civics classes in our schools, fix our roads and bridges and infrastructure, wire the entire country for 21st century internet, and support scientific research that improves our lives.

7. Join the rest of the free world and create a single-payer, free and universal health care system that covers all Americans all of the time.

8. Immediately reduce carbon emissions that are destroying the planet and discover ways to live without the oil that will be depleted and gone by the end of this century.

9. Require corporations with more than 10,000 employees to restructure their board of directors so that 50% of its members are elected by the company's workers. We can never have a real democracy as long as most people have no say in what happens at the place they spend most of their time: their job. (For any U.S. businesspeople freaking out at this idea because you think workers can't run a successful company: Germany has a law like this and it has helped to make Germany the world's leading manufacturing exporter.)

10. We, the people, must pass three constitutional amendments that will go a long way toward fixing the core problems we now have. These include:

a. A constitutional amendment that fixes our broken electoral system by:

1. Completely removing campaign contributions from the political process.
2. Requiring all elections to be publicly financed.
3. Moving election day to the weekend to increase voter turnout.
4. Making all Americans registered voters at the moment of their birth.
5. Banning computerized voting and requiring that all elections take place on paper ballots.

b. A constitutional amendment declaring that corporations are not people and do not have the constitutional rights of citizens. This amendment should also state that the interests of the general public and society must always come before the interests of corporations.

c. A constitutional amendment that will act as a "second bill of rights" as proposed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt: that every American has a human right to employment, to health care, to a free and full education, to breathe clean air, drink clean water and eat safe food, and to be cared for with dignity and respect in their old age.

Let me know what you think. Occupy Wall Street enjoys the support of millions. It is a movement that cannot be stopped. Become part of it by sharing your thoughts with me or online (at OccupyWallSt.org). Get involved in (or start!) your own local Occupy movement. Make some noise. You don't have to pitch a tent in lower Manhattan to be an Occupier. You are one just by saying you are. This movement has no singular leader or spokesperson; every participant is a leader in their neighborhood, their school, their place of work. Each of you is a spokesperson to those whom you encounter. There are no dues to pay, no permission to seek in order to create an action.

We are but ten weeks old, yet we have already changed the national conversation. This is our moment, the one we've been hoping for, waiting for. If it's going to happen it has to happen now. Don't sit this one out. This is the real deal. This is it.

Have a happy Thanksgiving! —Michael Moore (MMFlint@MichaelMoore.com)

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

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