



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #35 — DEC. 15, 2011**

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Gingrich: Our Problem Is the Work Ethic of the Poor

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 15, 2011)

Here's Newt's latest pontification (by Elicia Dover, ABC News):

(Des Moines, Iowa) Responding to controversial comments he made about child labor in late November at Harvard University, Newt Gingrich today told a crowd in Des Moines, Iowa, that children in poor neighborhoods have "no habits of working and nobody around them who works." [Nobody, Newt? –SteveB]

Gingrich was asked by an audience member to clarify the comments he made last month in which he called the current child labor laws "stupid" and would replace janitors with schoolchildren to work in the community school.

"They have no habit of showing up on Monday and staying all day or the concept of 'I do this and you give me cash,' unless it's illegal," Gingrich said.

It's really just a continuation of what has become an old standby for the Republicans: The plight of the poor? That's the problem of the lazy poor. Joblessness? That's the problem of the lazy jobless. Not getting a good education? That's the problem of the lazy teachers and lazy students. (They should get to work as janitors immediately, instead of waiting for later.)

And, lastly, the problem of being rich and having to pay a single dollar in taxes? Now, that's a problem the Republicans are prepared to deal with!

"Gingrich Has It Wrong About the Poor" by LZ Granderson, CNN

Dec. 13, 2011, (http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/13/opinion/granderson-poor-families/index.html?hpt=us_mid)

My mother and stepfather both held full-time jobs and it wasn't unusual for them to work overtime. Sometimes days would go by when I wouldn't see my stepfather because he was working a double shift on consecutive days.

And yet, despite all their hard work, my family struggled to make ends meet.

Sometimes I would have to hurry home to get my homework done before nightfall and an unpaid electric bill put the house in the dark. We depended on the cinder blocks of cheese, powdered milk and canned meats encased in saturated fat that the government distributed. School clothes shopping typically began and ended at Goodwill. None

of this was unusual in my neighborhood on the east side of Detroit, so I didn't know then what I know now. We were poor. My friends were poor. My cousins who lived nearby were poor. Most everyone I encountered on my block was poor.

True, a few of them were lazy and leaned too heavily on the welfare system, while others turned to crime to survive. The first time I was mugged I was in elementary school. And yes, by saying "the first time," I am also saying it was not the only time.

But most adults were like my folks. They were sacrificing, hardworking people who wanted one thing: a better life. Better for themselves, better for their children. My story is very similar to that of my partner, whose mother worked hard to feed him and his sister, and that meant peanut butter and jelly sandwiches everyday. Our stories are similar to that of Starbucks president Howard Schultz who grew up in the projects in Brooklyn and whose father never made more than \$20,000 a year, or to that of William Jefferson Clinton, who started off as a poor kid from Arkansas and 46 years later was in the White House.

It is because of all of this that when I think of what it means to be poor in this country, I don't see a bunch of parasites looking for tax-subsidized handouts. I see hardworking people who could use a helping hand. I see my mother, who to this day shops at the Goodwill, even though her children can now buy her clothes whenever she wants. None of us is rich, but we are the fruit of her years of nonstop labor and inherited the work ethic we saw all around us. And if you scan through the biographies of some of this nation's greatest success stories across every conceivable demographic, you will find people with humble beginnings like mine. Perhaps you yourself came from little.

But more important, some people start from humble beginnings and die that way, which is no indication of how hard they did or didn't work, or how good or bad a person they were.

As we begin the painful work of tightening the belt of a nation that has gotten fat on credit, it is important that we don't forget: Those stories are the reason we are such a great nation. The middle class doesn't comprise a bunch of affluent people who fell on hard times, but is made up of children and grandchildren of poor people who busted their ass to pull their families up.

Newt Gingrich and others say the work ethic is absent in neighborhoods like the one I grew up in. That's just wrong. Gingrich and his like have their collective noses too high up in the air to see this country isn't great in spite of the poor. It is great because of the poor.

I'm not saying that the richest country in the world should celebrate millions of her children going to bed hungry each night. But it should celebrate that so many of these children make it out of poverty and reach back to help those behind. They remember what it is like to be hungry. To be cold. To only be recognized for what they don't have, if they are recognized at all.

I was walking along the boardwalk in Santa Monica, California, this past weekend enjoying the view of the ocean, while pretending I didn't see the homeless people lying on the beach. How ironic to be in southern California to attend "CNN Heroes" and too afraid to look another human being in the eye. Growing up, I didn't do that.

Now that I have a little money in my pocket to make donations and the luxury of time so I can volunteer, I rationalize that I am doing my part. And in a way, maybe I am. But that should not excuse me, excuse us from having enough decency to simply look another person in the eye.

Or to remember there are faces behind the issues of unemployment benefits and Medicare. To remember with 14 million people looking for work, compassion is our greatest weapon against despair.

When you hear politicians talk about deficits, it's all about finances. But culturally we seem to be in an deficit of empathy as well. We have equated the American Dream with being rich, and now that resources are scarce, the rhetoric has a "kill or be killed" tone to it.

When I was growing up in Detroit, it never occurred to me to equate a person's net worth with his or her worth as a person, or look at it as a snapshot of a value system. No one around me did. That's because we saw so many people working hard for a better life. With that as your backdrop, it is hard to see poor as a four-letter word.

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20111214-05	18:49	Pam	Re: Gingrich: Our Problem Is the Work Ethic of the Poor (reply to SteveB, above)
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20111214-05	18:49	Pam	Re: Gingrich: Our Problem Is the Work Ethic of the Poor (reply to SteveB, above)
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"Deficit of empathy." I like that. I can't believe Gingrich is looking more and more like the Republican nominee. Why are people fooled by this charlatan? Who are these people anyway? Everything that comes out of his mouth is despicable and arrogant, and his ideas are laughable. We've seen his like before, but why do so many Americans fall for it time and again?

20111214-01	10:53	Art	Re: DCCC Petition: Stop Holding the Payroll Tax Cut Hostage to Tea Party Demands! (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #34)
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Probably different opinions on this one, but holding the payroll tax cut extension for millions of Americans hostage to the Canadian pipeline's hasty approval (which by the way will not generate many jobs, period, even for a short time) is just criminal. Each needs to stand on its own merit. You can express views below:

<http://www.dccc.org/pages/payroll>.

20111214-02	11:47	SteveB	Replay: "Obama's Biggest Mistake: Selling Out to the Bankers"
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The remains of the past...

submitted by Dennis:

"Obama's Biggest Mistake: Selling Out to the Bankers" by James K. Galbraith, New Deal 2.0/AlterNet

Nov. 7, 2010, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/148770/>)

One cannot defend the actions of Team Obama on taking office. Law, policy and politics all pointed in one direction: **turn the systemically dangerous banks over to Sheila Bair and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation. Insure the depositors, replace the management, fire the lobbyists, audit the books, prosecute the frauds, and restructure and downsize the institutions. The financial system would have**

been cleaned up. And the big bankers would have been beaten as a political force. Team Obama did none of these things. Instead they announced "stress tests," plainly designed so as to obscure the banks' true condition. They pressured the Federal Accounting Standards Board to permit the banks to ignore the market value of their toxic assets. Management stayed in place. They prosecuted no one. The Fed cut the cost of funds to zero. The President justified all this by repeating, many times, that the goal of policy was "to get credit flowing again."

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

20111214-03	13:26	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action: Tell Lowe's Not to Discriminate Against Muslims!
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from CREDO Action:

The major home improvement retailer Lowe's just pulled its ads from a popular reality show featuring the everyday lives of Muslim families in Detroit.

The move by Lowe's came as a result of a campaign by a rightwing group based in Florida. The Florida Family Association objected to the Discovery Channel/TLC's "All-American Muslim" calling it "propaganda that riskily hides the Islamic agenda's clear and present danger to American liberties and traditional values."

In response, California State Senator Ted Lieu called Lowe's decision "bigoted, shameful, and un-American" and "profoundly ignorant." We join State Senator Lieu in calling on Lowe's to reverse its decision.

Tell Lowe's: Reverse your ignorant and un-American decision to pull your advertising from "All-American Muslim.":

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/lowes_ad/.

20111214-04	17:29	Jim	"House-Senate Revise Indefinite Detention Bill in Bid to Avoid Obama Veto, But Fears Remain"
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By the time you watch/read this, the House may have passed it, but it is important to be aware of this major attack on Constitutional rights to fair and speedy trials, habeus corpus, etc.

["House-Senate Revise Indefinite Detention Bill in Bid to Avoid Obama Veto, But Fears Remain" by Democracy Now!/NationofChange](#)

Dec. 14, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/house-senate-revise-indefinite-detention-bill-bid-avoid-obama-veto-fears-remain-1323881202>)

Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=mnEUx_JNBgg

Democracy Now! speaks to Chris Anders, the senior legislative counsel in the American Civil Liberties Union's Washington Legislative Office, on a massive \$662 billion defense bill that could usher in a radical expansion of indefinite detention under the U.S. government.

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

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

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