



## **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #37 — DEC. 19, 2011**

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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### **Where Almighty 'Free Enterprise' Has Failed**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 19, 2011)

If I am to believe the Republican politicians, their loyal lackey pundits, Fox News, and the “conservative” emails and hate mail than come through my In-Box, Republicans and the Right love (idealize? worship?) the capitalist system of FREE (or PRIVATE) ENTERPRISE. They seem to feel the need to save the country from Democrats, who Republicans say want to destroy BUSINESS with “Big Government.”

Is that a pretty fair assessment of where we stand right now? I over-generalize, of course, but I’m merely trying to understand and express the heart of one of our key political differences, according to what the Right tells me—over and over and over again.

Republicans define themselves as the party of BUSINESS and FREE ENTERPRISE. Republicans define Democrats as being somehow opposed to their god, CAPITALISM, a god that apparently demands blind, unswerving loyalty. Republicans say that Democrats worship a different god, GOVERNMENT, which everyone knows, they say, is in total opposition to CAPITALISM and the AMERICAN WAY.

Their religious fervor permits no logic, no debate, no rationality, no compromise, just plenty of good, old fashioned emotion. Christians and Muslims seem to feel pretty much the same way about their God (GOD, himself) as Republicans feel about their gods—BUSINESS, CAPITALISM, “FREE” ENTERPRISE, GUNS, BIG ARMIES, SMALL GOVERNMENT (OLIGARCHY). Amen.

But, unfortunately, as is so often the case, there is a snake in this Garden of Eden of the Right. Even a quick look around the country and a careless reading of American History produces evidence of a ton of problems that Free Enterprise has caused or failed to solve in America. We might want to discover the facts before blindly worshipping such an imperfect system. It turns out that Free Enterprise is not the “Perfect Shining God.” Just saying.

Before I present the obvious failures of Free Enterprise, let me first try to dispel a gigantic myth Republicans and the Right disseminate vociferously—that Democrats are anti-business, against free enterprise and, therefore, the American Way, or are socialists out to destroy business and, therefore, the American Way.

Nothing could be further from the truth! To the degree that Republican economic philosophy fosters and perpetuates monopolies and concentration of power, Democrats are probably more in favor of true Free Enterprise (a level playing field between large and small) than Republicans. Democrats love free enterprise. Democrats love business. Always have. Always will. That’s America for you. History proves over and over that it is a blatant lie for anyone to advance the claim that Republicans are more pro-business than Democrats. There is merely a minor difference of focus or emphasis between the two parties, just as there always has been. Modern Republicans seek

to inflate this difference into some gigantic divide which exists only in their minds, but this myth poisons the air of the debate. It achieves its goal: it prevents debate.

Personally, I could not be more pro-business. I have been a businessman almost all my life. I started my first company when I was fifteen-years-old. I designed electronic circuits, sold plans, kits, and devices, and paid a good part of my expenses in college. No one recognizes more than I do that the engine of America's success, is Free Enterprise. But, please, just not completely free.

Given human nature, anarchy doesn't work. It doesn't work in the streets and it doesn't work in the markets. History shows that almost all Americans—Republicans and Democrats—agreed upon this long ago and have worked together on the enterprise of controlling the beast, until recently. We might disagree on how much government involvement is appropriate, we might disagree on strategy, tactics, and method, but to pretend that the argument is between Republican Free Enterprise and Government Control is a lie. Both sides sincerely seek something in between, but only one side will admit to that.

Let me ask one further question: Has the Free Enterprise entities of the Church and of institutions like Penn State protected our children? Even non-profit corporations need a little oversight, or terrible excesses develop and remain hidden indefinitely or forever. No thank you. Yet you tell me that government is not the solution to our problems? Then what the h\*ll is?

Here, then, please allow me to present the important areas where Free Enterprise and the Republican Masterplan have failed America and the American people. These are the areas where government must step in and do something, and where government, with the agreement of the vast majority of Americans, has been active for a long time.

### 1. Poverty, Disability, Disaster, Hunger, Homelessness

If Private Enterprise and private citizens, with the help of the entire non-profit world, has eradicated these problems, I have not noticed, have you? I didn't think so. If the Republicans could have solved them without government, why are the problems still huge, even with government help? Why haven't Republicans just fixed things themselves, if government is not required? Oh, I see, government is somehow preventing Free Enterprise and the charitable hearts of people from doing a good job of combating poverty, etc? Even the charitable tax deduction is somehow a plot to destroy the private charity that rich Republicans would otherwise perform? They just need for government to get out of their way? This would, of course, be a lie and we all know it. We all know none of these problems will ever be solved without government help, or they would have vanished as problems long ago. They have not.

### 2. Healthcare

We all know the system is broken and is breaking the backs of people and businesses. Healthcare costs affect our ability to compete in international markets. Yet all the statistics show that, despite devoting an inordinately huge share of our GNP to healthcare costs, we are doing a very poor job as a nation of providing good healthcare to our citizens. We have presented bountiful statistics in this Newsletter. If you don't believe me that the system is broken, just reply to this Newsletter with your point of view and I'll get you all the evidence you could want. And, just as with poverty, etc., above, Private Enterprise and citizens have had ample opportunity to fix the healthcare problem. Obviously, they have not. One of the fundamental problems (and opportunities) of Free Enterprise is that its goal, though worthy, is simply to make money. Making money is not necessarily a good solution to the problems of society. Healthcare represents a great example of that fact.

### 3. Retirement

Remember, in the early Bush years, there was talk of how much better Social Security would be if it were privatized and the money invested in the stock market, etc? I suppose this would have been done by AIG, Lehman Brothers, Goldman Saks, Citicorp., Bernie Madoff, and MF Global, among others. Maybe Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac could have sold the Social Security system a bunch of those great mortgages. Post-2008, I think we all realize that the

government has a big role to play in the retirement funds of Americans. Or you can trust Jeff Corzine. It's up to you.

#### 4. Banking, Finance, Insurance, Mortgages, Real Estate, Housing

My goodness! What could I possibly say here? If you truly believe the government has no place in preventing anarchy and thievery in this industry after what has transpired, I have a bridge I want to sell you!

#### 5. Working Conditions

Many of you have never been in a union. I have. You probably don't like union strikes and possibly having to pay more for things when union wages rise. That's logical. Maybe you don't remember when the American workplace was a very dangerous place indeed. If you want to learn what working conditions were like in America when unregulated Business ruled, read Upton Sinclair's classic, *The Jungle*. Unions fought huge battles to achieve better working conditions and a living wage (barely) for Americans. They ballooned the middle class. Good people lost their lives fighting those battles. They should not be forgotten. We must never return to those awful days and, with unions dwindling, at least for now, only government can prevent a return to the sweatshops and deadly abuses of the past.

One of my summer jobs, when I was teaching near Chicago, years ago, was at a small chemical plant that treated waste from the steel mills and other chemical manufacturers in the area. They recovered precious and semi-precious metals from the gunk, by chemically treating it, heating it, then further processing. One day they were heating this huge open tank full of unknown sludge, when it went off in a giant fireball. Pretty soon, other parts of the building had caught on fire. I was hurrying out when my boss saw me and told me to grab a small fire extinguisher from the wall and use it. A very stupid order, but my family needed me to have the job, so I quickly complied, though never getting nearly close enough to actually reach any flames. Impossible. The next day, when I went back to work, the fire was out, the gunk in the tank that had gone off was just glowing with a few smoking embers of something. Two of us were told to take picks and shovels, climb down into the tank, and start digging. My family needed me to have the job, so I did it, with no respirator or anything. The next thing I knew, I was outside the tank, lying on the floor, being revived. I had a huge nosebleed and an even bigger headache. My family needed me to have that job, but they also needed me alive, so I quit immediately. I received no medical care or compensation. It all happened before OSHA. Later, this gross negligence and disregard for the lives of workers would likely have been prevented. By the GOVERNMENT, not FREE ENTERPRISE.

Free Enterprise did not protect me. Government has to be involved or simple greed rules.

During the days when I first started working as an engineer, I remember an orange juice factory in Florida that we were automating. They were constructing another huge factory building at the time, just across the street from us. It had just one very tall floor, but as tall as a three-story building, as factory building sometimes are. The roof was, therefore, pretty high. The construction workers were all over the edge of the roof, using jury-rigged cranes, climbing around. I noticed that none of them used safety harnesses which, at the time, would have been required up north by state law. Apparently, in Florida, such laws, unions, and insurance company intrusion did not exist. Free Enterprise ruled. The Republican way ruled. One day a man fell from that roof, needlessly, no safety harness. A man with three children. Death ruled. Free Enterprise ruled.

Free Enterprise did not protect that man and his family. Government has to be involved or simple greed rules.

History has proven this point all over the world time and time again. Unfettered, business sees ensuring the safety of its workers to be an expense that can be shaved. Do you want your safety or that of your loved ones sacrificed to the almighty dollar or do you prefer a little government intervention? I know where I stand.

#### 6. Safety (incl. toys, cars, food, drugs, etc.)

I have already mentioned OSHA. Do you really believe that seatbelts, air bags, and other requirements for safer vehicles would ever have been implemented by Free Enterprise alone? Do you think Ron Paul is right and that these are not things that are necessary to preserve life and limb and lower insurance rates for all of us? That they are a

governmental intrusion on the liberty of Free Enterprise? If so, I guess you probably hold your little baby in your lap while you drive without your seatbelt on, as you talk on your cell phone. Please tell me what state you are driving in so that I may avoid it.

Time and time again, even very recently, it has been proven that Free Enterprise cannot be trusted with the purity and safety of our food supply, our medicines, even our baby formula. Or maybe you don't care if your grandchild eats lead-based paint? Maybe that means you ate a little of it yourself?

## 7. Environment

Maybe you don't remember the huge yellow cloud of deadly acid smoke that used to extend over the South Side of Chicago and Northwest Indiana, often as far south as Rensselaer and as far east as Ft. Wayne. Maybe you don't remember when the Cuyahoga River in Cleveland caught fire. Love Canal? Have you ever been to the manufacturing district in Guangzhou, China? Where the air is almost unbreathable, where there is not one tree or bird or insect for miles, where environmental hell has been created on Earth.

I remember and I have seen. I do not want that for my children and grandchildren, nor for yours.

Even the scientists that the Right has relied upon to fight against the concept of global warming and, therefore, having to do anything about it (you know how Free Enterprise operates), now have confirmed that the trend is real. This is a huge step forward. Unfortunately, the Republicans themselves now want to refute the work of their own scientists. And, as usual, Republicans don't need scientific principles to argue science or creationism. Democrats admit that we still can't prove the cause of the warming, but a little logic points in the right direction to look first—Man! The truly conservative approach would be to use an abundance of caution before polluting the air, water, and land. The Republican approach is, "What? Me worry?"

The EPA is a great example of government that works, not perfectly, but well. I thank whoever your deity might be—God, the dollar, whatever! Government is so obviously required here that everyone except radicals accepted this truth long ago, especially those of us who love to get out and enjoy nature, wilderness, the sea, being able to breathe, etc.

## 8. Transportation, Communications

Free Enterprise did not create America's transportation system, with the possible exception of Henry Ford. The government gave huge land subsidies, concessions, tax breaks, guaranteed loans, and more to the railroads. The airlines would never have flown without the government. Government built the Interstate Highways that business takes advantage of, almost for free. Government put up the communications satellites that make your cell phone and GPS work. Government invented the internet, not Al Gore. Government funded semiconductor and computer research and development.

If Private Enterprise could do these things alone, why did it request and receive so much government help? I think we all know the answer to that.

As great a thinker as Steve Jobs might have been, where would the Apple have been without the billions of tax dollars that were spent to develop the basic technology?

## 9. Energy

I'm probably as critical as anyone of the Energy Department and America's energy policy, or lack of. You say Free Enterprise is the answer? Then why have the energy and oil companies, with all their \$billions, not provided us with a stable energy policy and situation that guarantees a dependable, lowest cost supply of oil and energy? Maybe their goals and those of our larger society do not exactly correspond, maybe they don't even overlap. The government has relinquished and left the search for a solution to Free Enterprise, Free Enterprise has been heavily subsidized by government with tax, royalty, and exploration breaks. Yet we're in bigger trouble than ever! Is that the fault of Free Enterprise? Only if you expect a corporation to be more than a mindless eating machine whose

purpose is to sh\*t money. It takes government to see to it that the long-term interests of the people are kept foremost in the minds of this important industry. Government must set the policy, and soon!

## 10. Scientific/Medical Research, Space

Despite the Republican individualistic fantasy, little scientific research gets done without governmental help to Free Enterprise. I've already mention satellites and Steve Jobs. Maybe pharmaceutical companies want to pretend that Free Enterprise develops life saving drugs, but I have worked for several of the largest, and I have seen government money working at nearly every turn. In the university or hospital laboratory. In the research laboratory. Government grants, at least as much as Free Enterprise dollars, drives scientific research in this country and on this planet. The government's medical research has more than paid for itself in lives and suffering saved. The space program has already paid for itself through the technology it helped create. Then there are all the jobs and tax revenues.

Along with the Free Enterprise system, this government funding of science (partly military) is one of the two American geese that have laid our golden eggs. To threaten it, just as to threaten the educational system, is to threaten our most basic values as Americans.

Free Enterprise (Capitalism) is a wonderful wealth and job creating tool. It takes a very short-term view because it must make a profit today, and as much as possible. They'd rather worry about the long term, well, later. Government is a wonderful tool for controlling the greed and abuses of Free Enterprise. Government, hopefully, takes a longer view for the good of its citizens. Obviously, we need both. One is no good without the other.

In conclusion, for Republicans and the Right to argue that government has no important role to play in the areas discussed is a lie. To argue that Democrats think big government can solve all our problems is equally a lie. All of us know we need both. To pretend otherwise is a three letter work that starts with "L." Even worse, these lies divide us as a nation. These lies seek to destroy the hopefulness and optimism of the American people. These lies have no interest in solving the problems, they are an attempt to run away from the problems as if they don't exist.

Wealth gets redistributed in America, alright. It largely gets redistributed not from rich to poor, but from all taxpayers, to be applied in solving the very real problems I have listed that all Americans want solved. Now, let us talk about the solutions, not more lies.

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Hear! Hear! This pretty well sums things up so far as I'm concerned.

I caught about 30 seconds of Gingrich on "Meet the Press" this morning and heard him going on about the "elite, secular, liberal"....I couldn't take any more. Name-calling, not argument. I'm the biggest conservative! No, I am! Are not! Am! Where does it get us? I have seen nothing in the world around me to dispute anything you, SteveB, say here. We can argue about how much to spend on what and what solutions to try, but Republicans don't want to do that. All they can do is attack "liberals" and crow about how religious they are. As that Smirnoff guy used to say, What a country!

<a href="#">20111216-01</a>	09:41	Pam	Re: The Other 98% Petition: Clarence Thomas Should Recluse Himself! (reply to Dale & SteveG, FotM Newsletter #36)
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I'm with SteveG. It's the principle, stupid. I think both Thomas and Kagan should recuse themselves. Better yet, come up with a GOOD health care plan: single payer, universal coverage.

<a href="#">20111216-02</a>	09:48	Pam	Re: Real Care vs. Photo Ops (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #36)
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I suppose Mission Accomplished in a Flak Jacket wasn't a photo op? I wonder if Bush thought the word would get out about what he'd done at Ft. Hood. Yes, I'm always going to be snarky when it comes to Bush. My high school boyfriend went to prep school with him and knew him when.... Let's just say Bush didn't get his vote. OK, he did a lot to fight AIDS in Africa. What did he do for the U.S.? My answer would be too long.



[20111216-03](#) 09:51 Pam Re: Real Care vs. Photo Ops (reply to SteveBA, FotM Newsletter #36)

From SteveBA to Dale (Dec. 15, 2011):

Well said. The liberals that yak on this thread never have gotten it. They seem to think their freedom of speech came free.

I'm afraid I don't see the connection between this tragedy and freedom of speech. In any case, it is a mistake to believe that liberals don't appreciate our freedoms or recognize those who have sacrificed to secure them. When the Right proposes arrest without trial and indefinite detention, then I think the Right doesn't "get it."

[20111216-08](#) 12:10 The Grammar Police Re: Real Care vs. Photo Ops (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #36)

"Photo Ops"... what?

Where is it? What is it? Does this entity have gender, or is it a business, or an object?

Most of all, if we had this thing that belongs to Photo Op: what would we do with it?

Your subject raises many profound questions.

[20111216-09](#) 13:25 Art Re: Real Care vs. Photo Ops (reply to Dale & SteveB, FotM Newsletter #36)

This is what just amazes me! Dale, you're not a stupid person. Why can't you just see one of these and instantly recognize the BS factor and check it out before sending it on? As I've said before, it is stuff like this that so turned me against the Republicans. If they have so much truth on their side, why is it so necessary to lie and lie again? Do they think we are all that stupid????

[20111216-04](#) 10:04 Pam Re: "Tax Cuts Simply Do Not Create Jobs" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #36)

Terrific. I'm so glad to see this spelled out. OK, you guys who don't want even a small tax increase, explain yourselves.

[20111216-16](#) 16:27 Art Re: "Tax Cuts Simply Do Not Create Jobs" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #36)

The whole 'tax thing hurts business' has always been a myth without any serious data to back it up. We built this country's economic power in the post WW II period with 75% to 90% taxes. If you just adjust the taxes for people and not corporations - almost every small business quickly incorporates - you could get away from even that small factor. The tax danger all pretty much smoke and mirrors by the Republicans, always has been.

[20111216-10](#) 13:26 SteveB Re: "Tax Cuts Simply Do Not Create Jobs" (reply to Art, above)

And you notice that our friends on the Right love to take potshots at Obama, but have no response to logic.

They complain about statistics being lies or, let's say, pliable, so they present none. They believe everything they are told by the powers that be (like the photo op piece of trash), yet believe no statistics.



OK. But then there are the strictly logical arguments that don't rely on statistics, simply logic. (I won't even mention the other possible area- of confirmation—ethics.) Logic. Reason. Rationality. Like the beautiful tax analysis in the article, "Tax Cuts Simply Do Not Create Jobs", by Larry Beinhart (below).

The other major article I presented recently that contained, I think, 9 big Republican lies, beautifully refuted, depended on some statistics (OK'ed by Snopes.com) J, but also contained some logical arguments that were very, very good. For instance, see #3. No statistics required, see? To me, that article is so useful and important:

From Newsletter #31, "The 9 Biggest Conservative Lies About Taxes and Public Spending" by Joshua Holland, Alternet (<http://www.alternet.org/story/149265/>).

All have gone un-refuted. Not a single point has been scored against these arguments. Not one. Instead, lies and op-ed's are presented as evidence.

<a href="#">20111216-05</a>	11:07	Pam	Re: Graphic: translations of Common Euphemisms (reply to Art, FotM Newsletter #36)
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Everyone go out right now and read George Orwell's essay, "Politics and the English Language." It's a classic.

<a href="#">20111216-06</a>	11:10	Pam	Loss: Christopher Hitchens
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R.I.P., Christopher Hitchens. You will be missed.

[I agree! –SteveB]

<a href="#">20111216-07</a>	11:11	Art	Michele Bachmann
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Go Bachmann!!!! (My personal pick for the Republican nominee.)

[Is this something romantic, or...? –SteveB]

<a href="#">20111216-11</a>	15:17	SteveB	From the FotM Archives: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!!
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What I expect next from the Right is that Bush was good because he's white and Obama is bad because he's black. I believe that is what goes to the core of much of the mystery about why the Right can't seem to express itself. Stupid lies are the best the Right has been able to come up with lately. We liberals have offered much more cogent criticism of Obama and the Democrats than the entire American Right. And it amounts to nothing. But he is black.

Some of you might remember Bob, who was with us for a while before the 2008 Elections. Here's a quote from the archive (slightly \* edited to get through spam filters):

**From: Bob**  
**Ref: You really need to do some research!!!!**  
**Date: Tue, 28 Oct 2008, 21:59:20 +0200**

Dear SteveB,

I have been receiving from you many emails smashing McCain and praising Obama, via somebody on your mailing list. However I have noted that you are very much for Obama and very much against McCain.

I am not saying McCain is the best choice by no means, by the way where is Ross Perot now when we really need him!!!! The USA needs to be ran like a business not a world bank and world police. The USA needs to put back its pride and forget about what the rest of the world says or thinks.

...could go on and on, but I won't!

However you really need to look at world history and look at every country in the world that has been under a white president and then turned over to a n\*gger. Every country where this has happened that n\*gger has ran the country into a sh\*t hole bigger then ever.

Also it is one thing that he is a n\*gger, but also he is an islamic f\*cking n\*gger which is even worse. Do you know the extreme muslims are looking to destroy the USA from the inside out not from the outside in???? Especially with a name like Obama!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Come on people wake the f\*ck up!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

But anyway I see the USA quickly catapulting to the sewer the way it is, but if people are really as stupid as they seem and if they do vote for this extreme muslim n\*gger well I hope you are all ready to pay the consequences.

So I hope you really think about this and don't vote for the rag head n\*gger!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! And if you do well get ready for the consequences.

All of the best regards, —Bob

[20111216-12](#) 15:28 Art Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to SteveB, above)

Ugly, but I think seriously that is what most tea baggers really believe.

[20111216-20](#) 17:23 SteveG Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to SteveB, above)

Obama isn't Black, he is white – his mother was white and her parents were white. Interesting country we live in.

Who is this Bob – he completely needs to be left out!

[20111216-21](#) 18:05 SteveB Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to SteveG, above)

Don't worry, he is left out, though I bet we get at least one more like him before the election.

Ya, I forgot Obama was white! Was Cain black? I'm getting confused.

[20111216-22](#) 18:55 Pam Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to SteveB, above)

Good grief! I see what you mean now about vicious emails. This Bob is a real piece of work. He can't even spell, but that aside, what a jerk. I think of people with ideas like this as someone with an infection—of the mind. He may look like a normal man, but he's SICK.

[20111216-25](#) 19:30 Art Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to Pam, above)

Actually I think this is the first honest response we have received as to why they oppose President Obama. Sick, but honest.

[20111217-01](#) 05:01 SteveB Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to Pam, above)

I think I have to agree with you completely, Art. This is the missing piece of the puzzle. This is why none of the stuff we get from the right makes any sense to us.

The very fact that this is the honest but untold truth.

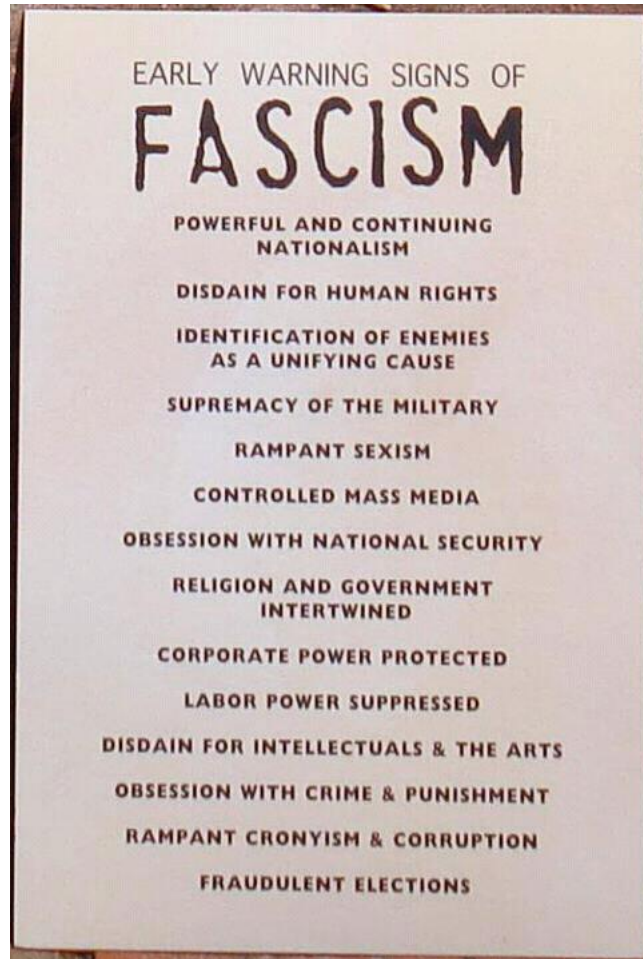
What else makes sense?

Other than his color, what does the Right have to complain about with Obama? His war policy? He's a damn hawk! Taxes? He caves at every turn! Re-Regulation? He kept the Republican culprits in office and in power. Obamacare? Name one person on the Right who understands it! Being an "uppity n...."? Maybe getting warm!

<a href="#">20111217-04</a>	07:14	SteveG	Re: You Really Need to Do Some Research!!!! (reply to SteveB, above)
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A black protestor I met this fall has constantly said the country was not ready for a black president. Rodgers understands and has viewed first hands the racism that was and is in the country. He also graduated from high school in 1964. He has seen a lot of changes, but also sees and lives the need for more changes. Race will always be an issue on some level, as will religion.

Here are some things to consider regarding American freedom, and how it is maintained...or not.



It's the last one on the list I'm starting to worry about a lot: "Fraudulent Elections."

I like the list. I would add Racism and Constitutional Revision. The latter is what happened here in Bolivia. The "commies" won an election, threw out the old Constitution, and wrote their own. The courts permitted it, because they were controlled. The press and the people (though a minority) were powerless. The new President created an entirely new country to his own liking overnight. Hello, U.S.? In our case, the Supreme Court could do it in about one month.

I don't know where you got this, but it's spot on.

America has a new twist on this one, claiming nonexistent fraudulent elections in an attempt to justify disenfranchising eligible voters.

[20111216-18](#) 16:56 SteveB Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to Dennis, above)

I hope Eric Holder is on the job! A lot of disenfranchising has, is, and will be attempted in regards to this crucial election. And look at the reapportionment battles.

Call me a conservative, but you know what I want?

I want a Constitutional amendment that establishes a mandatory uniform paper ballot for all U.S. elections at every level. These ballots would be archived (in Yucca Mountain?) for a minimum of 100 years, available for verification. Perhaps other voting regulations would be part of this. In fact, you could add election finance reform and call it the "Fair and Honest Elections Amendment."

This computerization crap? Knowing something about the limits and weaknesses of computer software, knowing true verification is impossible, it scares me. A lot! An election could be stolen so easily. A piece of hacker cake. You think the CIA couldn't do it? (Oh ya, they aren't supposed to operate in the U.S. LOL.) Or the DSD?

[20111216-24](#) 19:12 Pam Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to SteveB, above)

Maybe we could have both computer voting and paper ballots. Of course, if both turned out not to be exactly the same, there would be a problem, but hand counting millions of paper ballots doesn't seem feasible. I agree that we need a system that isn't susceptible to fraud, but I'm not sure what it should be. One thing we could do is have voting on more than one day, maybe on weekends as well as Tuesdays. We need to make it easier for ALL the electorate to vote and prevent jerrymandering (sp?).

[20111216-26](#) 20:48 SteveG Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to Pam, above)

Gerrymandering is probably necessary as population shifts according to census information, but needs to be done by independent non-political councils/committees.

I will go against what I just wrote by the following example:

We left Indiana on October 1, 2009; spent October and November in Florida; traveled in December, returned to Florida the first week in 2010; completed census data in Florida; left Florida in March; in Washington state in April 2010 and have been here since; a census worker knocked on our door in May and census data was not completed since we had done so in Florida; where should we have been counted as residents? We were counted as residents of Florida, but only there for 4 months out of our lifetime.

All federal elections should be done in the same manner, using the same equipment and process with the same paper trail across the country. Won't happen.

[20111217-13](#) 04:53 SteveB Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to Pam & SteveG, above)

It's actually very feasible and easy to do paper ballots. It's done all over the world (including Bolivia) and we did it in the U.S. until recently.

Nothing else can be trusted! No verification is possible. No way of knowing for sure an election was honest.

Paper ballots are now signed, thumbprinted, and archived for verification elsewhere in the world. And with national ID's, voter registration is unnecessary and much voter fraud and unfairness are eliminated.

Our elections are rigged for easy cheating, on the one hand, and denying the vote to some, on the other hand.

[20111217-06](#) 10:07 Pam Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to SteveB, above)

Paper ballots, count me in!

[20111217-08](#) 10:44 Jim Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to SteveB & Pam, above)

Here in Indiana or at least in my county we do mark our paper ballots by filling in a bubble with pencils and then they are scanned through a computer terminal so there is a quick count, but there is a hard copy. I don't know how long they have to keep the hard copies.

There is a process of picture ID and signing a register in front of poll watchers from the neighborhood of both parties but there is not anything like a (intentional) fingerprint on the ballot that tells which ballot went with which voter.

[20111217-10](#) 15:14 Art Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to Jim, above)

Recently finished *That Used To Be Us* and would recommend it to all. Very well done and while not a lot really new, put things together very nicely.

Their take on Gerrymandering is interesting. By creating these "safe" voting districts we have fostered the creation of an extremist Congress where individual Congressmen no longer have to worry about serving all the people. Instead, as individual Congressmen, the only threat they have is during the nomination process and then generally the more radical you are, either way, the more likely you are to be receive the nomination. The election is a slam dunk, no matter what. It may help explain why 20 years ago individuals in Congress would cross party lines and agree to compromises, since they had to respond to and serve all the people. Today that seems to rarely happen.

Voting districts should be determined by geography period. No wanderings around. Yet another example of how the people are losing ground.

[20111217-11](#) 16:10 Jim Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to Art, above)

I just received an email from a Democratic state leader who said that 414,000 women voters in Indiana who had voted in 2008 did not show up to vote in 2010.

That was something like 51% of the women voters who took time in a presidential year but not in a year with "only" congress and state offices to vote on.

They naturally want to get these women back to the voting booths.

It makes a point for compulsory voting except that I can't see how to require voters to be informed or responsible in this age of television attack adds sponsored by those corporate citizens united.

[20111217-12](#) 16:46 Pam Re: Graphic: Early Warning Signs of Fascism (reply to Jim, above)

Isn't it always true that elections in "off" years see fewer voters. When I voted for our City Council recently, I was the only person there. I bet those voters will be back in 2012. Maybe they would have made more effort if they'd had any idea of what lay ahead. Just saying.

Well not quite Christmas and the Republican beat down goes on. Below a list of just some of the Internet crap many of you have received and sadly some still accept as gospel. First time I've seen some of this put together . It's all pretty much one sided. If you are not questioning why all these lies and just who is initiating them, you might want to rethink that.

That lies pass more quickly than the truth is never truer nor sadder than in the internet world. Here are many debunked by a reliable source (<http://www.FactCheck.org>):

"Don't Get Spun by Internet Rumors" by FactCheck.org

updated occasionally, (<http://www.factcheck.org/hot-topics/>)

Just because you read it on somebody's blog or in an email from a friend or relative doesn't mean it's true. It's probably not, as we advised in our special report "Is this chain e-mail true?" (<http://factcheck.org/2008/03/that-chain-e-mail-your-friend-sent-to-you-is-likely-bogus-seriously/>) back on March 18, 2008. On this page we feature a list of the false or misleading viral rumors we're asked about most often, and a brief summary of the facts. But click on the links to read the full articles. There is a lot more detail in each answer.

Will the Obamas do away with the White House Christmas tree?

No. This zombie rumor first appeared in 2009 and was proved false. It is still false today. Nov. 10, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/11/we-repeat-still-a-christmas-tree/>)

Does George Soros own the company buying many firms that make guns and ammunition?

No. Contrary to a fanciful claim made in a viral email, the Freedom Group is not linked to the liberal billionaire. The National Rifle Association says the real owners are "strong supporters" of gun rights. Oct. 21, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/10/george-soros-gun-grab/>)

Did Obama order the military to drop the words "on behalf of the president of the United States" when presenting the flag to the next of kin at funerals?

A chain email that makes that claim is wrong. Spokespersons for the Defense Department and the armed forces say that no change was ordered. Oct. 10, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/10/change-in-military-funeral-protocol/>)

Was President Obama's tour bus made in Canada?

The shell of the \$1.1 million bus came from Canada, but it was converted for the Secret Service by a company in Tennessee. Aug. 25, 2011 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2011/08/obamas-canadian-american-bus/>)

Is a chart claiming to show the "top 20 raises" to White House staffers accurate?

It's misleading. The salary increases for 19 of the 21 employees listed resulted from promotions. Average pay for White House staff actually declined. Aug. 4, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/08/top-20-white-house-raises/>)

Is President Obama flying on Air Force One more than other presidents did? Is he being accompanied by more people on international trips?

Two chain e-mails suggesting that the president's travel habits are more excessive than his predecessors are off base. July 8, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/07/the-traveling-president/>)



Will the new health care law raise Medicare's basic monthly premium to \$247 in 2014, as a viral message claims?

No, Medicare officials project the basic premium will be less than half that. But the law will eventually cause 14 percent of seniors with incomes over \$85,000 a year (\$170,000 for couples) to pay higher "income-related" premiums, up from 5 percent currently. April 1, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/04/premium-nonsense-on-medicare/>)

Is it true that boycotting companies that import foreign oil will "avoid putting more money into the coffers" of foreign countries?

No. There is no way to know for sure whether your local station is selling gasoline from imported or domestic oil. Besides, U.S. oil demand is twice its domestic supply. March 25, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/03/who-sells-american-gasoline/>)

What about the "Congressional Reform Act of 2011"?

A viral e-mail calls for fixing some abuses and excesses that don't exist, repeating misinformed claims that we've addressed before. March 18, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/03/congressional-reform-act/>)

Is President Obama using tax dollars to rebuild mosques around the world?

Yes — and to rebuild historic churches and temples as well. The State Department's program to preserve overseas cultural landmarks started under President Bush in 2001. March 10, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/03/funding-mosques-overseas/>)

Do statistics in a chain e-mail give an accurate "report card" of President Obama's first two years?

Not exactly. The author made many minor mistakes and some major omissions in describing the terrible economic conditions he attributes to the president. Feb. 25, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/02/sorry-statistics/>)

Is it true that members of Congress, their staffers and their family members do not have to pay back their student loans?

Not true. Some congressional employees are eligible to have up to \$60,000 of student loans repaid after several years — just like other federal workers. But that's not the case for members of Congress or their families. Jan. 6, 2011 (<http://factcheck.org/2011/01/congress-not-exempt-from-student-loans/>)

Does Illinois pay a grandmother \$1,500 per month per child to be the foster parent to her eight grandchildren?

No. State officials have no record of such a case, and state law would not allow it. This second-hand story spread by a Danville urologist isn't true. Dec. 10, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/12/fostering-a-fortune/>)

Is President Obama honoring Jane Fonda as one of the women of the century?

No. That was done 11 years ago by Barbara Walters of ABC News. Nov. 22, 2010 (<http://factcheck.org/2010/11/blame-jane-falsehoods/>)

Did President Obama have his dog, Bo, flown to Maine in his own private jet for the family vacation?

No. The family and staff took two small jets because the airport couldn't accommodate the usual presidential plane. Bo flew with several staffers. Sept. 16, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/09/bos-private-plane/>)

Is "Obama's finance team" recommending a 1 percent tax on all bank transactions, as a chain e-mail claims?

No. This idea was first floated in 2004 by one House member, who says it would replace the federal income tax and eliminate the national debt. So far it has gone nowhere. Sept. 8, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/09/1-transaction-tax/>)

Will Muslim Americans be exempt from the mandate to have health insurance?

The Muslim faith does not forbid purchasing health insurance, and no Muslim group has ever been considered exempt under the definitions used in the health care law. May 20, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/05/dhimmitude-and-the-muslim-exemption/>)

Has President Obama canceled the May 6 National Day of Prayer?

No. This widely circulated falsehood echoes similar claims made last year when the president issued a pro-prayer-day proclamation but didn't hold White House services as President Bush had done. April 29, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/04/national-day-of-prayer-still-on/>)

Does the new health care law impose a 3.8 percent tax on profits from selling your home?

No, with very few exceptions. The first \$250,000 in profit from the sale of a personal residence won't be taxed, or the first \$500,000 in the case of a married couple. The tax falls on relatively few — those with high incomes from other sources. April 22, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/04/a-38-percent-sales-tax-on-your-home/>)

Was Michelle Obama's brother's job saved with money from the stimulus act?

This chain email is a hoax. It makes a ridiculously false claim about Craig Robinson, who is the head coach of Oregon State University's men's basketball team and the first lady's older brother. March 22, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/03/stimulus-saves-first-ladys-brother/>)

Is it true that nobody remembers Obama attending Columbia University?

At least one of his classmates remembers him well, and the university proudly claims Obama. Feb. 16, 2010 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2010/02/obama-at-columbia-university/>)

Did Congress raise its own pay for 2010 while voting to deny an increase for Social Security recipients?

No. A chain e-mail calling for "retribution" in the fall elections makes false claims and uses fabricated figures. Jan. 8, 2010 (<http://factcheck.org/2010/01/retribution-fabrication/>)

Did Obama loan \$2 billion to Brazil's oil company to benefit China and George Soros?

The president had nothing to do with the loan, which the Export-Import Bank approved for Brazil to buy U.S.-made equipment and services. Sept. 18, 2009 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2009/09/bogus-brazilian-oil-claims/>)

Is there any truth in the e-mail claiming to give "a few highlights from the first 500 pages of the Healthcare bill"?

Barely. We examined all 48 claims, finding 26 of them to be false and 18 to be misleading, only partly true or half true. Only four are accurate. Aug. 28, 2009 (<http://factcheck.org/2009/08/twenty-six-lies-about-hr-3200/>)

Is the ACLU suing to have cross-shaped headstones removed from military cemeteries?

The ACLU has filed no such suit, and it hasn't sued to "end prayer from the military" either. July 5, 2009 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2009/07/aclu-and-cemetery-crosses/>)

Did Obama accuse veterans of "selfishness" and whining? Would he have forced them to "pay for their war injuries"?

This chain e-mail contains fabricated quotes and misrepresents a budget idea that the White House scrapped. May 12, 2009 (<http://factcheck.org/2009/05/would-obama-have-soldiers-pay-for-own-war-injuries/>)

Has a "smoking gun" been found to prove Obama was not born a U.S. citizen? Did he attend Occidental College on a scholarship for foreign students?

This chain e-mail is a transparent April Fools' Day hoax. It fabricates an AP news story about a nonexistent group, and makes false claims about Obama and the Fulbright program. May 7, 2009 (<http://factcheck.org/2009/05/was-obama-born-in-the-usa/>)

Is Congress about to give Social Security to illegal immigrants?

No. Congress hasn't voted on any measure to pay benefits to illegal immigrants, and has no plans for any such vote. March 1, 2009 (This long-standing falsehood was bandied about back in 2006 and again during the 2008 presidential election.) (<http://factcheck.org/2009/03/social-security-for-illegal-immigrants/>)

What's the deal with Prof. Joseph Olson's "unreported stats" from the 2008 election?

This chain e-mail is a hoax. The "statistics" are grossly incorrect, and Olson says he didn't write it. Jan. 5, 2009 (<http://www.factcheck.org/2009/01/unreported-stats/>)

Was Obama born in the U.S.A.?

Yes. We give you the truth about Obama's birth certificate. Aug. 21, 2008 Updated Nov. 1, 2008 ([http://www.factcheck.org/elections-2008/born\\_in\\_the\\_usa.html](http://www.factcheck.org/elections-2008/born_in_the_usa.html))

Is there a connection between FactCheck.org and Barack Obama or Bill Ayers?

None, aside from benefiting at different times from the charity of the late publisher Walter Annenberg. We are a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and get funding from the Annenberg Foundation, created by Walter Annenberg in 1989. Ayers was one of three Chicago educators who applied for a grant from the Annenberg Foundation in 1995, which was one of 5,200 grants the foundation made during its first 15 years. That \$49 million grant, plus additional funds raised locally, funded the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, which sought to improve Chicago public schools. Obama was selected by Chicago officials (not Ayers) to chair the board set up to administer Annenberg Challenge funds, and he headed it until 1999. FactCheck.org came into being in late 2003. For other details see our [Oct. 10, 2008](http://www.factcheck.org/elections-2008/he_lied_about_bill_ayers.html), article about Obama and Ayers, which includes a sidebar: "FactCheck.org and the 'Annenberg Challenge.'" ([http://www.factcheck.org/elections-2008/he\\_lied\\_about\\_bill\\_ayers.html](http://www.factcheck.org/elections-2008/he_lied_about_bill_ayers.html))

<a href="#">20111216-19</a>	17:20	SteveB	Re: "Don't Get Spun by Internet Rumors" (reply to Art, above)
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These are beautiful, Art. All in one place!

<a href="#">20111216-27</a>	20:53	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Johnson & Johnson to Join the Medicines Patent Pool!
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From SumOfUs.org:

On Monday, a handful of millionaire corporate executives sitting in a boardroom in New Jersey will decide the fate of HIV/AIDS patients around the world.

Johnson & Johnson executives will announce whether they plan to negotiate a global agreement that could save more than 100,000 lives every year — from babies in Kenya to teachers in Vietnam.

J&J cares deeply about its family-friendly brand — spending billions of dollars a year on advertising with slogans like “No more tears” for its baby shampoo. And if you’ve ever bought Tylenol or Band-Aids, you’re a Johnson & Johnson customer.

Tell Johnson & Johnson — put patients before profits and make your life-saving drugs available to HIV patients everywhere:

<http://sumofus.org/campaigns/jandj-mpp/> (campaign now suspended)

Right now, the most effective HIV/AIDS medications are unavailable or unaffordable in most of the developing world. HIV/AIDS activists have been working to get major pharmaceutical companies like J&J into a deal with the Medicines Patent Pool (MPP) — a move that would save precious lives.

Johnson & Johnson owns three key HIV/AIDS drugs. After a year of dithering, its executives are finally announcing on Monday whether to begin formal negotiations with the MPP — or to leave millions of the world’s HIV/AIDS patients untreated.

<a href="#">20111216-28</a>	21:07	Pam	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Johnson & Johnson to Join the Medicines Patent Pool! (reply to SteveG, above)
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You might want to read John Le Carre's *The Constant Gardener*. It's about big pharma and Africa. It presents a horrible picture, but Le Carre's Afterword says that bad as the novel is, the reality is worse.

P.S. Does anyone else notice that most of what we say in this forum is sad, desperate, and disillusioned? I really feel the big challenge of older age is figuring out how to be happy in a world that is so f—ed up. I don't want to be a Debbie Downer, but what's a more realistic response to what's going on? I had dinner with my best friend last night—a former Republican turned Libertarian; I've referred to her before. We got into some of this stuff, and her response is, I want to be happy, so I'm not going to think about this anymore. I love her, but I can't shrug things off so easily. I don't want to turn into a crotchety, old curmudgeon, and I don't want to be terminally sad, but I can't help feeling that pretending cheerfulness is choosing delusion. You guys are sensible. How do you cope with the grim realities? Another friend we ran into at the same restaurant said he just wants to withdraw and go into hedgehog mode. Is that the best we can do?

<a href="#">20111216-29</a>	21:32	SteveG	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Johnson & Johnson to Join the Medicines Patent Pool! (reply to Pam, above)
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I don't know.

Yesterday Jason, our son, and I had lunch — he is the one that suggested “Collapse” from Netflix. He said the first time he watched it, the guy started making sense and at the end Jason said to himself “Oh shit”. He has watched it two more times and he said each time he says “Oh shit”. The basics is the collapse of the world as we know it — economy, oil, agriculture, etc. Do we become survivalists, isolationists, violent over throw, etc?

Until we, whomever we are, figure it out we communicate with all that listen, we petition, we vote, we write letters, we demonstrate, we read, we watch, we think, we laugh, we smile, we make a plan, we execute the plan.

The world is screwed up to put it mildly. Maybe we join Steve B in Bolivia? Maybe we move to a completely new country where we can more readily have a positive impact? Maybe we start our own country?

<a href="#">20111216-30</a>	21:40	Pam	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Johnson & Johnson to Join the Medicines Patent Pool! (reply to SteveG, above)
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I'll tell you one thing. Being able to share my thoughts with this group is a life saver. Even those of you I don't agree with, I guess we're all in this together.

<a href="#">20111217-02</a>	05:44	SteveB	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Johnson & Johnson to Join the Medicines Patent Pool! (reply to SteveG & Pam, above)
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Such a worthy subject...a couple of thoughts come to mind...early on this beautiful tropical morning, as my neighbors start to sing their odes to the *madrugada*, the morning sun, from the trees, and people gradually appear.

Starting a country... When I was in late college, our extended circle of friends gave some seemingly serious thought to buying an entire town and all of us living there communally. It wouldn't be a commune. We would commute to work, or farm, etc., as normal. But our neighbors would be our friends and we would always be together. We explored the countryside and found the perfect little town near the Portland Arch, outside of Lafayette, Indiana. I bet to this day the place has not changed. But we did, I guess. SteveG's email reminded me of that.

I'm working on an "epic" poem called "Climate Control" that is not about the weather. In it, I talk about my belief that our generation is what I call (after Jefferson Airplane) the "crown of the crown of creation". We have lived during the peak of civilization, or very close to it. Naturally, in every direction we look, forward and back, we look down. When we look at the past, we are sorry because it is gone, but we see that we ascended. When we look at the future, well...we are inevitably saddened. The more we care, the more love we have within us, the more sadness. That is the price of love and attachment. As much as it may hurt, we have a simple job. To truly love and appreciate, with all the strength we have, what we have been fortunate enough to have been given, and life often takes more strength than we have. This is one reason why I think Alan Grayson's farewell admonition is so appropriate, even without its political context, "Courage!"

Maybe Republicans will tell you that you earned this life by your individual actions and those of some mythical superheroes. I say they lie. We only earn it with our love, appreciation, and our efforts to share it with others. That is what built this world. Love, not hate. We live at the peak. Let us do all the living we can. Let us have adventures in this wondrous, incomprehensible time and place.

<a href="#">20111217-07</a>	10:13	Pam	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Johnson & Johnson to Join the Medicines Patent Pool! (reply to SteveB, above)
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Beautifully said. I like what you say about our generation being at the peak looking down. That makes a lot of sense. There will always be peaks and valleys. We were lucky (and it's pure luck) to be born when and where we were. Gratitude is required. And love. That's the only intangible I believe in. Others may sense a presence of something divine; I don't. But I do know love, and that is where all my meaning lies. Since I believe we create our own meaning, I feel fortunate that my proclivity is toward loving those close to me.

<a href="#">20111217-03</a>	07:10	SteveG	"Bail-out Bombshell: Fed Emergency Bank Rescue Totaled \$29 Trillion Over Three Years"
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from "Bail-out Bombshell: Fed Emergency Bank Rescue Totaled \$29 Trillion Over Three Years" by J. Andrew Felkerson, AlterNet (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153462/>):

Here's the hurricane: In reality, no less than \$29.616 trillion is the total emergency assistance provided by the Fed to foreign and domestic entities during the Global Financial Crisis. Let's repeat that: \$29 trillion. This astounding number is over twice U.S. gross domestic product, the nominal value of all goods and services produced for the year 2010. This is the total of the bailout as calculated by Nicola Matthews and myself as part of the Ford Foundation project, *A Research And Policy Dialogue Project On Improving Governance Of The Government Safety Net In Financial Crisis*. We will be presenting the results of our analysis in a series of papers published by the Levy Economics Institute, the first of which, "29,000,000,000,000: A Detailed Look at the Fed's Bailout by Funding Facility and Recipient," is already available here.:

<http://www.levyinstitute.org/publications/?docid=1462>.

20111217-05	07:41	SteveB	Replay: The Truth About News Media
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Here's a possibly instructional item from the Archive. (below)

When one side is dedicated to the truth as a core part of their most basic "Constitution" and one side is not, communications becomes more difficult, does it not?

from: SteveM, Ref: Check this – the John Edwards affair with Rielle Hunter, Date: Sun, 3 Aug 2008, 10:53:41—0700

Here's some better detail from MSM web sights also. Why has this not made the Evening news like the discredited story about McCain's alleged "affair did for 3 days?"

Note that unlike the NY times "McCain affair" there are photogs, eye witnesses and progeny as a result of an affair, from which DNA could be offered up as proof of paternity. Oh how the mighty Democratic social conscience for us un-washed minions has fallen.

You got love the liberal media, Note the LA Times pull the story than reposted and edited venison with no explanation in OCT 07 and only 5 days ago reposted with an explanation once the "evidence' became "overwhelming", and in their BACKYARD!

What a bunch of .....

Source of original email is unknown. This is another one of those emails which, while honestly telling about a true story on the surface, are in fact telling a world of lies beneath. I'd estimate that this email is 50% truth and 50% lie so insidious that it will literally rot the brain of an unsuspecting person. Here's the way it works.

Fact (and admittedly a strike against Democrats by association): John Edwards is a rat.

Lie: There was no liberal media conspiracy. It's a pretend conspiracy that the truth is being repressed. How dare they! The hidden agenda of this email is nefarious—to sew distrust and discord, at the very least. In a time when there is as much conservative media as liberal, the myth of the evil, lurking liberal media is perpetuated.

**And then there is the simple yet inescapable fact that one of the most basic and important tenants of liberal media is, duh, trying to get as close to the truth as it is humanly possible to do. Media that does not do this cannot be defined as "liberal." What would be liberal about it? Is respect for the truth a basic tenant of Rupert Murdoch, FOX, Rush, Glenn, and the rest of the conservative media gang? Their only basic tenants seem to be money and their agenda.**

In the case of this particular "liberal media conspiracy" the facts are these: All the mainstream media, liberal, middle, and conservative were slow to pick up the story from the *Enquirer*, because there was no corroboration and the *Enquirer* is a sleazy publication, what can I say? (Though they did a good job on this story.) Then, *The Washington Post* was a leader in getting the story out there in July, 2008, forcing Edward's admission of the affair, if not the child, on Aug. 7, 2008.



And, hey, why doesn't the *National Enquirer* count as part of the evil liberal media? They don't really seem to be a "family values" kind of publication.

[20111217-16](#) 08:47 MarthaH Re: The Truth About News Media (reply to SteveB, above)

AMEN. Back when people read to get news, not click a control, there was more respect for the fourth branch of government—and ethics in writing, for the most part. Granted it was in 5th grade reading level words, but it was not for ratings like modern NEWS. Looking at something in 360 degrees leads to thinking and concluding so rereading. It was not a sound-bite story, much less a for-bankrolling side show.. Some wackos think there is only one side and thinking is out of style.

[20111217-09](#) 13:57 Pam "How We All Pay for the Huge Tax Privileges Granted to Religion — It's Time to Tax the Church"

The Church (Religion, call it what you will) is too rich and powerful for the suggestions in this essay ever to be discussed, let alone implemented, but it's worth considering all the same. In today's political climate religion is beyond reproach, making it another special interest, one with an edge. Why can't churches be taxed at the same rate as non-profits?

["How We All Pay for the Huge Tax Privileges Granted to Religion — It's Time to Tax the Church" by Adam Lee, Altnet](#)

Dec. 14, 2011, (<http://www.altnet.org/belief/153448>)

(By some estimates, the property tax exemption alone removes \$100 billion in property from U.S. tax rolls, and that's only the tip of the iceberg.)

Would the world be better off without religion? That was the topic of a recent debate in the NYU Intelligence Squared series. One of the audience questions concerned the enormous wealth hoarded by churches, which Christian apologist Dinesh D'Souza defended as follows:

I think in the case of the Vatican, the wealth of the Vatican is in priceless treasures, tapestries, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, art. Now, let's remember... it was popes, the Medici popes and so on, who commissioned those paintings. If it wasn't for Catholicism, we wouldn't have the Sistine Chapel.

This was the only line of the night that got boos from the audience. It's easy to see why, since D'Souza was clearly trying hard to overlook the obvious reply: The reason it was the church that commissioned those artworks, and not some other buyer, is because the church had all the money! The great composers, painters and sculptors of the Renaissance worked for whomever could afford to pay them, which is why they often ended up working for the church even when they were notorious freethinkers, as in the case of Giuseppe Verdi. If it wasn't for Catholicism, we might not have the Sistine Chapel, but it's a near-certainty that we'd have *different* artworks, equally majestic and famous, by the same artists. As Richard Dawkins has suggested, wouldn't you love to hear Beethoven's *Evolution Symphony*?

I bring this up because, thanks to the Occupy protests, inequality has come to dominate the American political conversation. Poverty and inequality are at their highest levels since the Great Depression, and there's a growing clamor to raise taxes on the wealthy to provide more opportunity for the rest of us. I think this is an excellent idea, and I'd like to suggest that beside Wall Street bankers and stock traders, there's another group of the mega-wealthy that's often overlooked.

Why don't we consider taxing the churches?



Not all churches or all ministers are rich, but some of them are very rich indeed. And that's no surprise, because society subsidizes them through a constellation of generous tax breaks that aren't available to any other institution, even non-profits. For example, religious organizations can opt out of Social Security and Medicare withholding. Religious employers are exempt from unemployment taxes, and in some states, from sales tax. Religious ministers - and no other profession; the law specifies that only "ministers of the gospel" are eligible for this benefit -- can receive part of their salary as a "housing allowance" on which they pay no taxes. (Compounding the absurdity, they can then turn around and double-dip, deducting their mortgage interest from their taxes, even when their mortgage is being paid with tax-free money in the first place.) And, of course, churches are exempt from property tax and from federal income tax.

We're all paying for the special privileges afforded to religion. Your taxes and mine have to be higher to make up the revenue shortfall that the government isn't taking in because these huge, wealthy churches don't pay their own way. By some estimates, the property tax exemption alone removes \$100 billion in property from U.S. tax rolls. (And it's not *just* the big churches where that exemption bites: According to authors like Sikivu Hutchinson, the proliferation of small storefront churches is a major contributor to poverty and societal dysfunction in poor communities, since these churches remove valuable commercial property from the tax base and ensure that local governments remain cash-strapped and unable to provide basic services.) Just about the only restriction that churches have to abide by in return is that they can't endorse political candidates -- and even this trivial, easily evaded prohibition is routinely and flagrantly violated by the religious right.

Combined with a near-total lack of government scrutiny, the privileges granted to religion have enabled megachurch ministers to live fantastically luxurious lifestyles. An investigation by Sen. Chuck Grassley in 2009 gave a rare public glimpse of how powerful preachers spend the cash they rake in from their flocks: jewelry, luxury clothing, cosmetic surgery, offshore bank accounts, multimillion-dollar lakefront mansions, a fleet of private jets, flights to Hawaii and Fiji, and most famously in the case of Joyce Meyer, a \$23,000 marble-topped commode. Meyer's ministry alone is estimated to have an annual take of around \$124 million.

Most of these Elmer Gantry-types preach a theology called the "prosperity gospel." The basic idea of this is that God wants to shower you with riches, but only if you first "plant a seed of faith" by giving your church as much money as you possibly can, trusting that God will repay you tenfold. (The typical ask is for 10 percent of your annual income -- gross, not net; people who tithe based on their net income hate the baby Jesus.) Naturally, this idea has made some churches very, very rich, while making a large number of poor, desperate people even poorer.

One might think this scam would only work for so long before people start to realize that giving all their money away isn't making them rich. But the pastors who preach it have a very convenient and clever rationalization: when supernatural wealth fails to materialize, they tell their followers that it must be their own fault, that they're harboring some secret sin that's preventing God from fulfilling his promises.

But beyond the prosperity gospel, we're now witnessing a new and even more brazen idea spreading among the American religious right: that the poor should accept their lot without complaint, and that calling for a stronger social safety net or advocating higher taxes on the rich is committing the sin of envy. For example, here's Watergate felon Chuck Colson, who's found a profitable after-prison career as a born-again right-wing pundit, denouncing the poor for wanting a better life for themselves:

Despite this, many people insist on soaking the well-off because... what they want is to see their better-off neighbors knocked down a peg. That's how envy works.

Thomas Aquinas defined envy as "sorrow for another's good." It is the opposite of pity. And it is one of the defining sins of our times.

(I would guess that by Colson's standard, some of the authors of the Bible would also be committing the sin of envy with their denunciations of the rich.)

The right-wing Family Research Council has also joined in, calling for its followers to pray that God stifles the Occupy Wall Street protests; its president, Tony Perkins, has said that Jesus "endorses the principles of business and the free market". And then there's this billboard, which asserts that protesters' demands for health insurance

and higher corporate tax rates violate the biblical commandment against coveting. I would've thought this was a bizarre joke if not for the fact that so many powerful right-wing Christians are openly saying the same thing.

On its surface, Christianity seems like the least likely religion for this theology of the rich and powerful to take root. The Bible, after all, denounces wealth and praises poverty in no uncertain terms. In fact, Jesus unequivocally commands that Christians should sell all their possessions, give the money to the poor, and live as wandering mendicant evangelists. The famous analogy about a camel going through the eye of a needle was a parable intended to forcefully make the point that it's almost impossible for a rich person to get into Heaven -- and by the Bible's standard, millions of modern Christians are very rich indeed:

Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" ...Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." —Matthew 19:16-24

In another verse, Jesus tells his followers not to save money or store up possessions, but to travel constantly with no thought for the future, having faith that God will somehow feed and clothe them each day:

"And he said unto his disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?

Consider the lilies, how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is today in the field, and tomorrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind... But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you." —Luke 12:22-31

The Bible goes so far as to say that the first community of Christians weren't just socialists, but communists:

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." —Acts 2:44-45

By some accounts, this verse is what inspired Karl Marx's dictum, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his need." Irony of ironies: Communism was espoused in the pages of the Bible!

Of course, these commands are nearly impossible to follow, and that's precisely the point. In the beginning, Christianity was a small, radical sect whose followers expected the world to end within their own lifetimes. It's no wonder that they saw no use for earthly possessions. But when Christianity became the state religion of the Roman Empire and began to convert the powerful and the comfortable, this would no longer do. No large, organized religion could possibly thrive on precepts like this, and so they were left by the wayside in the pursuit of worldly riches and imperial grandeur.

This pattern happens over and over: Even when it begins among the poor and disenfranchised, religion almost always ends up being co-opted by the wealthy and powerful and used as a convenient excuse to justify inequality. Nothing is more effective at persuading the poor not to rebel or protest than the belief that, if they stay quiet and compliant, they'll be rewarded after death. As the columnist Ed Weathers wrote, "If you would have your slaves remain docile, teach them hymns." And this idea isn't just prominent in Christianity -- we also see it in other religions, like Hinduism, which teaches that people's social caste is the deserved result of the karma they accumulated in past lives. Obey the rich people in this life, and maybe you'll be reborn as one of them next time!

The repeated exploitation of religion throughout history to further beat down the downtrodden isn't just a coincidence. Any belief system which teaches people to fix their gazes on another life can by its nature be leveraged to excuse poverty, oppression, and injustice in this one. When we see wealthy preachers joining hands with wealthy

bankers to urge the masses to stop protesting and quietly accept their lot, it shouldn't be surprising -- it's a reminder of the natural order of things. Both groups are privileged elites whose highest concern, with a few rare and honorable exceptions, is hanging on to that privilege.

There's a lesson here for the 99 percent of us: If we seek social justice, the only way we'll ever truly attain it is to overthrow every ideology that promises pie in the sky by and by. As long as our effort is focused, even partially, on another world, it will always be divided and therefore less effective than it could be. (It's not for nothing that John Lennon put "Imagine no religion" together with "No need for greed or hunger.") We'll have real equality and real opportunity when we learn to set aside fantasies of another existence and turn our attention fully to this life and the things of this world, which are the only real or important things.

<a href="#">20111218-01</a>	07:57	SteveB	Re: "How We All Pay for the Huge Tax Privileges Granted to Religion — It's Time to Tax the Church" (reply to Pam, above)
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I think this is a tough issue, though I would start with the premise that churches and religion should be treated exactly as any non-profit organization/corporation.

They would never pay any income tax.

I thought that, in many places, non-profits pay no property or sales tax, so in those cases neither should the churches.

The only change I can see, and one I might be able to get behind, would be to make all non-profits, including churches, pay property taxes. This would be up to individual states. I could support this only because these taxes are the main way we finance our schools. They could use a little help.

A large proportion of the money taken from churches would come from charitable, educational, and medical work that they do. I can't see them cutting much staff or auctioning crosses, but entire schools, hospitals, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters would close.

In the case of charity, non-profit and religious organizations are part of the private sector, of course, though lines can blur a little where the government gets involved. For Monday's Newsletter, I'm writing about the failures of private enterprise. One of the biggest is help for the poor and needy. If the state is going to tax churches, it had better be prepared to come to the aid of many Americans in dire distress.

<a href="#">20111218-03</a>	12:44	Pam	Re: "How We All Pay for the Huge Tax Privileges Granted to Religion — It's Time to Tax the Church" (reply to SteveB, above)
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I guess I wouldn't really go after ordinary churches. Treating them like non-profits is fine. But when you read about those mega-churches where some charismatic minister rakes in millions (Jim and Tammy Faye), then I think we need to look closely at that. People are free to spend their money however they want, but those "corporate" churches take advantage of foolish, gullible people.

I hope everyone has a peaceful holiday season.

<a href="#">20111217-14</a>	18:06	Pam	Video: "Robert Reich Puts an Offer on the Table for President Obama"
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Video: "Robert Reich Puts an Offer on the Table for President Obama" by MoveOn.Org, (<http://bit.ly/tCPLvF>)

<a href="#">20111217-15</a>	18:38	SteveG	"Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension"
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"Perry Double Dips State Salary and Pension" by AP

Dec. 16, 2011, (<http://www.newsmax.com/InsideCover/Perry-double-dips-salary/2011/12/16/id/421260>)

(AUSTIN, Tex.) Texas Gov. Rick Perry is a double-dipper, collecting a salary and retirement benefits simultaneously, according to a personal financial disclosure form made public Friday.

The report filed with the Federal Election Commission shows that Perry is collecting his \$7,700 monthly state pension in addition to his nearly \$133,000 annual salary as governor. State law allows any employee to begin collecting retirement benefits if their years of military and state service plus their age adds up to more than 80.

[Continue...](#)

[20111218-02](#) 11:27 Art Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG, above)

Forgetting everything else, that is an incredible monthly retirement. After 28 years in the Army, I get nothing like that. Clearly I joined the wrong government.

[20111218-04](#) 12:59 Pam Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG, above)

That IS a huge retirement. I think I don't have a very good sense of what people actually earn. When I look at that yearly Parade magazine issue that shows various salaries for different jobs, I'm always surprised—sometimes by how little, sometimes by how much people make. I was never on tenure track and the longest contract I ever had at UNCG was for 3 years. I knew I'd never be fired, but I didn't feel secure enough to ask for a big raise. When I neared retirement, I decided to go for it and got a little one, but what I thought was a nice salary would probably seem paltry to some people. I read somewhere that something like 60% of Americans are poor or close to it.

That's a lot of people. But when I drive around my NC city, I see lots and lots of big, fancy houses. I always ask myself, Who lives there? Do some people who have a similar income to us just spend more? We are very frugal. Living on a tight budget for so long has become a habit. For all the talking we do about economics and money and what's fair, I really have no figures to attach to the discussion. I remember when I was in college the starting salary for a high school teacher was \$5,000/yr. When I taught high school, I made around \$7,000. My then father-in-law remarked at the time that a family needed at least \$20,000/yr. to be comfortable. It was a looooooong time before I made anything close to that. People seem as reluctant to talk about money as about sex or religion, yet it's one of the most important parts of our lives. I'm not asking anyone to divulge how much they make, but I wouldn't mind some basic parameters. How much do you need to be considered "rich." I knew a stockbroker about 20 years ago who was intending to retire once he had accumulated \$2 million. He told me I had no idea how hard it was to save up that much. Would that still be true today? I hope this is relevant to our discussions.

[20111218-07](#) 15:25 Art Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG & Pam, above)

I have heard you need \$7M to feel rich. And your stockbroker is right, for us normal mortals saving up \$2M is very hard.

[20111218-08](#) 15:26 Pam Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to Art, above)

\$7M! Yikes. I just don't want to end up in the poorhouse. Do those of you from Greencastle remember the county poorhouse from our youth? We used to go sing Christmas carols out there. I thought it was the saddest place I'd ever been.

I guess what lurks in the back of my mind is the fear that we all might lose everything, like in Weimar Germany. When you lose your life savings, or don't have any, you're sunk. I feel like we're all teetering on the edge, but then you know what a worry wart I am.

[20111218-14](#) 17:37 SteveG Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to Pam, above)

The poor farm closed a couple of years ago in Putnam County. There is still one in Clinton County (Frankfort). All of us are close to one medical catastrophe from the poor house.

[20111218-18](#) 19:31 Art Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG & Pam, above)

It does however portray the other side of the issue and that is the run away retirement costs for State workers. Some are just outrageous. Further, many are allowed to retire early, latching onto the privilege given to those who risk their lives, policemen, firemen and a few others. Now garbage truck drivers can retire early with absurd pensions. It really does need cleaning up. Trouble they will all scream like scalded cats if you even approach the subject. I get a NARFE ( National Association of Retired Federal Employees) newsletter every screaming at me to write my Congressman and Senators about the terrible injustice being done to Federal workers. So far I have ignored them, because I believe we all need to contribute to getting the financial ship back on course. No one should be exempt - except the very rich of course. Someone has to keep those corporate jets flying.

[20111218-20](#) 20:28 SteveG Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to Art, above)

I think you are the exception rather than the rule. I know a couple of retired Colonel level individuals that bemoan every time they have to pay more for their medical coverage and that they had to go a couple of years without a cost of living increase. The ship isn't right, but I see no one in congress willing to give up an ounce of their benefits – active or retirement. Like your sense of humor too.

[20111218-21](#) 20:39 Pam Re: "Perry Double Dips State Salary & Pension" (reply to SteveG, above)

It doesn't have to be like that, but I'm afraid it's not likely to change soon.

[20111218-09](#) 15:48 Mark "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production"

Pres. Obama has a war on the American people...here's what I've gotten from him...higher healthcare costs with a poorer government plan, higher electricity costs and the potential for disruptions (outages due to lack of electrical capacity were unheard of ten years ago), trying to shut down the domestic coal industry, doubling of fuel costs, a 30% increase in food prices....new stealth taxes, a permanent protesting class...reduced stature abroad.

"Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" by Christopher Prandoni, *Townhall*

Dec. 16, 2011,

([http://townhall.com/columnists/christopherprandoni/2011/12/16/obamas\\_war\\_on\\_domestic\\_oil\\_production/page/full/](http://townhall.com/columnists/christopherprandoni/2011/12/16/obamas_war_on_domestic_oil_production/page/full/))

This week the Department of Interior (DOI) sold its first oil lease in the Gulf of Mexico in over a year. Withholding drilling permits and cancelling leases, the Obama Administration has made what was once routine nearly impossible. Upon assuming office, President Obama cancelled 31 oil and gas lease sales, delaying thousands of jobs and billions in economic activity. Not letting any crisis go to waste, the Department of Interior imposed a six month drilling

moratorium on the Gulf following the Macondo disaster and then followed that with denial for the Keystone Pipeline, with Canada's oil now having the potential of going to China.

The Obama Administration's recent offshore drilling plan codifies the White House's anti-energy, anti-jobs position. The Obama 2012-2017 draft drilling plan closes a majority of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) to new energy production. In fact, less than 3 percent of America's OCS will be available for development.

[Continue...](#)

**20111218-11** 16:15 Pam Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to Mark, above)

Oh, goody. A nice juicy argument. To begin, the Obama administration, to my knowledge, shut down offshore drilling in the wake of the BP oil spill, an environmental disaster we still don't know the full extent of. Let's suppose the oil companies could do all the drilling they want, anywhere they want. What would happen? We'd lose pristine beaches and ocean views, we'd almost certainly experience more Exxon Valdez and BP spills that would cost billions to clean up, the oil industry would continue to run the country through its Washington lobbyists, the rich would get richer, and in a finite number of years the oil will run out and the lights will go off. Short-term profits; long-term environmental destruction that will only hasten global warming with its attendant catastrophes. Once a pipeline is laid, few workers are needed to keep it going. Lots of jobs may be created during construction, but once it is up and running, those jobs disappear, and all the restaurant owners and landlords who depended on workers' money will discover their customers have moved on—or are collecting unemployment.

Obama is right to urge the development of sustainable energy, and we need government money to support that research. No private company is going to invest a ton of money in something that might not bring in a return for years; that would be bad business, no? But government can make long-term investment in things that are for the public good, like energy, medicine, technology, etc. Once the publicly supported research is done, then private companies can step in and do the manufacturing and distribution. Like Steve says, we need a partnership between government and business. Yes, OSHA is sometimes irritating to employers, but then falling to your death from an unsafe scaffold can be a bit annoying too. Do you really trust business to police itself? Everybody has oversight: teachers get evaluated, my son who works for a hardware manufacturing company gets evaluated every quarter, doctors have licensing boards. Maybe you or I wouldn't, but people will cheat, cut corners, and hope for the best. It's the nature of the beast. If we let the oil companies loose, we will lose a lot more than jobs. We will lose our future.

**20111218-12** 16:27 SteveB Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to Mark, above)

I think Obama's conservatism here is a very good thing. We should go slow. I think we should preserve as much of our own oil as we can for the future. Kind of a strategic reserve, if you will. A giant one that we will greatly need. At that time, the alternative—to obtain international oil—will be war and oil will be costly indeed, especially if we are out of it ourselves.

Now, while oil is cheap, we should buy oil from other countries as much as possible, but use as little as possible. There should be a very hefty tax on gasoline, making it cost consistently above \$5-\$6 per gallon, as it is in Europe, to encourage alternative development, which the government should assist in, just as it did with railroads and airlines and many other industries. (see my other recent posts)

We have seen the disasters these oil companies can cause. You have seen that, haven't you??? It is good if we bide our time before doing much more offshore drilling. I'd be even more conservative than Obama. I think he's right in the middle on this one. The longer we wait to drill, the stronger our reserves and the more technology will have time to develop so, hopefully, spills can be prevented.

This is what true conservatism is all about. Thinking long term!!!!

20111218-13 16:38 Dennis Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to Mark, above)

from Mark, above:

Not letting any crisis go to waste, the Department of Interior imposed a six month drilling moratorium on the Gulf following the Macondo disaster and then followed that with denial for the Keystone Pipeline, with Canada's oil now having the potential of going to China.

This statement alone shows a complete ignorance of the energy industry. The Keystone Pipeline makes no sense since it will transport oil to refineries in Texas and then the petroleum would go into the world market to mostly be sold outside the U.S., including to China. Huge new sources of oil now being exploited from the Eagle Ford basin in East Texas will fill all of the available refinery capacity and there will be little room for oil from Canada in any case. Keystone would jeopardize the aquifers of the Great Plains for no sound economic reason.

20111218-16 19:23 Art Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to Mark, above)

Interesting argument, but a little short on facts. The truth is oil companies have failed to drill on hundreds of leases they already hold. The current Administration has also resumed releasing new leases so that also is no longer correct. Given the nature of the oil spill this summer by BP and their inability to control it, one would think any prudent individual would at least temporarily halt new drilling until we figured out what went wrong.

Tell all those fishermen and recreation people in the Gulf it was no big deal.

But the real issue is the last paragraph. Again much incorrect. Fuel prices at the pump have actually gone down from the latter years of the Bush Administration. The run up was caused by investment speculators not the availability of fuel by the way. The electricity stats are totally bogus and domestic coal production has some terrible disasters due to lack of enforcement of safety regulations. Not to mention the cost of mountain top mining. New stealth taxes - name them. A permanent protesting class - where were you in the 60s? And lastly "reduced stature abroad"? I travel a lot overseas, did and still do. Headlines in the *London Times* when we re-elected Bush: "How Could 58 Million People Be So Stupid?" They don't say that now.

20111218-22 20:42 Pam Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to Art, above)

Soooo glad you joined this group, Art.

20111218-19 20:05 SteveB Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to all, above)

Here's my question. Where does this stuff really come from? Who tells people what to think?

All of a sudden the stupid Keystone Pipeline is a big deal. **It is not!** Who tells people to think it is?

Who tells people to think Obama is not a natural born American citizen?

Who tells people who know nothing about Obamacare that it is to be called "Obamacare" and it is bad. So people say it's bad. Who tells people to think it is?

Even poor people parrot the party-line: "DON'T TAX THE RICH!"

I could go on and on. The Republican Right-wing party-line gets repeated over and over like a mantra, but it is without meaning and usually based on lies. We debunk them here all the time, including today (see above).



But who tells these people to all think and say the same thing, invariably, for no reason, and they do? **What control!!!!**

[20111218-17](#) 19:24 SteveG Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to Art & Mark, above)

Currently the US has a surplus of gasoline and is exporting it to other countries while our prices remain above \$3 a gallon and we continue to subsidize oil companies.

I heard that Art was setting himself up to run for congress in 2016 and that SteveB was setting up to run for president. But they may be rumors.

[20111218-23](#) 20:44 Pam Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to SteveG, above)

Now, that's a campaign I could get behind!

[20111218-24](#) 20:54 SteveB Re: "Obama's War on Domestic Oil Production" (reply to SteveG, above)

SteveG!! I would run but I'm not a natural born citizen, I was born you-know-where.

[20111218-15](#) 17:49 SteveG Fw: Sierra Club Action: Tell the White House: Put Our Health First, End Mountaintop Removal Coal Mining!

from Sierra Club:

My name is Donna Branham and I live in Mingo County, WV — smack dab in the middle of coal mining country. I'm a registered nurse and I've seen first hand how mining hurts the health of my community. I've seen how it is making my community sick<sup>1</sup> and year after year it's only getting worse.

Mountaintop removal coal mining blows off the tops of mountains to extract the coal that fuels our nation's power plants. It has already leveled 500 mountains and buried over 1,200 miles of streams<sup>2</sup> — but it gets worse. It raises my community's risk of birth defects, cancer, and heart disease.

Right now, dozens of permits are pending for new mines and the Obama Administration could approve them any day. If they get approved, it will mean more people get sick and more mountains get destroyed. I don't know about you, but I don't want any more families to suffer the effects of Big Coal's pollution.

Send a message to the White House before it's too late. I'm tired of seeing families get sick just so Big Coal can increase its profits. Tell the Obama Administration to put our health first: no more mountaintop removal coal mines.

<https://secure.sierraclub.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=7343>

[20111218-05](#) 13:09 Pam "Banana Republicans' Assault on Democracy"

"Banana Republicans' Assault on Democracy" by David Sirota, NationOfChange

Dec. 17, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/banana-republicans-assault-democracy-1324149748>)

When the Senate minority leader of the United States calls something "a genuine threat to our country," everyone — regardless of party — should listen. Even in the post-9/11 era of overheated language and hyper-partisanship, that kind of declaration from such a powerful public official is not to be taken lightly.

So, what horrible menace to our way of life was Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) talking about when he recently uttered those words? Communism? Al-Qaida? Hostile extra-terrestrials?

None of the above. He was referring to democracy.

That sounds hard to believe, but it's absolutely true. In a speech last week to the Heritage Foundation, McConnell used that War on Terror-flavored jeremiad about an existential "threat" to describe a grassroots effort aimed at electing presidents via a national popular vote.

Prompted by frustration with swing states' disproportionate power, the national popular vote idea is elegant in its simplicity. States commit their Electoral College votes to the national popular vote-winner, regardless of the outcome of the presidential contest within their boundaries. The plan does not go into effect until a majority of Electoral College votes are signed on, but if and when that happens, America finally gets what should be a fundamental democratic guarantee: that our president is the candidate who received the majority of votes.

To most readers, that seems like a non-ideological no-brainer — it means every vote is equally important, regardless of geography. And why shouldn't it be that way? After all, there's no moral or substantive reason that a vote in liberal Denver should be more valued by a presidential election system than a vote in rural Idaho just because the Denver vote was cast in the swing state of Colorado. Similarly, there's no democratic justification for candidates reaching the Oval Office when they didn't win the most votes.

Yet, despite those non-partisan truisms, McConnell billed the accelerating national popular vote campaign as a nefarious liberal plot.

While such a paranoid theory sounds like a "Saturday Night Live" spoof of a Fox News diatribe, the Senate minority leader was dead serious, which made his statements all the more hilarious — but also painfully revealing. They highlight the fact that Republicans are now openly defining themselves as opponents of the most basic democratic ideals.

In the states, the onslaught against voting has been unselfconsciously overt. As civil rights lawyer Judith Browne Dianis told CNN, "Through a spate of restrictive laws passed in Republican-led legislatures, a disproportionate number of African-Americans, Latinos, people with disabilities, the elderly and the young will find voting difficult and in many cases impossible." These statutes, she notes, "require a state photo ID to vote, limit early voting, place strict requirements on voter registration and deny voting rights to Americans with criminal records who have paid their debt to society."

Now, with 132 electoral votes signing onto the national popular vote compact, there's the real possibility of more democratic presidential elections. So the highest-ranking Republican in America is mobilizing the opposition.

Taken together, this coordinated war on democracy leads to a frightening question: Why is it being waged?

Republicans claim they are moved by (totally unproven) fears of rampant voter fraud, but their obvious motivation is authoritarian self-interest. With polls showing the party's policy goals wholly out of line with public attitudes, the GOP is trying to limit the public's democratic rights. In other words, Republicanism is at odds with public opinion. So, rather than bend to that opinion, Republicans are trying to disenfranchise it.

Such fanatical ends-justify-the-means-ism was once the exclusive hallmark of foreign banana republics. Should our own Banana Republicans succeed in their assault on democracy, that's exactly the kind of backward country America will become.

<a href="#">20111218-06</a>	13:20	Pam	"There Goes the Republic"
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"There Goes the Republic" by Robert Scheer, TruthDig

Dec. 16, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/there-goes-republic-1324045094>)

Once again the gods of war have united our Congress like nothing else. Unable to agree on the minimal spending necessary to save our economy, schools, medical system or infrastructure, the cowards who mislead us have retreated to the irrationalities of what George Washington in his farewell address condemned as "pretended patriotism."

The defense authorization bill that Congress passed and President Obama had threatened to veto will soon become law, a fact that should be met with public outrage. Human Rights Watch Executive Director Kenneth Roth, responding to Obama's craven collapse on the bill's most controversial provision, said, "By signing this defense spending bill, President Obama will go down in history as the president who enshrined indefinite detention without trial in U.S. law." On Wednesday, White House press secretary Jay Carney claimed "the most recent changes give the president additional discretion in determining how the law will be implemented, consistent with our values and the rule of law, which are at the heart of our country's strength."

What rubbish, coming from a president who taught constitutional law. The point is not to hock our civil liberty to the discretion of the president, but rather to guarantee our freedoms even if a Dick Cheney or Newt Gingrich should attain the highest office.

Sadly, this flagrant subversion of the constitutionally guaranteed right to due process of law was opposed in the Senate by only seven senators, including libertarian Republican Rand Paul and progressive Independent Bernie Sanders.

That onerous provision of the defense budget bill, much discussed on the Internet but far less so in the mass media, assumes a permanent war against terrorism that extends the battlefield to our homeland. It reeks of a militarized state that threatens the foundations of our republican form of government.

This is not only a disaster in the making for civil liberty but a blow to effective anti-terrorist police work. Recall that it was the FBI that was most effective in interrogating al-Qaida suspects before the military let loose the torturers. Under the newly approved legislation, that bypassing of civilian experts will be codified as a routine option for a president.

As *The New York Times* editorialized, the bill "would take the most experienced and successful anti-terrorism agencies—the F.B.I. and federal prosecutors—out of the business of interrogating, charging and trying most terrorism cases, and turn the job over to the military." Not only has FBI Director Robert Mueller III opposed this shift in the law, but so has Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, who previously ran the CIA.

What's alarming is not just that one pernicious aspect of the defense spending bill, but the ease with which an otherwise deadlocked Congress that can't manage minimal funding for job creation and unemployment relief can find the money to fund at Cold War levels a massive sophisticated arsenal to defeat an enemy that no longer exists.

Throwing \$662 billion, plus hundreds of billions more in non-Pentagon "security" programs, at what that other great-general-turned-president, Dwight Eisenhower, condemned as the "military-industrial complex," with its tentacles in every congressional district, is an act of absurdity in a world bereft of a serious military challenge to the United States. Not even the best-funded terrorists can afford aircraft carriers.

There is simply no militarily significant enemy in sight, yet we spend almost as much on our armed forces as the rest of the world combined, and are already ludicrously superior in military might to any rogue power, like Iran, that might threaten us. The hawks who attempt to justify Cold War levels of spending on advanced weaponry by reviving "Red China" as a formidable enemy are undermined in their argument by China's sharply limited regional force projection. The real leverage that China exercises over U.S. policy options is not military but rather economic and derives precisely from the fact that we have gone into debt to those same communists in order to fund our irrational military spending.

Military spending is rationalized with patriotic froth, but it is driven by the unfortunate fact that it is the most reliable source of government-funded profits and jobs. It is an obviously inefficient use of resources as a means of lifting

the overall economy compared with building infrastructure and training workers for the jobs of the future, but don't count on Congress or the president to change that dynamic anytime soon. The White House's five-year projection of defense spending aims not at the one-third budget cut initiated by the first President Bush in response to the end of the Cold War, but at a "flattening" of military expenditures between 2013 and 2017.

We had every right to expect President Obama to stick to his word and veto this bill, not as a means of forcing a much needed bigger cut in government waste, but more urgently because its assault on the Constitution's requirement of due process represents a direct threat to the freedom of the American people every bit as menacing as any we face from foreign enemies.

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

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