



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #40 — DEC. 22, 2011**

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Bankers Join Billionaires to Debunk 'Imbecile' Attack on Top 1%

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 22, 2011)

Two opposing points of view that you might find to be quite instructive. I'd love to hear your opinions on this "hot topic." BS or not BS?

FIRST OPINION:

"Bankers Join Billionaires to Debunk 'Imbecile' Attack on Top 1%" by Max Abelson, Bloomberg

Dec. 20, 2011, (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2011-12-20/bankers-join-billionaires-to-debunk-imbecile-attack-on-top-1-.html>)

Jamie Dimon, the highest-paid chief executive officer among the heads of the six biggest U.S. banks, turned a question at an investors' conference in New York this month into an occasion to defend wealth.

"Acting like everyone who's been successful is bad and because you're rich you're bad, I don't understand it," the JPMorgan Chase & Co. (JPM) CEO told an audience member who asked about hostility toward bankers. "Sometimes there's a bad apple, yet we denigrate the whole."

Dimon, 55, whose 2010 compensation was \$23 million, joined billionaires including hedge-fund manager John Paulson and Home Depot Inc. (HD) co-founder Bernard Marcus in using speeches, open letters and television appearances to defend themselves and the richest 1 percent of the population targeted by Occupy Wall Street demonstrators.

If successful businesspeople don't go public to share their stories and talk about their troubles, "they deserve what they're going to get," said Marcus, 82, a founding member of Job Creators Alliance, a Dallas-based nonprofit that develops talking points and op-ed pieces aimed at "shaping the national agenda," according to the group's website. He said he isn't worried that speaking out might make him a target of protesters.

"Who gives a crap about some imbecile?" Marcus said. "Are you kidding me?"

'Feels Lonely'

The organization assisted John A. Allison IV, a director of BB&T Corp. (BBT), the ninth-largest U.S. bank, and Staples Inc. co-founder Thomas Stemberg with media appearances this month.

"It still feels lonely, but the chorus is definitely increased," Allison, 63, a former CEO of the Winston-Salem, North Carolina-based bank and now a professor at Wake Forest University's business school, said in an interview.

At a lunch in New York, Stemberg and Allison shared their disdain for Section 953(b) of the Dodd-Frank Act, which requires public companies to disclose the ratio between the compensation of their CEOs and employee medians, according to Allison. The rule, still being fine-tuned by the Securities and Exchange Commission, is "incredibly wasteful" because it takes up time and resources, he said. Stemberg called the rule "insane" in an e-mail to Bloomberg News.

"Instead of an attack on the 1 percent, let's call it an attack on the very productive," Allison said. "This attack is destructive."

Income Tripled

The top 1 percent of taxpayers in the U.S. made at least \$343,927 in 2009, the last year data is available, according to the Internal Revenue Service. While average household income increased 62 percent from 1979 through 2007, the top 1 percent's more than tripled, an October Congressional Budget Office report showed. As a result, the U.S. had greater income inequality in 2007 than China or Iran, according to the Central Intelligence Agency's World Factbook.

Not all affluent Americans are on the defensive. Billionaire Warren Buffett, 81, chairman and CEO of Berkshire Hathaway Inc., has called for increasing taxes on the wealthy, as has Patriotic Millionaires, a group whose supporters include Ask.com co-founder Garrett Gruener and Peter Norvig, director of research at Google Inc., according to its website.

"Rich businesspeople like me don't create jobs," Nick Hanauer, co-founder of Quantive Inc., an online advertising company he sold to Microsoft Corp. for about \$6 billion, wrote in a Dec. 1 Bloomberg View article. "Let's tax the rich like we once did and use that money to spur growth."

Two out of three Americans support raising taxes on households with incomes of at least \$250,000, according to a Bloomberg-Washington Post national poll conducted in October.

Schwarzman, Paulson

Asked if he were willing to pay more taxes in a Nov. 30 interview with Bloomberg Television, Blackstone Group LP (BX) CEO Stephen Schwarzman spoke about lower-income U.S. families who pay no income tax.

"You have to have skin in the game," said Schwarzman, 64. "I'm not saying how much people should do. But we should all be part of the system."

Some of Schwarzman's capital gains at Blackstone, the world's largest private-equity firm, are taxed at 15 percent, not the 35 percent top marginal income-tax rate. Attacking the banking system is a mistake because it contributes to "a healthier economy," he said in the interview.

Paulson, the New York hedge-fund manager who became a billionaire by betting against the U.S. housing market, has also said the rich benefit society.

"The top 1 percent of New Yorkers pay over 40 percent of all income taxes," Paulson & Co. said in an e-mailed statement on Oct. 11, the day Occupy Wall Street protesters left a mock tax-refund check at its president's Upper East Side townhouse.

'Going to Vomit'

Tom Golisano, billionaire founder of payroll processor Paychex Inc. (PAYX) and a former New York gubernatorial candidate, said in an interview this month that while there are examples of excess, it's "ridiculous" to blame everyone who is rich.

"If I hear a politician use the term 'paying your fair share' one more time, I'm going to vomit," said Golisano, who turned 70 last month, celebrating the birthday with girlfriend [Monica Seles](#), the former tennis star who won nine Grand Slam singles titles.

Ken Langone, 76, another Home Depot co-founder and chairman of the NYU Langone Medical Center, said he isn't embarrassed by his success.

"I am a fat cat, I'm not ashamed," he said last week in a telephone interview from a dressing room in his Upper East Side home. "If you mean by fat cat that I've succeeded, yeah, then I'm a fat cat. I stand guilty of being a fat cat."

Job Creators

[Wilbur Ross](#), 74, another private-equity billionaire, said in an e-mail that entrepreneurship and capitalism didn't cause the financial crisis.

"Tearing down the rich does not help those less well-off," said the chairman of New York-based WL Ross & Co. LLC. "If you favor employment, you need employers whose businesses are flourishing."

That view is shared by Robert Rosenkranz, CEO of Wilmington, Delaware-based Delphi Financial Group Inc., a seller of workers'-compensation and group-life insurance.

"It's simply a fact that pretty much all the private-sector jobs in America are created by the decisions of 'the 1 percent' to hire and invest," Rosenkranz, 69, said in an e-mail. "Since their confidence in the future more than any other factor will drive those decisions, it makes little sense to undermine their confidence by vilifying them."

'Persecuted Minority'

[Peter Schiff](#), CEO of Westport, Connecticut-based broker-dealer Euro Pacific Capital Inc., is delivering the message directly. He went in October to Zuccotti Park in lower Manhattan, where Occupy Wall Street protesters had camped out, with a sign that said "I Am the 1%" and a video camera.

"Somebody needs to do it," Schiff said in an interview.

Schiff, 48, disclosed assets of at least \$64.7 million before losing the 2010 Republican primary for a Connecticut U.S. Senate seat, according to filings. He's wealthier now, even though his taxes are "more than a medieval lord would have taken from a serf," he said.

A clip from Schiff's video was used in a Nov. 1 segment of Comedy Central's "The Daily Show," in which comedian John Hodgman, wearing a cravat, called the wealthy a "persecuted minority." He asked that the phrase "moneyed Americans" replace "the 1 percent."

Neither term appeared in a Nov. 28 open letter to President Barack Obama from hedge-fund manager [Leon Cooperman](#), the Omega Advisors Inc. chairman and former CEO of Goldman Sachs Group Inc. (GS)'s money-management unit. Capitalists "are not the scourge that they are too often made out to be" and the wealthy aren't "a monolithic, selfish and unfeeling lot," Cooperman wrote. They make products that "fill store shelves at Christmas" and provide health care to millions.

Cooperman, 68, said in an interview that he can't walk through the dining room of St. Andrews Country Club in [Boca Raton](#), Florida, without being thanked for speaking up. At least four people expressed their gratitude on Dec. 5 while he was eating an egg-white omelet, he said.

"You'll get more out of me," the billionaire said, "if you treat me with respect."

SECOND OPINION:

"One Percent to 99: Stop Picking on Us" by Jason Linkins, Huffington Post

Dec. 20, 2011, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/20/bankers-still-whining-abo_n_1160938.html)

According to Bloomberg today, what the major banks and the gentlemen who run them want for Christmas is for everyone to stop persecuting them with all this talk of "the 1 percent," and to stop reminding them of the fact that they've profited while the rest of the country has suffered through an epic crisis of unemployment and home foreclosures as a direct result of their cosmic incompetence.

They're quite sick of it, and they want it to stop! So they whined at length to a Bloomberg reporter and, as Chaire Sicha characterizes the end result, "It's an incredibly hot, defensive mess up in there."

To wit:

Jamie Dimon, the highest-paid chief executive officer among the heads of the six biggest U.S. banks, turned a question at an investors' conference in New York this month into an occasion to defend wealth.

"Acting like everyone who's been successful is bad and because you're rich you're bad, I don't understand it," the JPMorgan Chase & Co. (JPM) CEO told an audience member who asked about hostility toward bankers. "Sometimes there's a bad apple, yet we denigrate the whole."

And sometimes, you know, "the whole" turns out to be entirely rotted through with "apples" that were not adequately capitalized against the crazy bets they were making with each other, forcing teachers and firefighters and mail-carriers and, I don't know — stevedores? — to give them \$4.7 trillion so that they can pretend to be solvent. But that money was donated with the explicit expectation that it would be lent productively. What happened instead is that all the banks posted record profits and spent that money on an army of lobbyists, dispatched to Washington, D.C., to ensure that whatever financial regulation comes out of the just-averted disaster doesn't actually prevent the casino-derivatives game from ramping up all over again.

It's pretty understandable for denigration to commence at that point. Apparently, we're just expected to forget that "2008-present" actually happened.

While there are a few people who show up in the piece to speak from a position of reason to discuss how jobs are actually created, the piece, in the main, seems to exist just so the reporter can stuff as many quotes as possible into it, so that the reader comes away thinking, "My God, the *balls* on these guys!" You have the guy who's proud to call himself a "fat cat," and the guy who says he was going to "vomit" if he hears about paying his fair share again. Honestly, this is all forgivable bluster from pretty ignorant people. By far, this is the most hilarious statement:

"Instead of an attack on the 1 percent, let's call it an attack on the very productive," [director of BB&T Corp. John A.] Allison said. "This attack is destructive."

That's what's so comical about this: The massive derivatives casino that exploded, taking down the global economy with it, was an extraordinarily *unproductive* enterprise for wealth to have been involved in. What would these people do with their lives, if they sequestered themselves to Galt's Gulch? Based on what we've learned, the most likely outcome is that they'd spend their time passing the same 20-dollar bill back and forth between them, with each new recipient exclaiming, "I can feel it getting more valuable!" until they all starved to death, leaving the rest of us to bury them in a mass grave.

The other hilarious statement comes from Blackstone's Stephen Schwarzman, who says of people who are not wealthy bankers: "You have to have skin in the game ... I'm not saying how much people should do. But we should all be part of the system."

Hey, speaking of:

Five banks that received federal bailout funds during the financial crisis didn't pay income taxes for one or more years between 2008 and 2010, according to an iWatch News analysis of a new study of tax dodgers [from the Citizens for Tax Justice & the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.]

Wells Fargo & Co., Goldman Sachs Group, PNC Financial Services Group, Capital One Financial Inc. and State Street Corp. were among 78 of America's largest and most profitable corporations that managed to avoid paying income tax in at least one of those years.

Researchers looked at 280 corporations that reported a total pretax U.S. profits of \$1.4 trillion. The federal corporate tax code "ostensibly requires big corporations to pay a 35 percent corporate income tax rate, on average, the 280 corporations in our study paid only about half that amount."

The study was released Thursday by nonpartisan advocacy groups Citizens for Tax Justice and the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy.

All five financial institutions named were profitable, but still received funds in the form of stock purchases from the Treasury Department's Troubled Asset Relief Program.

And so we return to where we began, with ordinary Americans ponying up \$4.7 trillion to save the world, sacrificing their own jobs and homes along the way.

Now, as it happens, I've been thinking of ways for the Jamie Dimons of the world to get back in good favor with the rest of country that saved his bacon. You know who the greatest human beings in the country are right now? It's these anonymous donors who are going around, paying off people's layaway items at K-Mart. Whoever this person or persons are, they are giving the entire nation the gift of anti-cynicism for Christmas. He/she/they are just out there, doing some good for the holidays.

Something that these aggrieved financiers could do, if they wanted, is, say, agree to pay off the student loans of everyone who has graduated from college or grad school since 2008. It would send a strong message, that the people who have posted the highest profits during this decline are not willing to permit the next generation or producers and innovators and teachers and healers to be saddled with debt at a time when jobs are unavailable. Instead of placing high-tech bets on who will default on their mortgage, they'd be placing a bet on the next generation of Steve Jobses. (Yes, they'd be benefitting people in other fields of study, too, but the last time I checked, rich people like to underwrite opera companies and symphony orchestras and museums and libraries as well.)

I mean, failing that, they could pay that fee that people need to pay, in some areas, for the fire department to come and pour water on house fires? Just an idea I had. Or they could simply agree to return the \$1.5 trillion they owe taxpayers from all of the bailouts? I mean, if you're really going to take pride in the fact that you're a fat cat, shouldn't your fat-cattedness be based on something other than the fact that you received charity from taxpayers?

Or you could just thank America for saving your entire industry from that time you nearly destroyed it through your own titanic mess-ups, instead of lecturing your saviors about what awful people they are.

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20111221-01	09:33	Pam	Re: Politics: The Biggest Lies of 2011 (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #39)
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An amazing compendium. Very useful!!

20111221-02	11:14	SteveG	"Wisconsin Would Rather Let You Get Breast Cancer Than Go to Planned Parenthood"
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"Wisconsin Would Rather Let You Get Breast Cancer Than Go to Planned Parenthood" by Robin Marty, Care2

Dec. 20, 2011. (<http://www.care2.com/causes/wisconsin-would-rather-let-you-get-breast-cancer-than-go-to-planned-parenthood.html>)

Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, who was elected with the help of extreme anti-choice groups who not only advocate against abortion, but also against contraceptive use, has made it a key priority to roll back initiatives in the state that assist with providing more accesses, resources and education when it comes to reproductive health in the state. He's limited teen access to the birth control pill, attempted to clamp down on age appropriate fact based sex ed, and even removed low income men from being to able to access STI screenings through BadgerCare.

Now, he's continuing his mission to eliminate as much funding as possible from the state's Planned Parenthood facilities, in this case by denying the group \$130,000 in federal funding usually used to provide cancer screenings through the state's "Well Woman" program. Walker has deemed that money should instead go to "less controversial" entities.

Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin states, "In what appears to be yet another politically motivated effort to end health care services coordinated by Planned Parenthood, Department of Health Services Secretary Dennis Smith, a Governor Walker appointee, indicated that he is ending the state's 16 year partnership with Planned Parenthood to facilitate breast and cervical cancer screenings as a part of the Wisconsin Well-Women program in Winnebago, Outagamie, Sheboygan and Fond du Lac counties. This sudden and unexpected decision was communicated in a phone call to staff earlier this month with no further explanation or written notice to help direct existing patients. Because no replacement staffing or health services plan has been communicated to Planned Parenthood or any of

the public health providers in the four affected counties, up to 1,000 women in the Fox Valley are likely to lose access to lifesaving cervical and breast cancer screenings, referrals and treatment starting January 1, 2012."

Anti-choice activists both in the state and nationally are applauding Walker for his decision. "On behalf of the members and supporters of Wisconsin Right to Life, I want to extend our thanks to Governor Walker and Secretary Smith for making sure that this vital health care will be provided by local entities that are not engaged in the destruction of unborn human life and the endangerment of women," said Susan Armacost, Wisconsin Right to Life Legislative Director. "These important services will continue to be provided to low income women by other providers throughout Wisconsin."

It's repeated by everyone — "other providers" will be taking over the service instead. But who are these "other providers" that they refer to? The state's DHS Secretary doesn't really have any idea yet. "We are committed to making sure these vital prevention services are provided to women in these counties and will work with local community providers to ensure continued access," Smith has said in response to the accusations that women are being cut off with no alternative sources.

No list of alternative providers can be seen in the state's Well Woman site, and Planned Parenthood is still listed as the contact for coordinating a screening in a variety of counties.

Maybe they haven't updated their info yet? Oh, well, no rush. After all, it's just cancer.

20111221-03	11:47	SteveB	"Payroll Tax Stalemate Caps Off an Ugly First Year for Boehner"
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"Payroll Tax Stalemate Caps Off an Ugly First Year for Boehner" AP/ *The National Memo*

Dec, 20, 2011 (<http://nationalmemo.com/article/payroll-tax-stalemate-caps-ugly-first-year-boehner>)

(WASHINGTON) John Boehner vowed early on that as speaker, he would let the House "work its will." At the end of his first year in charge of the fractious Republican-controlled chamber, it's clear he has little choice.

An uncompromising band of conservatives, led by GOP freshmen to whom Boehner owes his speakership, has repeatedly forced him to back away from deals with President Barack Obama, Democrats and, this week, even one struck by Senate Republicans. Gridlock, again and again, has defined Congress in the Boehner era even as Americans fume and the economy continues to wobble.

In a closed meeting Monday night, a few Republicans gave voice to widely whispered questions about Boehner's ability and willingness to represent them in negotiations with the White and Senate. They were incensed that the Senate had overwhelmingly passed a two-month extension of a payroll tax cut for 160 million Americans and then left town for the holidays. House Republicans were demanding a year-long tax cut, but there was no longer a Senate in session to negotiate with.

How could this have happened, Rep. Duncan Hunter, R-Calif., asked Boehner, according to multiple officials who were present.

Rep. Cliff Stearns was more direct: Was the Senate deal really a total surprise? Or did Boehner give some sort of tacit agreement?

Boehner tersely, adamantly denied doing so, according to those present. He said he had not expected the Senate's overwhelming approval of the two-month extension.

"I take the speaker at his word that he was surprised by the strong support for the payroll tax legislation in the Senate, which approved it with 89 votes, including from 39 Republicans," Stearns said Tuesday in a statement to The Associated Press.

Did Rep. Jeff Flake believe Boehner? "Oh, I don't know," said the Arizona Republican, grinning and edging away. "You'll have to ask the leaders that."

Boehner "has told us he did not agree to this," said Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-N.C. "I am not a mind reader, and I can only go on what the speaker has said."

At midday Tuesday, the House rejected the Senate's two-month extension, leaving hanging the fate of the tax cut for 160 million Americans, unemployment benefits for 2 million more, and Medicare reimbursements for physicians to treat 48 million Medicare beneficiaries. As it now stands, Social Security taxes on workers will by up to \$40 a week on Jan. 1, people out of work for more than six months will start losing jobless benefits and doctors will see their fees for treating Medicare patients cut 27 percent.

It was an ugly end to a year of gridlock on Capitol Hill that earned Congress historically low approval ratings and the nation a downgrade in its credit rating. The policy debate changed, but the question was the same each time: Compromise, or no deal?

First was the fight last spring over how many billions of dollars to cut from the 2011 federal budget after talks strayed far below the Republicans' campaign promise to slash \$100 billion. Rather than standing firm and allowing parts of the government to shut down until enough lawmakers came around, Boehner did exactly what the tea partiers campaigned had campaigned against — he negotiated with Obama and Senate Democrats on smaller spending cuts.

"Cut it or shut it!" chanted a crowd of tea partiers outside the Capitol.

OK as a campaign slogan, but not a viable technique for lawmaking in a divided government. Some of the 87-member freshman class, swept to power by tea party enthusiasm, insisted that Boehner rewrite the GOP proposal. He did, and submitted instead a proposal to cut about \$61 billion— the pro-rated remainder of conservatives' campaign pledge to cut \$100 billion in the 2011 budget year.

Moments before the government was set to shut down, most of the freshman class voted for the final, six-month deal to cut \$38.5 billion.

Soon followed the showdown over whether to raise the nation's debt limit. Deficit cuts totaling \$2 trillion or more over a decade would be the price for Congress to raise the nation's \$14.3 trillion debt ceiling and continue borrowing 35 to 40 cents of every dollar it spends. Failure to lift that cap could cause the U.S. government to default on its bills and previous borrowing for the first time in its history. Experts warned the cascading reaction in world financial markets could trigger another recession.

Massive spending cuts were mandatory, and raising taxes was out of the question, Republicans said. Boehner assigned his lieutenant, Majority Leader Eric Cantor, to negotiate a blend of spending cuts into the deal with Vice President Joe Biden. But Boehner was meeting secretly with Obama on a grander deal to cut as much as \$4 trillion. House Republicans were furious when they learned about it, and the speaker broke off his talks with the president.

In the end, Congress agreed to a deal cutting spending by more than \$2 trillion and raising the debt limit by nearly the same amount. But the bill was still highly unpopular among House conservatives who felt it didn't go far enough in slashing government spending.

And finally, the end-of-year debate over the payroll tax cut. The House voted Tuesday, 229-193, to kick the measure back to the Senate, where the bipartisan two-month measure passed on Saturday. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., says he won't allow bargaining until the House approves the Senate's short-term measure.

Back to gridlock.

The speaker's allies say his patience and his willingness to pull back is preventing conservatives from trying to replace him.

"It's a maturation process" for the House's feisty newcomers, said Rep. Steve LaTourette, a fellow Ohioan and close Boehner ally. "They came to town not knowing how this place works. Now that they have a year under their belts, we're in a much better place going into next year."

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[20111221-04](#) 13:26 SteveG Fw: MoveOn Petition: Make Publix Stop Using Styrofoam Packaging!

Publix Super Markets continue to package numerous vegetables and fruits in Styrofoam packaging. As the largest supermarket chain in Florida, this creates a huge amount of non-recyclable trash.

That's why I created a petition to the CEO of Publix, Ed Crenshaw, on SignOn.org urging Publix to switch to recyclable and sustainable packaging for all of its produce. The petition says:

As loyal Publix customers, we urge you to discontinue the use of all Styrofoam packaging—especially the Styrofoam trays still used by Publix in packaging vegetables—and switch to sustainable, or at a minimum, recyclable packaging. We recognize the positive measures Publix has taken to date to help protect the environment and urge you to take this important additional step.

Will you sign the petition? Click here to add your name, and then pass it along to your friends:

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268898&id=34045-20195165-35XeeIx&t=2>.

[20111221-05](#) 13:51 Ben Re: Psychology 101 (reply to Mark, FotM Newsletter #39)

Well, that certainly explains the so-called "conservative way of thinking", doesn't it?

[20111221-07](#) 16:24 Art Re: Ayn Rand Was a Hypocritical Monster (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #38)

Thanks SteveB, This FotM Newsletter particularly informative, not that they all aren't, but I very much appreciate your digging for different things to think about. Like many our age, I guess, I read Ayn Rand back in the 60s. I found both *Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged* forgettable at best. Maybe it reflects my lack of intellect but, while I recognized at the time her sort of glorifying the individual, I did not see it as particularly illuminating. I'm probably just not the thinkers Clarence Thomas and Ronald Reagan are.

[20111221-08](#) 16:25 SteveB Re: Ayn Rand Was a Hypocritical Monster (reply to Art, above)

Thank you! We're having a good week, I think.

Art: I'm probably just not the thinkers Clarence Thomas and Ronald Reagan are.

Thank God most of us aren't!

Ya, I read all her stuff when I was about 14 or 15 because they were thick and had some sex in them. I can remember thinking, "There's something wrong with this," but I couldn't quite put my finger on it, so I just moved on to *Lord of the Rings*. More fantasies.

[20111221-06](#) 16:05 SteveG "Bradley Manning & the Fog of War"

"Bradley Manning and the Fog of War" by Amy Goodman, NationofChange

Dec. 21, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/bradley-manning-and-fog-war-1324485462>)

Accused whistle-blower Pvt. Bradley Manning turned 24 Saturday. He spent his birthday in a pretrial military hearing that could ultimately lead to a sentence of life...or death. Manning stands accused of causing the largest leak of government secrets in United States history.

More on Manning shortly. First, a reminder of what he is accused of leaking. In April 2010, the whistle-blower website WikiLeaks released a video called "Collateral Murder." It was a classified U.S. military video from July 2007, from an Apache attack helicopter over Baghdad. The video shows a group of men walking, then the systematic killing of them in a barrage of high-powered automatic fire from the helicopter. Soldiers' radio transmissions narrate the carnage, varying from cold and methodical to cruel and enthusiastic. Two of those killed were employees of the international news agency Reuters: Namir Noor-Eldeen, a photojournalist, and Saeed Chmagh, his driver.

Renowned whistle-blower Daniel Ellsberg, who released the *Pentagon Papers* that helped end the war in Vietnam and who himself is a Marine veteran who trained soldiers on the laws of war, told me: "Helicopter gunners hunting down and shooting an unarmed man in civilian clothes, clearly wounded...that shooting was murder. It was a war crime. Not all killing in war is murder, but a lot of it is. And this was."

The WikiLeaks release of the Afghan War Logs followed months later, with tens of thousands of military field reports. Then came the Iraq War Diaries, with close to 400,000 military records of the U.S. war in Iraq. Next was Cablegate, WikiLeaks' rolling release (with prominent print-media partners, including The New York Times and The Guardian in Britain) of classified U.S. State Department cables, more than a quarter-million of them, dating from as far back as 1966 up to early 2010. The contents of these cables proved highly embarrassing to the U.S. government and sent shock waves around the world.

Among the diplomatic cables released were those detailing U.S. support for the corrupt Tunisian regime, which helped fuel the uprising there. Noting that Time magazine named "The Protester," generically, as Person of the Year, Ellsberg said Manning should be the face of that protester, since the leaks for which he is accused, following their impact in Tunisia, "in turn sparked the uprising in Egypt ... which stimulated Occupy Wall Street and the other occupations in the Middle East and elsewhere. So, one of those 'persons of the year' is now sitting in a courthouse."

Another recently revealed Cablegate release exposed details of an alleged 2006 massacre by U.S. troops in the Iraqi town of Ishaqi, north of Baghdad. Eleven people were killed, and the cable described eyewitness accounts in which the group, including five children and four women, was handcuffed, then executed with bullets to the head. The U.S. military then bombed the house, allegedly to cover up the incident. Citing attacks like these, the Iraqi government said it would no longer grant immunity to U.S. soldiers in Iraq. President Barack Obama responded by announcing he would pull the troops out of Iraq. Like a modern-day Ellsberg, if Manning is guilty of what the Pentagon claims, he helped end the war in Iraq.

Back in the Fort Meade, Md., hearing room, defense attorneys painted a picture of a chaotic forward operating base with little to no supervision, no controls whatsoever on soldiers' access to classified data, and a young man in uniform struggling with his sexual identity in the era of "don't ask, don't tell." Manning repeatedly flew into rages, throwing furniture and once even punching a superior in the face, without punishment. His peers at the base said he should not be in a war zone. Yet he stayed, until his arrest 18 months ago.

Since his arrest, Manning has been in solitary confinement, for much of the time in Quantico, Va., under conditions so harsh that the U.N. special rapporteur on torture is investigating. Many believe the U.S. government is trying to break Manning in order to use him in its expected case of espionage against WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange. It also sends a dramatic message to any potential whistle-blower: "We will destroy you."

For now, Manning sits attentively, reports say, facing possible death for "aiding the enemy." The prosecution offered words Manning allegedly wrote to Assange as evidence of his guilt. In the email, Manning described the leak as "one of the more significant documents of our time, removing the fog of war and revealing the true nature of 21st century asymmetrical warfare." History will no doubt use the same words as irrefutable proof of Manning's courage.

20111221-09

17:47

Pam

"I Cannot Eat Your Prayers': How Student Debt Changed One Woman's Mind on 'Christian Charity'"

I encourage you to read Kristin Rawls' essay "I Can't Eat Your Prayers" in this edition of AlterNet. [See below. – SteveB] I guess I identify with her because I spent so many years in graduate school, living on education loans and a graduate assistantship to support my three kids. I felt like Kristen: a woman who could "pass." Pass for normal, middle-class, educated, and just like everyone else I passed in the hallways everyday. Only I wasn't. I was an authority figure of sorts to my students, a respected teacher to my colleagues, a successful graduate student to my professors, and I couldn't afford to take my kids to McDonald's. One year my sons got their winter coats from a charity. We had a wood stove for heat and no air conditioning—in NC. All my kids began working as soon as they turned 15. Two of them put themselves through college with Pell Grants and work because I couldn't afford to help them. I have been where Kristen Rawls is, without the lupus. I was able to pay off my enormous debt with an inheritance, which is all that kept me from going under financially. Once I began teaching full time and moved into lower administration, I was able to get on my feet, but by then my kids were grown and on their own. I help them now as much as I can, but I am so traumatized by those years of struggle that I live in fear of ending up under a bridge, irrational, I know, but true nonetheless.

I figure if this young woman could have the courage to tell her story, I could find enough gumption to tell some of mine. Most of my friends have always been better off than I; they are sympathetic, but I don't believe they really KNOW what poverty is like. Financial hardship can happen to anyone. No one, especially these days, should feel entirely safe. The poor are not the "other;" they could be you or your kids or your parents. At one point I cut my hair because I couldn't afford both shampoo AND conditioner to detangle it. I bought my clothes at discount outlets and my furniture came from used furniture stores. I say this not to elicit sympathy. I did choose to live this way because I was so determined to get my PhD and couldn't imagine a life outside academia. I loved teaching and studying and interacting with other intellectual people. I thought I would die without that. So my kids and I paid a heavy price for me to pursue my dreams. Somehow I always knew that difficult time would end, and ultimately it did, but I will never be the same person who grew up in a nice, middle-class family, with a comfortable home and a new family car every year. Where were my parents, you ask? I never let them know the extent of my difficulties. They knew about the As and my classes and how well my kids were doing; that's all I wanted them to know.

I'll probably regret posting this. On the other hand, I've decided in my old age to try to tell the truth—unvarnished and without shame.

Merry Christmas, everyone. I love this group!

"I Cannot Eat Your Prayers': How Student Debt Changed One Woman's Mind on 'Christian Charity'" by Kristin Rawls, AlterNet

Dec. 19, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153485/>)

(From an evangelical home to over \$100,000 in student loans and healthcare debt, one writer faces the ways in which even progressive Christianity comes up short.)

I'm going to tell you a story. It's the story of a good girl from a quiet town who prayed, studied hard, said no to drugs, and otherwise did everything she was told—and then went on to become Sallie Mae's bitch and lost just about everything. This story is mine.

I grew up in an evangelical home, and was an earnest "liberal-evangelical" into my early twenties. Now I think that my former religious faith—not unlike my faith in the U.S. higher education system—gave me a warped sense of optimism about the way the world works. I believed in faith-based platitudes, plus a few secular ones. Examples:

1. God has a plan for my life.
2. My whole future is ahead of me.

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

20111221-10 18:47 SteveB Re: "I Cannot Eat Your Prayers'..." (reply to Pam, above)

I love what you have to say here and I agree with all of it. I am so sorry you had to suffer! Like many of our group, it seems, I grew up in the middle class, but with not much left over for candy, so to speak. We were about as totally unaware of class distinctions as kids can be. And I was so lucky that, as a kid and, later, as a college student, I always knew I could count on my parents for support. For kids who have to worry about such things, it must be hard. Later, when I had three kids and my wife didn't work, I lived by my wits alone and was lucky, but there were nights I simply couldn't sleep because of the worry. I didn't really have any backup. It's not a fun way to live when you have rug-rats you kinda like and mine were the greatest. Once I lost a job at a bad time. It's funny how that works. Often, the job can be there, then the company slightly redefines itself, maybe in a slightly more efficient way, and the job is not there, farewell, here's your severance (generous) and maybe you could consult for us for a lot more money (and I did). But when I lost the job, I didn't know what I was going to do. I couldn't even tell my sweet wife. I would get-up, get ready for work, and leave as usual. I did that for about a week. Then I would go look for jobs. Finally, I told her. She's wasn't happy, but finally, it all worked out for the best. Lucky again. But it's so easy not to be so lucky.

I look at society now with a lot of time on my hands and a purpose, and whether I am sh*t or Shinola, it is an artist's purpose, mainly to bend life into my poetry and storytelling. Then there is the fact that I've been here for a while now and have witnessed a fair amount of history as an interested observer. The two, together, give one a strange focus. I think that if a person can grow..."older"...without becoming senile (stay active), cranky (I hate that), or selfish (we all hate that) then great, interesting things can be accomplished that can't be done when you have to worry about making money all the time to survive.

And with that focus, it is easy to see some of the faults of society that must be fixed. I love America. I love its people even more. When its people cannot lead lives of dignity, we all suffer. When students, who are our future, are forced to take-on poverty inducing debt, we put that future in great jeopardy. When teachers at any level, because of the incredibly crucial work they do, are not rewarded with lives of simple dignity, the future of us all suffers. These problems are simply intolerable to me in my America. This is not how I want my fellow citizens to be treated.

If I must pay more, if we all must pay more, surely we want education fixed. I want the brightest half of high-school graduates to go to college for free, unless their parents are rich. The rich have more than convinced me that they don't need or want government benefits, so be it. Teachers must be plentiful and paid a living wage. I want foreign languages taught to almost all, from kindergarten up.

Yet, like healthcare, education must somehow become more efficient. Are we stupid or what? Can't we do something? Maybe that top half of students could take-on a little more responsibility for their own educations, starting at the junior high or high school level? Couldn't we get more college students involved on a voluntary basis? Couldn't computers and the internet help? What are we waiting for? We can end up with fewer teachers more fully employed if they have enough help, so that students gain teacher time, not have it reduced. But the country must face this reality: teachers should make good money and the total cost of K-12 will rise. It must.

I want everyone possible to go to public schools and I want them to be good enough that almost everyone wants to go there. I think public schools are the great equalizer of American society and are one of our great treasures. It is also more cost efficient, just like with health insurance, to have as many students in the system as possible, not in private schools or home schooled. We need to find a way to maintain local control, while finding a way to more and better funding.

I agree with Ron Paul. I don't think the Republican wars that have bankrupted us have made us safer or more secure and have, in fact, made us many enemies, thus making us less safe and secure in the world. Let's take that money from "Defense" and spend it on the future. One way is to improve the education of our children and the lives of those involved. Why not?

[20111221-11](#) 23:21 SteveG Fw: Important Legislative Update on Medicare's SGR

from Patients' Action Network (AMA):

Debate in Congress has raged over the last few weeks concerning Medicare's flawed sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula and what must be done to prevent an end-of-year 27.4 percent physician payment cut that would put Medicare patients' access to quality care at serious risk.

Unfortunately, efforts have now stalled as we head into the holidays and the status of the critical SGR issue remains in limbo.

The following legislative update will help give you the lay of the land on Capitol Hill as we prepare to re-double our efforts in January on this critical issue.

Votes on H.R. 3630. As originally passed by the House on December 13 by a vote of 234-193, the legislation would have provided Medicare physician payment updates of 1 percent a year for two years, followed by a return to the current negative trend line produced by the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula. But, due to disagreements over financial offsets and other policy issues unrelated to the SGR, the legislation could not attract a sufficient number of votes to pass the Senate.

On December 17, the Senate voted 89-10 to pass an amended version of the bill that would extend all the expiring policies, including current Medicare physician payment rates, for two months. The rationale for the short-term extension was to avoid disruptions on January 1 and provide time for further negotiations on financing longer-term extensions.

House action on December 20. Following the Senate's action, a significant number of House Republicans expressed strong opposition to the two-month extension, and several relevant votes were scheduled for December 20. Most important of these, the House approved a resolution by a vote of 229-193 to disagree with the Senate and appoint members to a House-Senate conference committee, which would be charged with working out differences between the two versions of the bill.

Prior to the House vote that day, the Senate leadership announced that the Senate would not reconvene over the holidays to engage in further negotiations and votes. In addition, members of the House departed for the holidays, after being informed that they could be called back to Washington on short notice. At this time, it does not appear likely that the outstanding issues will be resolved before January 1.

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

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