



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #29 — DEC. 1, 2011

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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Payroll Tax Cuts

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

Got nothing to say today. I'm disappointed once again in the weakness of the bonds of friendship and love. Let that be a lesson to me, more than to all other people, to always try to be a better friend with as much love in my heart as I can possibly muster. What others do is their affair. I will try to follow my own path, God willing.

Conviction's Lies (Chicago, IL)

To enter the realm of reason
Certainty must be left behind
With all the other forgotten
And lost things of this world
Yet faith or love not one of these
Though bright beyond all imagining
Remember conviction's lies.

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"Obama: 'Massive Blow' if GOP Blocks Payroll Tax" by AP

Nov. 30, 2011, (<http://nbcpolitics.msnbc.msn.com/news/2011/11/30/9113617-obama-massive-blow-if-gop-blocks-payroll-tax>)

(SCRANTON, Pa.) On the attack, President Barack Obama warned Wednesday of a "massive blow to the economy" if Republicans oppose him over extending a payroll tax cut, as he campaigned for more money in the pockets of U.S. workers — and in his campaign treasury.

Obama pressed his case at a campaign-style rally in working-class Scranton, Pa., where he said Republicans had to choose between lower taxes for the wealthy, or a payroll tax cut that would help working Americans.

"Are you going to cut taxes for the middle class and those who are trying to get into the middle class or are you going to protect massive tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires?" he said. "Are you going to ask a few hundred thousand people who have done very, very well to do their fair share, or are you going to raise taxes for hundreds of millions of people across the country?"

"We need to get wealthy Americans to pay their fair share," the president said.

Obama was traveling later Wednesday to donor-rich New York City to raise money for his already flush re-election bid, in a day illustrating the dual policy and political demands on the president as the 2012 campaign season nears.

Recommended: Gingrich previews his general election fight against Obama

Meanwhile on Capitol Hill, Republicans indicated they were prepared to extend the temporary payroll tax cut, but said any extension must be paid for with savings from elsewhere in the budget, even as they opposed Democrats' plan to pay for it by taxing incomes over \$1 million. That set up a showdown over how to find mutually acceptable savings before any extension could become law.

The full payroll tax of 6.2 percent would be restored if Congress does not act by year's end, increasing taxes on 160 million Americans.

"If Congress doesn't act to extend this tax cut then most of you, the typical middle-class family, is going to see your taxes go up by \$1,000 at the worst possible time," Obama said.

Obama was welcomed warmly by a crowd of nearly 2,000 in the Scranton High School gym. At one point the president said that Republicans have sworn an oath not to raise taxes, prompting one man in the crowd to yell loudly: "Give us some names!"

In making a case for the consequences of letting the tax cut lapse, Obama offered a bleak assessment, telling his audience: "It would be tough for you. It would also be a massive blow for the economy because we're not fully out of the recession yet."

Technically, though, the recession ended in June 2009, according to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the nonprofit group that determines the beginning and end of recessions. The downturn began in December 2007 and was the longest and deepest since World War II, costing the country about 7.5 million jobs.

The recovery has been unusually weak, but the economy is growing again. It expanded 2 percent in the July-September quarter.

In selecting Scranton to make his appeal, Obama ventured to the birthplace of Vice President Joe Biden and Sen. Bob Casey, the Pennsylvania Democrat who is the author of the payroll tax cut plan expected to come up for a vote in the Senate later this week.

Before making remarks, Obama sought to put a face on the beneficiaries of the payroll tax cut by stopping at the home of third-grade teacher Patrick Festa and his wife Donna, a graphic designer, in working-class South Scranton. The three chatted in the family's Christmas-decorated dining room, Obama inquiring about their work and their two high school-aged children.

Obama won Pennsylvania with 54 percent of the vote in 2008, but the fragile economy could put the state in play in 2012. Its proximity to Washington and its political importance have made it a favorite stopping place for Obama and Biden. The trip comes as Obama steps up his re-election campaign, rolling out two ads that call on supporters to begin to mobilize.

White House press secretary Jay Carney, while conceding that the re-election effort is under way, played down politics as a factor in Obama's Scranton visit.

"It's part of his responsibility, serving the American people, to get out and be among them and to speak with them about his agenda or her agenda," he said.

In New York, Obama was to attend three fundraisers: one at the home of businessman Jack Rosen, chairman of the American Jewish Congress, where tickets begin at \$10,000; one at the Greenwich Village restaurant Gotham Bar

and Grill at \$35,800 per ticket; and a reception at the Sheraton Hotel, where tickets begin at \$1,000. The money will be split between the Democratic National Committee and the Obama re-election campaign.

Obama also was scheduled to attend a reception celebrating progress on gay rights and the six-month anniversary of New York's approval of gay marriage. Obama has been supportive of gay and lesbian causes but has stopped short of declaring support for gay marriage.

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[20111130-01](#) 07:34 SteveB Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to Art, FotM Newsletter #28)

But "their" current plan has run for, what, 30 years? Since Reagan and, arguably, since Ike.

Whoever these dudes are, they can certainly take the long view.

The question is—who would want to destroy the American economy and middle class and why? Are they our friends or our enemies?

Does that sound paranoid? Maybe that's how they keep the truth at bay...

[Please understand, dear reader, this and a very few other threads are not completely serious. –SteveB]

[20111130-03](#) 11:55 Larry Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #28)

Great thinking!

Keep it up, and I know you will.

[20111130-02](#) 11:28 Anonymous1 Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)

SteveB: I can't figure out why someone wants to destroy the country.

[Note: This is another not 100% serious thread. –SteveB]

It DOESN'T make sense, by any logical measure, but it is sure as heck deliberate. Speculation is the only way to understand it. I speculate that someone/someorg who has enough money not to care about short-term (months, a decade or two) personal monetary gain simply wants to control everything.

[20111130-04](#) 11:56 Anonymous1 Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #28)

SteveB: But "their" current plan has run for, what, 30 years? Since Reagan and arguably since Ike. Whoever these dudes are, they can certainly take the long view. The question is—who would want to destroy the American economy and middle class and why? Are they our friends or our enemies? Does that sound paranoid? Maybe that's how they keep the truth at bay...

They're certainly not MY friends.

"If you're not paranoid, you haven't been paying attention." —seen on a bumper sticker in Austin, Texas

I would say that whatever this is took on its current course during the Nixon administration, and has been gathering steam ever since. It may have older roots. It may be more recent. It may not even be real, but I do believe I see patterns that defy classification as "random". It seems directed.

Like you, I do not know why.

Speculate. I haven't got an answer that satisfies me any more than my wife's observation that if you keep 'em stupid and poor, they can't cause much trouble.

Guns in citizen hands aren't much of an issue if most of the gun owners have drunk your Kool-aid; even then, small arms in private hands wouldn't do much against the military. Opposition can be located with pinpoint precision.

Paranoid? Me? Nope: just watching quietly...

[20111130-05](#) 12:08 SteveB Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to Anonymous1, above)

Yet, look at it like this, and what a plot for a sci-fi or spy novel, whoever it is, is actually in some sort of control, would not be able to resist making big bucks in the markets.

Maybe whoever is making a lot of money, especially on the down swings, that's our culprit.

All this is one more reason why I say the raw speculation must be stopped and made highly illegal, toxic even.

We gotta catch these dudes and turn your ferrets loose in their houses!

[20111130-07](#) 12:40 Anonymous1 Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)

There have been many novels written on such a subject. Science is rarely involved.

You're making an assumption about anyone being unable to resist profits. You're still thinking short-term.

Speculate more.

[20111130-09](#) 13:14 SteveB Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to Anonymous1, above)

They need the money for something...pizza? So they need maximum volatility. Bubbles popping.

[20111130-11](#) 13:27 Anonymous1 Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)

SteveB: They need the money for something...pizza? So they need maximum volatility. Bubbles popping.

Maybe "they" do not need the money. SOME people (and organizations) that have a whole stack of loot and influence actually concede that they do not need more. Bill Gates is an example, although he is surely not the source of this little conundrum.

[20111130-20](#) 17:35 SteveB Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to Anonymous1, above)

OK, I got two former Army guys [Art & Tom] on this with us. What I'm wondering about is your comment before about "Guns in the hands of citizens..."

Please understand I want no insurgency, no revolution, no armed conflict. But, if it ever came to that, I wonder...

I know you and I have talked before as if small arms don't have a chance against tanks, but look at Libya. They started with very few arms in the hands of civilians. Many fewer than we have. Now, those were very brave folks too. I admire them greatly.

And there would be certain, I hope inevitable, factors that would come into play if the military and civilians ever got into it in the US, some of which I learned from recent conflicts going back to Viet Nam:

1. I hope there would be an effort on the part of the Army to minimize destruction and civilian casualties, to prevent bad press, if for no other reason.
2. Some soldiers or even Army or police units might decide to help the civilians in lieu of killing them.
3. The population starts with just rifles and improvised explosives, but IED's and (surely not?) suicide bombers follow. Molotov cocktails are extremely effective.
4. For the Army to operate in, say, a city, it has to have ammo dumps, logistics into and out of the city, many ways in which machine guns, bazookas, RPG's, cannon, and tanks to fall into the hands of the civilians. That's what seems to have happened in Libya.
5. Look at Afghanistan. Seemingly unconquerable, even against vastly superior forces. Wouldn't the US be like that?
6. That Army intelligence might not stack up too well against an army of civilian hackers.

Not that I want it. Not that it will come to pass in my lifetime. But the vision of the Founding Fathers in the 2nd Amendment may have resulted in something more effective than we have supposed.

Just thinking out loud...in case the Koch Brothers or Rick Perry takes over.

[20111130-21](#) 17:43 Anonymous1 Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)

I have Army friends, too, and they are among the most upstanding and moral folks I know. I do not think for a moment that the US Army would be involved in anything stateside that would bring them into direct confrontation with civilians with guns, at least in this context.

However, I DO think it's possible that similarly equipped resources exist in other pools that might be brought to bear surgically. Conceivably.

What I was trying to say, probably too quickly to make it clear, is that if there is some shadowy powerful agency, organization, coalition, group, or individual that is shaping the Republican platform in this seemingly illogical manner, I doubt that they/it/he has any particular concern about individual citizens with guns. And as I observed, the majority of that group - citizen gun-owners, among whom I number myself a dozen times and more - are reactive Republicans. One has only to visit any gun show to know that that majority is 'way beyond 90%. I am an anomaly: not unique, but very uncommon... a liberal-leaning gun owner.

So my point with regard to citizens with guns was simply that they would be no practical deterrent to whatever is guiding the Republican platform, behind the scenes.

Of course, I could be completely off-base. Maybe their platform DOES make sense to them. But... how could it?

[20111130-23](#) 17:55 SteveB Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to Anonymous1, above)

And what I'm saying is...maybe the 2nd Amendment truly is and/or could be a real deterrent, plus a chance for you to use your heaters and gats.

[20111130-26](#) 18:53 Anonymous1 Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)

SteveB: And what I'm saying is...maybe the 2nd Amendment truly is and/or could be a real deterrent, plus a chance for you to use your heaters and gats.

(I really DO feel that the US Army really would defend the citizenry, without hesitation.)

Thanks very much, but I do not regard the possibility of ever having to aim deadly force at another human as an "opportunity".

I have very mixed feelings about the ease with which citizens, and only US citizens, are able to obtain firearms. I DO believe that it's important that we are, but am not so awfully bloody sure it should be as easy as it is. It's that enforcement issue, really: if the existing laws and statutes could be, and were, uniformly and diligently observed and enforced, many of my misgivings would be addressed. But enabling the means to do that, and to do it well, opens up many other cans of worms.

It's complicated.

20111130-06	12:24	SteveB	"White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?"
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This gets my blood pumping and boiling mad!

Wonder why Republicans didn't think the huge dollar extension to the Bush tax cuts for the rich should be funded before extension?

Why didn't the Democrats think of that? Why did they cave-in so easily?

Republicans only want tax increases on middle class working Americans! Maybe because we're "scum-bags"?

"White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" by Byron Tau, Politico

Nov. 30, 2011, (http://www.politico.com/politico44/perm/1111/role_reversal_6caa9de1-423a-4390-a6c5-db189250798e.html)

(Role reversal.)

'I thought they were for tax cuts,' Jay Carney said of the GOP's stance on the payroll tax.

The New York Times' Jennifer Steinhauer reports on a strange dynamic in the fight between the White House and congressional Republicans over the extension of some modest payroll tax cuts:

In a sharp role reversal, Democrats and Republicans have become divided over whether to extend a federal payroll tax cut enjoyed by every working American last year, with Democrats leading the charge for the tax break and many Republicans demanding that the cut be paid for if it is extended at all.

It is a shift from the recently failed deficit talks when Republicans pushed for extending Bush-era tax cuts without paying for them and Democrats argued against added tax breaks for the most affluent Americans. Now the fight over how to handle the tax cuts as well as added unemployment benefits is set to play out in the final month of the year as the two parties prepare for a politically charged 2012.

The White House messaging operation has been hammering home on this theme. White House senior adviser Valerie Jarrett took the GOP to task on the cuts today on MSNBC.

"There are no reasons why we should see taxes go up if Republicans are willing to act. They're the ones that don't want to raise taxes, so why would they allow - come January 1 - for taxes to go up on these hard-working Americans?" said Jarrett on MSNBC's "Morning Joe." And yesterday during the daily briefing, press secretary Jay Carney echoed the same theme.

"I thought they were for tax cuts" said Carney. "What you all are telling me is that Republicans are going to vote against it?"

[20111130-08](#) 13:02 SteveG Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (to all)

Call/email your senators/representative!!

[20111130-10](#) 13:18 Pam Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (reply to SteveB, above & to Dale & GaryC)

Unbelievable! Dale, GaryC, please respond.

[20111130-13](#) 14:34 Pam Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (reply to SteveB, above)

Here's what I think. I don't claim to know. I think Grover Norquist has a "thing" about government, in that he wants it smaller. Much smaller. I would like to know more about him, his background, etc. I'll google him and see what I can find out. When you trace everything back, it all seems to end up with him and his No More Taxes pledge. He's got the Republicans on a leash. I'm trying to figure out why he and his followers despise government so much. Does he want a return to 19th c. laissez-faire capitalism? Does he not know how awful things were in England before reform? Why do Republicans defend big corporations but condemn "big" government? Government at least has elections where all citizens can vote. Stockholders are the only ones who have a say in corporate management, and we know what their priorities are. I follow the stock market like everybody else. I'm not against profit, but why do Republicans think government needs regulation but banks don't? I really want to know what's at the bottom of this.

[20111130-14](#) 14:42 Art Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (reply to SteveB, above)

Well, there are tax cuts and then there are tax cuts. Republicans don't care about payroll taxes. Their masters don't pay them.

Want your blood to boil some more? Good articles in the *WP* today about earmarks. Remember that noble stance taken by the Republicans with much fanfare about no more earmarks. They have a new name but there are 111 amendments/earmarks in the new Defense Authorization Bill. Again, while I oppose earmarks I also see how they can be useful. What I object to is the Republican nobler-than-thou hypocrisy that they can't even hold to for one session.

[20111130-15](#) 15:46 Pam Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (reply to all, above)

OK, so I googled Norquist, and he looks like a pretty normal guy, except for his extreme political views. He reminds me of a student I had a few years ago who is a staunch Republican. He's in law school now, and I know he's headed for a political career. We got along very well, despite our differences, and I even helped him get a job with our Honors Program. People like him are an enigma to me. This is a nice, clean-cut kid. Intelligent and hard-working. But he has the opinions of a Neanderthal. I read that Norquist wants to take America back to its pre-Teddy Roosevelt days, as if that were a viable 21st c. option. There's a streak of rampant individualism in this country that is as invidious as totalitarianism is at the other end of the spectrum.

I listen to the Right go on and on about not wanting to create a culture of dependency. A culture of dependency is when a substantial portion of families and the healthy young have no work and must turn to the government for help. We need to create jobs, lots of jobs, so that every able-bodied adult can earn a decent living. We need to keep in place all those services that provide sustenance to the disabled, the chronically ill, the impoverished elderly. Those folks are not dependent because they are lazy but because they have no choice. We need jobs in the short

term, a government-led program to put the country back on its feet. When the long-term solutions kick in, we can let govt. programs lapse. We've done it before.

I just read a review of Michael Lewis's new book Boomerang: Travels in the New Third World. The bottom line is, the recovery is going to be long and slow. Individuals and nations are going to have to reign in their spending and learn to manage temptation. The Germans have handled their economy well and are understandably in no mood to bail out the likes of Greece and Italy, but they're going to have to. Here's how I explain it to myself: if a man with a good income marries a woman with a lot of debt, he can refuse to pay off her credit cards. But her debt will still affect him. Just as the couple will have to work their way out of debt together, so too will Europe. It's a bitter pill.

When I read about Greeks rioting because they're being asked to work past age 55 (50 for women), my sympathies are not aroused. But when I read about massive layoffs of hard-working people in America, I shake my head. I'm a realist (I think). I'm willing to do my part. But I expect everyone else to pitch in too, and that includes the rich. Socking it to the middle class and protecting wealth for the top 1% is not only nonsensical, it's demoralizing. If I feel the pinch, I want to see that the rich are feeling it too. I retired before the crash; I probably shouldn't have, but the childcare I provide for my grandsons allows my daughter to work. My husband hasn't had a raise in three years, university travel money for students and faculty has been cancelled, a vigorous Teaching Fellows program has been scrapped, and full time employees have been let go. The only thing that has gone up is top administrators' salaries. Demoralizing? You betcha. There will be pain. But we need to spread it around so no one group feels unfairly put upon. I wish someone would explain to me why firing some workers is preferable to reducing the salaries of all workers in a given workplace.

[20111130-16](#) 16:05 Art Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (reply to Pam, above)

As always well said, Pam. One thing you left out about Norquest is that he has hitched his wagon to a very cushy job. They interviewed him on 60 Minutes last week and he just oozed slime to my way of thinking. That his segment was followed by an interview with the new IMF Chief, who is about as classy a lady as you can get, didn't help the impression. So, Norquest is in it for the bucks and has done very well for himself, but that is the mantra of the Republican Party, isn't it? I guess the ultimate is a nation of free landholders who produce everything internally, depend on no one and answer to no one. Only problem is when things like famines or other disasters come along and no one can require sharing, that usually doesn't work out quite so well.

And that is the other factor. I think Republicans look backward to a time that really never was but in their minds only the good parts existed. (Remember, here in Virginia we are teaching that uncounted numbers of blacks served willingly in the Civil War defending the south.) Like the Luddites or the South for that matter these things are always doomed to failure. Denying the realities of the time and ignoring scientific research and facts is a recipe for disaster. We are where we are today exactly because of that thinking by previous Administrations.

[20111130-17](#) 16:51 SteveG Re: "White House: GOP Now for Tax Increases?" (reply to Pam, above)

Grover Norquist wants a return to 1900 taxes at 8%.

[20111130-19](#) 17:04 SteveB "Fed Salary Freeze to Cover Payroll Tax Cut?"

OK, the Republicans are determined to try to look like heroes. Of course, the Democrats go along with the cuts to fund it, which Republicans refused to do for the Bush tax cuts. So who are the big heroes? Republicans threaten us, Democrats save us one again, and we're supposed to credit the GOP? Haha

"Fed Salary Freeze to Cover Payroll Tax Cut?" by Scott Wong, Politico

Nov. 30, 2011, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/1111/69423.html>)

Senate Republicans are coalescing around a plan that would continue the current salary freeze for all federal workers and lawmakers to pay for an extension of the payroll tax cut favored by President Barack Obama and other Democrats, a GOP senator told POLITICO on Wednesday.

Obama instituted a two-year federal pay freeze that began Jan. 1, and the GOP plan would extend it either one or two years, saving about \$100 billion. The idea for a federal pay freeze was discussed by the presidential Bowles-Simpson fiscal commission, and was later part of the deficit supercommittee negotiations that collapsed last week.

"It's the idea that private sector employees around the country have had their pay freeze. Many have been laid off," said the GOP senator, who noted that the pay freeze was discussed in Tuesday's closed-door caucus meeting. "And at the federal level, the salary relative to private sector salaries has crept up."

The senator, who asked for anonymity to discuss a closed door meeting, said the pay freeze could be coupled with a means testing plan to limit Medicare and Social Security benefits for those earning more than \$1 million a year.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) told reporters Tuesday that there was support in his conference for extending the payroll tax holiday. He added that Republicans would propose a different pay-for than the surtax on millionaires that Democrats have offered.

But McConnell declined to go into any detail, and a McConnell aide on Wednesday would not confirm that the federal pay freeze was the preferred pay-for.

"Republicans will put aside their misgivings and support this extension, not because we believe as the President does that another short-term stimulus will turn this economy around," McConnell said on the floor Wednesday, "but because we know it will give some relief to struggling workers out there who continue to need it nearly three years into this presidency."

A vote on the Democratic plan, which would impose a 3.25 percent surtax on any income over \$1 million a year, is set for Friday, though is largely expected to fall short of the 60 votes needed to overcome a GOP filibuster.

The payroll tax holiday, which gives the average family an extra \$1,500 a year, expires on Dec. 31.

Obama traveled Wednesday afternoon to Pennsylvania's Scranton High School, where he was expected to pressure Congress to pass the payroll extension. His speech comes almost a year to the day when he announced the federal pay freeze.

"The hard truth is that getting this deficit under control is going to require broad sacrifice," Obama said on Nov. 29, 2010. "And that sacrifice must be shared by the employees of the federal government."

20111130-12	14:19	SteveB	"Did an Illinois Water Utility Come Under a Cyberattack?"
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I'm not saying this is a bad thing (below). I'm just saying that we need to recognize this fact about privately-held public corporations like GE or Citi. They are required to think only of money. And now we are told that they are "people", with rights. (They've always had some, of course.) So we have these "people" walking around, so to speak, in society, and they are completely, positively amoral, without morals, or sometimes downright immoral. THEY MUST BE RIGIDLY CONTROLLED! Just as any other kind of amoral pervert in the neighborhood would be!

"Did an Illinois Water Utility Come Under a Cyberattack?" by Jeffrey Carr, Slate

Nov. 22, 2011,

(http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2011/11/cyber_attack_on_an_illinois_water_utility_.html)

(And why was it connected to the Internet, anyway?)

A danger scenario that national security experts have been warning about has finally happened—at least, according to news headlines. Reports say that a cyberattack carried out by foreign nationals successfully shut down a pump at an Illinois water utility. But is that really what happened?

Details about the incident at the Carrant-Gardner Public Water District in Springfield, Ill., are sparse. It was brought into the media spotlight by security-conference organizer and researcher Joe Weiss, who has a commercial interest in announcing attacks against so-called “supervisory control and data acquisition” systems. (SCADA systems basically control the automated processes used by water and power companies, plus many other industries.)

The critical infrastructure of the United States is 90 percent privately held, and owner companies are required by law to maximize profits or potentially face a shareholder lawsuit.

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

20111130-18	16:56	SteveG	Fw: SignOn.org Action: Start Your Own Petition!
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From SteveG (4:56 pm) – ref: FW: Yes, petitions really do work / MoveOn

from MoveOn.org:

Earlier this year, a MoveOn member named Robert Applebaum started up a petition for student loan forgiveness using our new website, SignOn.org. Robert's petition spread quickly, especially after we emailed it to our list.

Then, something really amazing happened. President Obama actually responded—not with a form letter, but with an actual change in policy that will lower student loan payments for over 1.6 million people.

Of course, Robert didn't do this alone, and this isn't the total solution to the student debt problem. But it proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that petitions *can* make a difference.

Now it's your turn. Using SignOn.org, you can start your own online petition on any issue—local or national—and invite your friends to sign it. We'll send the most popular petitions to other MoveOn members to help build support for your cause.

Click here to start your own petition on SignOn.org right now:

http://www.signon.org/create_start.html?add_id=1&id=33399-18997482-70QzxKx.

Thanks for all you do. –Steven, Anna, Michael, Adam Q., Stefanie, and the rest of the team

20111130-22	17:48	SteveG	Fw: FreePress Petition: End the Big Broadcast Swindle!
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from FreePress:

Television and radio broadcasters get to use our public airwaves for free. It's a great deal ... for them, at least. For the rest of us, it's just another corporate giveaway.

These broadcasters rake in billions in profits using our public property. And what do we the public get from them in return? Next to nothing.

Tell the FCC: No more handouts to big media:

(http://act2.freepress.net/letter/ownership_review/?akid=3092.8893383.pdxgdd&rd=1&t=3).

The original idea was to offer commercial broadcasters free access to our airwaves in exchange for programming that serves the needs of our communities. This is the core of the Federal Communications Commission's public-interest bargain. But over the years broadcast industry lobbyists have trampled this social contract in their rush to maximize profits.

Instead of covering the issues communities say matter the most, broadcasters have shuttered their newsrooms, laid off journalists and aired cookie-cutter programming often produced by other stations.

Now the FCC is about to review its media ownership rules — including rules that promote localism, competition and diversity on the airwaves. These rules need to be strengthened and enforced. But the FCC has a track record of creating policies that cater to industry at the expense of the news people need:

1. The agency is reportedly planning to re-introduce a Bush-era policy that would consolidate local media even further in the hands of a few corporate interests. This rule change would allow a single company to own a newspaper and a TV station in the same city.
2. The FCC has repeatedly neglected its responsibility to correct dramatic inequalities in the broadcast industry. A Free Press survey of broadcast licenses in 2007 showed women and communities of color to be grossly underrepresented among broadcast owners. Members of Congress and even the courts have repeatedly demanded action by the FCC, yet the agency has done next to nothing to fix this problem.
3. The FCC has turned a blind eye to "covert consolidation," a practice in which corporations control two or three TV stations in the same community. Covert consolidation leads to copycat news programming and has left over 100 communities with few to no choices of local news broadcasts. The agency must strengthen its rules to protect the public from this harmful practice.

It's time for the FCC to address these serious problems once and for all. By signing this letter to the FCC, you're helping Free Press launch a new initiative to reverse decades of bad policy. We need to put the public interest back into the public airwaves. It begins today with you. Thanks.

—Libby Reinish, Free Press (<http://www.savethenews.org/>)

20111130-24 17:59 SteveG "The Pledge: Grover Norquist's Hold on the GOP"

"The Pledge: Grover Norquist's Hold on the GOP" by Steve Kroft, CBS

Nov. 20, 2011, (http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-18560_162-57327816/grover-norquist/?tag=currentVideoInfo;videoMetaInfo)

As head of Americans for Tax Reform since 1986, Grover Norquist has transformed a single issue - preventing tax hikes - into one of the key platforms of the Republican Party. As Steve Kroft reports, his biggest coup was getting more than 270 members of Congress, and nearly all of the 2012 Republican presidential primary candidates, to sign a pledge promising never to vote to raise taxes. But some opponents say the pledge may be hindering a solution to America's debt crisis.

The following is a script of "The Pledge" which aired on Nov. 20, 2011. Steve Kroft is correspondent, Frank Devine, producer. Video: <http://www.cbsnews.com/video/watch/?id=7389006n&tag=contentBody;storyMediaBox>.

The Joint Congressional Committee on Deficit Reduction has just three days to reach a deal eliminating at least \$1.2 trillion from the nation's debt using some combination of cutting spending and raising taxes.

The person at the heart of those negotiations - and some would say the person responsible for the deadlock - is neither a member of Congress nor the holder of any public office. He is a lobbyist and a conservative activist named Grover Norquist who, over the years, has gotten virtually every Republican congressman and senator to sign an oath called "The Pledge." It's a promise that they will never, under any circumstances, vote to raise taxes on

anyone. And so far Grover Norquist has held them to it, controlling 279 votes, including the Speaker of the House, the Senate Minority Leader and all six Republican members of the Joint Committee on Deficit Reduction.

Steve Kroft: A lot of people think you're the most powerful man in Washington.

Grover Norquist: The tax issue is the most powerful issue in American politics going back to the Tea Party. People say, 'Oh, Grover Norquist has power.' No. Grover Norquist and Americans for Tax Reform focus on the tax issue. The tax issue is a powerful issue.

Grover Norquist is trying to be modest. Since creating Americans for Tax Reform at Ronald Reagan's behest back in 1985, Norquist has been responsible, more than anyone else, for rewriting the dogma of the Republican Party.

Norquist: The Republicans won't raise your taxes. We haven't had a Republican vote for an income tax increase since 1990.

Kroft: And this was your doing?

Norquist: I helped. Yeah.

It began with the simple idea of getting Republicans all over the country to sign an oath called the "Taxpayer Protection Pledge," promising their constituents that they would never, ever vote for anything that would make their taxes go up.

Norquist: This is Speaker Gingrich's tax pledge back in 1998...

And once they sign the pledge, Grover Norquist never forgets. The more signatures he's collected, the more his influence has grown.

Norquist: I think to win a Republican primary-- It is difficult to imagine somebody winning a primary without taking the pledge.

The signatories not only include more than 270 members of Congress, but all of the Republican presidential candidates, with the lone exception of Jon Huntsman.

All that leverage has made Norquist's Wednesday breakfast meetings a must-attend event for Republican operatives fortunate enough to get an invitation. David Keene, the president of the National Rifle Association, was there the day we attended along with conservative columnist John Fund.

John Fund: This is the Grand Central station of the conservative movement.

We were told it was the first time cameras have ever been allowed into the weekly off-the-record strategy session.

Steve Law (American Crossroads): Our approach is going to be to just simply drill away every day.

Norquist: It's people from Capitol Hill, House and Senate, think tanks, Tea Party groups, business groups. Everybody who wants the government to be smaller and everybody who wants the government to leave them alone.

Norquist (at Seattle Tea Party event): I intend to win. I intend to be part of the whole effort to crush the other team.

Grover Norquist has been called both the "dark wizard of the right's anti-tax cult" and "the single most effective conservative activist in the country." He is a libertarian ideologue who believes that Washington is controlling our lives through the taxes it raises to fund big government. And he's said that he wants to shrink it to a size where it could be drowned in a bathtub.

Kroft: You wanna drown it in the bathtub?

Norquist: No. We want it down to the size to where it would fit in a bathtub. And then it could worry about what we were up to.

Kroft: I mean, you did say that your ultimate ambition was to chop it in half and then shrink it again to where we were at the turn of the century. You're talking about 1900 not 2000.

Norquist: Well, the-- I think--

Kroft: Eight percent of GDP.

Norquist: Yeah. We functioned in this country with government at eight percent of GDP for a long time and quite well.

Kroft: That was before Social Security. It was before Medicare. It was before welfare assistance, unemployment assistance. Is that the federal government you envision?

Norquist: Each of these government programs were set up supposedly, in name, to solve a problem. Okay. Do they solve the problem? Could the problem be better solved through individual initiative? I mean, I think we've found under welfare that we are doing more harm than good.

Kroft: Do you feel the government has any obligation to the poor or the elderly or the unemployed?

Norquist: Yeah. It should stop stepping on them, kicking them and making their lives more difficult.

Norquist claims he got the idea to brand the Republican Party as the party that would never raise your taxes, when he was just 12 years old and volunteering for the Nixon campaign. He says it came to him one day while he was riding home on the school bus.

Norquist: If the parties would brand themselves the way Coke and Pepsi and other products do so that you knew what you were buying, it had quality control. I vote for the Republican. He or she will not raise my taxes. I'll buy one. I'll take that one home.

Kroft: So this is about marketing?

Norquist: Yes. It's a part of that. Yeah, very much so.

But Norquist says the success of any product requires relentless monitoring and diligent quality control to protect the brand, whether it's Coca Cola or the Republican Party.

Norquist: 'Cause let's say you take that Coke bottle home, and you get home, and you're two thirds of the way through the Coke bottle. And you look down at what's left in your Coke bottle is a rat head there. You wonder whether you'd buy Coke ever again. You go on TV, and you show 'em the rat head in the Coke bottle. You call your friends, and tell them about it. And Coke's in trouble. Republicans who vote for a tax increase are rat heads in a Coke bottle. They damage the brand for everyone else.

Grover Norquist is not interested in compromise. He likes things ugly and takes no prisoners. Those who refuse to sign the pledge or backslide are subjected to primary fights against well-funded opponents, backed by Norquist.

Norquist: These are people in North Carolina who voted for a tax increase when they said they wouldn't. And down here in blue are which ones were defeated in the next election.

Kroft: Well, is there any set of circumstances in which you would condone a tax increase? Or release people from the pledge?

Norquist: The pledge is not to me. It's to the voters. So an elected official who says, 'I think I wanna break my pledge,' he doesn't look at me and say that. He looks at his voters and says that. That's why some of them look at their voters, don't wanna say that, and they go, "Well, how 'bout you? Could you release me from my pledge?" No, no. I can't help you.

Kroft: But you--

Norquist: You didn't promise me anything.

Kroft: But you're the keeper of the pledge.

Norquist: We remind your voters that you took the pledge.

Kroft: You are the ones that are--

Norquist: That's true.

Kroft: --gonna retaliate if they break the pledge.

Norquist: Oh, no, no, no. The voters will retaliate. We may inform the voters. But let's say the voters all want --

Kroft: Inform the voters with hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign or educational--

Norquist: Nineteen--

Kroft: --expenditures to point out the fact that they broke the pledge.

Norquist: If necessary.

Kroft: But you make it pretty clear. If someone breaks the pledge, you're gonna do everything you can to get rid of them.

Norquist: To educate the voters that they raise taxes. And again, we educate people--

Kroft: To get rid of them.

Norquist: To encourage them to go into another line of work, like shoplifting or bank robbing, where they have to do their own stealing.

Kroft: You've got them by the shorthairs.

Norquist: The voters do. Yeah.

Kroft: And they have to march in lockstep with Grover Norquist?

Norquist: With the taxpayers of their state. I applaud from the sidelines. I go, 'Very good.' Yes, yes.

If nothing else, it is a brilliant, bare-knuckle political strategy with some of the characteristics of a protection racket. Many Republican congressmen fear retaliation from Norquist if they even suggest that a tax increase for the wealthiest of Americans should be up for discussion in the current deficit negotiations. And Democrats - like Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid - have been demonizing Norquist on a daily basis.

Sen. Harry Reid: They're giving speeches that we should compromise on our deficit, but never do they compromise on Grover Norquist. He is their leader.

But he also has some critics among elder statesmen of the Republican Party, the most vocal being Senator Alan Simpson.

Kroft: What do you think of Grover Norquist?

Sen. Alan Simpson: [snorts]

Simpson gleefully accepts that he is one of Norquist's Republican rat heads in the Coke bottle. He got there by serving as co-chairman of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility, which recommended that some tax increases would be necessary to solve the nation's debt problem. Simpson has no use for Norquist.

Simpson: He may well be the most powerful man in America today. So if that's what he wants, he's got it. You know, he's -- megalomaniac, ego maniac, whatever you want to call him. If that's his goal, he's damn near there. He ought to run for president because that will be his platform: 'No taxes, under any situation, even if your country goes to hell.'

Simpson also wants to know where Norquist and Americans for Tax Reform, with its multimillion dollar budget gets its money.

Simpson: When you get this powerful, and he is, then it's, 'Where do you get your scratch, Grover?' Is it two people? Is it 10 million people? The American people demand to know where you get your money, Grover babe.

But under federal law, Grover babe, as Simpson calls him, and Americans for Tax Reform, a nonprofit organization, aren't required to disclose the identity of its contributors. So the finances of a group that demands transparency in government are opaque. Norquist says the money comes from direct mail and other grassroots fundraising efforts. But a significant portion appears to come from wealthy individuals, foundations and corporate interests.

Kroft: In the interest of transparency, would you disclose your major donors?

Norquist: I-- I would not-- I don't know. Haven't thought of it. It doesn't really matter because what we do is what we do. I guess I would argue, thinking back on it, we've had times when people who are contributors to us were literally threatened by senators and congressmen.

Kroft: So you're protecting the corporate interests from harassment and threats?

Norquist: Well, protecting me and anyone who wants to participate in American politics. You don't want people threatened because they wanna fight against higher taxes.

Over the years, some of his group's lobbying activities have stretched into areas that are not generally associated with preventing tax hikes. He has lobbied the State Department on behalf of the controversial Keystone pipeline and has dipped into areas like communications law, raising suspicions that the "Leave Us Alone Coalition" includes a lot of wealthy and powerful interests. His reputation also took a hit a few years ago because of his close association with disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff. But none of the insinuations of impropriety have ever stuck.

Norquist: It didn't work because at the end of the day, there wasn't a there there.

Sen. Alan Simpson: He is a Houdini. He-- you can throw him in the bottom of the East River in chains and he'd come outta there.

But Alan Simpson predicts that Norquist could soon become irrelevant. He thinks the country's financial situation is so dire that tax increases will become inevitable, and that a lot of Republicans who have signed the no-tax increase pledge, are already experiencing buyer's remorse.

Kroft: You think there are Republicans who have signed it who regret it?

Simpson: I do. I know damn well they have. I've talked to 'em. They come up to us and say, 'Save us from ourselves. I got trapped by this guy.'

In fact there are a few signs it's already beginning to happen - albeit on a small scale.

Thirty-seven Republican pledge signers have urged the select committee to consider all options in solving the debt crisis. And six Republican congressmen, including Steve Latourette of Ohio, have rescinded their pledges altogether. Latourette, who signed his back in 1994, says his driver's license expires, the milk in his refrigerator expires -- the only thing that never expires is the Grover Norquist pledge.

Rep. Steve Latourette: My word has been good on this tax pledge for 18 years. To be bound by something based upon circumstances that existed 18 years ago, when the circumstances are different, I think that's a little naive.

Grover Norquist says he's not losing any sleep over the defections. He's convinced that the Republicans have no intention of raising taxes and he still has signed markers from 279 members of Congress promising they will never let it happen.

Norquist: Most of the Republicans I know are very pleased that we make it easy for them to credibly make that commitment. They're smiling when they're getting their picture taken with me and -- and the pledge. Not grumpy. Smiling.

Kroft: Do you believe that everybody who smiles at a press conference is actually happy?

Norquist: No, but most, many. There may be one or two that are-- are grumpy. And if they wish to provide their names, we'll focus on their states in upcoming elections.

Kroft: I mean, you've got them coming and you've got them going if they're a Republican. If they sign the pledge and break it they're toast. And if they don't sign the pledge they're probably toast.

Norquist: But if they sign it and keep it, they win the primary. They win the general. They get to govern. And, I've helped make all this possible.

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20111130-25 18:39 Dennis "7 Ways to Support the Real Job Creator: Main Street"

In case you believe the lie that Wall Street creates jobs rather than killing them, read this:

"7 Ways to Support the Real Job Creator: Main Street" by John Cavanagh and David Korten, *Yes! Magazine*

Nov. 29, 2011, (http://www.yesmagazine.org/new-economy/7-ways-to-support-the-real-job-creator-main-street?utm_source=tw&utm_medium=socmed&utm_content=CavanaghJ7WaysToSupportRealJobCreators&utm_campaign=111129NewEconomy)

(Turns out most job creation comes from the 99 percent, not the one percent.)

If you've been following GOP debates lately, you've heard that Wall Street businesses are the real "job creators" of our economy, and that the best way to put Americans back to work is to remove all the troublesome fetters—like environmental and safety regulations, or taxes, or unionization rights for workers—that hold them back.

But Wall Street's goal is to make money, not create jobs. Wall Street institutions view wages and worker benefits as costs to be minimized. Wall Street executives know that the most certain way to boost the share price of their

company, and thereby pump up the value of their personal stock options, is to announce that thousands of people are to be laid off, their jobs eliminated or moved abroad.

Between 2000 and 2009, for example, U.S. transnational corporations, which employ roughly 20 percent of all U.S. workers, slashed their U.S. employment by 2.9 million even as they increased their overseas workforce by 2.4 million. The result was a significant loss of jobs nationally, as well as a net loss globally.

So who are America's real job creators?

Most jobs come from the 99 percent—and that the best way to support job creation is to support rights and protections for the 99 percent.

It turns out that most job creation in the United States is the result of Main Street entrepreneurs, not Wall Street financial wizards. In our new report, *Jobs: A Main Street Fix for Wall Street's Failure*, we show that most jobs come from the 99 percent—and that the best way to support job creation is to support rights and protections for the 99 percent.

A series of Kauffman Foundation studies find that nearly all job growth in the United States comes from entrepreneurial startups, which by their nature are products of Main Street. It is equally significant that more than 90 percent of the entrepreneurs responsible for job growth come from middle-class or the top end of lower-class backgrounds. Less than 1 percent of America's job-creating entrepreneurs come from extremely rich or extremely poor backgrounds.

Just as the Wall Street economy is about making money for the 1 percent, the Main Street economy is about middle class people self-organizing to make a living by creating businesses that serve community needs for goods, services, and livelihoods within a market framework. This is the market economy Adam Smith envisioned when he wrote *The Wealth of Nations*.

This is a critical insight. To unleash America's job-creating entrepreneurial energies, we must advance policies that expand the middle class and build strong Main Street economies. We have seen this demonstrated by our own national experience.

After Wall Street financiers precipitated the Great Depression of the 1930s, America put in place corrective structures, including a highly progressive tax system, a strong social safety net, and effective regulation of Wall Street banks and corporations. These structures shifted the locus of economic power from Wall Street financiers to ordinary Americans who worked hard and invested their savings in job-creating businesses that served community needs and built community wealth.

Less than 1 percent of America's job-creating entrepreneurs come from extremely rich or extremely poor backgrounds.

From this strong economic foundation, the United States emerged from victory in World War II with a large middle class and an industrial and technological base that made us the world's most powerful nation. A major portion of the society achieved the American Dream of a secure and comfortable life in return for hard work and playing by the rules. For a brief moment, the civil rights movement created hope that all Americans might eventually share in the dream regardless of their color.

Beginning in the 1970s, Wall Street interests quietly mobilized to free themselves from regulation, unions, and taxes and to dismantle the nation's economic and social safety nets. Their initiatives, which gained traction under the Reagan administration, reduced taxes on the rich, undermined unions, pushed down wages and benefits, eliminated and outsourced jobs, eliminated limits on usury and speculation, and redirected financial markets from long-term investment in real wealth creation to profiting from securities fraud, usury, market manipulation, corporate asset stripping, and the inflation of financial bubbles.

It may seem that America's prosperity now depends on Wall Street. That perception is largely an illusion created by Wall Street success in rewriting the rules to gain control of the nation's money, productive resources, and

politicians. Wall Street's relationship to the United States is akin to that of a colonial occupier loyal solely to itself and devoted exclusively to expropriating wealth it has no hand in creating. Its institutions profit from eliminating jobs and worker benefits, depressing wages, evading taxes, denying health insurance claims, and pillaging the retirement accounts of the elderly.

Every need that Wall Street institutions fill is better served by Main Street institutions with strong community roots.

Occupy Wall Street has focused a spotlight on the concentration and abuse of Wall Street power and opened a much needed conversation about how to restore the American Dream of a secure and comfortable life in return for hard work and playing by the rules.

The New Economy Working Group, which we co-chair, has just issued a report on "Jobs: A Main Street Fix for Wall Street's Failure". It examines the systemic cause of the current economic failure and outlines a seven-part program to restore the middle class, advance a power shift from Wall Street to Main Street, and get America working again.

1. Redefine our economic priorities by replacing financial indicators with real-wealth indicators as the basis for evaluating economic performance.
2. Restructure the money system to root the power to create and allocate money in Main Street financial institutions that support Main Street job creation.
3. Restore the middle class by restoring progressive tax and employment policies and a strong and secure social safety net.
4. Create a framework of economic incentives that favor human-scale enterprises that are locally owned by people who have a natural interest in the health and well-being of their community and its natural environment.
5. Protect markets and democracy from corruption by concentrations of unaccountable corporate power.
6. Organize the global economy into substantially self-reliant regional economies that align and partner with the structure and dynamics of Earth's biosphere.
7. Put in place global rules and institutions that secure the universal rights of people and support democratic self-governance and economic self-reliance at all system levels.

A serious jobs program will necessarily include short-term stimulus measures. Its primary focus, however, will be on structural interventions to shift the balance of economic and political power from Wall Street to Main Street and rebuild the American middle class.

20111130-27	23:19	Dale	Re: "7 Ways to Support the Real Job Creator: Main Street" (reply to Dennis, above)
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Dennis: In case you believe the lie that Wall Street creates jobs rather than kills them, read this...

I've not been following the GOP debates as closely as the Democrats, so I guess I missed the news. Who has been saying that Wall Street businesses create the jobs?

Of course, some companies traded on public exchanges DO create jobs. ALL GOP candidates are in agreement that Government jobs are not the long term answer.

So far as I've seen, GOP candidates agree that small businesses are the job creators in the US, so why did the President bail out the automotive companies and the banks again?

In a message dated 11/30/2011, Dennis writes:

20111130-28 23:36 SteveG	Re: "7 Ways to Support the Real Job Creator: Main Street" (reply to Dale, above) & "Bailed Out Banks"
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Were the bailouts started under Bush?

"Bailed Out Banks" by The Rescue, CNN

date unknown, (<http://money.cnn.com/news/specials/storysupplement/bankbailout/>)

The Treasury Department has invested about \$200 billion in hundreds of banks through its Capital Purchase Program in an effort to prop up capital and support new lending. Here's a list of the banks that got bailed out.

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

20111130-29 23:40 SteveB	Re: "7 Ways to Support the Real Job Creator: Main Street" (reply to Dale & SteveG, above)
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First, SteveG, your last email was brilliant! Bank bailouts: 2008 = Bush. How quickly they forget.

Dale, "Wall Street" businesses to me are not all the publically traded companies, but only the financial industry. Not Ford, etc.

You aren't seriously trying to tell me it was a bad thing for the government to make a profit bailing out the auto industry and Citi? Why, pray tell? You don't appreciate the taxes those workers are paying? You don't appreciate not having them on the dole? What the h*ll is it you want, anyway? The whole country unemployed? What? Your positions are not making sense to me.

And what President was that?? Both! Mainly Bush. (though it was actually Republicans in Congress) Did you mean to "blame" it on Obama? Laughable! I guess that would mean Obama saved us!

Democrats also "are in agreement that government jobs are not the long term answer." And Democratic "candidates agree that small businesses are the job creators in the US." Everybody knows this. So what? You seem to intend your statements as some kind of accusation or differentiation? Better look elsewhere.

20111130-30 23:43 Dale	Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to all, FotM Newsletter #28)
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How can anyone be proud of this trash? This is high school newsletter quality.

20111130-31 23:51 SteveB	Re: Simple Economics & Taxes (reply to Dale, above & all)
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I am sorry for my poor job performance, everyone. I guess I just honestly don't know how to do any better. Maybe I should just quit? I grow weary of the hatred. And, like the man who accused me of being a socialist, communist, and drug dealer in front of all of you (and all of which are lies), then stormed out of the group as if he'd been insulted, I thought Dale was my friend...

Politics does indeed make (and break) strange bedfellows. Sorry you feel that way, Dale.

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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>
FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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