



# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #42 — DEC. 31, 2011**

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> [FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

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## **Republicans Kick the Year Off Right**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 31, 2011)



I hope you all had a great New Year's Eve celebration and that you're none the worse for wear.

Tomorrow, the Republicans kick-off the 2012 Presidential Primaries with a little fireworks of their own and the Iowa Caucuses. Just based on things I've read, without having looked at any polls for a while, I'm going to make my predictions based on instinct:

1. Ron Paul (Iowa is crazy)
2. Mitt Romney (the guy they want but don't want)
3. Ron Santorum (he's worked hard, but still a zero)
4. Rick Perry ("Oops!")

5. Newt Gingrich (despite crying)
6. Jon Huntsman (doubtfully)
7. Michele Bachmann (hopefully)

Soon, we shall see.

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<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
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<a href="#">20111223-01</a>	09:20	Pam	Re: Alan Grayson, Privatizing Money (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #41)
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Yikes. History will remember this era as "The Great Collapse."

<a href="#">20111223-02</a>	11:14	SteveG	"Trump Thinks African-American Vote Would propel Him to 3rd Party Win"
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from "Trump Thinks African-American Vote Would propel Him to 3rd Party Win" by Henry Decker, The National Memo

Dec. 22, 2011 (<http://nationalmemo.com/article/trump-thinks-african-american-vote-would-propel-him-3rd-party-win-video>)

Reality TV star Donald Trump is continuing to hint at a third party presidential bid, telling Fox News' Greta van Susteren that he could defeat President Obama in a hypothetical match-up -- by winning African-American voters away from the nation's first black president.

"I think I'd get a great cross-section," Trump told Van Susteren. "I think I'd get Hispanic votes, frankly. I think — and people smile when I say it — I think I'd do great with the African American votes. I think I'd do great with that."

<a href="#">20111223-03</a>	11:19	Anonymous	What Happened Yesterday Just Before Boehner Caved?
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Thought your crew may be interested that when I got to work yesterday morning and checked my Google news feed, the first listed article in the National News section bore this headline:

"Rove Tells Boehner to Cave on Tax"

How many more days of criticism will the House GOP endure over its failure to pass a payroll-tax extension? The latest turn of the screw: GOP star strategist Karl Rove publicly urged House Speaker John Boehner to cave and pass the bill, saying the party has already "lost the optics on it." Meanwhile, in interviews with 10 current and former congressional Republican advisers, *The Washington Post* notes a "recurring critique" of House Speaker John Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor for failing to warn their Senate counterparts of House opposition—a failure that allowed nearly all Senate Republicans to vote in favor of the extension. A top House GOP aide called the Senate bill "disastrously bad" and say the House rank and file want leadership to better defend their position.

Article is now: "House Republicans Face Pressure on Extension of Payroll Tax Cut" by Paul Kane, *Washington Post* Dec. 22, 2011, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/house-republicans-face-pressure-on-extension-of-payroll-tax-cut/2011/12/21/gIQA7nLJAP\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/house-republicans-face-pressure-on-extension-of-payroll-tax-cut/2011/12/21/gIQA7nLJAP_story.html))

What's REALLY interesting about this is that the Washington Post internet reference here doesn't mention Karl Rove any longer. But about an hour and a half later, the news went around that Boehner had surrendered.

None of the news articles released since mentions that Rove has any opinion at all, but you can still find references...

<http://www.thedailybeast.com/cheats/2011/12/22/gop-continues-tax-squabbling.html>

Unlike this one, most of the others seem to have been redacted to exclude any mention of Mr Rove. The cached stuff on Google still mentions it. But when you follow the link, to the "original" articles, there's just no "Rove" there...

Golly. Wouldn't do at all to show the public how the Grand Old Party really works, would it?

Ever read *The Spike*, by Borchgrave and Moss? Great book, if a little dated to the Viet Nam era. But that kind of stuff is still going on, even though it's no longer the KGB pulling the strings: just somebody else who read their playbook.

[http://www.amazon.com/Spike-Arnaud-Borchgrave/dp/0517536242/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1324653377&sr=1-1](http://www.amazon.com/Spike-Arnaud-Borchgrave/dp/0517536242/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1324653377&sr=1-1)

<a href="#">20111223-04</a>	12:50	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama to Stop the Keystone XL Pipeline!
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from CREDO Action:

[http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/keystone\\_timeline/?r=239724&id=32546-3891339-TzcuBIX](http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/keystone_timeline/?r=239724&id=32546-3891339-TzcuBIX).

<a href="#">20111223-05</a>	14:58	SteveG	Fw: Care2 Petition: Tell President Obama to Support Increased Fuel Efficiency for Cars!
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from Care2:

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/414/576/205/?z00m=20158992>.

<a href="#">20111223-06</a>	16:39	SteveG	"Who Will Fix the U.S. Economy?"
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"Who Will Fix the U.S. Economy?" by Henry Mintzberg, NationofChange

Dec. 23, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/who-will-fix-us-economy-1324655842>)

Much commentary about the American economy nowadays leaves the impression that economists should fix its problems. But Washington is teeming with smart economists, and the problems remain.

An economy is like a cloud: only when inside does one realize how diffuse it is – and that what matters are the particles of vapor that it comprises.

Likewise, an economy is an accumulation of transactions involving goods and services, mostly carried out by business enterprises. Their behaviors are what matters, and they cannot be adequately perceived from the distant perspective of economic models and statistics, but only on the ground – where an economy is built, where it breaks, and where it must be fixed.

On the ground, there are two kinds of enterprises: those that rely on exploration, and those that rely on exploitation. Every economy has both, but a healthy one favors the explorers. This fosters the sense of enterprise that made the United States such an economic powerhouse. Unfortunately, the American economy now favors the exploiters.

Economic development proceeds through a cycle that begins with young, exploring enterprises introducing new products, services, and processes. Over time, however, as they succeed, many explorers become exploiters. They saturate their markets, run out of new ideas, and get lazy. They then extend their product lines instead of developing new products; cut costs by putting pressure on their workers; lobby governments for favorable treatment; merge with competitors to reduce competition; and manipulate customers to squeeze out every last penny.

This, of course, makes these enterprises vulnerable to the creative challenges of the next wave of explorers – the fast new firms that confront the fat old corporations – and the cycle of destruction and reconstruction begins anew.

Contrast this with the America of bailouts, where the fat are considered “too big to fail.” In fact, many are too big – or at least too mismanaged – to succeed. How else to explain why major banks and insurance companies bet their futures on mortgages that a little investigation would have shown to be junk? Their senior managers either didn’t know, or cynically thought that they could get away with it, while the rest of their managers either didn’t care, or couldn’t get through to their bosses.

This American problem goes far beyond the bailouts. For every Apple and Google – explorers par excellence – count the energy companies with their cozy tax deals, the defense contractors that live off government budgets, and the pharmaceutical companies that buy their innovations and price what the market will bear, thanks to patents that governments grant, but without policing their holders.

On top of this, many US startups now leap into exploitation. Whereas America’s entrepreneurs had traditionally been inclined to create sustainable legacies, now many of them strive for an early IPO that will let them cash out quickly. This can be terribly dysfunctional, cutting off much of what still must be learned.

When economists boast about America’s great productivity, what they have in mind is exploration – finding ways to do things better, especially through superior processes. But much of this “productivity” has in fact been destructively exploitative. Think of all the corporations that have fired great numbers of people at the drop of a share price, leaving behind underpaid, overworked employees and burned-out managers, while the CEOs escape with their bonuses.

To see where this leads, imagine a company that fires all of its workers and then ships its orders from stock. Economic statistics would record this as highly productive – until, of course, the company runs out of stock. American enterprise is running out of stock.

Seen in this way, there is no quick fix for America’s current economic problems. Firing workers or even printing money can be easy; changing dysfunctional behaviors is not. The U.S. economy will have to be fixed by its enterprises, one by one, on the ground. Attitudes will have to change, and this will demand great dedication and patience – traits that seem to be in short supply in the U.S. today.

The place to start is America’s executive suites, which should be cleared of mercenaries in order to encourage real leadership. That is the easy part: get rid of the obscene compensation packages and watch the mercenaries disappear. People who care about building and sustaining decent enterprises – and who understand that doing so is a team exercise – can then take over.

Successful enterprises take time to create – time spent on inventing better products, serving customers more effectively, and supporting workers in ways that enhance their commitment. Symbols matter, too: the term “human resources,” for example, should be retired, because a great enterprise is a community of engaged human beings, not a collection of detached capital.

Public support should be shifted from protecting large established corporations to encouraging the growth of newer enterprises. And startups should be discouraged from rushing into the embrace of the stock market’s short-sighted analysts (and many an established corporation should be encouraged to escape that embrace). At the same time, regulation and taxation should be used to rein in disruptive day trading and other exploitative speculation that crowds out sustainable investment and disrupts regular business activities.

Above all, what the American economy needs now are managers who know and care about their businesses. Armies of MBAs who have been trained to manage everything in general but nothing in particular are part of the problem, not the solution. So are economists who study clouds without ever getting wet.

<a href="#">20111223-07</a>	18:00	Pam	“President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens”
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I just read the piece below on Obama's failure to veto the bill authorizing the indefinite detention of American citizens. My stomach feels like I just dropped down an elevator shaft. I am currently reading a novel by Helen Dunmore called *The Betrayal*, about the Soviet Union after WW II under Stalin. It is totally chilling and reminds me a lot of Eugenia Ginsburg's memoirs about her years in Soviet prisons and camps. So many innocent people were utterly destroyed and for no good reason. I've also read Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, another prison novel about the show trials in the '30s. I see so many signs in America today that remind me of these books. It's as if there is a creeping tide moving incrementally closer to us, so slowly that we don't even notice. There's the big stuff like *Citizens United* (what a euphemism!), this latest failure by Obama, the pandering to the Tea Party, the ridiculous accusations. But there are other things too that don't even seem related to government. The new mania for assessment is one. Hitler's and Stalin's regimes were notorious for their precise record-keeping. Having the right forms was a matter of life and death. What do we have? Our schools and universities are increasingly choked by demands for "accountability" and quantifiable "student outcomes." Teachers have to follow a prescribed curriculum. University professors have to submit lengthy syllabi and what amount to contracts with their students that cover all contingencies, and these documents have to follow a prescribed protocol so they are all uniform. These documents are time-consuming and pointless, so most professors, especially young ones, simply sigh and fill out the bloody things. Anyone who objects is a "trouble maker" who probably ought to retire.

We require immigrants to carry ID. Most of us are already in the system through our credit cards and cell phones. Intersections have cameras to photograph speeders or red-light runners. Private homes have security systems, as if there were a major crime wave (yes, we have one). The 2000 election was stolen, and there is no public outcry. Drip by drip the foundations of our democracy are being eroded, and most of us have lost trust in our political institutions. I don't trust the Supreme Court; I don't trust the system for appointing federal judges; I certainly don't trust the Congress; and now I am forced to admit my doubts about Obama. He says the right things, but look at what he does. I thought Jimmy Carter was weak, but I trusted him. I thought Nixon was a son of a bitch, but I didn't think he was trying to ruin the country. I thought Reagan was a pawn of the Right, but I thought he was well-intentioned. Maybe I was wrong about all of them. I think the tide turned a long time ago, and we're only noticing it now because it is up to our necks.

I read (in the *New Yorker*) that the thing Putin fears most is people in the streets. We have seen time and again that the only way to change course is for masses of people to band together and create a rumpus. I'm sure it worries you that freedom of the Internet is coming under attack. It sure worries me. I don't want to sound like I'm up on a soap box. I've never been much of an activist, and I'm always a bit leery of people who pursue a cause with what seems to me like an excess of zeal. Something in me always wonders if they are a little bit crazy. But the fracturing of America is truly frightening to me. I'm not personally afraid--unless there's a revolution of the wrong sort, in which case those of us on this list will be among the first to go. I do worry about the world my beloved grandsons will inherit. Politics always changes eventually. No single system lasts forever. But if our climate alters the earth's atmosphere beyond our ability to live without catastrophic hardship, our politics will grow

even more rancorous. I fear we will destroy ourselves, intent on tearing each others' throats out as we all plunge off the last cliff

"President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens" by Brian Walker, NationofChange

Dec. 23, 2011, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/president-obama-requested-removal-indefinite-military-detention-exemptions-us-citizens-1324653317>)

Here is the full-text of a presidential order to indefinitely detain a US citizen under military conditions as an enemy combatant:

TO THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE:

Based on the information available to me from all sources,

REDACTED

In accordance with the Constitution and consistent with the laws of the United States, including the Authorization for Use of Military Force Joint Resolution (Public Law 107-40); I, GEORGE W. BUSH, as President of the United States and Commander in Chief of the U.S. armed forces, hereby DETERMINE for the United States of America that:

(1) Jose Padilla, who is under the control of the Department of Justice and who is a U.S. citizen, is, and at the time he entered the United States in May 2002 was, an enemy combatant;

(2) Mr. Padilla is closely associated with al Qaeda, an international terrorist organization with which the United States is at war;

(3) Mr. Padilla engaged in conduct that constituted hostile and warlike acts, including conduct in preparation for acts of international terrorism that had the aim to cause injury to or adverse effects on the United States;

(4) Mr. Padilla possesses intelligence, including intelligence about personnel and activities of al Qaeda, that, if communicated to the U.S., would aid U.S. efforts to prevent attacks by al Qaeda on the United States or its armed forces, other governmental personnel, or citizens;

(5) Mr. Padilla represents a continuing, present and grave danger to the national security of the United States, and detention of Mr. Padilla is necessary to prevent him from aiding al Qaeda in its efforts to attack the United States or its armed forces, other governmental personnel, or citizens;

(6) it is in the interest of the United States that the Secretary of Defense detain Mr. Padilla as an enemy combatant; and

(7) it is REDACTED consistent with U.S. law and the laws of war for the Secretary of Defense to detain Mr. Padilla as enemy combatant. Accordingly, you are directed to receive Mr. Padilla from the Department of Justice and to detain him as an enemy combatant.

DATE: June 9, 2002 Signature

[George Bush]

In September of 2005 the Fourth Circuit of Appeals ruled on whether or not the president had the authority to declare a U.S. citizen (as above) an enemy combatant and then indefinitely detain him. The court ruled in the president's favor.

The National Defense Authorization Act that originally passed through the Armed Services Committee was approved with provisions that explicitly exempted U.S. citizens from the indefinite detention language of section 1031 (which was re-numbered to 1021 immediately before it was passed) of the bill. This would have meant the legislation would have reduced the president's powers to detain U.S. citizens.

President Obama's administration intervened behind the scenes and requested that the specific exemptions for U.S. citizens from section 1031 (now 1021) be removed.

The reasons for the President's veto threat were reported in such a way to suggest that the President was trying to protect U.S. citizens from questionable detention laws, the ACLU reported that Obama was threatening to veto the bill over the indefinite detention provisions, but new evidence shows this was not the case.

Answering a question from Senator Udall about why the ASC did not exempt U.S. citizens before bringing the bill to the full congress, Senator Levin (and chairman of the Armed Services Committee) explained, "I wonder whether the senator is familiar with the fact that the language which precluded the application of section 1031 to American citizens was in the bill that we originally approved in the Armed Services Committee, and the administration asked us to remove the language which says that U.S. citizens and Lawful residents would not be subject to this section?" and continuing, "Is the senator familiar with the fact it was the administration that asked us to remove the very language which we had in the bill which passed the Committee and that we removed it at the request of the administration, that would have said the act - that this determination - would not apply to U.S. citizens and lawful residents. I'm just wondering, was the senator familiar with the fact it was the administration which asked us to remove the very language, the absence of which is now objected to by the senator from Illinois?"

The Obama administration specifically requested the removal of language which protected US citizens from indefinite detention by the military. After multiple attempts at amending the bill before final passage, the new language promises - instead of an explicit exemption - that it will not alter "existing law" in relation to the President's authority to detain American citizens without trial.

"Existing law" appears to already give the president the authority to detain U.S. citizens as enemy combatants without trial. *Jose Padilla vs the 4th Circuit of Appeals* ruled that the President did have the authority to indefinitely detain enemy combatants, regardless of if they are a U.S. citizen or not. Even before this, and even less well known, is that the United States of America has been in a presidentially declared state of emergency since September 14, 2001. While the state of emergency has a two year limitation rule under the National Emergencies Act, President Obama renewed it in 2009 and 2010, and again in September of 2011 so it is still in effect today.

From Wikipedia:

At least two constitutional rights are subject to revocation during a national state of emergency:

1. The right of habeas corpus, under Article 1, Section 9;
2. The right to a grand jury for members of the National Guard when in actual service, under Fifth Amendment.

In the Fourth Circuit of Appeals ruling on whether or not the president had the authority to declare US citizens enemy combatants and indefinitely detain them, the court ruled that the Authorization for Use of Military Force passed by Congress after the terrorist attacks on 9/11/2001 granted him the authority to do so.

*Padilla v. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals*

We understand the plurality's reasoning in *Hamdi* to be that the AUMF authorizes the President to detain all those who qualify as "enemy combatants" within the meaning of the laws of war, such power being universally accepted under the laws of war as necessary in order to prevent the return of combatants to the battlefield during 10 PADILLA v. HANFT conflict. Id. at 2640-41. Given that Padilla qualifies as an enemy combatant under both the

definition adopted by the Court in Quirin and the definition accepted by the controlling opinion in Hamdi, his military detention as an enemy combatant by the President is unquestionably authorized by the AUMF as a fundamental incident to the President's prosecution of the war against al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

The Bush administration did give Padilla his day in court and eventually successfully convicted and sentenced him, but this does not change the ruling which determined he did not have to.

Press Secretary Jay Carney released a written statement about Obama's decision, "We have concluded that the [NDAA's] language does not challenge or constrain the President's ability to collect intelligence, incapacitate dangerous terrorists, and protect the American people," and stated "The President's senior advisers will not recommend a veto."

<a href="#">20111223-08</a>	19:17	SteveG	Re: "President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens" (reply to Pam, above)
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My understanding is that Obama signed the bill but wrote an exception to the portion about detaining US citizens. I further understand that this nullifies that portion – the process was used over 100 times by Bush and has been used 10 times by Obama. Dennis probably knows more about this process and if my understanding is accurate or out in left field.

We are all up the creek and all the paddles have been stolen

<a href="#">20111223-09</a>	19:26	Dennis	Re: "President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens" (reply to SteveG, above)
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I just read an explanation by Senator Carl Levin who cited why this was not an abandonment of due process for American citizens. It was convoluted one that only a lawyer could understand. Since I scored abysmally on the law school entrance exam, I'm not the one to ask about this.

<a href="#">20111223-10</a>	20:40	SteveG	Re: "President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens" (reply to all, above) & "The Defense Bill Passed. So What Does It Do?"
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"The Defense Bill Passed. So What Does It Do?" by Adam Serwer, MotherJones

Dec. 16, 2011, (<http://motherjones.com/mojo/2011/12/defense-bill-passed-so-what-does-it-do-ndaa>)

<a href="#">20111223-11</a>	21:39	Pam	Re: "President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Thanks for the clarification. It's not as bad as I thought, but we're still drifting...

<a href="#">20111224-02</a>	12:04	SteveG	Re: "President Obama Requested the Removal of Indefinite Military Detention Exemptions for U.S. Citizens" (reply to SteveG, above)
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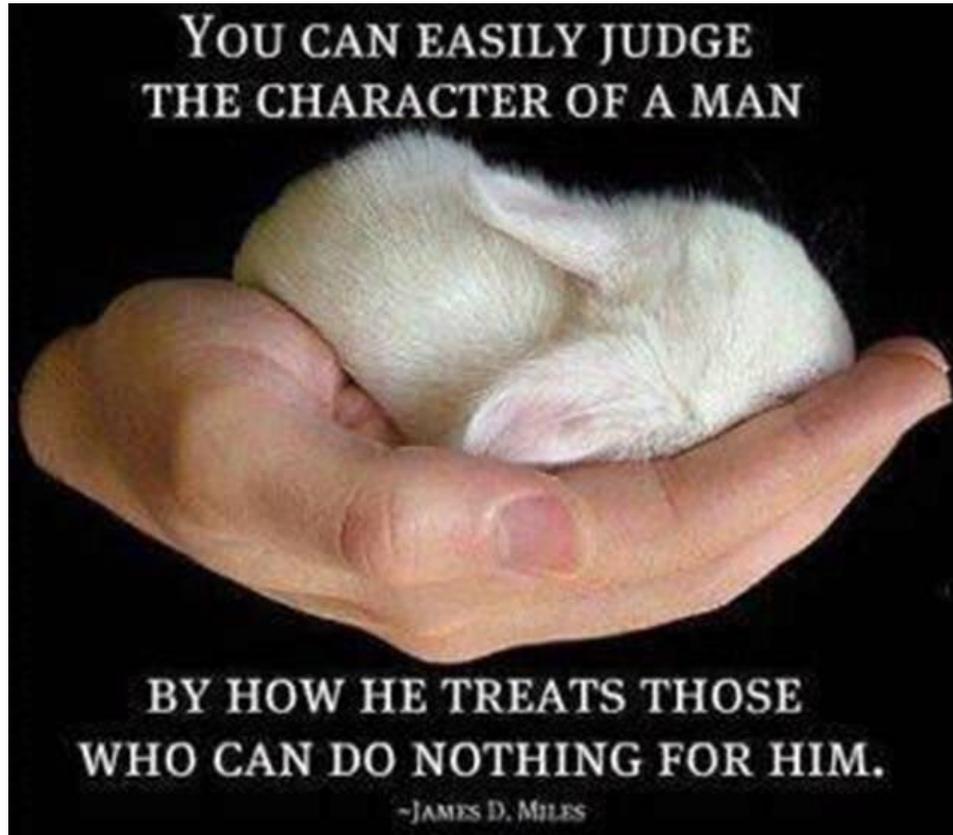
Drifting way too far to the right.

<a href="#">20111223-12</a>	21:14	SteveG	"NLRB Could Be Shut Down in New Year"
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"NLRB Could Be Shut Down in New Year" by Chris Isidore, CNN Money

Dec. 23, 2011, ([http://money.cnn.com/2011/12/23/news/economy/nlrb/index.htm?source=cnn\\_bin](http://money.cnn.com/2011/12/23/news/economy/nlrb/index.htm?source=cnn_bin))

[20111224-01](#) 11:53 Jim Quote: James D. Miles on Character



[20111224-03](#) 12:20 SteveG "Mentally Ill Flood ER as States Cut Services"

Having worked at a mental health center for 17 years, having worked with homeless/ill people, having seen shock treatments, having worked with people before they committed suicide, having helped people get their medication when they couldn't afford it, having worked with mentally ill to become stable/employed/live within their community, having helped people move out of state institutions, I really find this article disturbing. A really sad statement about our society and we are responsible.

"Mentally Ill Flood ER as States Cut Services" by Julie Steenhuysen and Jilian Mincer, Reuters

Dec. 24, 2011, (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2011/12/24/us-usa-health-psychiatric-idUSTRE7BN06820111224>)

[20111226-04](#) 14:49 Pam Re: "Mentally Ill Flood ER as States Cut Services" (reply to SteveG, above)

This is so disturbing.

We watched "Margin Call" the other night--about the collapse of what I assume is supposed to be Lehman Bros. It was chilling. It showed all the top executives scrambling around trying to avoid the inevitable catastrophe, and you feel sorry for them. Lots of mistakes were made and warnings ignored, but you can't point the finger at any one person. What you also see is these top executives getting huge packages when they get fired. The ones at the top

get golden parachutes. The mentally ill and the destitute get their funding cut. Life is not fair, but does it have to be quite so unfair?

[20111224-04](#) 15:12 SteveG Fw: Care2 Petition: Stop Organ Trafficking in Egypt!

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/3/stop-organ-harvesting-of-refugees-in-egypt/>

[20111224-05](#) 17:22 Pam Gingrich Fails to Get on Ballot in Virginia

I just heard on the radio that Newt failed to qualify to be on the ballot in Virginia. This is described as a huge embarrassment. No kidding.

[20111224-06](#) 18:21 SteveB Re: Gingrich Fails to Get on Ballot in Virginia (reply to Pam, above)

Ya, Newt didn't make it, nor Perry, though that might be a little more expected. I'm sure Cain wouldn't have qualified either. I don't think he or Newt have had any endgame plans. They were just in it to increase book sales and speech prices. Trump too, I'm sure (who has just changed his voter registration from Republican to Independent, something I'm sure the republican power brokers hate.) No one but Romney and Paul have any political organization to speak of. Only these four and Obama even tried to qualify in Virginia, the rest didn't even try...Bachmann, et al.

I don't remember a time in American politics when candidates were so incompetent. In 2008, Republicans faulted Obama mightily for having no "executive" experience. I guess it does show he had none. But what I always replied was that he seemed to be pretty good at running a presidential campaign, which is not that easy. They said that was nothing.

These Republican clowns are proving that maybe it isn't that easy after all. Only Romney can do it and the Right hates him. Be prepared for at least one third party candidate. Maybe we could get lucky and both Ron Paul and the Donald would run, just to push their books, TV shows, etc., helping Obama win.

In the Republican Party the dollar rules. Candidates are seriously pursuing publicity and dollars, but maybe not the presidency.

[20111224-07](#) 20:17 SteveG Re: Gingrich Fails to Get on Ballot in Virginia (reply to Pam, above)

Both failed to get the proper number of signatures required to be in the primary election. Donnie has dropped his identity as a Republican so he may be able to run a third party candidate starting May 21, 2012. Gary Johnson (former New Mexico governor) has withdrawn as a republican candidate and filed as a Libertarian candidate for president – plays a wicked piano. And the round robin circus continues.

[20111225-01](#) 17:09 SteveG "A Conservative Christmas Carol of Scrooge, Marley, Gingrich & Romney"

<http://www.nationofchange.org/conservative-christmas-carol-scrooge-marley-gingrich-and-romney-1324825478>

[20111225-02](#) 21:13 SteveG "Christmas Is No Time to Talk About War & Peace"

<http://www.truth-out.org/christmas-no-time-talk-about-war-and-peace/1324398991>

<a href="#">20111226-01</a>	10:52	Art	Re: "Christmas Is No Time to Talk About War & Peace" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Good stuff. Thanks, Steve, and Merry Christmas to all.

<a href="#">20111226-02</a>	14:30	Dennis	"Goodbye 'Shop Til You Drop' Mentality: Renegade Band of Economists Call for 'Degrowth' Economy"
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I don't suppose the article below will resonate with greedy, gluttonous Republicans, but as a supporter of Reverend Billy's Church of Stop Shopping, I say "hallelujah" to these economists. The downside I see to degrowth is the question of having enough productive jobs for everyone who wants one. Since socialist redistribution of wealth has proven to not be a particularly viable answer, I think some thinking outside the box will be necessary.

"Goodbye 'Shop Til You Drop' Mentality: Renegade Band of Economists Call for 'Degrowth' Economy" by Christine MacDonald, AlterNet

December 23, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153553/>)

In this country, shopping is not just a national pastime. Consumer spending, which makes up about 70 percent of the economy, is a sort of patriotic duty -- never more so than in the last four years of economic malaise.

So news from the National Retail Federation that the country is on track for a record-breaking holiday shopping season -- \$469.1 billion in sales, up 3.8 percent from last year -- could only be a good thing, right?

But what if all roads to prosperity don't lead to the shopping mall, as most economists would have us believe? What if, in fact, all that shopping -- and the imperative to grow corporate profits quarter after quarter and continuously expand the economy -- was actually the root of many of the problems we face today?

That's the view of a renegade but increasingly influential band of economists, who say the myth of perpetual economic growth and "the iron cage of consumerism" are the chief causes of world economic dysfunction and environmental crisis -- and the biggest obstacle to our very happiness.

"Overwhelmingly, growth is seen as the solution to all problems, but growth is failing," says Herman Daly, a former World Bank economist who is also known as the father of "ecological economics," an offshoot of the same field that spawned Adam Smith three centuries ago but challenges many of the assumptions that classical economists hold dear.

While the term may seem like an oxymoron to some, ecological economics places the economy inside the larger "ecosphere" that supports all life on Earth, rather than seeing the economy and job creation in direct opposition to environmental protection. That's an idea that has gained ground in recent years as businesses have become increasingly compromised by water and raw material scarcity, extreme weather, crop failures and other problems linked to global warming and environmental degradation.

The problem, says Daly, is that the economy, once an inconsequentially small part of the natural world, has become so supersized that -- sort of like an ingrown toenail or an evasive Japanese knotweed bush -- it's now growing into the remaining ecosphere and jeopardizing our ecological life supports: things like drinkable water, fresh air and a stable climate.

Those ideas can be found influencing, among other things, the slow money movement, D.I.Y. culture, modern barter systems, car sharing, and corporate sustainability rhetoric. They are also reflected in the views of ecologists such as Lester Brown and Jeremy Rifkin, the author, pundit and adviser to the European Union, as well as entrepreneurs such as Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, which ran an advertisement this holiday season urging consumers not to buy the pictured jacket and to think twice about making any purchases they don't really need. Even Unilever, the consumer goods conglomerate, has embarked on a corporate social responsibility campaign pledging to "decouple" its growth from its ecological footprint.

Daly's work and the related "degrowth" movement have inspired books, academic conferences and documentaries. Even as such ideas struggle to gain purchase with the world's leading economists, they are blurring the lines between the economic and the environmental and acquiring new political dimensions, as well.

"You can see it in the Occupy Wall Street movement; People are finally starting to say, what has growth done for us? It's simply increased the inequality in the country," Daly says.

While some may see growing income disparity as a political issue and global warming as an environmental problem, Daly sees them both in economic terms.

"What does the economy do when it runs into limits?"

One of Daly's more prominent disciples, U.K. economist Tim Jackson, tends to agree in his report to the British government, later published in book form, titled: *Prosperity Without Growth*. Even the 2008 world financial meltdown can't be blamed simply on "isolated malpractice or simple failures of vigilance," Jackson writes, but that the market "was undone by growth itself." He goes on to suggest, "There is something odd about the modern refusal to countenance anything but growth at all costs."

And world economic growth has been nothing short of astonishing in recent decades. Jackson notes that the global economy has doubled in size in the last quarter century, at the same time "an estimated 60 percent of the world's ecosystems have been degraded."

### Signs of Crisis

Daly's steady state economy, which he first wrote about in the 1970s, isn't alone in calling attention to problems created by unchecked economic growth. Other works that waved red flags include Rachel Carson's 1962 classic, *Silent Spring*, widely credited with launching the U.S. environmental movement; and *Limits to Growth*, the Club of Rome-commissioned study by a group of MIT economists, which caused public consternation when it first appeared four decades ago.

Since then, evidence has continued to mount that humanity may be reaching the end of the road built by our Western industrial model with its assumptions that natural resources, and nature itself, are super-abundant. A few of the problems that have garnered headlines include the following:

- Critical minerals are on the decline.
- Experts worry that declining "energy quality" threatens growth, as the world's dwindling fossil fuel stores require more effort to extract.
- Many countries including the world's biggest grain producers -- the U.S., India and China -- are depleting their aquifers to keep bringing in the harvests.
- Carbon emissions are reaching a dangerous level.
- 2011 broke the record for extreme weather with 12 events costing \$1 billion or more to clean up.
- Plant and animal species are going extinct at unprecedented rates.
- World population is growing and so is hunger.
- We have already exceeded some important planetary boundaries.

"One reason growth doesn't work is we've underestimated the ecological cost of growth, and overestimated the benefits of growth," Daly says.

### New Approaches

Most people probably conjure up Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke or pundits like Mark Zandi, when thinking "economist." Daly started out similarly. He earned a PhD in economics at Vanderbilt University in the late 1960s, before setting off for Brazil, where he had landed a job in the northeast of the country preparing graduate students to follow his footsteps at U.S. universities. He says it was there that the environmental degradation he observed

first made him challenge assumptions about resource abundance and capital scarcity that underpin classical economics.

In the 1970s, Daly published books on the steady state economy, which laid out an alternative path for humanity that would substitute year-on-year growth with a system geared toward keeping the economy within the ecological boundaries of the planet.

The books were received "violently," Daly, 73, quips today. But he thrived professionally, rising to the post of senior environmental economist at the World Bank until 1994, when he decamped for a teaching post at the University of Maryland and taught for several years before retiring. At the Bank, he was "a lonely voice of dissent in an organization that frowns on unbelievers," according to a 2003 profile in *Grist* that compared economics to a religion and Daly to an "arch-heretic, a member of the high priesthood turned renegade."

Ecological economics got off the ground formally in the early 1980s, with an international professional society and an academic journal of the same name that Daly cofounded with Robert Costanza, director of the Institute for Sustainable Solutions at Portland State University.

Today, U.S., European and Australian societies have also emerged as forums for a wide range of ideas about how best to strike an ecology-economy balance. There's plenty of disagreement within the field about how best to go about getting off the growth treadmill ["Treadmill"? –SteveB]. Daly's steady state economy, which envisions practically no more growth, is perhaps the purist and most cold-turkey approach.

Some ecological economists such as William Rees and Costanza have done groundbreaking work helping to visualize the scope of the environmental-economic conundrum. Rees came up with the concept of the ecological footprint. Costanza was the lead author of a groundbreaking 1997 paper published in the journal, *Nature*, titled "The Value of the World's Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital." It tallied up the value of the planet's ecosystems in dollar terms -- between \$16 trillion and \$54 trillion a year.

Others like the UK's Tim Jackson, Canadian Peter Victor and Australian Philip Lawn, a professor at Flinders University, Australia, focus on taking the ideas pioneered by Daly and putting them into practical use -- thinking through, for instance, how to "de-grow" the economy, essentially sending it into a planned recession, without throwing large numbers of people out of work.

Daly says he's disappointed that more of the country's leading economists have not embraced his ideas but some experiments in low-growth living are underway around the world.

In South London, the mixed-income BedZED development, and the Findhorn Ecovillage in Moray, Scotland are two developments that slash the carbon emissions of residents nearly in half compared to the U.K. average. They are part of a growing "ecovillage" movement, though critics suggest the promised emissions reductions are sometimes less dramatic than advertised. In the U.S., commercial builders are starting to construct "net zero" homes aimed at middle-class buyers, such as the new neighborhood going up in Fredrick, Md.'s historic downtown that uses a combination of insulation, geothermal heating and solar panels to generate all the energy needed to run the homes.

On the city-scale, more than 1,000 U.S. cities have pledged to reduce their carbon emissions as part of U.S. Conference of Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement, and other cities around the world have taken even more aggressive measures. Malmö, Sweden, for instance, has pledged to be climate-neutral by 2020 and run the entire municipality on renewable energy by 2030.

On a national scale, Daly says only the country of Bhutan has embraced larger changes with the substitution of its Gross National Happiness index in the place of the standard Gross National Product measurement.

New ideas and shifting demographics, however, suggest the mantra of perpetual growth may not be forever after all. The International Energy Agency has released a report showing that it's possible to provide clean renewable electricity to the 1.3 billion people in the world living without it, with only "a negligible impact on energy security and climate change."

Even Lester Brown, whose thought-provoking work has earned him a reputation as a Cassandra, is upbeat about a wind-powered new economy. He's predicting a 20 percent decline in U.S. carbon emissions by 2020 from the 2007 level. In the last four years, the country's emissions have already fallen by 7 percent, a decline started by the economic recession but accelerating thanks to the phase-in of new lightbulbs and a major shift in the country away from the automobile as baby boomers retire and drive less and young people drive less.

"Young people today are not part of a car culture as my generation was. They socialize with smart phones and over the Internet," Brown says.

### Money + Happiness

Another reason to believe degrowing the economy, while not painless, may make us happier in the long run is a growing body of research comparing health and wellbeing across national borders and economic classes. As a billion poor people around the world already know and many Americans have found out as unemployment has spiked in this country in the last four years, money enough to ensure a roof over one's head, a full belly and other basic needs is very important to well-being. Beyond a certain subsistence level, however, some provocative research suggests money won't buy you love.

In their 2009 book, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, epidemiologists Richard G. Wilkinson and Kate Pickett argue that a society's overall happiness is linked to income equality. Not only do they argue that equality -- not more income or more consumption -- make us healthier and more contented, their research shows that less equal societies like the United States have higher rates of anxiety and illness, violence, teenage pregnancies, obesity, drug abuse and eroding public trust. And they tend to consume excessively, among other negative effects.

"Wilkinson's and Pickett's work is unsettling to a lot of people since it basically says 'we the rich are wrecking the planet for no further gain.' In fact, many rich countries are going backwards," says William Rees, the Canadian economist who pioneered the concept of the ecological footprint.

### Public Awakening

The latest report from the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, released December 7, shows that climate denial is on the decline again in the United States, perhaps propelled by this year's extreme weather.

While the percentage of people who understand global warming is happening has remained essentially unchanged since last May, at 63 percent, belief that human activity is fueling the warming edged up 3 points to 50 percent of those polled. Perhaps even more significantly, "A majority of Americans (57%) now disagree with the statement, 'With the economy in such bad shape, the US can't afford to reduce global warming' -- an 8 point increase in disagreement since May 2011."

Researchers say they were surprised that nearly 4 in 10 people surveyed said they had experienced the effects of global warming firsthand, perhaps signaling a shift toward viewing climate change as a current problem, not one looming off in a vague and distant future. And more than half saw a connection between global warming and growing poverty and said they are worried about running out of natural resources.

A similarly serious public mood was captured in last week's forecast of holiday season sales put out by the National Retailers Federation.

"They're still more cautious than in the past," Ellen Davis, an NRF vice president, told Bloomberg. While the story attributed the concern to continuing uncertainty over the economy and the political landscape in Washington, perhaps the country's continuing austere attitude isn't such a bad thing, though most observers don't expect it to last.

Daly says he's not optimistic about the direction of the country, despite the growing interest in degrowing the economy and moving toward greener growth. "Green growth is better than brown growth," he says, "but the key problem is that you are going to have continued growth in a finite and entropic world."

(Christine MacDonald is an environmental journalist and the author of *Green Inc., An Environmental Insider Reveals How a Good Cause Has Gone Bad* (The Lyons Press).)

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[20111226-03](#) 14:36 Pam Re: "Goodbye 'Shop Til You Drop' Mentality..." (reply to Dennis, above)

I read an article once that said there simply is not enough work in the world for every person, ie., the entire world population could be maintained by the work done by a subset of people, and they probably wouldn't have to work all that hard. It's just that everything is distributed so unevenly.

I go back and forth on this, but I am forming some new ideas and attitudes, which I will fill you in on later. On the one hand, I support a simple, reasonable life style that doesn't gobble up too many of the earth's resources. On the other, I would really like some new living room furniture. I believe wanting things is a spur to achievement. Along with silk and faceted diamonds, we get antibiotics and cell phones. Who's to say what we can live without?

[20111226-05](#) 15:18 Dennis Re: "Goodbye 'Shop Til You Drop' Mentality..." (reply to Pam, above)

The world is in a mess. There is plenty of work everywhere to be done, but many jobs aren't profitable in a market economy. And many jobs that are highly profitable aren't productive, such as speculating in derivatives, for example. I've never met many people, even those on welfare in the inner city, who didn't want a job (although the entrepreneurs there, unlike the ones on Wall Street, usually end up in prison for engaging in the most profitable occupations).

[20111226-06](#) 18:42 Dennis "President Obama Richly Deserves to Be Dumped"

"President Obama Richly Deserves to Be Dumped" by John R. MacArthur, *Harper's*

December 14, 2011, (<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article29988.htm>)

As evidence of a failed Obama presidency accumulates, criticism of his administration is mounting from liberal Democrats who have too much moral authority to be ignored.

Most prominent among these critics is veteran journalist Bill Moyers, whose October address to a Public Citizen gathering puts the lie to our barely Democratic president's populist pantomime, acted out last week in a Kansas speech decrying the plight of "innocent, hardworking Americans." In his talk, Moyers quoted an authentic Kansas populist, Mary Elizabeth Lease, who in 1890 declared, "Wall Street owns the country.... Money rules.... The [political] parties lie to us and the political speakers mislead us."

A former aide to Lyndon Johnson who knows politics from the inside, Moyers then delivered the coup de grace: "[Lease] should see us now. John Boehner calls on the bankers, holds out his cup, and offers them total obeisance from the House majority if only they fill it. Barack Obama criticizes bankers as fat cats, then invites them to dine at a pricey New York restaurant where the tasting menu runs to \$195 a person."

As it happens, Moyers's remarks anticipated the trenchant question posed in an interview by another prominent liberal, Barbara Ehrenreich, just after billionaire Michael Bloomberg and mayors of other cities cleared public spaces of Occupy Wall Street protesters: "Where in all this was Obama? Why couldn't he have picked up the phone and called the mayors of Portland and Oakland and said: 'Go easy on these people. They represent the anger and aspirations of the majority.' Would that have been so difficult?" Well, yes, particularly if your principal occupation is shaking down bankers and brokers for campaign donations on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

By now it should be obvious that the system, and the Democratic Party, run Obama, not the other way around. Under this arrangement, the president carries out his duties as pre-eminent party functionary—fundraising being at the top of his list of responsibilities—and defers on legislation, leaving it to corrupt Democratic barons such as Sen. Max Baucus (D., Mont.), devoted friend of the insurance, pharmaceutical, and banking crowd, and sworn enemy of reform.

As Ron Suskind's book "Confidence Men" confirms, there was never any question of doing things differently. Describing the then president-elect's choice of economic advisers, he notes, "Obama, after all, had selected for his top domestic officials two men [Lawrence Summers and Timothy Geithner] whose actions [in the Clinton Administration] had contributed to the very financial disaster they were hired to solve." These anti-reform appointments did not go unnoticed by party regulars, even though they were ignored by Obama groupies. "I don't understand how you could do this," Suskind quotes Sen. Byron Dorgan (D., N.D.) saying to Obama. "You've picked the wrong people!"

The "wrong people" included Rahm Emanuel, now mayor of Chicago, and his replacement as White House chief of staff, William Daley; both of these advisers were four-star generals within the Chicago Democratic machine who cut their teeth in Washington during the campaign to pass that job-killer North American Free Trade Act and who later worked for investment banks. But Obama's hypocrisy in Osawatimie, Kansas, set a new standard in deception. Among other things, his speech blamed "regulators who were supposed to warn us about the dangers of all this [the unfettered sales of bundled mortgages], but looked the other way or didn't have the authority to look at all. It was wrong. It combined the breathtaking greed of a few with irresponsibility all across the system."

What's truly breathtaking is the president's gall, his stunning contempt for political history and contemporary reality. Besides neglecting to mention Democratic complicity in the debacle of 2008, he failed to point out that derivatives trading remains largely unregulated while the Securities and Exchange Commission awaits "public comment on a detailed implementation plan" for future regulation. In other words, until the banking and brokerage lobbies have had their say with John Boehner, Max Baucus, and Secretary of the Treasury Tim Geithner. Meanwhile, the administration steadfastly opposes a restoration of the Glass-Steagall Act, the New Deal law that reduced outlandish speculation by separating commercial and investment banks. In 1999, it was Summers and Geithner, led by Bill Clinton's Treasury Secretary Robert Rubin (much admired by Obama), who persuaded Congress to repeal this crucial impediment to Wall Street recklessness.

And then there's Afghanistan. Obama should be condemned for escalating this grotesquely expensive, destructive, and self-defeating war. Thoroughly discredited by analysts on both the left and the right, the Afghan madness seems to bore liberals who once would have marched against Vietnam. I suggest they watch the brilliant new documentary "Hell and Back Again" to enhance their knowledge of the war's casualties. The pitiful story of Marine sergeant Nathan Harris ought to make them furious at our commander in chief; shouldn't it also spark an intra-party revolt?

I urge people who haven't given up on politics to examine the career of Allard Lowenstein. Lowenstein founded the Dump Johnson movement in 1967 and, against all odds, persuaded Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota to launch a Democratic primary challenge against the incumbent president over the issue of Vietnam. His example, I hope, might inspire someone to challenge another Democratic incumbent who has forfeited the trust of the people.

You may say it's too late, that Obama is impregnable. Consider Gene McCarthy's obscurity on November 30, 1967, when he announced his insurgent crusade. At the time, many Americans confused him with Senator Joe McCarthy (R., Wis.), the notorious communist hunter, and in January 1968 a Gallup poll showed him winning just 12 percent of the votes in a presidential election. But on March 12, McCarthy nearly beat Johnson in the New Hampshire primary. The opposition was galvanized, Robert Kennedy jumped into the race, LBJ announced he would not seek re-election, and American democracy was revived.

Granted, there are big differences between 1968 and 2012 — for one thing, there's no military draft to frighten the young — but the great issues are the same: an immoral war and a merciless money power. Moreover, high unemployment and the dominance of Wall Street do frighten the young. They need a tribune.

In November 1967, before he announced his candidacy, McCarthy told an audience of college students, "There is deep anxiety and alienation among a large number of people.... Someone must give these groups entrance back into the political processes. We may lose, but at least in the process of fighting within the political framework, we'll have reduced the alienation." Two days later, in remarks that would have pertained just as well to the current Occupy Wall Street movement, he said, "Party unity is not a sufficient excuse for silence" and Vietnam was "not the kind of political controversy which should be left to a children's crusade or to those not directly involved in politics. It should rather be taken up by adult political leaders and activists in America."

Are there any adults left in the Democratic Party?

<a href="#">20111226-07</a>	19:50	Art	Re: "President Obama Richly Deserves to Be Dumped" (reply to Dennis, above)
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Thanks Dennis. Interesting but doesn't convince me. I think President Obama is a moderate and personally I like that. I have a few friends on the far left who echo some of the same items in the article but, just as I dislike extremist theories from the right, I dislike them from the left also. We need, as a country, to steer a middle path that has appeal to all, if we are to get out of this tail spin we are seemingly in. To do that we will need the organizational and entrepreneurial ability of industry's leaders as well as the collective efforts of all of us

I realize you didn't necessarily endorse this article but even if you did, it brings up excellent points we all need to consider.

Thanks again. Good stuff.

<a href="#">20111227-01</a>	05:39	SteveB	Re: "President Obama Richly Deserves to Be Dumped" (reply to Dennis, above)
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Ya, I have to agree with Art on this one, though I share a world of disappointment with Mr. MacArthur.

For a good contrarian view try to see the Fared Zakaria interview with David McCullough that was on CNN this past weekend. Transcript: (<http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1112/25/fzgps.01.html>).

McCullough says he, "Admires President Obama very much."

It seems like there have been so many squandered opportunities for a President who has not seemed sufficiently engaged. Still....

<a href="#">20111227-02</a>	09:52	SteveB	"The Molotov Party"
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A little scary, but some aspects of the problem are well stated.

Hope you all had a great Christmas and are ready to PARTY for New Year's, because who knows how many more anyone has left? Celebrate life! Be there in the dark plaza when the tordos start singing their ode to the new day from their perches high in gigantic flowering trees! Watch, yet be part of, the freshness of the new day and the birth of the new year, as if you have never seen such a thing before and never will again. (And you must conduct this spiritual exercise, at least in Bolivia, after having consumed copious quantities of alcohol while dancing and singing all night long. But, don't worry, after the tordos sing and breakfast, you can go home and go to bed.)

Oh! You say you have snow and ice? Oops! Sorry...simply do your equivalent then. ^\_^

"The Molotov Party" by Frank Rich, *New York Magazine*

Published Dec 26, 2011, (<http://nymag.com/print/?/news/frank-rich/gop-2012-1/>)

(For the new GOP, conservative isn't nearly radical enough.)

Even those who loathe Karl Rove's every word may be hard-pressed to dispute his pre-Christmas summation of the Republican circus so far: "the most unpredictable, rapidly shifting, and often downright inexplicable primary race I've ever witnessed." And all this, as he adds, before a single vote has been cast. The amazing GOP race has also been indisputably entertaining, spawning a new television genre, the debate as reality show. Installment No. 12, broadcast by ABC in the prime-time ghetto of a Saturday night in early December, drew more viewers (7.6 million) than that week's episode of *The Biggest Loser*. It's escapist fun for the entire family (Hispanic and gay families excluded). Or it would be were it not for the possibility that one of the contestants could end up as president of the United States.

Rove does have one thing wrong, however. His party's primary contest, while unpredictable, is not inexplicable. It is entirely explicable. The old Republican elites simply prefer to be in denial about what the explanation is. You can't blame them. To parse this spectacle is to face the prospect that, for all the GOP's triumphal declarations that Barack Obama is doomed to a one-term presidency, the winner of the Republican nomination may not reclaim the White House after all.

In the standard analysis of the race, which the embattled GOP Establishment is eager to believe, the rapid ascent and implosion of each wacky presidential contender is seen mainly as a passing judgment on Mitt Romney, the android who just can't close the deal and improve his unyielding 25 percent average in polls of the Republican electorate. The Old Guard professes to have no worries. That steady 25 percent has been good enough to induce much of the press to portray Romney as the "presumed" (if not the "commanding") front-runner ever since Beltway handicappers like Mark Halperin of *Time* and Chris Cillizza of the *Washington Post* labeled him as such early in 2010. One day or another Romney will surely make good on that bet. He has money, organization, and the looks of a president (or perhaps an audio-animatronic facsimile of one). Eventually primary voters will exhaust all conceivable alternatives and accept that no Chris Christie will descend from the heavens as a *deus ex machina*. Then they will come home to the 25 percent leader of the pack, because that's what well-mannered Republicans always do. Add to this scenario the GOP conviction that much of the electorate shares its judgment that Obama is an abject failure—he's "an incumbent nobody likes," as Peggy Noonan framed it—and the presidency must be in the bag.

But this narrative is built on a patently illogical assumption: that a 25 percent minority is the trunk wagging the Republican elephant. What makes anyone seriously assume that the 75 percent will accommodate itself to that etiolated 25 percent rather than force the reverse? That lopsided majority of the GOP is so angry at the status quo that it has been driven to embrace, however fleetingly, some of the most manifestly unqualified, not to mention flakiest, presidential contenders in American history. The 75 percent is determined to take a walk on the wild side. This is less about rejecting Mitt—who's just too bland a figure to inspire much extreme emotion con or pro—than it is about fervently wanting something else. While the 75 percent has been splintered among the non-Romney candidates, it is largely unified in its passionate convictions. Just because Trump and Cain have folded their tents doesn't mean those convictions have fled with them, or that financial underwriters like David Koch (a major Cain enthusiast) have closed their checkbooks.

The 75 percent's passions are hot because their GOP is a party of revolution. This underlying reality has tended to be lost in the brisk play-by-play narration of the primary-season horse race. While a recent Pew poll shows a decline in support for the tea party, that quaint brand, sullied by its early association with birthers and doofuses in Colonial Williamsburg costumes, was certain to fade and become superfluous once tea-partyers colonized the Republican Party. That takeover has long since been consummated. At the annual Conservative Political Action Conference in Washington, D.C., Romney won its influential presidential straw poll three years in a row until Ron Paul ended that streak in 2010, then beat him again this year. Both times Paul's victories were dismissed by the GOP Establishment (CPAC's organizers included) as aberrations—fleeting coups staged by hustling young cadres of fringe maniacs. But Paul's triumphs were no aberration; he was a bellwether of the right's new revolution. His zeal to dismantle Washington is now mainstream for the firebrand 75 percent. These days a Republican candidate who wants to send multiple departments of the federal government to the guillotine only risks a backlash when he can't remember the condemned agencies' names. Romney, a moderate reformer who emphasizes eliminating programs, not departments, is such an outlier next to this wrecking crew that he could be in the Obama Cabinet.

The GOP is even undergoing a cultural revolution to match its ideological reboot. A party that has spent much of the past three decades pandering to the religious right remains adamantly opposed to reproductive rights for women and equal rights for gays. But now it routinely rationalizes and even embraces the same licentious sexual culture it once opposed with incessant anti-indecency crusades. Extramarital behavior that Republicans decried as an apocalyptic stain on the national moral fabric in the Clinton era is the new normal on the right. Just look at Iowa, long an epicenter of the family-values brigade, and the plight of Rick Santorum, a hard-line proselytizer for every religious-right cause and an ostentatious promoter of his own religious orthodoxy and procreative prowess. He has not had one even near-winning week in state polls in 2011 despite campaigning in all 99 counties among what would seem to be his natural constituency. The thrice-married philanderer Newt Gingrich, despite little presence in Iowa and an even smaller campaign outlay than Santorum's there, effortlessly surged to the top, however transitorily, beating his nearest competitor (Paul) by nearly a two-to-one margin among white Evangelical Christians in an early December *Times*-CBS News poll of likely →Republican caucus goers.

While the fierce anti-government absolutism of the 75 percent is the renewal of a creed that dates back to the Goldwater era, the cultural revolution is a recent phenomenon. Sarah Palin was the pioneer. Her ascent to the McCain ticket was almost immediately followed by the revelation of the out-of-wedlock pregnancy of her daughter Bristol. Enthralled with Bristol's grizzly mama, the party instantly forgave the transgression, which the younger Palin would shamelessly turn into a multi→media show-business career, replete with an ungainly stint on *Dancing With the Stars*. (Another klutz and lapsed GOP moral scold, Tom DeLay, had preceded her onto that dance floor.) The messiness of the Palins' domestic arrangements, later merchandised by the family's own reality series, was applauded, not condemned, by their fan base. "She is beautiful, well →spoken, and a sinner, but aren't we all?" was Sean Hannity's take on Bristol. Had she or her mother or perhaps even Levi Johnston had a "wardrobe malfunction" on-camera tantamount to Janet Jackson's notorious Super Bowl misadventure, chances are the 75 percent would have ridiculed any public condemnations as a humorless overreach by insufferably p.c. liberals. It's impossible to imagine the new GOP majority following the right's previous template of demanding that the Federal Communications Commission punish any offending network.

This relaxed moral flexibility has been highly visible as Trump, Cain, and Gingrich have enjoyed their star turns in the Republican field this year. Once-powerful family-values hucksters like Tony Perkins and Gary Bauer have tiptoed around candidates' marital pratfalls rather than rail against them; Hannity took the easy way out with Cain by refusing to believe his multiple accusers even as they threatened to reach a total of 999. After Cain dropped out, *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page didn't fault him for his apparent misbehavior, only for his campaign's "inept" efforts at crisis management. Gingrich's infidelities have also been largely forgiven once he figured out he could retro→fit them into a Christian redemption narrative and wrap them in the flag. (He confessed that his affairs were "partially driven by how passionately I felt about this country.") The recent *Times*-CBS News poll found that while only 8 percent of Iowa's white Evangelical Republicans cited Gingrich as the candidate who best shares their values, they still rated him as their top presidential choice.

Among those same voters, Romney (ranked fifth for president, behind Michele Bachmann) fared even worse on the values question—at 7 percent. Even allowing for the hits Romney takes with some Evangelical Christians for being a Mormon, that poor showing is astonishingly low for a candidate who is fond of boasting, especially since Newt's reemergence, that he has been married to the same woman for 42 years. What Mitt doesn't understand is that Gingrich's personal life, like the Palins', looks more like America than his does in the day of *Modern Family*. He doesn't realize that parading his own picture-perfect, intact, shrink-wrapped domestic bliss carries a whiff of condescension and privilege, perhaps even more so than Callista Gingrich's brandishing baubles from Tiffany. In a country riven by class war, the resentments are not only about money. Ann Romney's smug campaign-trail mantra—"No other success can compensate for failure in the home"—is as tone-deaf as Mitt's observation that "corporations are people."

Like Romney, almost every Republican gatekeeper was startled when Gingrich, long given up for dead, improbably staged at least a brief resurrection. The list of those who lined up against him is almost epic in its length and breadth: Rove and Noonan, of course, but also *National Review* editorialists, George Will, Charles Krauthammer, Michael Savage, Kathleen Parker, Alan Simpson, David Brooks, Joe Scarborough, Tom Coburn, and Peter King, not to mention Republican campaign hands like Alex Castellanos and Mike Murphy, and even Glenn Beck. Many of them have expressed a similar (if less histrionic) disdain for most of the other non-Romneys as they've cycled through—

Paul, Palin, Bachmann, Trump, Cain. The gulf between the party's Establishment and its troops could not be more stark.

Along with Rush Limbaugh, the most conspicuous conservatives missing from the list of Gingrich haters are Rupert Murdoch, who knows how to cover his bets, and most of his current stars. It was on The Wall Street Journal op-ed page that the Newt surge was anticipated in early November by Dorothy Rabinowitz of the paper's editorial board, in a prescient piece titled "How Gingrich Could Win." Her fellow board members, both in print and on their own Fox News program, have tended to be supportive of Newt (his \$1.6 million take from Freddie Mac aside) and contemptuous of Mitt. Further empirical evidence of this tilt could be found in the airtime Roger Ailes bestows on Republican contenders. In a December 20 Media Matters accounting of the minutes Fox devoted to each candidate since June 1, Gingrich came in second to Cain, with Romney finishing behind Bachmann, Paul, and Santorum in this unofficial Fox primary. In Mitt's most newsworthy appearance on the network, all it took was straightforward questioning about his record by the affable anchor Bret Baier to melt him down into a puddle of patrician prissiness.

That Gingrich could soar in popularity for even a nanosecond among the 75 percent and particularly its Fox core would seem, to put it mildly, counterintuitive. He is a far more extravagant flip-flopper than Romney, and, like Romney, has in the past endorsed radioactive elements of "Obamacare." He is nearly a career-long creature of Washington and its K Street gravy train. He has espoused the same (mildly) soft line on illegal immigration that was supposed to have destroyed Rick Perry. The Teflon that allowed Gingrich to deflect all these demerits—until an avalanche of attack ads threatened to bury him in Iowa—is surely not his public personality, an amalgam of preening egomania and snide superiority that borders on the transgressively hostile. And heaven knows his saving grace is not his perennially self-advertised genius as a "historian." He is a scholar only if compared with Bill O'Reilly, whose current best seller, *Killing Lincoln*, is replete with references to the Oval Office even though the Oval Office wasn't built until 1909.

No, what endears Gingrich to the 75 percent is the one big thing that matters: He is the only candidate who has been the leader of an actual Republican revolution, even if it went down in flames within a year. He walked the walk beyond even Ron Paul's dreams, shutting down the entire federal government. And he has talked the talk as well, with a grandiosity beyond the wildest imagination of anti-Obama tea-partyers waving DON'T TREAD ON ME signs. Back in his 1994–95 heyday, Gingrich positioned himself as the leader of "a rising populist majority" taking down the last defenders of "the old order." He saw his mission as to advance "the cause of freedom," and he portrayed a government shutdown as nothing less than "the heart of the revolution." In 2012, such Newtonian rhetoric from the "Contract With America" era could be dusted off and recycled with only minor updating (e.g., more anti-Obama slurs like his claim that the president exhibits "Kenyan anti-colonial behavior").

The animosity of the Republican elites only empowers Gingrich, much as it did Palin and Cain; the Old Guard is the right enemy (along with Democrats and the news media) to have. The contrast that Mitt draws between himself and Newt also plays into Gingrich's hands. "I'm not a bomb thrower, figuratively or literally," Romney is fond of saying; he instead offers "sobriety" (figuratively and literally, as it happens). That's a loser in the 75 percent marketplace, where bomb throwers, at least figurative ones, are the rage. If these are "crazy and extraordinary times," wrote Jonah Goldberg, one conservative pundit who did not shut the door on Newt, "then perhaps they call for a crazy, extraordinary—very high-risk, very high-reward—figure like Mr. Gingrich."

The leaders of the 25 percent just hope this mood will go away, after Newt presumably goes the way of all the other non-Mitts. David Brooks has written that the GOP working class (his language) will come to its senses and embrace Romney "when people actually start to think seriously." The pro-Mitt Ramesh Ponnuru of National Review asserts that his party is "increasingly resigned" to Romney as if he were the nutritious political equivalent of spinach. The sole prominent national conservative whose enthusiasm for Romney extends beyond damning him with faint praise is Dan Quayle. The only real reason, one imagines, that any of the Establishment supports Romney is that he's an incredibly useful front man. He puts a milquetoast mask of garden-variety old-school conservatism on a revolutionary party that would scare the hell out of moderates if one of its rank and file's favored non-Mitts were leading the charge. This "electability" argument explains why a former Romney skeptic like Ann Coulter reversed herself and (halfheartedly) endorsed him.

The panicked GOP Establishment, belatedly closing its ranks to hasten Romney's coronation, could well get its wish. Gingrich's capacity for self-immolation is infinite, and the only non-Romney left who could make trouble is Paul.

Either way, the 25-75 split has been a lucky break for Obama. Though the White House has made a great show of saying that it regards Romney as its toughest potential opponent, that stance has always seemed disingenuous. In a time of economic woe, it's a gift to run against a chilly venture-capital tycoon who, in Mike Huckabee's undying characterization from the 2008 GOP primary campaign, looks like "the guy who laid you off." If a candidate can attract only a quarter of his own party after essentially four years of campaigning, where is the groundswell going to come from next November? The thinness of that 25 percent is dramatized by the Real Clear Politics compilation of polls of Republican contenders and voters: Of 59 surveys taken since the Perry boomlet of August, Romney has only placed first in 20. A bomb-throwing non-Mitt, by contrast, would energize the 75 percent majority that whipped Mitt the other 39 times—particularly the activists who might otherwise be tempted to sit on their hands on Election Day. But fielding a radical ticket would come at the price of energizing any Democrats who also are thinking of staying home in 2012.

Given its potentially lose-lose alternatives, some GOP elites are still hoping for a last-minute savior to be drafted at a brokered convention. But that's a pipe dream—if not procedurally, then substantively. Even if any of the missing candidates were to reverse course and run, it's hard to picture the 75 percent embracing them. Chris Christie is relatively moderate on guns, immigration, and climate change. Mitch Daniels has called for a "truce" on social issues. Paul Ryan's Draconian plan for a Medicare overhaul was so unpopular with voters that even many in the Republican congressional caucus had second thoughts about it. (Nor has any sitting member of the House been elected to the presidency since James Garfield in 1880.) Jeb Bush's very name is political poison—and he's a moderate on both immigration and tax hikes besides. In the end, the most powerful Obama opponent remains the same it has always been—the economy.

Whoever ends up on the GOP ticket or in the White House, the 75 percent is no sooner going to disappear than the aggrieved 99 percenters in the blue populist camp. What Republican aristocrats in denial like Karl Rove can't bring themselves to recognize is that "the most unpredictable, rapidly shifting, and often downright inexplicable primary race" they've ever seen is not just a conservative revolution but one that has them in its sights.

[20111227-03](#) 11:46 Art Re: "The Molotov Party" (reply to SteveB, above)

Good stuff. Sad to say, I think what they are really looking for is another Adolf Hitler to articulate and help channel their hate.

[20111227-06](#) 14:12 Pam Re: "The Molotov Party" (reply to Art, above)

I totally agree, though one thing puzzles me. Why would folks who are suffering because of unemployment vote for candidates that would cut their benefits? We went to a party a couple of days before Christmas with a group of people who've been gathering like this for 30 years--all connected with UNCG and frisbee friends with my husband. Of the half dozen men there (with their wives and now-grown kids) one has been unemployed for three years; one has had to relocate to Ohio, where he and his wife are both miserable; one lost his business and is now freelancing as a fishtank cleaner (also his house burned down this year), and one is a newly-fledged therapist who has about three clients so far. The wives all have jobs. Their kids have college educations and work at places like Pet Smart and Starbucks. I have grown really fond of these people, and I came home feeling pretty dejected. These guys are in their 50s. How on earth are they ever going to turn things around at this point? I don't know who they plan to vote for; I didn't have the nerve to bring up politics. Not the time or place. My guess is they all feel pretty helpless, which is just a step away from fatalistic acceptance.

[20111227-05](#) 13:54 Dennis Re: "The Molotov Party" (reply to SteveB, above)

Go to this link to read how the extreme right is attacking Ron Paul for being an extremist:

<http://www.patriotactionnetwork.com/>.

[20111227-07](#) 14:17 Pam Re: "The Molotov Party" (reply to Dennis, above)

A glimpse into the abyss.

[20111227-08](#) 15:40 Art Re: "The Molotov Party" (reply to Dennis, above)

Interesting. Lots of flash but little bang. Tried to get into all those marvelous bills passed by the house that will save the country, but all I could get was an unhappy Santa Claus. Sound demonstration of the substance of this site.

One thing fun, you can vote for your choice for a Republican candidate. I think maybe you can write in President Obama but otherwise you can vote for Huntsman. My personnel choice is still Bachman, who I believe is undergoing a bit of a metamorphosis or, maybe better said, has once again crawled out from under a rock. Get out your veils ladies, they may become mandatory.

[20111227-04](#) 11:53 SteveB From the Right: "What's That Huge Long Scar on Obama's Head & Is That Why We Can't See His Birth Certificate?"

Maybe one to try to top Dennis...

Right-wing extremism at its best (<http://www.escapetyranny.com/2011/04/03/whats-that-huge-long-scar-on-obamas-head-and-is-that-why-we-cant-see-his-birth-certificate/>)

What I love most about this article is that one of the people who wrote a comment (included below) nailed the thing, but was totally ignored. Ignorance is bliss!

"What's That Huge Long Scar on Obama's Head? And Is That Why We Can't See His Birth Certificate?" posted by Ben Hart, Escape Tyranny

April 3, 2011, (<http://www.escapetyranny.com/2011/04/03/whats-that-huge-long-scar-on-obamas-head-and-is-that-why-we-cant-see-his-birth-certificate/>)



I stumbled across these arresting photos while perusing the American Thinker. I remembered seeing them somewhere before. Every time I see them, they stop me in my tracks.

What the heck is that long scar running up the side of Barack Obama's noggin, up over his crown, then down the other side of his head?

No one in the media has asked (until recently, that is, after this article appeared on this blog).

The point is: We can't see his medical records, his school records, his college records, or his birth certificate. He's almost done with his first term, and we still know almost nothing about the background of the President of the United States.

Very strange.

Whatever happened to create that scar, it was clearly something serious.

Was it a brain operation? Has it affected his thinking? Is he really an alien from another planet, which would explain no birth certificate?

We have no proof as to where he was born, to whom, where he came from, or what his national origin is. Maybe he's one of the androids (a replicant), like in *Bladerunner*, not really human at all.

Anything's possible.

This is why we need answers — to put a stop to this kind of speculation.

Even Obama's pal, Hawaii Governor Neal Abercrombie, could not locate Obama's birth certificate after boasting that he would find it, produce it for all to see, and forever bury the birther issue. But no luck. He abandoned the quest.

Obama's political team has spent millions of dollars preventing release of his birth certificate, which now allegedly sits in a sealed vault somewhere in Hawaii.

But no one is allowed to see it. No one can find it, not even the governor of the state, after making a much-publicized and valiant try.

Now Donald Trump says he's sent a team of detectives and investigators to Hawaii to find out about Obama's origins.

I can't wait to see what Trump's team comes up with.

Obama's just one big Mystery Man, which just adds intrigue to what that huge scar on his head is all about.

What on earth is it?

This big scar (or scars) also might explain why Obama can't speak without a teleprompter and why he often gets lost, even while reading the teleprompter.

If's he's a replicant (like in *Bladerunner*) and not really human, this might have been a case of Obama's circuitry misfiring. That seems to happen a lot with Obama.

Who knows?

The question is: When will the media start inquiring into what that huge scar on his head is all about?

Well, the U.K. Daily Mail recently took me up on this challenge and asked the White House about these apparent scars and what the White House thinks of this article (yes, this one you are reading now).

The White House had "no comment" on the scars and called my thoughts on the matter "ridiculous."

I am now credited by one hostile blogger with having: "The Best Obama Conspiracy Theory Ever"

CNN's Anderson Cooper took up the matter and says it's probably just some weird way Obama's hair grows that creates these patterns that look like scars. It's possible. Is this what it looks like to you?

Glenn Beck's Blaze website also wrote about this post. It's now the most popular thread on his website.

Now this little article has gone viral. It's all over the old Soviet Bloc, Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Even something called "The Winds of Jihad" has picked this up.

And to think this post took me ten minutes to write one morning over a cup of coffee. (Well, I've added some stuff to it since then).

I'm now looking for more conspiracy theories.

If you have a good one, please send it my way. I'll give it wide circulation.

But I think the reason this post really struck a chord is that it makes valid points about Obama The Mystery Man.

He promised to be the most transparent President in history. He promised a "new era of openness"

If Obama would just release his long-form birth certificate and other records, and show us who he is, Donald Trump could move onto other subjects, and there would be no audience for silly articles like this.

<a href="#">20111227-10</a>	18:46	Art	Re: "What's That Huge Long Scar on Obama's Head..." (reply to SteveB, above)
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I'm goin' with alien. He's too smart to be from this planet.

<a href="#">20111227-11</a>	19:34	Dennis	Re: "What's That Huge Long Scar on Obama's Head..." (reply to SteveB, above)
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Obama's scar is obviously from the experimental postfrontal lobotomy performed by British colonialist surgeons on boys born in Kenya to cause them to forget that they are congenitally Muslim. Obama's birth certificate was sealed into his skull during the lobotomy which, of course, explains why he can't produce it for the media. He has tried to recollect this history by consulting with the hypnotist pictured below in a Tijuana clinic. It is unquestionably the biggest failure of many by his administration., but it is certainly not a conspiracy.

<a href="#">20111227-12</a>	19:55	SteveB	Re: "What's That Huge Long Scar on Obama's Head..." (reply to Dennis & Art, above)
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LOL! So that's where the birth certificate is! And so they (Art's aliens?) also have a little control thing in there so that in Obama's skull. Whenever he is about to take a strong stand on an issue, they give him such a jolt of extreme pain or extreme pleasure (just as deadly) that he caves and gives the Republicans, or Pelosi/Reid, or the bankers anything they want. They're probably using pain on Obama, because they usually reserve the extreme pleasure for Republicans, like Newt. Pain doesn't work with them. They like it. But they feel so guilty at the orgasmic pleasure (especially Rick Perry, Herman Cain and Michele), that they couldn't think straight if they had to. And, strangely, the extreme pleasure usually doesn't work on Democrats, who are so used to the feeling that it doesn't overload their synapses like pain does. The reason for this is that their consciences are clear. ^\_^

This one is different than last year's, but just as pertinent. Good luck!

"How to Argue with Right-Wing Relatives" by Alex Pareene, *Salon*

Dec. 25, 2011, ([http://politics.salon.com/2011/12/25/how\\_to\\_argue\\_with\\_right\\_wing\\_relatives/](http://politics.salon.com/2011/12/25/how_to_argue_with_right_wing_relatives/))

(Responding to common conservative talking points without losing your mind.)

There comes a time at most large family gatherings when a heated political argument breaks out. And by "heated political argument" what I mean is "someone just repeats something they heard on Hannity's radio show that you know to be completely untrue." You may be the lone liberal in a conservative family, or you may have one right-wing uncle in your left-wing family, but this will happen. What to do?

If you have a "smart phone," just bookmark Snopes (<http://www.snopes.com>) now. That'll take care of the really weird stuff. (Well, not really weird, but "I read that airlines don't pair Christian pilots and co-pilots in case The Rapture happens" weird.)

But a right-wing myth generally lives on forever, no matter how many times it is debunked. You are powerless to prevent its spread. All you can do is perhaps convince one person that one talk radio meme is completely bogus. But you will probably have better luck simply changing the subject. (Suggestions: Whether or not Peyton Manning will be a Colt next season, "American Horror Story," Jay-Z and Beyonce's baby.)

If you insist on answering back, here are some suggestions.

Barack Obama's illegal immigrant aunt is an illegal immigrant and so is his illegal immigrant uncle, and they must be deported.

1. The immigration status of Barack Obama's aunt Zeituni Onyango (the half-sister of Obama's father, from whom the president was estranged for much of his life) was leaked to the press just before the 2008 election. She eventually won asylum, because she is old and sick and Kenya has recently seen a rise in political violence. "Uncle Omar" is in the news because he was recently arrested for drunk driving, and it turns out he's lived here since 1963 and been in violation of a deportation order since the early 1990s. Mitt Romney accidentally said he'd deport him, but then Romney sort of walked that back, because he's Romney.

Just ask what exactly is moral or beneficial to American interests in sending an old woman who is related to the United States president to a nation where she could be a target of politically motivated violence. And whether or not an appropriate punishment for drunk driving is to be sent "back" to a foreign country that you haven't lived in in half a century. Then add that these cases have nothing to do with the president beyond involving people he is distantly related to, because the White House has never sought special treatment for either of these people. Then ask your relative if they really want these two people to go have to live under SHARIAH LAW, because why not.

That probably won't convince anyone so maybe now would be a good time to bring up your own family's ethnic heritage, unless you all happen to be American Indians.

2. Food Nazi Michelle Obama is forcing children to eat vegetables even though she herself is fat and enjoys hamburgers.

Have you ever noticed that pretty much everyone with a creepy fixation on the first lady's fitness is a fat old white guy?

3. Excessive regulation/regulatory uncertainty is killing the recovery, that is why there are no jobs!

Look, you can print out some lame chart from Ezra Klein or memorize some "statistics" about Obama not issuing any more regulations than other presidents, but those won't help, because numbers and charts lie about everything. This is basically just a stand-in for the entire incomprehensible right-wing narrative of the ongoing miserable economy. Your best bet is just to say that it's criminal that no Wall Street executives went to jail for fraud (unless your familiarly includes lots of Wall Street executives, in which case my only advice is to steal the silver on your way out).

Barack Obama disrespected the U.K. by sending it the White House bust of Winston Churchill.

Sure, the "correct" answer is that presidents change the decor when they move into the White House, but I'd just say, "Winston Churchill was a raging racist drunk a\*shole," because he was.

#### 4. Barack Obama's Christmas card is anti-Christmas.

Sarah Palin insinuated that the Obamas' Christmas card — which features wrapped presents, poinsettias, garland and bows — is part of his secret Muslim plot to destroy Christmas, because the card featured Bo the dog rather than "family, faith and freedom." I'm not sure what you say to this, actually, because at this point you're dealing with a lunatic, but if there are Christmas cards from loved ones nearby, maybe go check and see how many of them explicitly feature "family, faith and freedom."

#### 5. Solyndra!

Solyndra was a solar company that got a loan guarantee from the government and then it went bankrupt. Conservatives say this means the government shouldn't try to support things that it thinks are good ideas because the government is a lot worse at "picking winners and losers" than the private sector, which never loans money to companies that then go bankrupt. I dunno, the "scandal" here is pretty opaque. I'd recommend trying to get someone to explain, to you, what exactly happened that was so illegal or whatever. Basically, the review of this loan guarantee to this poorly managed solar company with political connections was rushed, and someone might have asked them not to lay everyone off until after the midterms, which is pretty stupid, but honestly much less stupid than spending \$4 billion on subsidies for oil and gas.

#### 6. Eric Holder must resign because of "Fast and Furious."

"Fast and Furious" was such an epically stupid and awful idea that you shouldn't bother trying to "defend" it (though if you care you could point out that there's still no evidence that Eric Holder knew about it) — you should instead congratulate your relative on finally coming to his senses regarding the ridiculous counterproductive drug war. We can finally all agree that the government should find better things to do with our tax dollars!

#### 7. The New Black Panther Party.

Tell your relatives that you have recently joined the New Black Panther Party. They will be too terrified to bring it up again!

<a href="#">20111227-13</a>	20:16	SteveBA	"Was the 2011 Economy a Miracle?"
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Maybe things aren't as bad as it seems.

"Was the 2011 Economy a Miracle?" by Brian S. Wesbury and Robert Stein, First Trust "Monday Morning Outlook"

Dec. 27, 2011, (<http://www.ftportfolios.com/Commentary/EconomicResearch/2011/12/27/was-the-2011-economy-a-miracle>)

The year (2011) started on a high note, and apparently, will end on one, too. What happened in the middle was frantic, noisy and bothersome.

A year ago, in late 2010, the bears had seemingly gone to sleep. The Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA) finished 2010 at 11,576, up 15.6% in the final four months of the year. Real GDP grew 3.1% in 2010, its fastest expansion since 2005. The unemployment rate was still high (9.4%), but private sector job growth had been positive for 10 consecutive months.

The stock market continued to roll in early 2011, with the DJIA hitting 12,810 on April 29th. Our forecast of 14,500 for the end of the year looked reachable.

And then, the wheels sort of fell off, or at least it looked like they had. Real GDP growth slowed sharply, the unemployment rate ticked higher and the stock market had a major (16%) correction. For August, both retail sales and non-farm payrolls were reported as big fat zeros.

Massive tornadoes tore up Tuscaloosa, AL and Joplin, MO. A tsunami hit Japan and a major nuclear event unfolded. Washington, DC went to war over the debt ceiling. Standard & Poor's downgraded US Treasury debt, while Europe started to fall apart financially. The Super Committee failed to reach any kind of agreement on deficit reduction. MF Global filed for bankruptcy.

The bears woke up, turned the amplifier volume up all the way to 11, and started screaming about an imminent recession. They had a lot to scream about and they had a very receptive audience.

In August, after the weak data of the summer, Nouriel Roubini said, "The macro data...will come out worse and worse, the market will start to correct again. We're going to a recession, we are at stall speed and we are running out of policy bullets." In September, Lakshman Achuthan, co-founder of ECRI said the U.S. is, "indeed tipping into a new recession. And there's nothing that policy makers can do to head it off." He has reiterated this call in recent months.

For some reason, bearish calls (about recession or depression) get a massive amount of coverage in the press – headlines, breaking news banners, and continued references in any story about economic data or markets for weeks or months after the call is made.

Instead of a 2011 recession, the economy slowed early, but then picked up speed as the year progressed. Real GDP grew just 0.3% at an annual rate in the first quarter, accelerated to 1.3% annualized growth in Q2, 1.8% in Q3, and the consensus puts Q4 real GDP growth at 3.5% to 4.0%. And remember those zeros in August? Revisions now show positive retail sales and employment growth in August. Not only did the economy avoid recession, but we remain confident that economic growth in 2012 will accelerate.

We look at the economy like a scale, with good things on one side and bad things on the other. Our models suggest that the good things outweigh the bad. This was true in 2009, 2010, 2011 and now 2012.

On the good (or growth) side, we place new technology, the Fed and a slightly better fiscal outlook.

The US is experiencing a wave of new technologies – the cloud, tablets, smart-phones among the most important. New oil and natural gas drilling techniques are also part of the mix. New technologies are increasing productivity and output despite the Super-Committee, S&P downgrades and European financial problems. The Fed is accommodative and federal spending is declining as a share of GDP. Combined, these developments all will boost growth.

On the bad side, government spending is too high, regulation is burdensome, and the Fed is accommodative.

Government spending may be falling as a share of GDP, but it is still very high. This limits job creation and holds back real GDP growth from its true potential. Excessive regulation does the same thing. And while an easy Fed boosts growth, it also creates inflation, which will become more of a problem in the years ahead.

Netting all this out, the scale is still tilted toward growth. New U.S. technologies and the productivity that they create are so powerful and positive that they are overwhelming the drag from bad government policies. Compared to forecasts of recession, it's a miracle. Look for another one in 2012.

[20111227-14](#) 20:35 SteveB Re: "Was the 2011 Economy a Miracle?" (reply to SteveBA, above)

I am keeping my fingers crossed. It seems like we're limping in the right direction, doesn't it? I really kind of like the volatility we had in the stock market, though. Gives me a chance to make more money than when it slogs along. I just don't see how we're going to generate enough jobs with housing/construction still in such doldrums, and manufacturing simply gone, in large part.

Until we can generate more jobs, any recovery will be slow indeed, don't you think?

I think history might show that a miracle did occur, not only in 2011, but during this entire period from when lame duck Bush, Obama, and the hated federal reserve kept us from the precipice. Very possible!

[20111228-01](#) 11:42 SteveB Fw: MoveOn Petition: Recall Florida Governor Rick Scott!

from MoveOn:

<http://signon.org/sign/florida-right-of-recall?source=mo&id=34247-20195165-uIe2Kax>.

[20111228-02](#) 15:22 SteveG "Police Decide Gay Teen Beaten to Death, Called 'Faggot' Not a Hate Crime"

<http://unicornbooty.com/blog/2011/08/25/police-decide-gay-teen-beaten-to-death-called-faggot-not-a-hate-crime/>

[20111228-03](#) 19:32 Art Re: "Police Decide Gay Teen Beaten to Death, Called 'Faggot' Not a Hate Crime" (reply to SteveG, above)

Always like to hear the full story but this is murder no matter what.

[20111228-04](#) 19:40 SteveG "10 Ultra-Rich Congresspeople Who 'Represent' Some of the Most Financially Screwed Districts"

<http://www.alternet.org/story/153583/>

[20111228-05](#) 23:39 SteveG Fw: Care2 Petition: Improve 'No Child Left behind'!

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/787/790/995/?z00m=20162258>

[20111229-01](#) 16:34 Jim Another Heinlein Memory

Most of you are too young to have read along as Robert Heinlein was developing and publishing his short stories that were organized around his Future History outline. They were great stories and he continued them for many years. There was a table showing key events.

Way back about 1950 he saw the trend and predicted that a radical preacher would use broadcast media to get a national fundamentalist political movement going and get himself elected president and wipe out the opposition. Heinlein wrote stories leading up to that and set in the counter revolution that eventually came after that but he never wrote "The Sound of his Wings" about the actual rise to power because the character disgusted him so much that he could not continue to think about him.

This was discussed in one of the anthologies in "Concerning Stories Never Written."

*Starship Trooper* was mentioned here earlier where the only citizens allowed to vote were veterans. But someone suggested that it was hard to join the army. This was not true. If you wanted to join they had to take you and find a way for you to serve. An example was given where a blind man signed up and they gave him jobs working with a sighted man in a wheelchair who could "see" for him. The point was that you were willing to submit to discipline and do things for the good of the country which sometimes did involve the war against the bugs.

I was reminded of this when a new post circulating now on the net pointed out that in WW 2 over 11 per cent of the population served but with current limited wars, no draft, and all volunteer armed forces only about 0.45% are serving and the rest of us have no idea what that service is like.. so that is a different 99.55%.

<a href="#">20111230-01</a>	09:25	SteveG	"Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?"
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Of all the troubles with in a state or across the country, is this problem worth legislation or is it not a problem?

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20111230/LOCAL/112300334/Singing-anthem-you-doing-right-?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|IndyStar.com>

<a href="#">20111230-02</a>	11:49	Pam	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" (reply to SteveG, above)
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This is so NOT a problem. I don't much like it when singers go all wonky with \*The Star-Spangled Banner\*, but it's a matter of taste. At the sporting events I've attended, I've noticed it's often the African-American singers who do the most embellishing. Not my style, but this is a free country. That's an expression I remember using a lot when I was a kid. Seems no one says it anymore.

<a href="#">20111230-04</a>	13:40	Art	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Well it is something the tea baggers can wrap their arms around.

<a href="#">20111230-06</a>	15:02	Bill	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" (reply to SteveG, above)
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No, it's chickensh\*t. I can understand the need for respect for performance of the national anthem, but this is low priority, in my opinion, among legislative items that need treatment.

<a href="#">20111230-07</a>	15:30	SteveG	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" (reply to Bill, above)
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Just thought it was unbelievable in this day and age to waste money and time on such legislation - certainly a ton of things that need to be done in every state. This is an example of what is going on in one state, just imagine the other 49 plus the federal government. No wonder the country is screwed up.

<a href="#">20111230-08</a>	16:30	Art	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" (reply to SteveG & Bill, above) & Important Issues
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It does bring up an interesting point however, what are the really big issues that we all should be focusing on? Once we get by this comedy of errors of the Republican nomination process we will then know who is going to face off again President Obama for the election. It would seem to me if we could get some sort of consensus as to what is really important, the question would then be, who and which party, is better focused to address these issues? We've taken a whack at this once before but here is my list:

1. **Global warming.** I know this is a bit out there and it is certainly bigger than the USA but I think it is going to overwhelm everything in the not very distant future. Even we, old as we are will see the beginnings. I believe our children will suffer the major effects and our grandchildren will struggle to survive. If we don't start taking steps now to make adjustments now, it may doom the human race. I think at the minimum it will be the equivalent of the Great Mortality X 10 or even worse. From the PETM age we know what happens when you load the atmosphere with carbon dioxide and the only difference this time is how fast it is happening.

2. **The economy.** Using the adage it is hard to remember your main task was to drain the swamp (global warming) when you are up to your ass in alligators, we have to somehow get that on track first. It is a huge issue with many moving parts but certainly addressing the federal deficit by increasing revenue (taxes), reducing meaningful expenditures (social security and Medicare), addressing the huge and growing disparity of wealth are all part of it. We also in most States need to address State deficits. Jobs, global economy etc all play a part in this issue.

3. **Education.** Personally it is what I call the stupiding (See!) of America. We are losing ground to everyone. What is wrong? Left and right get wrapped up in the wrong issues. In the Post a few days ago was an article on the racial disparity of school suspensions. To me far more important is what do we need to do to get teachers actually teaching and not playing baby sitter or school parole officer. I'll defer to the far superior experience of the teachers in this group but something is very wrong with our education system. We have good graduate schools in the hard sciences and engineering but they are filled with foreign students. Almost no native born Americans. Why? Maybe we need to adopt the German/European system and weed out the non performers early. My right wing friends tell me that white kids are real smart but the school averages are dragged down by those foreigners and other racial types. If that is so then why at a IBM sponsored computers skills challenge at the university level did only one US team even place in the top 12 among 105 contenders. China won and had another team third and Russia placed 5 teams in the top 12. Facts are facts. All of this plays into the other factors. If you're stupid, you won't be very competitive in business with the smart folks and you certainly won't be smart enough to recognize doom knocking at the door.

To me which group is better equipped to address some of the issue is clear but before I boor anyone further would be curious to know what others top issues are.

<a href="#">20111230-12</a>	17:50	SteveG	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" & Important Issues (reply to Art, above)
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I would add to the list some political points:

1. Election reform: All federal elections with same equipment and same process.
2. Repeal of Citizens United – no Super PACS.
3. No insider trading by house, senate, their staff or other federal employees.

#### 4. A united approach to renewable energy.

If we can agree on the list, then we could email the candidates with the agenda and ask our friends/contacts to do the same. Sending the list to media sources might also be an option.

[20111231-05](#)

15:32 Pam

Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" & Important Issues  
(reply to SteveG & Art, above)

These are my big three, with health care thrown in. We're seeing the effects of climate change already in more extreme weather events and the warmth-creep northward. Friends of ours from Rochester, NY, said they have only a dusting of snow this year, whereas, last year at this time they had 2 ft. Just one year, I know, but I've noticed that our winters in NC are nowhere near as cold as they used to be. Our summers are hotter too. From what I read, extinctions occur fairly rapidly once a tipping point is reached. The dinosaurs didn't just dwindle away. If elephants can ruin a habitat by eating everything in sight, then it stands to reason humans could do something similar. We're not the only destructive species, but we may be the most dangerous one. We're so good at denial, which may turn out to be our fatal flaw. Our world is changing. Either we'll figure out a way to accommodate that change or we'll vanish. As I've said before on this forum, my optimistic self believes we'll figure out a way to live in arctic temps. and shelter from vicious storms. Not everyone will make it, but enough to keep the species going. It is beyond crucial that we get a handle on our atmosphere, but the problem is so huge I have grave doubts of timely progress.

The economy will probably improve eventually. So far, throughout human history, it always has, but this recession is as crushing to humanity as the Black Death, the great ice age, or the dust bowl. Starvation and suffering are like weather; they ebb and flow and migrate from place to place. All we can address is the small picture; the big picture is beyond us. What we can do something about are the fairness of our laws, equitable distribution of material goods, our education system, and the provision of adequate health care. The one I know most about is education, so I'll say a word or two about that.

It's a wonderful thing that Americans are given so many chances to design and change their lives. You can flunk out of college and still return to succeed another day. It's much more difficult to change direction in many other advanced countries. But our democratic impulses get us in trouble sometimes. When I hear politicians say they believe every American should have a college education, I want to laugh. Any society constructs the educational system it needs. Ours was formulated in the 19th c. to acculturate immigrants and train docile factory workers. Desks bolted to the floor, enforced silence, and authoritarian teachers were all part of that enterprise, and it worked quite well. We don't need that kind of system any longer, in fact, it positively works against us, both corporately and individually.

Starting from the top, this is what we need: Our brightest students need to collaborate in small groups with teacher/mentors who challenge and inspire them. Back in the 90s, Groton Academy made a documentary about a Hispanic girl from a Bronx ghetto who went there on a scholarship. The focus was on her and her adjustment, but we learned a lot about the school and its philosophy, which could be a model. Classes were tiny. Students didn't raise their hands to speak but joined the conversation as and when they had something to add or ask. The Headmaster taught too and didn't hide in an office behind a barricade of secretaries. Idealistic teachers (many of them young) taught with passion and a concern for the moral development of their students, who were encouraged to think for themselves and take responsibility for their clubs and activities, rather than passively wait for things to come to them. I'm getting into my own thinking here, as you can probably tell. I've seen too many helicopter parents who have infantilized their kids by taking responsibility for doing things their kids should be doing for themselves. A high school senior should be able to fill out his own college applications, write his own essays, apply for his own financial aid, make out his own freshman schedule, and decide on his own major. He should be used to doing his own laundry as well, and he shouldn't call home until he's been at college for at least two weeks. Parents should cheer from the sidelines but otherwise stay mum.

Our kids are loved and succored, as they should be, but it is not a kindness to make a child weak. As soon as a kid can do something for himself, he should begin doing it. The only tiffs I had with my daughter when she was growing up involved her doing her own laundry. I thought that by 6th grade she was plenty capable. She thought

I should do it for her--like her friends' moms. I told her I wasn't her servant. Long story short, she is the most mature, wise, responsible, independent, compassionate person you could ever hope to meet. My six-year old grandson is a whiz at the computer, and even the two-year old knows how to work the DVD player. Earned competence leads to success and confidence. If we can somehow encourage independence at a young age, I believe those who are young today will save the world tomorrow. But kids don't invent themselves; adults have to be responsible too. That's the toughy.

Some of my best friends and family are more like orchestra conductors than mentors. To be blunt they interfere too much. No parent should EVER call his child's professor (lower grades are different) or pay for an education his kid obviously doesn't want or isn't ready for. (I'm talking higher education here.) I've seen lots of kids live out their parents' dreams. I believe parents should encourage their kids to follow their own dreams and not try to script their lives.

I could go on and on, but I'm sure you've had enough. :-)

<a href="#">20111230-09</a>	16:32	Bill	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" & Important Issues (reply to Pam, above)
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I would presume, if cynically, that this pol, Vaneta Becker, anticipates lots of credit from this legislation. Chances are, it'll get lost early in the legislative session. I doubt this could be enforced anyway.

<a href="#">20111230-10</a>	16:39	Art	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" & Important Issues (reply to Bill, above)
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The interesting thing is with some segments of the public she probably will get lots of credit. I find that very bothering. Saw last night that in Virginia the Republicans are trying to enforce some sort of rule/ law? that all citizens who vote in the Republican primary have to take a binding oath to vote Republican in the general election. How's them apples?

<a href="#">20111230-13</a>	18:14	Pam	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" & Important Issues (reply to Art, above)
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Jeesh!!

<a href="#">20111230-11</a>	17:40	SteveG	Re: "Singing the Anthem: Are You Doing It 'Right'?" & Important Issues (reply to Art, above)
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Might as well have them sign the "oath of no new taxes" at the same time.

<a href="#">20111230-03</a>	12:00	Pam	Interesting Statistics
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In his book *Why Some Politicians Are More Dangerous Than Others*, James Gilligan, a psychiatrist who works with violent offenders, notes that "In Republican ideology, dependence is associated with dishonor and shame. Gilligan offers a compelling model of how this ethic of shame triggers intolerable feelings of being discounted, disrespected, or "dissed" that issue in violence." (Terri Apter in the TLS) It seems that during the past 100 years, when Republican Presidents were in office (59 yrs.) there was a 20% increase in homicide and suicide. When Democratic Presidents were in office (48 yrs.) there was a 20% decrease. Just saying...

20111230-05

13:43

Pam

"Our Rallying Cry Should Be, 'We Own Wall Street and We Can Stop Corporate America's Worst Behavior.'"

"Our Rallying Cry Should Be, 'We Own Wall Street and We Can Stop Corporate America's Worst Behavior.'" by Eliot Spitzer, Slate

Dec. 21, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/economy/153535>)

As the year ends, American politics remains mired in the agenda of the right. The House is, at least momentarily, refusing to extend the payroll tax cut and unemployment benefits—two policies genuinely beneficial to the middle class. And the presidential campaign heading into the Iowa primaries is dominated by the libertarianism of Ron Paul and the astonishing, appalling ideas—eliminate child labor laws, for instance—of Newt Gingrich.

Yes, Occupy Wall Street changed the debate for a brief spell, and, yes, President Obama harkened back to the glory days of progressivism with his Kansas speech. But in general American politics has lost sight of the most important crisis of our generation: the shrinking middle class.

So let me offer some advice to Democrats and progressives seeking to capture the attention of the American people. It has long been my belief that ownership trumps regulation. What I mean by that is while laws and regulations can create boundaries to behavior, the reality, as we have seen after passing much legislation—Sarbanes-Oxley, Dodd-Frank—is that even good laws leave room for bad decision making that results in cataclysm. Even though prosecutors should have charged many more bad actors on Wall Street, much of what led to the crisis was not blatant illegality: It was horrific judgment exercised by senior executives and regulators.

More laws and different regulations might have mitigated the disaster, but the best remedy, and the step we have to focus on, is giving citizens more decision-making within the private sector. "We Own Wall Street" should be the rallying cry of the former Occupy Wall Street, come January.

We Own Wall Street is the truth. The actual ownership of major banks, manufacturers, and retail giants resides in vast repositories of capital that are owned and controlled by the public: mutual funds, public pension funds, and endowments at public institutions. If the public exercised its huge ownership capacity by influencing board member selection, compensation, and political donations, then these companies would be fundamentally altered.

How to do this? It's actually pretty easy. What's needed is a bit of leadership. The current Occupy Wall Street could enlist a few savvy and courageous state and city comptrollers. The first steps should be easy, almost nonideological, to demonstrate the power of ownership.

The leaders of the newly minted We Own Wall Street should announce the following: They are putting together a coalition that owns in excess of 5 percent of each of the major Wall Street firms that received bailout funds or loan guarantees. (They could amass this 5 percent by making common cause with union and state pension funds.)

This group could make the following two simple demands of the Wall Street firms:

First, disclose the substance of, and all records relating to, any meetings between senior officers of the company and any regulator over the past five years. On behalf of the public and shareholders, we need to understand what happened in the regulatory process and why; we need to be comfortable that the company and government officials have been forthright with the public about the nature of the discussions that led to the massive flow of public funds to the company.

Second, cease all giving of corporate funds to any entity—for-profit, not-for-profit, overtly political or not—that is involved in attempting to sway the course of legislation or regulation in Washington or any state capital. This would encompass the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as well as the Sierra Club. The idea would be to slow the cascade of money and influence flowing into politics from inside the corporations. As owners we are saying: Stop trying to alter the rules you play by. Just play by the rules and focus on building a better product.

There are many more substantive policy areas where a minority group of shareholder could alter corporate behavior for the benefit of both the company and the public, but it seems easiest to being with these steps relating to the bailouts and lobbying. The effort to reassert proper ownership need not be an argument from the left or the right. It is merely an effort to move responsibility and power back to where it belongs.

(Eliot Spitzer is the former governor of the state of New York.) [And a favorite of mine and Ron Paul's. –SteveB]

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[20111230-14](#) 23:42 SteveG Video: from *Capitalism: A Love Story*, "Flint Sit-Down Strike"

from *Capitalism: A Love Story*, "Flint Sit-Down Strike", by Michael Moore:

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8x1\\_q9wg58](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8x1_q9wg58).

[20111231-01](#) 10:20 Pam Re: Video: from *Capitalism: A Love Story*, "Flint Sit-Down Strike" (reply to SteveG, above)

I don't have to be particularly fond of a person to agree with him, as I do in this case. There is so much that needs fixing. Climate change, the economy, education, health care--in that order. More to follow. :-)

[20111230-15](#) 23:45 SteveG Fw: The Occupied Amendment Petition

<http://www.theoccupiedamendment.org/about/>

[20111230-16](#) 23:55 Dennis Dennis Cox Travel Portfolio—Best of 2010 & 2011

Happy New Year 2012!

You are invited to view: [Dennis Cox Travel Portfolio—Best of 2010 & 2011](#):

ChinaStock/WorldViews — [www.ChinaStockphotos.com](http://www.ChinaStockphotos.com)

Award Winning Travel Photography — [www.DennisCox.com](http://www.DennisCox.com)

Photo Explorer Tours — [www.PhotoExplorerTours.com](http://www.PhotoExplorerTours.com)

Official Photographer — [AllThingsCruise.com](http://AllThingsCruise.com)

[20111231-02](#) 11:21 SteveG "Is Limiting Number in Statehouse Pro-Safety or Anti-Protest?"

Not surprisingly anti-union, anti-middle class, right wing legislation moves to/continues in Indiana:

<http://www.indystar.com/article/20111231/LOCAL1805/112310319/Is-limiting-number-Statehouse-pro-safety-anti-protest-?odysey=tab|topnews|text|IndyStar.com>

[20111231-04](#) 13:38 Pam Re: "Is Limiting Number in Statehouse Pro-Safety or Anti-Protest?" (Reply to SteveG, above)

There's a lot of space outside. Protesters should occupy as much of that as they can. Visible presence is what's important. And call the media! I'm turning into a real rabble-rouser in my old age. A rabble encourager anyway.

<a href="#">20111231-03</a>	11:53	SteveG	Fw: Care2 Petition: Don't Let Congress Cut Funding for Child Survival and Maternal Health!
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<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/467/796/179/?z00m=20163998>

<a href="#">20111231-06</a>	20:29	SteveG	"The 12 Most Hopeful Trends to Build on in 2012"
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"The 12 Most Hopeful Trends to Build on in 2012" by Sarah Van Gelder, *Yes! Magazine*

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Who would have thought that some young people camped out in lower Manhattan with cardboard signs, a few sharpies, some donated pizza, and a bunch of smart phones could change so much?

The viral spread of the Occupy Movement took everyone by surprise. Last summer, politicians and the media were fixated on the debt ceiling, and everyone seemed to forget that we were in the midst of an economic meltdown—everyone except the 99 percent who were experiencing it.

Today, people ranging from Ben Bernake, chair of the Federal Reserve, to filmmaker Michael Moore are expressing sympathy for the Occupy Movement and concern for those losing homes, retirement savings, access to health care, and hope of ever finding a job.

This uprising is the biggest reason for hope in 2012. The following are 12 ways the Occupy Movement and other major trends of 2011 offer a foundation for a transformative 2012.

### 1. Americans rediscover their political self-respect.

In 2011, members of the 99 percent began camping out in New York's Zuccotti Park, launching a movement that quickly spread across the country. Students at U.C. Davis sat nonviolently through a pepper spray assault, Oaklanders shut down the city with a general strike, and Clevelanders saved a family from eviction. Occupiers opened their encampments to all and fed all who showed up, including many homeless people. Thousands moved their accounts from corporate banks to community banks and credit unions, and people everywhere created their own media with smart phones and laptops. The Occupy Movement built on the Arab Spring, occupations in Europe, and on the uprising, early in 2011, in Wisconsin, where people occupied the state capitol in an attempt to block major cuts in public workers' rights and compensation. Police crackdowns couldn't crush the surge of political self-respect experienced by millions of Americans.

After the winter weather subsides, look for the blossoming of an American Spring.

### 2. Economic myths get debunked.

Americans now understand that hard work and playing by the rules don't mean you'll get ahead. They know that Wall Street financiers are not working for their interests. Global capitalism is not lifting all boats. As this mythology crumbled, the reality became inescapable: The United States is not broke. The 1 percent have rigged the system to capture a larger and larger share of the world's wealth and power, while the middle class and poor face unemployment, soaring student debt burdens, homelessness, exclusion from the medical system, and the disappearance of retirement savings. Austerity budgets just sharpen the pain, as the safety net frays and public benefits, from schools to safe bridges, fail. The European debt crisis is front and center today, but other crises will likely follow. Just as the legitimacy of apartheid began to fall apart long before the system actually fell, today, the legitimacy of corporate power and Wall Street dominance is disintegrating.

The new-found clarity about the damage that results from a system dominated by Wall Street will further energize calls for regulation and the rule of law, and fuel the search for economic alternatives.

### 3. Divisions among people are coming down.

Middle-class college students camped out alongside homeless occupiers. People of color and white people created new ways to work together. Unions joined with occupiers. In some places, Tea Partiers and occupiers discovered common purposes. Nationwide, anti-immigrant rhetoric backfired.

Tremendous energy is released when isolated people discover one another; look for more unexpected alliances.

### 4. Alternatives are blossoming.

As it becomes clear that neither corporate CEOs nor national political leaders have solutions to today's deep crises, thousands of grassroots-led innovations are taking hold. Community land trusts, farmers markets, local currencies and time banking, micro-energy installations, shared cars and bicycles, cooperatively owned businesses are among the innovations that give people the means to live well on less and build community. And the Occupy Movement, which is often called "leaderless," is actually full of emerging leaders who are building the skills and connections to shake things up for decades to come.

This widespread leadership, coupled with the growing repertoire of grassroots innovations, sets the stage for a renaissance of creative rebuilding.

### 5. Popular pressure halted the Keystone XL Pipeline — for the moment.

Thousands of people stood up to efforts by some of the world's most powerful energy companies and convinced the Obama administration to postpone approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which would have sped the extraction and export of dirty tar sands oil. James Hansen says, "If the tar sands are thrown into the mix, it is essentially game over" for the planet. Just a year ago, few had heard of this project, much less considered risking arrest to stop it, as thousands did outside the White House in 2011.

With Congress forcing him to act within 60 days, President Obama will be under enormous pressure from both Big Oil and pipeline opponents. It will be among the key tests of his presidency.

### 6. Climate responses move forward despite federal inaction.

Throughout the United States, state and local governments are taking action where the federal government has failed. California's new climate cap-and-trade law will take effect in 2012. College students are pressing campus administrators to quit using coal-fired sources of electricity. Elsewhere, Europe is limiting climate pollution from air travel, Australia has enacted a national carbon tax, and there is a global initiative underway to recognize the rights of Mother Nature. Climate talks in Durban, South African, arrived at a conclusion that, while far short of what is needed, at least keeps the process alive.

Despite corporate-funded climate change deniers, most people know climate change is real and dangerous; expect to see many more protests, legislation, and new businesses focused on reducing carbon emissions in 2012.

### 7. There's a new focus on cleaning up elections.

The Supreme Court's "Citizens United decision," which lifted limits on corporate campaign contributions, is opposed by a large majority of Americans. This year saw a growing national movement to get money out of politics; cities from Pittsburgh to Los Angeles are passing resolutions calling for an end to corporate personhood. Constitutional amendments have been introduced. And efforts are in the works to push back

against voter suppression policies that especially discourage voting among people of color, low-income people, and students, all of whom tend to vote Democratic.

Watch for increased questioning of the legal basis of corporations, which "we the people" created, but which now facilitate lawlessness and increasing concentrations of wealth and power.

#### 8. Local government is taking action.

City and state governments are moving forward, even as Washington, D.C., remains gridlocked, even as budgets are stretched thin. Towns in Pennsylvania, New York, and elsewhere are seeking to prohibit "fracking" to extract natural gas, and while they're at it, declaring that corporations do not have the constitutional rights of people. Cities are banning plastic bags, linking up local food systems, encouraging bicycling and walking, cleaning up brown fields, and turning garbage and wasted energy into opportunity. In part because of the housing market disaster, people are less able to pick up and move.

Look for increased rootedness, whether voluntary or not, along with increased focus on local efforts to build community solutions.

#### 9. Dams are coming down.

Two dams that block passage of salmon up the Elwha River into the pristine Olympic National Park in Washington state are coming down. After decades of campaigning by Native tribes and environmentalists, the removal of the dams began in 2011.

The assumption that progress is built on "taming" and controlling nature is giving way to an understanding that human and ecological well-being are linked.

#### 10. The United States ended the combat mission in Iraq.

U.S. troops are home from Iraq at last. What remains is a U.S. embassy compound the size of the Vatican City, along with thousands of private contractors. Iraq and the region remain unstable.

Given the terrible cost in lives and treasure for what most Americans see as an unjustified war, look to greater skepticism of future U.S. invasions.

#### 11. Breakthrough for single-payer health care.

The state of Vermont took action to respond to the continuing health care crises, adopting, but not yet funding, a single-payer health care system similar to Canada's.

As soaring costs of health insurance drain the coffers of businesses and governments, other states may join Vermont at the forefront of efforts to establish a public health insurance system like Canada's.

#### 12. Gay couples can get married.

In 2011, New York state and the Suquamish Tribe in Washington state (home of the author of this piece) adopted gay marriage laws. Navy Petty Officer 2nd Class Marissa Gaeta won a raffle allowing her to be the first to kiss her partner upon return from 80 days at sea, the first such public display of gay affection since Don't Ask Don't Tell was expunged. The video and photos went viral.

2011 may be the year when opposition to gay marriage lost its power as a rallying cry for social conservatives. The tide has turned, and gay people will likely continue to win the same rights as straight people to marry.

With so much in play, 2012 will be an interesting year, even setting aside questions about "end times" and Mayan calendars. As the worldviews and institutions based on the dominance of the 1 percent are challenged, as the global

economy frays, and as we run headlong into climate change and other ecological limits, one era is giving way to another. There are too many variable to predict what direction things will take. But our best hopes can be found in the rise of broad grassroots leadership, through the Occupy Movement, the Wisconsin uprising, the climate justice movement, and others, along with local, but interlinked, efforts to build local solution everywhere. These efforts make it possible that 2012 will be a year of transformation and rebuilding — this time, with the well-being of all life front and center.

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

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