



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

JANUARY, 2012 NEWSLETTERS



Edited by Steven W. Baker for FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE
INDEX of FotM DAILY NEWSLETTERS — JANUARY, 2012

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<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
(01-12) 2012 PRIMARIES			
20120104-01	11:02	Beth	2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa
20120104-03	12:07	SteveB	Re: 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa (reply to Beth, above)
20120104-06	12:34	Beth	Re: 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa (reply to SteveB, above)
20120106-08	17:51	SteveG	Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Just Hand-Out the Prozac
20120118-00		SteveB	Why Do the Candidates Lie? by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("FACT CHECK: Distortions in Jan. 16 GOP Debate")
20120119-00		SteveB	The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("In South Carolina, Candidates & Citizens Occupy Separate Realms")
20120118-01	15:17	Pam	Re: The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)
20120120-00		SteveB	Shakespearean Drama by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
20120119-01	08:32	SteveB	"Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'"
20120119-02	11:09	Pam	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120119-03	11:32	Art	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to Pam & SteveB, above)
20120119-05	12:27	SteveG	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to all, above)
20120119-10	13:49	Dennis	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120119-12	14:25	Pam	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120120-05	19:04	SteveG	Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Pam, above, 18:17)
20120121-01	11:31	Pam	Re: Republican Primaries (reply to SteveG, above)
20120121-02	15:07	Dennis	Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Pam, above)
20120121-03	17:04	SteveG	Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Dennis, above)
20120121-04	17:16	Art	Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Pam & Dennis, above)
20120121-13	20:39	Pam	Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Art, above)
MITT ROMNEY			
20120104-00		SteveB	R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
20120104-02	11:31	Art	Re: R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter # 44)
20120104-04	12:09	SteveB	Re: R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa (reply to Art, above)
20120103-09	16:28	SteveB	"Super PACs Spend \$13 Million on Early Primaries, Romney Top Beneficiary"
20120111-12	22:28	SteveG	"Mitt Romney Tells the 99% to Stop Being Jealous & Bend Over Quiet Down" & "Romney: Any Concern For Income Inequality Is 'About Envy'"
20120112-03	13:39	Pam	"Some Additional Reflections on My Arrest at a Romney Event in Hudson, NH"
20120119-07	12:31	SteveG	"Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands"
20120119-08	12:35	Art	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120119-09	12:42	SteveG	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Art, above)
20120119-11	14:10	Dennis	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to all, above)

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20120119-13	14:26	Pam	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120119-14	14:59	Bill	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120119-15	15:24	Dennis	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Bill, above)
20120119-16	15:37	Pam	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120119-17	15:38	Bill	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to all, above)
20120119-18	15:42	Pam	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Bill, above)
20120119-19	16:13	SteveG	Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120126-00		SteveB	Romneymania! by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Romneymania Sweeps America")
20120127-03	11:52	SteveG	"Mitt Romney's Mexican Roots; His Father Was Born In Mexico, Could Choose Dual Citizenship"
20120128-02	06:00	SteveB	Mitt R0mney
RICK SANTORUM			
20120104-22	22:53	SteveG	Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong
20120104-24	23:15	Bill	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG, above) & "Santorum Surge Brings Ethics Questions"
20120104-25	23:41	SteveB	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG & Bill, above)
20120105-01	10:25	Pam	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #45)
20120106-06	14:57	SteveG	"Rick Santorum-Linked Universal Health Services Facility: Fraud, Assault & Alleged 'Exorcism'"
20120109-07	17:14	SteveG	Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Tried to Ban Weather Forecasts
20120109-12	18:58	Art	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Tried to Ban Weather Forecasts (reply to SteveG, above)
NEWT GINGRICH			
20120121-06	17:54	SteveB	"New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
20120121-07	18:06	Art	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120121-08	18:26	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120121-14	20:43	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120122-01	17:20	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Pam, above)
20120121-09	18:27	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Art & SteveG, above)
20120121-15	20:47	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120122-04	06:05	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Pam, above)
20120122-12	13:17	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120122-13	13:26	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120122-06	08:58	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120122-05	08:06	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120122-07	11:41	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120122-08	12:53	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120121-10	18:30	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to all, above)
20120122-14	13:54	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120121-11	18:37	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120121-12	19:06	Dennis	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120122-02	05:33	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120121-16	21:01	Art	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to all, above)
20120122-09	12:55	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Art, above)
20120122-03	17:38	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Art, above)
20120122-10	12:59	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120122-11	13:02	Art	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to all, above)
20120122-15	14:01	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" & Old Times (reply to Pam, above)
20120123-00		SteveB	What Hell & South Carolina Hath Wrought by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Newt's Delusions of Grandeur")
20120124-00		SteveB	In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Newt Gingrich: The Republican Dark Lord"—below)
20120124-08	23:58	Pam	Re: In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #58)
20120124-09	12:22	SteveB	Re: In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie (reply to Pam, above)
20120124-16	14:11	Mary	Re: In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #58)
20120123-01	10:16	SteveG	President Obama's Good Laugh
20120123-06	13:14	Pam	Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to SteveG, above)
20120123-08	15:17	Ben	Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to SteveG, above)
20120123-11	16:03	SteveB	Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to Ben, above)
20120123-12	16:06	Ben	Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to SteveB, above)
20120123-05	13:10	Ben	"Newt Gingrich: The Republican Dark Lord"
20120124-14	13:48	Dennis	Graphic: Newt Gingrich Anti-Campaign Poster
20120126-02	14:43	SteveB	Tax Problem Joke & Graphic: Newt & 'His Well of Sleaze' [sounds like a great name for a rock group!]
20120126-05	15:38	Dennis	Re: Tax Problem Joke (reply to SteveB, above)
20120126-09	17:18	SteveB	Re: Tax Problem Joke (reply to Dennis, above)
20120126-10	17:29	Pam	Re: Tax Problem Joke (reply to Dennis, above)
20120126-03	15:03	Ben	"Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon"

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120126-04	15:36	SteveB	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to Ben, above)
20120126-06	16:59	Ben	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120126-07	17:00	SteveB	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to Ben, above)
20120126-11	17:36	Ben	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to SteveB, above)
RON PAUL			
20120110-00		SteveB	Ron Paul by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Paul's 1,000 Points of Darkness")
RICK PERRY			
20120109-02	10:50	SteveB	"Warm South Carolina Welcome for Perry"
(02-12) 2012 ELECTIONS			
20120123-03	12:56	Art	Much Ado About Charleston
20120123-04	13:07	SteveB	Re: Much Ado About Charleston (reply to Art, above)
BARACK OBAMA			
20120103-01	08:21	GaryC	Fw: Groundhog Day
20120103-02	08:44	SteveB	Re: Groundhog Day (reply to GaryC, above)
20120106-05	14:42	Phil	Fw: Another Anti-Obama Email
20120106-04	13:56	SteveB	From the Right: "Refighting Old Fights" & "Obama's 'Abuse of Power' threatens to Shut Down Senate"
20120106-07	17:29	SteveB	"Arms Dealer Obama Will Win by Default"
20120115-20	18:06	Dennis	Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Art, above)
20120115-22	18:17	Bill	Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Art, above)
20120115-25	19:11	SteveB	Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Bill, above)
20120115-10	14:57	SteveG	Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Art, above)
20120115-15	16:12	SteveB	Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to SteveG, above)
20120115-12	15:01	Art	Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to SteveG, above)
20120123-10	15:23	Mary	Re: SteveB's fwd. of Art's "Thanks, Mr. President" Presentation (reply to SteveB) & Fw: New Fashion Rage in Police Mug Shots
20120123-13	16:17	SteveB	Re: SteveB's fwd. of Art's "Thanks, Mr. President" Presentation (reply to Mary, above)
20120130-00		SteveB	The Obameter: Tracking Obama's Campaign Promises by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
20120129-02	05:36	SteveB	Fw: From the Right: <i>The Roots of Obama's Rage</i>
20120129-05	11:25	Art	Re: From the Right: <i>The Roots of Obama's Rage</i> (reply to SteveB, above)
20120129-06	13:38	Pam	Re: From the Right: <i>The Roots of Obama's Rage</i> (reply to SteveB, above)
20120129-07	14:06	Dennis	Re: From the Right: <i>The Roots of Obama's Rage</i> (reply to SteveB, above)
(03) CONSERVATIVE MIND, THE			
20120104-07	13:55	Pam	Revolutionaries & Reactionaries

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20120104-08	14:01	SteveG	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
20120104-09	14:19	SteveB	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above) & "Republicans for Revolution"
20120104-11	15:09	Pam	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to all, above)
20120104-13	16:23	SteveB	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
20120104-15	16:42	Art	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
20120104-16	17:11	Marci	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to SteveB & Pam, above)
20120104-17	17:18	Pam	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to SteveB, above)
20120104-19	17:43	SteveB	Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
20120105-14	13:44	Dennis	Stupid Person's World Map
20120105-15	14:35	SteveB	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)
20120105-17	15:37	Ben	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)
20120105-18	17:28	Art	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)
20120105-19	17:37	Pam	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Art, above)
20120105-20	17:41	Art	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Pam, above)
20120105-21	18:46	SteveB	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Pam, above)
20120105-25	19:39	Dennis	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Pam, above)
20120105-26	20:24	SteveB	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)
20120105-27	20:35	SteveG	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)
20120105-28	22:25	Bill	Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to all, above)
20120124-04	10:54	SteveG	Graphic: Tea Party World Map
20120124-10	12:26	SteveB	Re: Graphic: Tea Party World Map (reply to SteveG, above)
20120124-15	13:49	SteveG	Graphic: Ronald Reagan World Map
20120124-17	14:51	SteveG	"Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP"
20120124-20	18:03	Pam	Re: "Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120124-21	18:34	Dale	Re: "Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" (reply to Pam, above) & Video: President Obama's Election Night Speech, Nov. 4, 2008
20120124-23	21:54	Pam	Re: "Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" (reply to Dale, above)
20120126-08	17:03	SteveG	"Low IQ & Conservative Beliefs Linked to Prejudice" & "The Secrets of the Republican Hair Helmet" [for Pam]
(04) DEMOCRATS			
20120126-12	19:32	SteveG	Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Dennis Kucinich vs. Predatory Capitalism
(05) LIBERAL MIND, THE			
20120103-03	09:00	SteveB	"Three Resolutions to Reform Washington"
20120103-04	10:09	Pam	Re: "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120103-05	11:54	Art	Re: "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" (reply to Pam & SteveB, above)
20120103-06	12:47	Ben	Re: "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120111-07	18:27	SteveG	"5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today"
20120111-08	20:14	Art	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120111-09	21:27	Pam	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120111-10	21:42	SteveG	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Pam, above)

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120111-11	21:59	SteveB	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120112-01	11:11	Phil	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #50)
20120112-06	20:51	SteveBA	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Art & SteveG, FotM Newsletter #50)
20120112-08	22:07	Art	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120112-09	22:17	SteveG	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120113-01	09:34	Pam	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveBA & SteveG, FotM Newsletter #51)
20120113-02	10:41	SteveG	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Pam, above)
20120113-03	11:03	Phil	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Pam, above)
20120113-04	11:15	DaveY	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Phil, above)
20120113-05	11:17	Pam	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Phil, above)
20120113-06	11:20	SteveG	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Phil & Pam, above)
20120113-07	11:26	Pam	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120113-09	12:15	SteveB	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to all, above)
20120123-19	22:49	Jim	Pseudo-Quote: Freud on Depression & Low Self-Esteem
20120124-05	11:00	SteveG	Graphic: America Is a Secular Nation
(06) MISC. POLITICS / CORRESPONDENCE w/ POLITICIANS			
20120114-01	00:20	Jim	"Time to Talk Politics at the Dinner Table"
20120115-18	17:14	Pam	Quote: Hywel Williams on Politicians
(07) REPUBLICANS			
20120103-00		SteveB	The Voldemort of American Politics Rules from the Shadows by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("George W. Bush, Voldemort Of American Politics, Rules From The Shadows")
20120116-02	14:50	SteveG	"Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?"
20120116-03	17:43	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120116-05	17:52	SteveG	Re: "Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?" (reply to Bill, above)
20120129-03	06:12	SteveB	"Allen West to Liberals: Get the Hell Out of the U.S."
20120129-04	11:03	Pam	Re: "Allen West to Liberals: Get the Hell Out of the U.S." (reply to SteveB, above)
20120130-01	11:47	SteveB	From the Right: Fw: GOP Establishment vs. Tea Party Conservatives
(08) STATE / LOCAL POLITICS			
20120109-01	05:35	SteveG	"Why the Capitol Clamor? Money"

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120125-03	12:27	SteveG	"Mitch Daniels: Bombast from the Past"
20120125-05	12:33	Art	Re: "Mitch Daniels: Bombast from the Past" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120125-06	12:42	SteveG	Re: "Mitch Daniels: Bombast from the Past" (reply to Art, above)
(09) THIRD PARTIES			
(10) CONSTITUTION			
20120116-01	13:35	JP	"Possible Deception Revealed in the Ratification of the 27th Amendment"
(11) CORRUPTION			
20120111-05	14:57	Pam	David Brooks Gets It Right
20120125-09	17:48	Dennis	"Demand That John Boehner Be Expelled or Resign for Keystone XL Scandal"
20120125-10	18:05	Pam	Re: "Demand That John Boehner Be Expelled or Resign for Keystone XL Scandal" (reply to Dennis, above)
(12) EDUCATION			
20120125-04	12:29	SteveG	Button: Education
(13) ELECTION REFORM			
20120105-00		SteveB	As Goes Montana, So Goes the Nation by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Citizens United Backlash: Montana Supreme Court Upholds State's Corporate Campaign Spending Ban")
20120104-21	19:55	SteveG	"Citizens United Unleashed a Monster: Why the Real Winner in the Iowa Caucuses Is the Big-Money Super PAC"
20120116-06	18:49	Dennis	"A Voters' Rights Amendment as a Focus for Dissent"
20120117-05	15:49	Pam	Re: "A Voters' Rights Amendment as a Focus for Dissent" (reply to Dennis, FotM Newsletter # 53)
20120120-03	15:58	SteveB	Video: "Amend 2012" & "Kucinich Announces Constitutional Amendment to Publicly Finance Federal Elections"
20120120-04	18:17	Pam	Re: Video: "Amend 2012" & "Kucinich Announces Constitutional Amendment..." & Republican Primaries (reply to SteveB, above)
(14) EXECUTIVE BRANCH			
(15) GUNS / INSURRECTION / CRIME			
20120105-13	13:27	Tom	"Oklahoma Woman Shoots, Kills Intruder: 911 Operators Say It's OK to Shoot"
20120109-00		SteveB	Why Not Just Throw the Rest of Us in Prison Right Now? by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Evil of Indefinite Detention and Those Wanting to De-Prioritize It")
20120113-00		SteveB	Government Needs De-Regulation: People Don't Need No Stinkin' Rights! by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Death in the Devil's Chair: Florida Man's Pepper Spray Death Raises Questions About Jail Abuse")
(16) IMMIGRATION			
(17) JUDICIAL BRANCH			

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
(18) LEGISLATIVE BRANCH			
(19) MISC. GOVERNMENT / CORRESPONDENCE w/ OFFICIALS			
20120129-09	22:20	SteveG	"Thousands of Federal Workers Owe Back Taxes"
(20) REPRODUCTION / WOMEN / LGBT			
(21) SOCIAL SECURITY / RETIREMENT			
20120111-03	13:09	GaryF	Fw: Letter to Former Sen. Alan Simpson
20120111-04	13:25	SteveB	Re: Letter to Former Sen. Alan Simpson (reply to GaryF, above)
(22) STATE / LOCAL GOVERNMENT			
20120103-10	17:29	Bill	National Anthem Quality Control Update
20120103-11	17:30	Art	Re: National Anthem Quality Control Update (reply to Bill, above)
20120107-05	23:49	Jim	Video: "Indiana Picks a Bad Time to Go to War Against Unions"
(23) TAXES			
20120108-06	22:11	SteveB	"The Top 5 Tax Myths to Watch Out for This Election Season"
20120110-08	21:54	SteveG	"Over Two-Thirds of Corporations Pay No Federal Corporate Income Tax" (But Their Owners Usually Do)
20120110-09	22:34	Art	Re: "Over Two-Thirds of Corporations Pay No Federal Corporate Income Tax" (But Their Owners Usually Do) (reply to SteveG, above)
20120112-00		SteveB	Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
20120112-07	21:42	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #50)
20120112-10	23:05	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120113-23	23:34	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #51)
20120114-03	09:53	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120114-06	11:20	Pam	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to all, above)
20120114-08	13:21	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
20120115-19	17:29	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120115-03	12:15	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
20120115-09	14:45	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120115-23	18:20	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
20120115-24	19:02	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120115-26	19:39	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120115-27	21:22	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120115-28	22:06	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
20120115-29	22:20	SteveG	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
20120115-06	13:33	Art	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB & Bill, above)
20120115-13	15:23	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Art, above)
20120115-17	16:13	Pam	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Art, above)
20120115-21	18:07	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Art, above)
20120113-08	12:08	SteveB	LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY!
20120113-10	12:20	GaryC	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)
20120113-12	13:26	SteveB	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to GaryC, above)
20120113-11	13:10	Larry	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)
20120113-13	16:16	Art	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)
20120113-14	17:48	SteveG	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)
20120114-02	08:08	Charis	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)
20120114-04	10:28	SteveB	Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to Charis, above)
20120117-01	13:54	Pam	Business Taxes
20120117-02	15:09	Bill	Re: Business Taxes (reply to Pam, above)
20120117-04	15:49	Pam	Re: Business Taxes (reply to Bill, above)
20120117-07	16:36	Bill	Re: Business Taxes (reply to Pam, above)
20120120-01	14:08	SteveB	"Tax Fairness"
20120120-02	15:06	Pam	Re: "Tax Fairness" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120124-02	10:24	SteveB	"Buffett Slams Congress for Romney's 15% Rate"
20120127-04	15:38	Dennis	Graphic: Corporate Tax Cheater Hall of Fame
(24) TRADE / INT'L RELATIONS			
(25) WAR / SECURITY			
20120123-15	18:20	SteveG	"Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down"
20120123-16	21:43	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120123-17	21:55	SteveG	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)
20120123-18	22:20	Bill	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120124-01	09:40	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG & Bill, FotM Newsletter #58)
20120124-11	12:56	Art	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)

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20120124-12	13:19	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Art, above)
20120124-13	13:41	Bill	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)
20120124-18	15:28	Art	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)
20120124-19	17:50	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Art, above)
20120125-11	18:29	Dennis	"Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon"
20120125-12	20:57	Bill	Re: "Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120125-13	22:13	SteveB	Re: "Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120127-07	19:36	Art	Fw: Honor Our Marines
(26) ART / LITERATURE / WRITING / MOVIES / MUSIC			
20120116-00		SteveB	Genius, Courage, Triumph: The Story of Brian Wilson by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Creative Struggle of Brian Wilson")
(27) BUSINESS / MONEY / ECONOMICS			
20120103-08	14:19	Dennis	Re: Supersized Debt (reply to SteveBA, FotM Newsletter #42)
20120104-18	17:27	Pam	"Our Economy Has Failed—Until We Admit That, We're Screwed"
20120108-01	12:32	SteveBA	"2012: A Year of Choices"
20120108-04	17:29	Dennis	Re: "2012: A Year of Choices" (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120108-07	23:08	SteveBA	Re: "2012: A Year of Choices" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120109-04	15:12	Dennis	"Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters"
20120109-05	16:13	SteveB	Re: "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" (reply to Dennis, above) & "Mitt Romney & the Bain Bomb"
20120109-06	17:13	Dennis	Re: "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120109-08	17:17	SteveB	Re: "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120112-02	11:47	Pam	"Killing the Competition: How the New Monopolies Are Destroying Open Markets"
20120112-05	20:14	Art	Re: "Killing the competition: How the New Monopolies Are Destroying Open Markets" (reply to pm, above)
20120114-14	15:31	SteveG	"The GOP's Efficiency Deficit"
20120115-11	14:58	Art	Graphic: Deficits & Tax Cuts Linked
20120115-14	15:57	SteveB	Re: Graphic: Deficits & Tax Cuts Linked (reply to Art, above)
20120123-14	16:40	SteveBA	Fw: "Rally Not Built on Complacency"
20120129-08	21:03	SteveG	"Why All the Robo-Signing? Shedding Light on the Shadow Banking System"
20120131-00		SteveB	The Mortgage Game—You Lose! by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Freddie Mac Bets Against American Homeowners")
(28) CLASS WAR / POVERTY / RICH & POOR			
20120103-13	20:42	Cândida	Video: Bunker Roy: "Learning from a Barefoot Movement"
20120104-05	12:20	Art	"No Longer the Land of Opportunity"
20120104-10	14:57	Dennis	"How Banks Are Using Your Money to Create the Next Crash"
20120106-00		SteveB	Who Can Be Screwed? by Steven W. Baker / SteveB

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20120105-22	18:58	Ben	Re: Who Can Be Screwed? (reply to SteveB, above)
20120105-23	19:02	Art	Re: Who Can Be Screwed? (reply to SteveB, above)
20120105-24	19:10	Pam	Re: Who Can Be Screwed? (reply to Art, above)
20120105-16	15:07	SteveB	Quote: Stephen Colbert on Serving the Poor
20120104-23	22:57	SteveG	"Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S."
20120105-02	10:30	Pam	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #45)
20120105-04	11:11	Art	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #45)
20120105-05	11:19	Pam	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to Art, FotM above)
20120105-06	11:57	SteveB	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to all, above)
20120105-07	11:58	SteveG	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to Pam, above)
20120105-08	12:08	SteveB	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)
20120105-09	12:16	SteveG	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveB, above)
20120105-10	12:25	Pam	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)
20120105-11	12:49	SteveB	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)
20120105-12	12:50	Pam	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveB, above)
20120105-29	23:59	Bill	Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)
20120111-00		Pam	Capitalism & Good Government by Pam McRae ("Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters")
20120110-04	17:07	Dennis	Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to Pam, above) & "Have the Super-Rich Seceded from the United States?"
20120110-05	18:30	Art	Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to Dennis, above)
20120110-06	19:08	SteveBA	Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to Pam & Dennis, above)
20120110-07	20:05	Dennis	Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120111-02	10:30	Pam	Re: Capitalism and Good Government (reply to Dennis, FotM Newsletter #49.)
20120116-04	17:50	SteveG	"Is This Land Made for 'You & Me'—or for the Super Rich?"
20120117-03	15:44	SteveB	"The Romney Tax Loophole" & "Free Enterprise on Trial"
20120119-04	12:21	Art	Re: "The Romney Tax Loophole" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #54)
20120124-06	11:02	SteveG	Graphic: Growth of Family Income 1947-2007
20120124-07	11:13	Pam	Re: Graphic: Growth of Family Income 1947-2007 (reply to SteveG, above)
20120127-01	11:16	SteveG	"How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism: Echoes"
20120127-02	11:48	Art	Re: "How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism: Echoes" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120127-06	19:35	Dennis	Saving Sam
20120128-03	13:50	Art	"Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns"
20120128-04	14:01	Pam	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to Art, above)
20120128-05	14:56	SteveG	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to Pam, above)
20120128-06	18:19	Art	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120129-01	01:25	SteveG	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to Art, above)
20120128-07	18:32	Art	"How Swedes and Norwegians Broke the Power of the '1 Percent'"
(29) DAILY PHOTOS / PHOTOGRAPHY			
20120104-20	19:29	Art	Photo: Dog People (Who Also Go to Heaven)
20120106-01	08:35	SteveB	Photo: Brotherhood (If Only Republicans and Democrats Could Get Along Like THIS!)
20120107-03	21:25	SteveG	Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, above)

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20120107-04	23:00	Larry	Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, above)
20120108-03	13:02	Art	Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, above)
20120109-15	21:34	PamB	Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #47)
20120111-13	23:55	Tom	Photo: Just Wrong!
20120111-14	23:59	SteveB	Re: Photo: Just Wrong! (reply to Tom, above)
20120119-22	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Montana: 'The Last Best Place' (for Jim & BrentR)
20120122-19	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Charleston, South Carolina
20120123-20	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Bolivia
20120124-24	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Bali (by FotM's Dennis!)
20120125-14	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Machu Picchu, Peru
20120126-13	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Roberto Mamani Mamani
20120129-10	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Hoosierland
20120130-06	23:59	SteveB	Photo: High, High Bolivia
(30) ENERGY / TRANSPORTATION / WATER			
20120103-12	17:30	Ben	"Big Shift for Gas-Guzzling Nation: Fuels Are Top U.S. Export; Oil Imports Still World's Highest"
20120109-09	18:01	SteveG	"Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq"
20120109-10	18:46	SteveB	Re: "Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120109-14	20:01	SteveG	Re: "Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120127-00		SteveB	Fossil Fuel Subsidies Must End by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Dirty Money")
(31) FOOD / DRINK			
20120104-12	15:22	SteveB	Fw: New Orleans Roadfood Festival
20120104-14	16:37	Ben	Re: New Orleans Roadfood Festival (reply to SteveB, above)
20120105-03	10:42	Pam	Re: New Orleans Roadfood Festival (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #45)
20120125-08	14:41	SteveG	"Drink Alcohol, Live Longer? Works for Worms"
(32) FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE			
20120102-01	13:36	Clark	New Year's Greetings
20120108-08	23:59	FotM	Friends of the Middle—Just Reminiscing
20120109-03	13:16	Pam	Reminiscences
20120120-06	21:06	Larry	Friends of the Middle
20120122-16	14:08	Pam	Re: Old Times (reply to SteveG, above)
20120122-17	15:26	SteveG	Re: Old Times (reply to Pam, above)
20120122-18	15:57	Pam	Re: Old Times (reply to SteveG, above)
20120125-00		SteveB	We ARE Making a Difference! by Steven W. Baker / SteveB (Fw: MoveOn Action: Contribute to Keep Pushing to Investigate Wall St.!)
20120125-01	08:48	SteveB	FotM Newsletter
20120125-02	10:51	Marci	Re: FotM Newsletter (reply to SteveB, above)
(33) FUN / DIVERSION			
20120110-02	13:12	GaryF	Cartoon: Internet
20120110-03	15:24	Phil	Graphic: Give a Sh*t vs. Age
20120111-01	09:55	Pam	Re: Graphic: Giva-a-Sh*t vs. Age (reply to Phil, FotM Newsletter #49)

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(34) HEALTH CARE / HEALTH / MEDICINE			
20120101-01	09:17	SteveG	Video: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents"
20120101-02	14:09	Pam	Re: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120109-16	22:05	Paula	Quote: Donald Trump on Obamacare
20120109-17	22:35	SteveB	Re: Quote: Donald Trump on Obamacare (reply to Paula, above) & "Donald Trump: We Need a Health Care System Like What Canada Has"
20120128-01	00:54	SteveG	"State Trends in Premiums and Deductibles, 2003–2010: The Need for Action to Address Rising Costs"
(35) HISTORY			
(36) JOBS / LABOR			
20120117-06	16:12	SteveG	Jails, Jobs & the Cost of Living
(37) LIFE / PHILOSOPHY / SPIRITUALITY			
20120116-08	23:40	Larry	'Can We Then Add That Bit of Essence...'
20120116-09	23:49	SteveB	Re: 'Can We Then Add That Bit of Essence...' (reply to Larry, above)
20120108-05	18:20	Dennis	Flowchart: Choosing Your Religion
20120113-15	19:10	SteveG	Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)?
20120113-18	20:20	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)
20120113-17	20:10	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)
20120113-16	19:19	Dennis	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)
20120113-19	20:21	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Dennis, above)
20120113-21	20:28	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Dennis, above)
20120113-20	20:27	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Art, above)
20120113-22	22:35	SteveG	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to all, above)
20120114-05	11:17	Bill	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)
20120114-07	11:52	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Bill, above)
20120114-09	14:05	Bill	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Indianapolis Superbowl (reply to Pam, above)
20120114-11	14:39	Dennis	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Indianapolis Superbowl (reply to Bill, above)
20120114-10	14:33	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Bill, above)
20120114-12	14:42	Dennis	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Art, above)
20120114-13	14:45	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Dennis, above)
20120114-15	17:59	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics & P.G. Wodehouse (reply to all, above)

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20120114-19	21:09	Bill	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics & P.G. Wodehouse (reply to Pam, above)
20120115-01	09:48	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics & P.G. Wodehouse (reply to Bill, above)
20120114-18	20:15	SteveG	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above, 17:59)
20120115-02	10:04	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to SteveG, above)
20120114-16	18:40	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above)
20120114-17	18:54	Clark	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Art, above)
20120115-04	12:30	SteveG	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above)
20120115-16	17:56	Bill	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to SteveG, above)
20120115-05	13:18	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to SteveG, above)
20120115-07	13:35	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above)
20120115-08	14:38	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & President Obama's Economy (reply to all, above)
(38) MEDIA / NEWS MEDIA			
20120117-00		SteveB	Rupert Murdoch Craves Big Government Intervention: \$\$\$ by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Rupert Murdoch Attacks Google, Obama in Pro-SOPA Twitter Rant")
20120118-04	19:30	Dennis	"Blackout Wednesday: The Time Has Come"
20120119-20	19:00	SteveG	"The Day the Internet Roared"
20120126-01	13:43	SteveG	MSNBC's "Rachel Maddow Show"
20120127-05	18:39	StevG	Fw: Media Mis-Coverage of Keystone XL Pipeline
(39) MISC. REALITY			
(40) OCCUPY WALL ST.			
20120130-04	18:08	Dennis	Boomers Failed
(41) PETITIONS / ACTIONS / CAUSES			
20120103-07	14:00	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Permit Medicinal Use of Cannabis in Florida!
20120106-09	19:05	SteveG	SteveG Action: Sign-up for Huffington Post's 'Daily Briefs' Emails!
20120109-13	19:50	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Order a Full Federal Banking Investigation!
20120110-01	13:06	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: End Indefinite Detention and Close Guantanamo!
20120111-06	15:35	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Start Your Own Petition!
20120112-04	16:40	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama to Investigate the Banks!
20120118-02	17:15	SteveG	Fw: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back <i>Citizens United!</i>
20120118-03	17:35	Pam	Re: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back <i>Citizens United!</i> (reply to SteveG, above)
20120119-06	12:29	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama: It's Time to Lead on Climate!

DATE-ID	TIME	FROM	SUBJECT/TITLE
20120119-21	20:29	SteveG	Fw: DCCC Petition: Tell Mitt Romney to Release His Full Tax Forms!
20120121-05	17:32	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Investigate Wall St. Bank Fraud
20120123-02	12:53	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Investigate the Big Banks!
20120123-07	13:15	Pam	Re: MoveOn Petition: Investigate the Big Banks! (reply to SteveG, above)
20120123-09	15:19	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Run for Mayor of Your Town or City!
20120124-03	10:33	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Call President Obama to Investigate Wall St.!
20120124-22	20:12	SteveBA	Re: MoveOn Action: Call President Obama to Investigate Wall St.! (reply to SteveB, above)
20120125-07	13:55	SteveG	Fw: Care2/Sierra Club Petition: Tell Southern Country Coal to Stop the Hypocrisy!
20120130-02	13:50	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Stop Florida Governor's Privatization Scheme!
20120130-03	16:03	SteveB	"ALEC's Latest Actions"
20120130-05	21:24	SteveG	Fw: Obama-Biden Petition: Ban Congressional Insider Trading!
(42) SCIENCE / TECHNOLOGY			
20120106-02	09:30	SteveB	Ancient Andean Astronauts
20120106-03	13:01	Ben	Re: Ancient Andean Astronauts (reply to SteveB, above)
20120109-11	18:56	Art	Video: Auld Lang Syne
20120109-18	23:05	SteveB	Re: Video: Auld Lang Syne (reply to Art, above)
(43) U.S.A., THE			
(44) WORLD, THE			
20120107-02	20:26	Dennis	Video: "Meet the Canada Party"
20120108-02	12:45	Art	Re: Video: "Meet the Canada Party" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120116-07	23:33	SteveG	"U.S. Ranks 27th in Social Justice"



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #43 — JAN. 3, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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INDEX: Click here.

The Voldemort of American Politics Rules from the Shadows

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 3, 2012)

Please visit our new and growing website and blog: <http://www.friendsOfTheMiddle.org> (or click on the logo/header, above).

The Iowa Caucuses should be pretty interesting. Today, I'm not sure if my predictions from yesterday should be thrown out the window, or not. What's with this Santorum rocket and his Google problem? ^_^

The good news is that at least one of these clowns will probably not be with us past, say, tomorrow. Many more will be fading fast, based on their organizing and financing efforts. Which candidate will we be left with? Mitt Romney, though no one seems to want him very badly? Ron Paul, from way out in Right field? Rick Santorum, a man extremely interested in what you do in your bedroom?

Good luck to all, and may the best "man" win!

Meanwhile, the man who's policies Obama follows as if they were written by God on those famous golden plates of the Mormons, George W. Bush, watches from afar...way, way afar. It seems that no one, no Republican, especially, dares to mention him by name. Surely the mark of an extremely successful Presidency! :-)

"George W. Bush, Voldemort Of American Politics, Rules From The Shadows" by Howard Fineman, Huffington Post

Jan. 2, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/howard-fineman/george-w-bush-election-2012_b_1179655.html?ref=politics)

(DES MOINES, Iowa) The 2012 campaign officially begins on Tuesday with voting in the Iowa caucuses. But here in the Iowa Republican campaign, the most influential political figure of the last decade -- the one whose policies everyone should be talking about -- is invisible.

To Democrats, George W. Bush is the Voldemort of American politics, an evil force. But even to Republicans, he is He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named, someone you dare not talk about as you try to win the votes of conservative Iowans.

In events involving five of the six GOP caucus contenders here in recent days, this reporter did not hear the former president's name mentioned once. A survey of other Huffington Post reporters yielded similar results.

The reasons for Bush's invisibility among Iowa Republican/conservatives are obvious. He was unpopular when he left office. With the help of Democrats, he piled up more federal debt than any of his predecessors. He vastly expanded the role and reach of government. He launched but did not "win" in the War on Terror. He and the Fed bailed out the big banks and financial firms on Wall Street and Europe.

Still, it is precisely these and other policies which still frame the outlines of American public life nearly three years after Bush's helicopter that made one last circle over the Capitol on the day Barack Obama was sworn in.

And yet, with the important and perhaps even crucial exception of Ron Paul, Republican candidates do not generally dispute the Bush framework, even though they don't mention his name. They want more tax cuts, not fewer; they advocate for a more aggressive policy toward Jihadists; like Bush, they shy away from specifically stating how they would balance the budget; and except for Paul and asterisk candidate Jon Huntsman, they do not specify, in any meaningful detail, how they would regulate Wall Street and the Fed in fundamentally different ways. The candidates say they are for "smaller government," but do not propose to do away with most of the government functions Bush expanded during his eight years in office.

President Obama -- hemmed in by Republicans and his own amendable nature and desire to win moderate votes in swing states -- has done little to change the basic framework of domestic and foreign policy laid down, brick by brick, in the Bush Years.

As a result, three years after he left office, Bush remains one of the most consequential, though paradoxically invisible, figures in modern American history.

Fiscal policy in the U.S. remains shaped and confined by the massive and successful tax cuts that the former president and his GOP allies put in place in 2001 and 2003. Obama has tried -- ineptly, half-heartedly or both -- to change them, to no avail. He has been unable even to tweak the top rate for millionaires and billionaires. Those tax cuts have and will cost the Treasury as estimated \$2.6 trillion in over a decade.

There will be another fight over tax policy in February. The outcome is at best uncertain.

In the name of fighting recession, Obama has expanded on Bush's own penchant for borrowing money. Bush piled up \$5 trillion in two terms, from 2001 to 2009; the current president has amassed that much in half the time.

The Federal Reserve, meanwhile, has pursued essentially the same easy-money strategy that it pursued in the Bush Years -- and that help lead to the housing bubble that nearly brought down the world economy.

Bush's administration set the essential and still prevalent strategy for fighting global economic catastrophe: shore up the biggest global banks and financial institutions with American loans and credit guarantees. Indeed Bush's Treasury Secretary in 2008, Hank Paulson -- he of the original TARP crusade -- continues to get favorable reviews, even from Hollywood, which portrayed him in a positive light in a recent movie. Timothy Geithner, Paulson's ally and protégè, remains Obama's trusted all-but-indispensable Treasury Secretary.

The president has tweaked but not abandoned -- and in some ways even amplified -- Bush's two biggest domestic policy initiatives: the No Child Left Behind education plan, and the Prescription Drug Benefit.

In foreign policy, President Obama promised a radical departure from the Bush theory of the world and the idea of a "Global War on Terror." But even though Obama delivered on his promise to wind down American military involvement in Iraq, the U.S. commitment to "taking the war to the enemy" has, if anything, grown.

Drones are replacing massive troop commitments, but drones require their own forward infrastructure, which means deeper military involvement throughout the Persian Gulf, Middle East and South Asia.

And though for the first two years of his administration the president and his aides studiously avoiding using the word "war" to describe their effort to defeat al Qaeda and other Jihadists, Obama uses the theory of war -- and the laws of war -- to justify continuing or even expanding Bush's policies of detention, assassination and surveillance.

Last week the president signed a Defense Authorization Bill that allows the U.S. military to capture and detain Al Qaeda or other suspected "terrorists" on American soil, a stark move away from the long American tradition -- born of the excesses of the British colonial era -- or barring domestic military activity.

The president also has approved a doctrine allowing for the killing of American citizens by the government without hearing of trial -- at least in the case of Americans living overseas who have become traitorous "enemy combatants."

Even the style and tactics of the 2012 campaign are defined by Bush and his crowd. His campaign was the first to enjoy the benefits of attack ads aired by anonymously-funded independent groups -- and made "swiftboating" synonymous with campaigning.

Now, in Iowa, there is a whole flotilla of outside groups.

So the Bush presidency may be gone, but Bush still reigns, even if we can't see him in Iowa.

[20120101-01](#) 09:17 SteveG Video: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents"

Indiana mentally ill kicked out into the street...

Back in the 50's this same location was a TB sanatorium. Then it was used as a facility to provide day services for developmentally disabled, changed to a nursing home and then to a private facility for the mentally ill contracting with the state. It is located about 6-8 miles east of Rockville in the middle of nowhere.

I find it amazing the government continues to screw over the most vulnerable. I am certain this is just one example and is replicated in some fashion in a multitude of states.

"'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents" by Heather Gillers, *Indianapolis Star*

Dec. 31, 2011, (<http://www.indystar.com/article/20120101/LOCAL/201010339/State-s-clearing-homes-mentally-ill-disaster-vulnerable-residents?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|IndyStar.com>)

(*Star* investigation finds troubling consequences of state's move to clear out more than 200 people from homes for mentally ill.)

[20120101-02](#) 14:09 Pam Re: "'Disaster' for Vulnerable Residents" (reply to SteveG, above)

This is horrible. More and more often I hear troubling things about Indiana's government. The action described here is reprehensible. My niece and her husband and two sons live in Indianapolis. The older son, who must be in his mid- to late-twenties by now, has a form of asperger's and is mildly retarded. He can be violent, and it was crucial to get him out of the home when he got too big to control. My niece's husband eventually had to quit his job in order to devote full time to trying to find adequate care for his son. It's been a mess. You're right, Steve. We're just beginning to see the effects of all these draconian budget cuts. As my case-manager daughter says, all the progress made in the last 20 years is about to be wiped out in NC, and it's back to square one. I say, let's take stuff from the millionaires until it hurts them as badly as the budget cuts hurt the mentally disabled. What wouldn't be fair about that?

[20120102-01](#) 13:36 Clark New Year's Greetings

Happy New Year, old Greencastle friends! Please don't overlook the very fine New Year's Greeting and Jingle PDF below, which you can view or download -- suitable for framing or birdcage lining!

For those of you who have never met my family, Catharine is my wife, Grael my son, Lia my daughter...where the cats and girlfriends/boyfriends came from, I have no idea, but they're at least somewhat decorative.

Wishing you all the best in the New Year.

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

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Welcome to all our new members who may be here for the first time. We want to hear from YOU! To submit your comment, you can use the form on our website or blog, or reply to this email with your two cents worth. Be sure to sign with your desired user name.

Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #44 — JAN. 4, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 4, 2012)

I'm worried about the Grand Old Party of the Republic.

Maybe I shouldn't be. In many ways, I suppose, they've become the radical enemy to many of us centrists, yet a healthy Republican party is essential. There must always be a "loyal opposition" if democracy is to work. Granted, the key word, "loyal", has largely been forgotten within the GOP, but remember, this is not a healthy political party at this moment in history. That couldn't have been demonstrated more clearly than it was in Iowa last night.

The Republican party is so badly splintered, that I don't see how it can be glued back together by November.

The titanic PAC money flood let loose by the Supreme Court has proven to be dedicated to one very effective, ruthless purpose—the destruction of any candidate designated by somebody. In any particular instance, it's impossible to know if that "somebody" is one of the candidates themselves, making a phone call to a backroom crony associated with the PAC, the PAC itself, the Koch brothers, George Soros, Grover Norquist, or some giant multinational corporate "person".

Here's just one example of the poison and vitriol from Iowa: in early December, Newt Gingrich had shot to the top of the polls both nationally and in Iowa. The PAC's supporting the other candidates, most notably R0mney*, Paul, and Perry, flooded the airwaves with, let us just say, very harsh truth. Gingrich finished with just 13% when all was said and done last night. Some of his own actions and inactions are undoubtedly responsible for part of his dramatic fall, but millions of dollars earmarked for character assassination can be almost impossible to compete against.

The top three finishers—Santorum, R0mney*, and Paul—all represent one and only one of the major republican constituencies: Conservative Christians, Moderates, and half Radical Right. The other half of the Radical Right, the ones who think Ron Paul is not enough of a militarist, apparently lost their potential candidates when Perry and Bachmann crashed and burned. If Michele is the only person on the planet who doesn't realize that yet...well, there's a good character portrait.

None of this bodes well for the GOP. None, as well, seems promising for our America.

As Pam said in a post just yesterday (see below), "There is so much meanness in politics today."

The problem now is that R0Mney* doesn't seem to be able to ever get more than 25% of the Republican party to "like" him and want to 'date' him. Maybe it's the Mormon thing, maybe it's the mini-Obamacare, maybe it's the robot-like demeanor, maybe it's the flip-flopping. The Tea Party and Ron Paul supporters will never back Romney if

they have any choice at all. I fear more and more that choice will be a GOP-destroying third party run by...someone. Obama will win by a landslide, just as in 2008, especially if the economy keeps improving the way it has been.

It all sounds almost too good to be true...but the political landscape of America will be forever altered, perhaps not for the better.

Final Iowa Caucuses Results

Santorum: 30,007 (24.5%)

R0mney*: 30,015 (24.5%)

Paul: 26,219 (21.5%)

Gingrich: 15,639+ (13%)

Perry: 12,127+ (10%)

Bachmann: 5,926+ (5%)

Huntsman: Tears.

*In case you're wondering...the weird letter in "R0mney" is a "zero". Get it?

20120103-13 20:42 Cândia Video: Bunker Roy: "Learning from a Barefoot Movement"

É espantoso! Uma universidade onde não importam curriculums, papeis nem vaidades.

Onde se aprende realmente a fazer as coisas importantes ao dia-a-dia e à auto-sustentabilidade das comunidades.

Onde as pessoas são valorizadas por aquilo que são e onde ganham auto confiança.

Inspirador: http://www.ted.com/talks/bunker_roy.html. (Bunker Roy: "Learning from a Barefoot Movement")

[What marvelous, creative, simple innovation! Maybe just what our schools need, especially our colleges and universities. We can solve our problems if we just have the will and the creativity. Maybe this is the future of education? I guess, during the great decline, the Roman Empire also decided their problems were unsolvable. Note: Cândia, an artist friend who lives in Portugal, is fluent in English, but this email is in Portuguese. The TED talk is in English. –SteveB]

20120103-01 08:21 GaryC Fw: Groundhog Day

[Source of original email unknown. –SteveB]

Somehow the truth hurts, and this may be it.

In the coming New Year, 2012, both Groundhog Day and the State of the Union address will occur on the same day.

This is an ironic juxtaposition of events.

One involves a meaningless ritual in which we look to an insignificant creature of little intelligence for prognostication.

The other involves a groundhog.

20120103-02 08:44 SteveB Re: Groundhog Day (reply to GaryC, above)

I don't think this is going to be "the truth" that "hurts".

Believe it or not, this is another bogus Republican email! The two events will not occur on the same day this year, and it would be unlikely for them to ever happen the same day. Normally the State of the Union is in January (Jan. 24, this year), and Groundhog Day is Feb. 2 (at least for now).

For instance: They used to tell this one about (oh my!) President Bush:

from <http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/jokes/bljokebushgroundhog.htm>

Bush and Groundhog Day

This year, both Groundhog Day and the State of the Union address occur on the same day. As Air America Radio pointed out, "It is an ironic juxtaposition of events: one involves a meaningless ritual in which we look to a creature of little intelligence for prognostication while the other involves a groundhog."

But, hey, it's just a joke, right?

20120103-03 09:00 SteveB "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington"

Largely what we've been saying, except that we never had the gullibility to think the last two could ever be possible. The first one, though equally impossible, simply must be accomplished or we sink inexorably into despotism and anarchy.

"Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" by Julian Zelizer , CNN

Jan. 2, 2012, (<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/02/opinion/zelizer-washington-resolutions/index.html>)

(Julian Zelizer says the new year should prompt rethinking by America's political leaders. Editor's note: Julian Zelizer is a professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University. He is the author of *Jimmy Carter* (Times Books) and author of the forthcoming book *Governing America* (Princeton University Press).)

At a time when many of us are making promises to change our behavior in the new year, politicians in Washington should make some resolutions of their own.

In the past year, public disgust with the politics has intensified. The approval ratings of Congress are in the tank. The ratings of the president are much better but still low.

Americans don't trust politicians, they don't trust government, and they have no confidence in the system. In their eyes, the nation's capital reflects the worst of the nation, not the best.

What are some resolutions to which both parties could commit?

The first would be to do something about the power of money in politics.

Without campaign finance reform, the system won't change.

In the past two months, there have been two grassroots movements, one on the left and one on the right, that have rallied supporters around trenchant criticism of politicians for not listening to voters but instead paying heed to the interest groups who finance their campaigns. The Occupy Wall Street Movement talked about the power of financial elites while the Tea Party looked more at liberal interest groups such as organized labor.

Democrats and Republicans paid lip service to these complaints. Each promised to be more responsive to this frustration. But realistically, unless the parties embrace some kind of campaign reform, these problems won't go away. The reason that politicians are under the influence of the lobbyists on K Street, rather than the interests of Main Street, is clear. Politicians need money to run their campaigns.

The situation has grown worse in the past year since the Supreme Court undercut existing regulations on corporate donations. Presidential candidates have abandoned the Watergate-era public finance system for campaigns. Independent organizations, such as Karl Rove's operation, American Crossroads, have developed sophisticated mechanisms for raising and distributing huge amounts of cash for advertising on behalf of candidates -- or against them.

One of the biggest forces in this campaign thus far have been the Super PACs, which are pouring out millions on political advertisements and taking advantage of loopholes in the federal election laws to protect the identity of their donors.

The second resolution must be for the parties to do a better job in the campaigns.

This is an election year when the nation faces huge and difficult issues. The inability of private markets or the government to stimulate muscular economic growth and significantly reduce unemployment has left millions of Americans desperate.

For some, the rising deficit is a huge challenge that must be handled immediately, with the twin causes being the massive tax cuts enacted under President George W. Bush and the growing fiscal cost of Medicare and Social Security. Overseas, the changes that have swept the Middle East have opened up huge questions about U.S. policy in the region.

Unfortunately, the presidential campaign, officially starting this week with the Iowa caucuses, will likely be a race to the bottom. The candidates will probably focus on character and personality without talking about policy other than in the shallowest of terms. Candidates will try to pin on each other the label of flip-flopper or dwell on the personal lives of their opponents, rather than pressing each other to address the huge problems that we face. The parties would serve the nation by truly engaging the opposition over the choices we face in coming years.

The final resolution should be for an agreement to limit the use of obstructionist tactics.

Over the past year, the Republican Party has dramatically escalated the procedural battles to new levels.

In addition to the ongoing filibuster threat that grinds the Senate to a halt, forcing it to find a supermajority of 60 votes to pass a bill, and a refusal to act on many presidential appointments, we have seen the budget process turn into a **national joke** with routine decisions becoming subject to threat, delay and constant temporary solutions. The process seems unworkable.

Diminishing the use of procedural obstructionism does not mean some kind of nostalgia for a bygone bipartisanship. Members of both parties can stick to the party line while restoring some kind of balance to the legislative process so that members can actually vote their will. The political system in this country is delicate. While the framework has endured, it is possible to tie the legislative process into such knots that it can't do its job.

To be sure, there is little chance that politicians will adhere to these promises. Like most people who join the gyms or promise to act better, the chances of following through are minimal. It is likely that Washington will only become a tougher place in years to come. But perhaps, even for a moment, the leaders of both parties should think about what they do to America when they weaken the political system upon which we all depend.

The opinions expressed in this commentary are solely those of Julian Zelizer.

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[20120103-04](#) 10:09 Pam Re: "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" (reply to SteveB, above)

This is really good. I don't see how anyone--right, left, or center--could disagree with these ideas for improving what we all know is a mess. I hate political campaigns because they're attacks on people, not honest discussion about policy. Yes, I care that Newt is a philandering jerk, but I care more that he wants to get rid of the Dept. of Education and send children to work. Actually, my understanding is that in Japanese schools even the smallest children help keep their classrooms clean and they clean up after themselves at lunch. It's not a bad idea at all to give kids responsibility; it makes them feel competent if nothing else. But the way Newt puts it--teach those sluggards the meaning of a REAL day's work, get 'em off the streets and behind a broom, we'll show those lazy b---s--is arrogant and mean. There is so much meanness in politics today. I think that's what bothers me most of all.

[20120103-05](#) 11:54 Art Re: "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" (reply to Pam & SteveB, above)

Pam, I had no idea you knew all those words.

Thanks Steve, All great stuff. Article on education really interesting. Given the season, I wonder how much Finnish Universities spend on football? I mean do schools like Auburn and Alabama even have academic departments?

[I thought the sports programs of the big universities actually turned a profit. I hope zero money ever gets transferred from education to professional sports, but that's just a hope. --SteveB]

[20120103-06](#) 12:47 Ben Re: "Three Resolutions to Reform Washington" (reply to SteveB, above)

Uh, "INTERnational joke".

[20120103-10](#) 17:29 Bill National Anthem Quality Control Update

Can't say it's an epilogue yet, but on this chilly (14 degrees F), sunny day in Indianapolis, some cold logic has hit the unfortunate legislation aimed at performances of the national anthem sponsored by state Sen. Vaneta Becker: "Drown out off-key legislation," the *Indianapolis Star* asserts on its editorial pages. "Who decides how those notes should be played?" the *Star* asks in its editorial interspersed with appropriate derision. Not known for its leftishness, the *Star* fortunately brings the hammer down squarely on this silliness. We shall see in the fullness of time, whether this legislation is a magnet for other legislative nuts.

[20120103-11](#) 17:30 Art Re: National Anthem Quality Control Update (reply to Bill, above)

Read this the other day. Please!!! Is this just silly or what?

[20120103-07](#) 14:00 SteveB Fw: MoveOn Petition: Permit Medicinal Use of Cannabis in Florida!

from MoveOn:

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=268997&id=34395-20195165-xmKz6Yx&t=2>.

[20120103-08](#) 14:19 Dennis Re: Supersized Debt (reply to SteveBA, FotM Newsletter #42)

from SteveBA:

I think it's time to rethink our whole military strategy, it seems we are always fighting the last war. The Pentagon won't reduce the bases unless they have to and super expensive air superiority plans don't do well fighting the Taliban. What wasn't said in the debate over the national debt was that we can't pay our bills unless we can borrow more money. The same old way of doing things won't work, but I doubt if the American people have the will to make the hard choices, Taxing the rich 100% won't even touch the problem. If you or I owed this much we would be looking at chapter 7.

As a real fiscal conservative, it's obvious there needs to be cuts to the military-industrial complex and medical-industrial complex. Of course this won't happen without reform of the political-financial complex's funding of the electoral system. As long as the American people continue to be duped into accepting the myth of a big government-military as actual national security and uncontrolled for-profit health care, there will never be a reduction in the national debt. This doesn't mean that taxes shouldn't be raised on the rich to make government revenues more equitable or that there is not a big government role in investing in the growth of a green, sustainable national economy and 21st century infrastructure. We need to get our priorities straight, but that won't happen with an ideologically rigid-thinking, willingly-ignorant citizenry.

20120103-09	16:28	SteveB	"Super PACs Spend \$13 Million on Early Primaries, Romney Top Beneficiary"
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"Super PACs Spend \$13 Million on Early Primaries, Romney Top Beneficiary" by John Dunbar, NationofChange

Jan. 3, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/super-pacs-spend-13-million-early-primaries-romney-top-beneficiary-1325604041>)

New outside spending groups, dubbed super PACs, that can accept unlimited donations from corporations and wealthy individuals, spent \$12.9 million in Iowa and other early GOP battleground states through New Year's Day, according to an analysis of federal data.

The top beneficiary was former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney. A total of \$4.6 million was spent to help the nominal front-runner, the vast majority for ads torpedoing former House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Second was Texas Gov. Rick Perry, who benefited from \$3.7 million in outside spending.

According to a Center for Public Integrity analysis of Federal Election Commission data, 12 outside super PACs spent money, mostly on advertising, with the intention of electing or defeating a GOP presidential candidate. Ten have not yet reported their donors. The two that have did so last summer.

The upshot is that voters in Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Florida, all of whose contests will be held this month, won't know who is paying for much of the advertising they see until after their votes are cast.

The next reports on donors aren't due until January 31, the day of the Florida primary.

Federal court decisions in 2010 made it possible for individuals, corporations and labor unions to give unlimited contributions to political organizations (super PACs) and certain types of nonprofits, which can then spend the money to elect or defeat candidates. The groups are prohibited from coordinating their activities with candidates.

The top super PAC spender was "Restore Our Future" — the ambiguously named group set up to help Romney. The group spent \$4.1 million, all of it in opposition to Gingrich, who enjoyed a brief lead in Iowa polls last month before the shellacking.

Restore Our Future has moved on from Iowa and spent \$622,000 in Florida, a likely harbinger of more to come in that high stakes contest. Almost \$100,000 has been spent by the pro-Romney group in South Carolina, whose primary is January 21.

Restore Our Future reported raising over \$12 million in the first six months of 2011; it is apparently the best-funded of the new breed of PACs, and has received a few seven-figure donations. Not so well known is a second organization that hopped on the Romney bandwagon, Citizens for a Working America Inc.

The group spent \$475,000 on a Christmas Eve ad buy praising the candidate.

The group initially supported Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota but changed course shortly before the big ad buy.

The Center traced an address in an FEC filing for Citizens Inc. to the office of JSN Associates in Dayton, Ohio. The "JSN" is James S. Nathanson, who said Monday the group is "very definitely pro-Romney." He would not say who the group's donors are.

A previous incarnation of the group met with some controversy when it accepted a single \$255,000 donation in 2010 from a Virginia consulting group called "New Models." Questions were raised as to whether the group was being used as a pass-through for unnamed donors.

A super PAC supporting Perry, "Make Us Great Again," spent all of its \$3.7 million on ads backing the Texas governor.

Former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman enjoyed the support of "Our Destiny PAC" which spent \$1.9 million for ads in New Hampshire, where he opted to compete first rather than Iowa.

Two groups supporting Gingrich ponied up just over \$900,000 for TV spots. The bulk of the pro-Gingrich spending was done by "Winning Our Future," a super PAC that was just started last month.

A surging Rick Santorum, a former U.S. senator from Pennsylvania, enjoyed \$631,000 in supportive spending by outside groups.

"Priorities USA," a super PAC supporting President Obama, was also active, spending a little more than \$306,000 on advertising opposing Romney.

And "Endorse Liberty Inc.," a new super PAC embracing Rep. Ron Paul of Texas, spent more than \$448,000, most of that on Internet advertising. It also listed one of the more unusual expenditures of the 2012 campaign — \$2,000 on "costumes and makeup."

20120103-12	17:30	Ben	"Big Shift for Gas-Guzzling Nation: Fuels Are Top U.S. Export; Oil Imports Still World's Highest"
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There are 2 oddities in the 2011 list...don't overlook item #4.

"Big Shift for Gas-Guzzling Nation: Fuels Are Top U.S. Export; Oil Imports Still World's Highest" by AP, *The Washington Post*

Dec. 30, 2011, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/big-shift-for-gas-guzzling-nation-fuels-are-top-us-export-oil-imports-still-worlds-highest/2011/12/30/gIQAw0A5QP_story.html?tid=sm_twitter_washingtonpost&tid=sm_twitter_washingtonpost)

(NEW YORK) For the first time in at least 21 years, the top export of the world's biggest gas guzzler, is — wait for it — fuel. Measured in dollars, the United States is on pace this year to ship more gasoline, diesel and jet fuel than any other type of export, according to government records dating back to 1990. Here are the top U.S. exports for the past six years, according to U.S. Census records.

2011 (Through October)

1. Fuel: \$73.4 billion.
2. Aircraft: \$70.8 billion.
3. Motor Vehicles: \$39.6 billion.
4. Vacuum Tubes: \$37.1 billion.
5. Telecommunications Equipment: \$33.2 billion.

2010

1. Aircraft: \$79.2 billion.
2. Fuel: \$53.7 billion.
3. Vacuum Tubes: \$47.3 billion.
4. Motor Vehicles: \$39.3 billion.
5. Telecommunications Equipment: \$35.3 billion.

2009

1. Aircraft: \$82.9 billion.
2. Vacuum Tubes: \$37.7 billion.
3. Fuel: \$36.5 billion.
4. Telecommunications Equipment: \$30.8 billion.
5. Motor Vehicles: \$28.4 billion.

2008

1. Aircraft: \$72 billion.
2. Fuel: \$51.8 billion.
3. Motor Vehicles: \$50.7 billion.
4. Vacuum Tubes: \$50.6 billion.
5. Telecommunications Equipment: \$35.4 billion.

2007

1. Aircraft: \$75.9 billion.
2. Vacuum Tubes: \$50.2 billion.
3. Motor Vehicles: \$44.8 billion.
4. Vehicle Parts: \$35.1 billion.
5. Telecommunications Equipment: \$32.4 billion.

2006

1. Aircraft: \$66.7 billion.
2. Vacuum Tubes: \$53 billion.
3. Motor Vehicles: \$35.4 billion.
4. Vehicle Parts: \$34 billion.
5. Telecommunications Equipment: \$28.8 billion.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #45 — JAN. 5, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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INDEX: Click here.

As Goes Montana, So Goes the Nation

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 5, 2012)

I'm so proud of this issue! And I'm so proud of my usually conservative adopted state of Montana, truly god's country.

What? Tiny Montana with only a million people in the entire, titanic state? Montana, fighting the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision almost single-handedly?

The reason why this is the case proves once again how important it is to study history. I know the Right wants to discard all history past, say 1890, but that will hardly be allowed by the rest of us.

Montana has a long history with *Citizens United*, in a way, going back to before 1912, when the state enacted laws to prevent political contributions from corporations. You see, before Montana passed this law and took their state back, conditions were the same as for the entire U.S. at this time, post-*Citizens United*. Corporations and big money could do whatever they wanted, and they did.

In Montana, this meant that the giant corporations owned Montana state government. Montana was probably the most corrupt place in the world in the early 1900's, largely because of the influence big money had on its politics. Sound familiar? Read a little history (also see SteveG, below, "*Citizens United* Unleashed a Monster"):

"*Citizens United* Backlash: Montana Supreme Court Upholds State's Corporate Campaign Spending Ban" by Mike Sacks, Huffington Post

Jan. 4, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/04/citizens-united-montana-supreme-court-corporate-spending_n_1182168.html)

(WASHINGTON) The Montana Supreme Court has put itself on a collision course with the U.S. Supreme Court by upholding a century-old state law (<http://applicationengine.mt.gov/getContent?vsId=%7b1C0B7886-01C0-49E3-A71A-C06CA7E71040%7d&impersonate=true&objectStoreName=PROD%20OBJECT%20STORE&objectType=document>) that bans corporate spending in state and local political campaigns.

The law, which was passed by Montana voters in 1912 to combat Gilded Age corporate control over much of Montana's government, states that a "corporation may not make ... an expenditure in connection with a candidate or a political party that supports or opposes a candidate or a political party." In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its

landmark *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* decision (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/08-205.ZS.html>), struck down a similar federal statute, holding that independent electoral spending by corporations "do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption" that such laws were enacted to combat.

That reasoning -- described by the *Citizens United* dissenters as a "crabbed view of corruption" (<http://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/08-205.ZX.html>) -- compelled 23 of the 24 states with independent spending bans to stop enforcing their restrictions, according to Edwin Bender, executive director of the Helena, Mont.-based National Institute on Money in State Politics (<http://www.followthemoney.org/>). Montana, however, stood by its 1912 law, which led several corporations to challenge it as unconstitutional.

By a 5-2 vote this past Friday, the Montana Supreme Court declined to recognize the common understanding that *Citizens United* bars all laws limiting independent electoral spending. Instead, Chief Justice Mike McGrath, writing on behalf of the majority, called on the history surrounding the state law to show that corporate money, even if not directly contributed to a campaign, can give rise to corruption.

McGrath's opinion in *Western Tradition Partnership v. Attorney General* harkens back to the turn of the 20th century, when Montana's "Copper Kings" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Copper_Kings) -- the natural resource-rich state's version of the robber barons -- competed "for political and economic domination" so effectively that by the time the Montana voters banned corporate spending in a voter initiative, "the State of Montana and its government were operating under a mere shell of legal authority." One such Copper King, wrote Mark Twain in a quotation cited by McGrath, was "said to have bought legislatures and judges as other men buy food and raiment."

Paul S. Ryan, associate legal counsel at the Campaign Legal Center (<http://www.campaignlegalcenter.org/>), characterized the Montana Supreme Court's reliance on factual findings culled from a century of state history, plus the trial testimony from contemporary politicians of both parties, as "an antidote to the crabbed view of corruption" adopted in *Citizens United*. Nevertheless, most observers, including Ryan, do not anticipate the U.S. Supreme Court accepting that antidote. The ruling in *Citizens United* that independent spending does not give rise to corruption introduced a categorical rule that no factual reality can overcome as long as the decision's five-justice majority remains on the Court.

To make this point, dissenting state Justice Beth Baker wrote that Montana "made no more compelling a case than that painstakingly presented in the 90-page dissenting opinion of Justice [John Paul] Stevens and emphatically rejected by the majority in *Citizens United*."

And state Justice James Nelson, also dissenting, put the point more bluntly. Even while lambasting *Citizens United's* reasoning as "utter nonsense" and "smoke and mirrors," among other insults, he found himself duty-bound to defer to the decision of the highest court in the land. "The Supreme Court in *Citizens United* rejected several asserted governmental interests," wrote Nelson, "and this Court has now come along, retrieved those interests from the garbage can, dusted them off, slapped a 'Made in Montana' sticker on them, and held them up as grounds for sustaining a patently unconstitutional state statute."

Nelson wrote that it "would not surprise me in the least" if the U.S. Supreme Court reversed his court's decision without even asking for briefs or oral argument from the opposing parties.

To reverse the Montana Supreme Court, however, the justices would have to extract themselves from a quandary of their own making, noted professor Rick Hasen (<http://electionlawblog.org/?p=27232>) of the University of California-Irvine Law School on his popular Election Law Blog. "If the Court were being honest in *Citizens United*," Hasen wrote, "it would have said something like: We don't care whether or not independent spending can or cannot corrupt; the First Amendment trumps this risk of corruption."

But by "dress[ing] up its value judgment ... as a factual statement," continued Hasen, the U.S. Supreme Court must now explain why the Montana Supreme Court was not correct to consider the factual record when it came to justifying corporate spending limits in campaign finance laws.

How the *Citizens United* majority will deny the force of Montana's factual record or, for that matter, Mark Twain's observations -- and whether the *Citizens United* dissenters will express their schadenfreude at their colleagues' efforts -- remains hypothetical for now. Donald Ferguson, executive director of lead plaintiff American Tradition

Partnership (formerly known as Western Tradition Partnership), wrote in an email to HuffPost that his organization has "not yet made a decision on future actions regarding the suit."

[20120104-01](#) 11:02 Beth 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa

I am so glad that I don't have to hear any more about Iowa. What a total waste of time and money. The sheer number of talking heads and all the words wasted in the endless coverage. Meanwhile the world and this country have real problems which desperately need to be addressed. There are still children starving in Congo. Sorry for the rant. I will never make it till November.

[20120104-03](#) 12:07 SteveB Re: 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa (reply to Beth, above)

I'm smiling...it can get to be a little much...I can never find those statistics on how many people simply explode sometime before the election actually rolls around, but there have to be at least a few.

Did you get a chance to watch the cool video about the guy from India providing education to, well, not "children starving in the Congo," but poor Indian villagers?

Thank you for all your comments! Hope you have a great 2012!

What would you like to talk about? What's #1

[20120104-06](#) 12:34 Beth Re: 2012 Republican Primaries—Iowa (reply to SteveB, above)

Tom Friedman had an interesting column in the *Times* this morning about how the right questions are not being asked of the candidates, particularly with regard to technology. I guess the problem is that the vision of the USA that the GOP embraces is the "old" country of the white middle class, not the country that we need to become to maintain our place in the world. Backwards is not where we need to go.

[20120104-02](#) 11:31 Art Re: R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter # 44)

Hi, Steve. Good stuff again as usual. You know you are setting a pretty high standard for the future.

One note on the key article. I think both the Internet outpouring of vitriolic hate and now the Super PACs, which - cannot bring myself to use who - are not accountable to anyone, can spew whatever hate and personal attacks they wish and the candidates can all claim "It wasn't me!!!" The problem is there is always a certain percentage of the population who believe some or all of the information in these attacks. It is evident by the almost unbelievable rise and fall of the Republican candidates over very short periods.

However the fallout from all these personal attacks is a growing distaste and outright vicious dislike for the candidates, all of them eventually. I think that is what has happened to President Obama. There are people who simply loath him, yet when you ask them why, they cannot provide any coherent reasons. Nonetheless the hatred exists. Now try running the country with that on your shoulders. The real problem too is it won't go away. Seemingly once people have turned some corner in their minds, that's it, the guy or gal is a low life dirtbag (sorry, I just don't have Pam's extreme vocabulary) and that is all there is to it.

My concern is, no matter who wins, they will enter office with a fair chunk of the country simply loathing them. Not good for anyone.

[20120104-04](#) 12:09 SteveB Re: R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa (reply to Art, above)

I think you're exactly right. That was one of the main points I wanted to get across...the lasting effects of all the money and poison...I think you put it better than I did.

20120104-05	12:20	Art	"No Longer the Land of Opportunity"
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"No Longer the Land of Opportunity" by Harold Meyerson, *The Washington Post*

Jan. 3, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/no-longer-the-land-of-opportunity/2012/01/02/gIQAQJVDZP_story.html)

"Over the past three years, Barack Obama has been replacing our merit-based society with an Entitlement Society," Mitt Romney wrote in *USA Today* last month. The coming election, Romney told *Wall Street Journal* editors last month, will be "a very simple choice" between Obama's "European social democratic" vision and "a merit-based opportunity society — an American-style society — where people earn their rewards based on their education, their work, their willingness to take risks and their dreams."

Romney's assertions are the centerpiece of his, and his party's, critique not just of Obama but of American liberalism generally. But they fail to explain how and why the American economy has declined the past few decades — in good part because they betray no awareness that Europe's social democracies now fit the description of "merit-based opportunity societies" much more than ours does.

The best way to measure a nation's merit-based status is to look at its intergenerational economic mobility: Do children move up and down the economic ladder based on their own abilities, or does their economic standing simply replicate their parents'? Sadly, as the American middle class has thinned out over recent decades, the idea of America as the land of opportunity has become a farce. As a paper by Julia Isaacs of the Brookings Institution has shown, sons' earnings approximate those of their fathers about three times more frequently in the United States than they do in Denmark, Norway and Finland, and about 11 / 2 times more frequently than they do in Germany. The European social democracies — where taxes, entitlements and the rate of unionization greatly exceed America's — are demonstrably more merit-based than the United States.

That's hardly the only measure by which Europe's social democracies demonstrate more dynamism than our increasingly sclerotic plutocracy. Unemployment rates in Northern European nations — as of October, Germany's unemployment rate was 6.5 percent; the Netherlands, 4.8 percent; Sweden 7.4 percent — are substantially lower than ours (9 percent then). Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Germany in particular have sizable trade surpluses, while the United States runs the largest trade deficits in human history.

There are, of course, a multitude of reasons the nations of Northern Europe are outperforming us. But if entitlements and social democracy were anywhere near the impediments to enterprise that Romney claims, Germany would hardly be the most successful economy in the advanced industrial world, with those of Scandinavia close behind.

The secrets of social democracy's successes are in plain view. In Scandinavia, government commitment to worker retraining and job relocation mean that there is no major political pressure to keep failing firms in business; it's a policy that favors innovative start-ups. In Germany, management and unions cooperate to upgrade their products and their processes — partly because corporate boards consist of equal numbers of management and worker representatives. Germany's surge in exports may be partly attributable to its union workers agreeing to hold their wages flat (at levels still well above those of their U.S. counterparts). But their workers' willingness to sacrifice in order to stay competitive is surely increased by the fact that their CEOs on average make just 11 times as much as their workers. In the United States, chief executives make roughly 200 to 300 times (choose your survey) as much as their average employees' salary.

Which brings us back to Romney's characterization of our country as a merit-based society and his failure to notice the huge changes in economic rewards over the past three decades. During the 30 years after World War II, the average American family's income doubled, while chief executives' income was restrained, increasing by less than 1

percent annually, according to a 2010 paper by economists Carola Frydman and Raven Saks. Beginning around 1980, however, as unions were smashed, industry moved offshore and executive pay skyrocketed, the incomes of most Americans began to flatten or decline, while financiers and corporate leaders were able to claim more and more of the nation's income for themselves.

Corporate leaders have been rewarded with huge payouts even when their corporation's performance has been disappointing. Conversely, millions of Americans have maintained or upgraded their skills yet seen their jobs shipped abroad or downgraded. Is this a description of a merit-based society? How does it compare with that of mid-century America, when the rewards for work were distributed more broadly?

Romney and his Bain Capital buddies may view their wealth as the just rewards endemic to successful people in a merit-based society. But why are so few Americans sharing in those rewards today while so many Americans shared in them 40 years ago? Are most Americans no longer meritorious? Or has our country ceased to reward any but the rich and powerful?

20120104-07	13:55	Pam	Revolutionaries & Reactionaries
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I just stumbled across something I was trying the other day to remember: Irving Kristol's quip that "neoconservatives were liberals who'd been mugged by reality." (Mark Lilla, NYRB 1/12/12) In his essay "Republicans for Revolution" Mark Lilla raises a crucial point that the main difference between the Left and the Right is "the quarrel over the nature of human beings and their relation to society [which comes first-- society or the individual?]. The quarrel between revolutionaries and reactionaries...has little to do with nature. It is a quarrel over history." Lilla describes two kinds of reactionaries, those who dream of a return to an Edenic past ("restorative reactionaries") and those who take for granted that the revolution has taken place, with no going back. The only sane response to what they see as an apocalypse is to create another and hope that a phoenix will rise from the ashes ("redemptive reactionaries"). The Republican party is now the party of redemption, hence the emphasis on moral absolutes, "taking back" America, and destroying the current system that grew out of the labor movements of the 'thirties and the discontents of the 'sixties. Redemptive reactionaries, whether they are religiously motivated or politically committed, all want to see the "old" order swept away and a new, clean, pure America re-created as a shining city upon the hill. The mythic past is substituted for reality and an ideal of purity--of whatever kind--is seen as the sole standard of governance.

We pragmatists keep harping on "policy" and "solutions," but I now realize those are not even blips on the Right's radar. They believe that if they can restore the moral integrity of America, the problems will solve themselves, if indeed they are problems and not just scare tactics of the Left. I don't know this for a fact, but I would guess that there are very few secular tea baggers. The whole aim of the Right is to clear the way for a theocratic system that will restore the nuclear family, promote Christian marriage, marginalize gays, and "save the soul of America". (Their words.) The political dogmatists, which would include the moneyed interests as well as libertarians, cynically make common cause with their right-wing compatriots. There are really two philosophies at work here: one that advances a theological agenda and one that just wants to take the brakes off business.

There's not much we can do or say to the religionists. Their minds are not open to argument, as reason has little to do with their beliefs. The dogmatists are reachable, however, if they can be persuaded that what benefits our whole society will benefit them as well. Obama is accused of being a "secular, European socialist," which ignores the fact that Germany and the Scandinavian countries are way ahead of us in just about any measure of well-being you can think of. Their CEOs make roughly 11 times what a worker on the factory floor makes; ours make around 200-300 times as much. German and Scandinavian unemployment rates are way below ours, and there is far more social mobility--based on merit--than we have. We have become like the old Europe, where wealth and power were inherited--quite a reversal I'd say.

To quote Lilla again, "People who know what kind of new world they want to create through revolution are trouble enough; those who only know what they want to destroy are a curse."

When I started this, my intention was to discuss the role of religion in society the world over, but I'll stop here and pick that up in another post.

20120104-08 14:01 SteveG Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)

I think you are onto it. Compromise used to be a good word. And now it seems to be you give into my way of thinking and we have compromised – please refer to anything that Eric Kantor says. “Retaking our country” also means our/my definition of our country and returning to our constitution means my interpretation of the constitution.

George the W made the statement numerous times that “Either you are with us or against us”. The phrase may have been slightly different, but he was using it to get us into the invasion of Iraq that would pay for itself and just take a few days or weeks. We all know how well that worked. The phrase has continued to be a part of our every day life, particularly from the neoconservative side. And now we fight each other.

20120104-09 14:19 SteveB Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above) & “Republicans for Revolution”

I love it, Art and Pam! This is exactly the paradigm of what is happening. Pam is right. This is the wellspring of causes and solutions.

Here’s the whole book review, though Pam’s summary might be better. I’d love to read the book too.

“Republicans for Revolution” by Mark Lilla, *The New York Review of Books*

Jan. 12, 2012, (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/jan/12/republicans-revolution/?pagination=false>)

(*The Reactionary Mind: Conservatism from Edmund Burke to Sarah Palin*, by Corey Robin, Oxford University Press, 290 pp., \$29.95) [Art would like this! –SteveB]



Republican presidential candidates Ron Paul, Rick Perry, Mitt Romney, Herman Cain, Newt Gingrich, and Michele Bachmann during the National Anthem before a debate, Washington, D.C., November 22, 2011

In 2004, then Senator Barack Obama brought the Democratic Party convention to its feet by declaring that there is “not a liberal America and a conservative America—there’s the United States of America.” He learned differently. As Princeton historian Sean Wilentz wrote recently in *The New Republic*, the American fantasy of a postpartisan politics runs back to the earliest days of the republic.¹ Politicians who exploited it for their own purposes did well; those who genuinely believed in it failed. And it’s a good thing, too. Modern democracy depends on distinctions among factions, principles, and programs, the clearer the better.

But the current public dissatisfaction with our parties is not just about partisanship. It also reflects a sense that the labels we use to distinguish factions, principles, and programs have lost their value. What does it mean to call oneself a liberal or conservative today? Does it make sense to distinguish “progressives” and “reactionaries,” or are those just terms of abuse and self-flattery? It’s hard to know how to talk about the new classes of rich and poor created by the global economy, and their strangely overlapping political commitments. Or where on the linguistic map to put the new populisms spawning around the world, some anti-global, some anti-immigrant, some libertarian, some authoritarian. Words are failing us.

Though it sounds dull, we actually need taxonomy. It is what renders the political present legible to us. Getting it right, though, requires a certain art, a kind of dispassionate alertness and historical perspective, a sense of the moment, and a sense that this, too, shall pass. Political scientists, intent on aping the methods of the hard sciences, stopped cultivating this art half a century ago, just as things started getting interesting, as new kinds of political movements and coalitions were developing in democratic societies. We’re in a similar moment now; we need a guide. That’s why Corey Robin’s *The Reactionary Mind* is a useful book to have—not as an example to follow, but one to avoid.

Robin, who teaches political science at Brooklyn College, has been writing thoughtful essays on the American right for *The Nation* and other publications over the past decade. *The Reactionary Mind* collects profiles of well-known right-wing thinkers like Ayn Rand, Barry Goldwater, and Justice Antonin Scalia, and some deserters who turned left, like John Gray and Edward Luttwak. There are also a few that look beyond our borders, including an excellent piece on Hobbes as a counterrevolutionary thinker. But the book aims to be more than a collection. It is conceived as a major statement on conservatism and reaction, from the eighteenth century to the present. And this is where it disappoints.

The problems begin in the opening paragraphs, where Robin lays out his general picture of political history. It is not overly complex:

Since the modern era began, men and women in subordinate positions have marched against their superiors in the state, church, workplace, and other hierarchical institutions. They have gathered under different banners—the labor movement, feminism, abolition, socialism—and shouted different slogans: freedom, equality, rights, democracy, revolution. In virtually every instance, their superiors have resisted them, violently and nonviolently, legally and illegally, overtly and covertly.... Despite the very real differences between them, workers in a factory are like secretaries in an office, peasants on a manor, slaves on a plantation—even wives in a marriage—in that they live and labor in conditions of unequal power.

This is history as WPA mural, and will be familiar to anyone who lived through the Thirties, remembers the Sixties, or was made to read historians like Howard Zinn, Arno Mayer, E.P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and Christopher Hill at school. In their tableau, history’s *damnés de la terre* are brought together into a single heroic image of suffering and resistance. Their hats are white, immaculately so. Off in the distance are what appear to be black-hatted villains, though their features are difficult to make out. Sometimes they have little identification tags like those the personified vices wear in medieval frescoes—“capital,” “men,” “whites,” “the state,” “the old regime”—but we get no idea what they are after or what their stories are. Not that it matters. To understand the oppressed and side with them all you need to know is that there are oppressors.

What distinguishes Robin from the old-style left historians is that he’s genuinely interested in the right and wants to paint its portrait—though, again, he’s committed to keeping it simple. In fact, he thinks that much of our confusion about this subject stems from the fact that we have been taken in by conservative intellectuals who lay out benign-sounding political principles, and historians who accept them as defining different streams of right-wing thought and

activity. Robin will have none of it. To his mind, the fundamental truth about the right is that it has always wanted one and only one thing: to keep down those who are already down. This is what unites Edmund Burke and Sarah Palin:

Conservatism is the theoretical voice of this animus against the agency of the subordinate classes. It provides the most consistent and profound argument as to why the lower orders should not be allowed to exercise their independent will, why they should not be allowed to govern themselves or the polity. Submission is their first duty, agency, the prerogative of the elite.

If you accept these claims, then you will have no trouble accepting what Robin says in the book's most extraordinary paragraph:

I use the words conservative, reactionary, and counterrevolutionary interchangeably: not all counterrevolutionaries are conservative...but all conservatives are, in one way or another, counterrevolutionary. I seat philosophers, statesmen, slaveholders, scribblers, Catholics, fascists, evangelicals, businessmen, racists, and hacks at the same table: Hobbes next to Hayek, Burke across from Palin, Nietzsche between Ayn Rand and Antonin Scalia, with Adams, Calhoun, Oakeshott, Ronald Reagan, Tocqueville, Theodore Roosevelt, Margaret Thatcher, Ernst Jünger, Carl Schmitt, Winston Churchill, Phyllis Schlafly, Richard Nixon, Irving Kristol, Francis Fukuyama, and George W. Bush interspersed throughout.

Glenn Beck's blackboard was never half this full.

Robin is a lump, an *über-lump*, which may please his beleaguered readers on the left, but makes his entire enterprise incoherent. He fails to see that it is based on a glaring fallacy of composition: he posits a class, isolates a characteristic of one of its members, and then ascribes that characteristic to every member of the class. Catholic reactionary Joseph de Maistre and George W. Bush are both on the right in Robin's scheme; following his logic, since Maistre spoke flawless French, Bush must too. Which would be some national secret. Yet that's exactly how Robin proceeds, until he has corralled everyone he doesn't like into a pen and labeled them all conservatives and reactionaries and right-wingers, terms he fails to distinguish. (More on that in a moment.)

But if there's anything we've learned over the past century, it is that *la destra è mobile*. The right used to be isolationist, then became internationalist, and to judge by recent Republican debates may be tiptoeing back to isolationism again. In the 1970s, if you thought that public schools were being used for social indoctrination, that power over them should be decentralized, and that children would be better off learning at home, that put you on the far left. Today those views put you on the right. Are we to think that these shifts were only about how best to keep power from the people?

And what about all the factionalism within the right? Isolationist paleoconservatives at magazines like *The American Conservative* hate "American greatness" neoconservatives at *The Weekly Standard* for their expansionist foreign policies and unconditional support of Israel, and the feeling is mutual. Theoconservatives at the journal *First Things* who resist gay marriage drive libertarians at the Cato Institute up the wall. There are serious and consequential disagreements on the right today over immigration, defense spending, the Wall Street bailouts, the tax code, state surveillance, and much else. Who wins those arguments could very well determine what this country looks like a generation from now. Robin registers none of this.

An opportunity has been missed. Robin is not wrong to think there are two tribes in modern politics, and the terms "right" and "left" are as good as any other to describe them. But within each tribe there are clans that do more than express more radical or moderate versions of the same outlook. Most of the turmoil in American politics recently is the result of changes in the clan structure of the right, with the decline of reality-based conservatives like William F. Buckley and George Will and the ascendancy of new populist reactionaries like Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter, and other Tea Party favorites. To understand why the distinction between them still matters, we need to remind ourselves what the terms "conservative" and "reactionary" originally meant.

"Liberal" and "conservative" first became labels for political tendencies in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Like all polemical terms their meaning and usage shifted around in partisan debate, but the philosophical distinction between them was settled by the mid-nineteenth century, thanks in large part to Edmund Burke. After the

Revolution, Burke argued that what really separated its partisans and opponents were not atheism and faith, or democracy and aristocracy, or even equality and hierarchy, but instead two very different understandings of human nature. Burke believed that, since human beings are born into a functioning world populated by others, society is—to use a large word he wouldn't—metaphysically prior to the individuals in it. The unit of political life is society, not individuals, who need to be seen as instances of the societies they inhabit.

What makes conservatives conservative are the implications they have drawn from Burke's view of society. Conservatives have always seen society as a kind of inheritance we receive and are responsible for; we have obligations toward those who came before and to those who will come after, and these obligations take priority over our rights. Conservatives have also been inclined to assume, along with Burke, that this inheritance is best passed on implicitly through slow changes in custom and tradition, not through explicit political action. Conservatives loyal to Burke are not hostile to change, only to doctrines and principles that do violence to preexisting opinions and institutions, and open the door to despotism. This was the deepest basis of Burke's critique of the French Revolution; it was not simply a defense of privilege.

Though philosophical liberalism traces its roots back to the Wars of Religion, the term "liberal" was not used as a partisan label until the Spanish constitutionalists took it over in the early nineteenth century. And it was only later, in its confrontation with conservatism, that liberalism achieved ideological clarity. Classical liberals like John Stuart Mill, in contrast to conservatives, give individuals priority over society, on anthropological as well as moral grounds. They assume that societies are genuinely constructs of human freedom, that whatever we inherit from them, they can always be unmade or remade through free human action. This assumption, more than any other, shapes the liberal temperament. It is what makes liberals suspicious of appeals to custom or tradition, given that they have so often been used to justify privilege and injustice. Liberals, like conservatives, recognize the need for constraints, but believe they must come from principles that transcend particular societies and customs. Principles are the only legitimate constraints on our freedom.

The quarrel between liberals and conservatives is essentially a quarrel over the nature of human beings and their relation to society. The quarrel between revolutionaries and reactionaries, on the other hand, has little to do with nature. It is a quarrel over history.

The term "reaction" migrated from the natural sciences into European political thought in the mid-eighteenth century, thanks to Montesquieu, who had picked it up from Newton. Originally, though, it was not associated with the concept of revolutions, which were then thought to be rare and unpredictable events, not part of some process of historical unfolding. That changed in 1789, when partisans of the French Revolution squared off against those who spoke openly of a Counter-Revolution that would set the world aright. The euphoria of rebellion, the collapse of the Old Regime, the Terror, and the subsequent rise of Napoleon gave history a secular eschatological charge, which destroyed many of the remaining moderates. For European radicals, the French Revolution was a cosmic epiphany that began an unstoppable process of collective human self-emancipation. For reactionaries, too, it was an apocalyptic event, signaling the end of a process that had placed Catholic Europe at the summit of world civilizations. One group saw a radiant future, the other saw nothing but the deluge. But revolutionaries and reactionaries did agree on one thing: that thinking seriously about politics means thinking about the course of history, not human nature.

There have always been two kinds of reactionaries, though, with different attitudes toward historical change. One type dreams of a return to some real or imaginary state of perfection that existed before a revolution. This can be any sort of revolution—political, religious, economic, or even aesthetic. French aristocrats who hoped to restore the Bourbon dynasty, Russian Old Believers who wanted to recover early Orthodox Christian rites, Pre-Raphaelite painters who rejected the conventions of Mannerism, Morrisites and Ruskinites who raged against the machine, all these were what you might call restorative reactionaries.

A second type—call them redemptive reactionaries—take for granted that the revolution is a *fait accompli* and that there is no going back. But they are not historical pessimists, or not entirely. They believe that the only sane response to an apocalypse is to provoke another, in hopes of starting over. Ever since the French Revolution reactionaries have seen themselves working toward counterrevolutions that would destroy the present state of affairs and transport the nation, or the faith, or the entire human race to some new Golden Age that would redeem aspects of the past without returning there.

This was the shared vision of Joseph de Maistre, the most bloody-minded of the French counterrevolutionaries, and twentieth-century European fascists. Fascists hated so many aspects of modern society—representative democracy, capitalism, cosmopolitanism, tolerance, bourgeois refinement—that we forget they were anything but nostalgic for Church and Crown. They had contempt for weak German aristocrats with their dueling scars and precious manners, and reserved their nostalgia for a new Rome to be brought into being through storms of steel. There was nothing conservative about them.

Americans' assumptions about human nature are basically liberal today. We take it for granted that we are born free, that we constitute society, it doesn't constitute us, and that together we legitimately govern ourselves. Most intellectuals who call themselves conservatives today accept as self-evident the truths enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, which no traditional European conservative could. Some of them have drawn from European conservatism when they write about the constructive role of civil society, the habits and mores needed to exercise liberty, and the limits of government action. But strictly speaking, they are go-slow, curb-your-enthusiasm liberals like Tocqueville, not conservatives like Burke or T.S. Eliot or Michael Oakeshott. As for those like Congressman Ron Paul who promote a minimal state and an unregulated economy, their libertarianism is actually a mutation of early liberalism, not conservatism. This is important to bear in mind.

On questions of history, however, Americans are all over the map. As we were reminded in the run-up to the last Iraq war, every now and then the prophetic strain in our political rhetoric inspires eschatological fantasies of democratic avant-gardism, with Lady Liberty replacing the French Marianne on top of history's barricades. Then reality intrudes and Americans revert to the converse fantasy of American exceptionalism, which must be protected from history through isolation and self-purification. We have also had our share of restorative reactionaries, from Southern nostalgics for the ol' plantation, to agrarian despisers of the great American cities, to racist despisers of the immigrants they attracted, to no-government oddballs who think they can go it alone, to trust-fund hippies who went back to the land, to lock-and-load eco-terrorists who want to take us off the grid (after they recharge their Macs). What we have not seen much of, except on the fringes of American politics, are redemptive reactionaries who think the only way forward is to destroy what history has given us and wait for a new order to emerge out of the chaos. At least until now.

The real news on the American right is the mainstreaming of political apocalypticism. This has been brewing among intellectuals since the Nineties, but in the past four years, thanks to the right-wing media establishment and economic collapse, it has reached a wider public and transformed the Republican Party. How that happened would be a long story to tell, and central to it would be the remarkable transmutation of neoconservatism from intellectual movement to rabble-rousing Republican court ideology. The first neoconservatives were disappointed liberals like Irving Kristol and Nathan Glazer, who saw the failures of a large number of Great Society programs to deliver on the unrealistic expectations of its architects, and consequently began to appreciate the wisdom of certain conservative assumptions about human nature and politics. Kristol's famous quip that neoconservatives were liberals who'd been mugged by reality captured the original temperament.

Sometime in the Eighties, though, neoconservative thinking took on a darker hue. The big question was no longer how to adapt liberal aspirations to the limits of politics, but how to undo the cultural revolution of the Sixties that, in their eyes, had destabilized the family, popularized drug use, made pornography widely available, and encouraged public incivility. In other words, how to undo history. At first, neoconservatives writing in publications like *Commentary* and *The Public Interest* (which I once helped to edit) portrayed themselves as standing with "ordinary Americans" against the "adversary culture of intellectuals," and to that end promoted "family values" and religious beliefs they did not necessarily share, but thought socially useful. Yet by the Nineties, when it became apparent that lots of ordinary Americans had adjusted to the cultural changes, neoconservatives began predicting the End Times, and once-sober writers like Gertrude Himmelfarb and Robert Bork started publishing books with titles like *On Looking into the Abyss* and *Slouching Towards Gomorrah*.

The new apocalypticism reached a fever pitch in a symposium published in 1996 in the widely read neoconservative journal *First Things*, edited by the late Richard John Neuhaus. The special issue bore the title "The End of Democracy? The Judicial Usurpation of Politics," and was provoked by a court decision on physician-assisted suicide. The opening editorial put the following question before readers: Given that "law, as it is presently made by the judiciary, has declared its independence from morality," and that, due to judicial activism, "the government of

the United States of America no longer governs by the consent of the governed," have we "reached or are [we] reaching the point where conscientious citizens can no longer give moral assent to the existing regime," and therefore must consider responses "ranging from noncompliance to resistance to civil disobedience to morally justified revolution"? To raise such a question, the editors insisted, "is in no way hyperbolic."²

This is the voice of high-brow reaction, and it was present on the right a good decade before Glenn Beck and his fellow prophets of populist doom began ringing alarm bells about educated elites in media, government, and the universities leading a velvet socialist revolution that only "ordinary Americans" could forestall. Apocalypticism trickled down, not up, and is now what binds Republican Party elites to their hard-core base. They all agree that the country must be "taken back" from the usurpers by any means necessary, and are willing to support any candidate, no matter how unworldly or unqualified or fanatical, who shares their picture of the crisis of our time. In the early Sixties, the patrician William F. Buckley joked that he would rather be governed by the first two thousand people in the Boston phonebook than by the combined faculties of Harvard and MIT. In 2010, former *Commentary* editor Norman Podhoretz wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* that "I would rather be ruled by the Tea Party than by the Democratic Party, and I would rather have Sarah Palin sitting in the Oval Office than Barack Obama." This from a former student of Lionel Trilling. And he wasn't joking.

Seen in this context, the current deadlock in Washington does not look so surprising. During the 2010 congressional election campaign, Republican candidates (and some Democrats) were put under enormous pressure to sign the Americans for Tax Reform "Taxpayer Protection Pledge," which obliges them to oppose any increase in the marginal personal or corporate tax rate, and any limits on deductions or tax credits that aren't offset by other tax cuts. To date, all but six Republican representatives and seven senators have signed this collective suicide note, making the group's president, Grover Norquist, nearly as successful as Reverend Jim Jones. That's how the apocalyptic mind works, though. It convinces people that if they bring everything down around them, a phoenix will inevitably be born.

The same faith has been expressed in the Republican presidential candidate debates, where the contenders compete to demonstrate how many agencies they would abolish when in office (if they remember their names), how many programs they would cut or starve, and how much faith they have in the ingenuity of the American people to figure it out for themselves once they're finished. What's so disturbing is that they don't feel compelled to explain how even a reduced government should meet the challenges of the new global economy, how our educational system should respond to them, what the geopolitical implications might be, or anything of the sort. They deliver their lines with the insouciant "what, me worry?" of Alfred E. Neuman.

All this is new—and it has little to do with the principles of conservatism, or with the aristocratic prejudice that "some are fit, and thus ought, to rule others," which Corey Robin sees at the root of everything on the right. No, there is something darker and dystopic at work here. People who know what kind of new world they want to create through revolution are trouble enough; those who only know what they want to destroy are a curse. When I read the new reactionaries or hear them speak I'm reminded of Leo Naphta, the consumptive furloughed Jesuit in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, who prowls the corridors of a Swiss sanatorium, raging against the modern Enlightenment and looking for disciples. What infuriates Naphta is that history cannot be reversed, so he dreams of revenge against it. He speaks of a coming apocalypse, a period of cruelty and cleansing, after which man's original ignorance will return and new forms of authority will be established. Mann did not model Naphta on Edmund Burke or Chateaubriand or Bismarck or any other figure on the traditional European right. He modeled him on George Lukács, the Hungarian Communist philosopher and onetime commissar who loathed liberals and conservatives alike. A man for our time.

¹"The Mirage: The Long and Tragical History of Post-Partisanship, from Washington to Obama," *The New Republic*, November 17, 2011.

²*First Things*, November 1996. On the background to this bizarre episode, see Damon Linker, *The Theocrats* (Doubleday, 2006), Chapter 3.

I have a writer/philosopher/neuroscientist to recommend to all of you: Sam Harris. He's written a number of books, including *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and has a blog and newsletter I've just started following. Today I read his interview with Lawrence Krauss, whose new book *A Universe from Nothing* has just come out. Krauss is a physicist, which means that every other word out of his mouth is incomprehensible to me, but I get his essential point: we may discover through science that the universe in fact came from nothing, or we may find it is part of a multi-verse. Either way, there is no scientific reason to think there had to be a "creator." As Krauss says, the universe is the way it is, whether we like it or not. Of course, we don't know everything, probably never will, but that is no reason to delude ourselves with fantasies that purport to explain the inexplicable.

We've talked a lot about politics, but religion is an important part of any such discussion, especially these days. I don't just mean Rick Perry's evangelicalism or Newt's new-found Catholicism. ALL religions have within them the possibility of violence, if not the actual thing. The danger is believing in absolutes--absolute truth, an absolute god, the absolute meaning of life. Absolutes invite defending; after all, anything else is error that needs correcting. Europeans stopped burning heretics by the 17th c. (a bit into the 18th?), Americans stopped burning witches, and there are now at least laws in India prohibiting the immolation of widows. To my knowledge, only Islam still threatens death for unbelief, though the Irish are not entirely blameless. Jonathan Swift had it so right in *Gulliver's Travels*. Human beings struggle over meaningless things, while the universe sails indifferently on.

You're all probably convinced by now that I am a certifiable paranoid who sees a menace around every corner. Believe me, I'm trying not to be. But I do feel threatened by religion, the hatred and intolerance it breeds, and the crushing of dissidence it leads to. I am not persuaded that just because some (many) Christians, Jews, and Muslims are good people with benign intentions religion is not at its root pernicious. There were good Soviets and good Germans too, but personal rectitude is no substitute for communal justice. To those who say there is no morality without god, I say, ridiculous. Sam Harris defines morality as that which conduces to well-being--pretty broad but all inclusive. I do not love my grandchildren because god tells me to (I'm adopting Christopher Hitchens' tradition of not capitalizing god). I do not want hungry children fed or Afghan women freed because god tells me to. I don't know if human beings are inherently moral or not, but I do know that religion and morality, while they may overlap, are not identical. That's why any expression of overt religiosity makes me uneasy. I tend to agree with Marx that "religion is the opiate of the people," though I suppose I don't mean that in the same way he does. I see that religion gives many people a sense of purpose and meaning, of protection, of aesthetic pleasure, of community, but, again, all those qualities can and do exist independent from a deity.

I say, let's get our sense of purpose from caring for our families and friends; our sense of meaning from nature and other people; our sense of protection from a sound justice system and an adequately funded police force; our sense of aesthetic pleasure from music and art; our sense of community from the people who actually mean something in our lives. Dostoyevsky said that if there were no god, man would have to create one, which is exactly what we have done. The concept of god can serve a purpose, but that purpose has as much potential for harm as for good, especially when one masquerades for the other. Believe what you want--just don't punish others for thinking differently and don't pretend to have a monopoly on truth. Civil society is an advance in human social organization. I fear--not with paranoia but with real alarm--that religion is as hostile to true civility today as it ever was, especially when it wraps itself in sincere piety.

20120104-13 16:23 SteveB Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)
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I am sitting here completely blown away! First, I am so honored that you take the time and energy and care and love to write what you do for us. I treasure you as a friend.

For me, today is your most shining moment! First you find the paradigm of the "reactionary mind" which, with religiosity, explains so much of what we've been discussing for more than a year.

Then you concoct the most beautiful spiritual piece I have read in a long, long time.

I agree with every word, but with one humble addition. I have spoken before about the eleven dimensions and the multi-verse(s). Probably, Krauss is right and the universe came from what we think of as "nothing" but which would be, in reality, an unknown, possibly unknowable, scientific principle or principles. The known universe has exploded

in our culture from a flat Earth with sun, moon, and stars (the spheres) revolving around it, to something so titanic as to be unfathomable. Maybe a God could concoct a green planet full of life, but the multi-verse(s)? This would not be an old man with a white beard sitting in a judge's chair. This would not be some friendly, alien mad scientist who just happened to create life on Earth and become a God. This would be some God indeed, to come out of "nothing" like He would have to have done. So He probably did not. Yet we did? It is wondrous, is it not? And he could be or represent the "spiritual" dimension of the universe, whatever that might be. He didn't necessarily have to create it all, did he? I mean, we probably made that part up, always trying to glorify him.

I too fear religion, for the reasons you express so well. As for my spirituality, I seem to have lost the God I once had, who was never the end-all-and-be-all of existence for me, as for the *tias*, below. But I admit to a vast tolerance for the belief in a God and I have to say that I just don't know. That is my one addition to your words.

I can be extremely tolerant of, but I cannot comprehend, people who live, breathe, and eat their faith. Not those who simply believe in God, but who are consumed by God, often without having undergone a true religious experience, whatever that might be.

My wife and I call the older women who go to the cathedral alone "*tias*" (tee' uhz)—aunts. They are the old maids of Bolivia and very religious. They come to mass once or twice every week and fervently say their prayers. They are god people with devout faith. They listen to what the priest tells them. Then they go out the giant doors and forget all about it, based on what you can see from the outside. They don't proselytize, they don't try to convert everyone they see, or talk about what good Christians they are and you, hint hint, aren't. They don't necessarily buy into major Church positions on abortion, birth control, gay marriage, or women priests. They don't think what they are told to think. They think practically about such things, meaning with a practicality. Christ's lessons are to be lived in one's lives and deeds, but spirituality resides within the heart. It is something between man and whatever God is, and does not require converting the world to one's views, or being married to Christ or Mohammed, and does not require a political agenda come hell or high water because God says so.

Being a practical person myself, I much prefer the *tias* to the American Evangelical types that seems so dominant within the Republican coalition. No offense to any who are.

Now, if we could just find a way to reason with Christians and Muslims before they destroy us to heaven, by heaven, and for heaven.

20120104-15 16:42 Art Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)

Well said Pam, as always. Religion is all about beliefs to explain the unexplainable. Handy when you convince people in the ME not to eat pork because God forbids it. Real reason was trichinosis but no one was capable of understanding it at the time, they just knew somehow it worked. Best to attribute it to God. As the Roman empire ran out of citizens for the army and the Christian religion - read Catholic church - aligned itself with the Roman empire, suddenly birth control became a no-no.

In history lots of people have exploited beliefs for their own gain, but the real problem becomes when the unexplainable is suddenly explainable. When that happens it causes a Whoops to those who have been telling us another reason. Copernicus comes to mind instantly for most of us. We see that today as the religious nuts try to deny evolution, global warming etc. I personally don't care that they do it but please stay out of the way of facts. For countries like Israel it is a real problem, as the growing number of Hasidic Jews don't serve in the IDF and depend on the secular ones to save their asses (learned that one from you Pam). In the Arabic world it has held back modernization for most of the Middle East. If they didn't have oil, we would simply watch them rot in ignorance - we pretty much do that for much of Africa now.

As for the American right, I agree with all those well written articles but in the end the right as we see it today is made up of people who really don't look forward very much and when they do, believe if we can just go back to the good ole days all will be well. Time marches on and you can never go back.

20120104-16 17:11 Marci Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to SteveB & Pam, above)

I loved your article and Pam's. How great to learn about scientific thoughts, theories, or discoveries about the universe and their guesses about god. I like the idea that god is not the creator of everything, especially of anything material. All that must come from nothing.

He is a Spirit like he told us. We just don't know what a spirit is. It is good to just get the good out of us from our own natural good. Like loving and protecting our children and respecting our neighbors.

Nevertheless, there are the other teachings like revenge is god's and payment too, love your enemy or forgive your brother 70 times 70, you know all the Christ teachings that were revolutionary. His teachings are not so normal standard human good behavior. They are more demanding. They want us to be better than we actually are. In the old testament, people are normal, they get mad and want revenge. In Jesus' teachings people get humble and forgiving. I think there is the mystery of god wanting us to be better. I think maybe 80 percent of the gospels are not the truth about what Jesus actually said or did, but there must be about 20 percent that he actually did say. The Jesus part always puzzles me.

Well.... just adding some to your thoughts.

20120104-17 17:18 Pam Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to SteveB, above)

Your appreciation of my writing makes my day. I have decided in my old age to try to be more truthful. Sam Harris wrote a book called *Lying* that I really want to read. He says we should never lie, even a little bit. I just read an article that says we all lie, that it's part of our biological destiny. Babies fake cry to get attention; cancer cells "lie" to get around immune systems. I find both positions compelling, but having lived with substantial lies most of my life I'm going to give truthfulness a shot. I don't mean to be mysterious here. You already know some of my lies anyway. When it comes to religion, people pussyfoot around so much. We want to be tolerant and open-minded, so we hold ourselves back, at least I do/have. I don't want to shake my fist in people's faces, but I'm finding my silence becoming less consideration for others and more a convenience for myself. I'm testing this out with this newsletter. It's easier to tell the truth when you're not sitting in the same room with someone. Being completely honest with my family, my kids in particular, is more difficult, but I'm working on it.

As for you and your spiritual dimension, I can appreciate your leanings. At least I sort of can. At least we agree that there's simply a lot we don't know and may never know. Life has to be lived, ignorant or not. I just think religion, as an institution since the beginning of time, has done more to make human life intolerable than anything else. Flowers can grow on dunghills: a Bach cantata (written "for the glory of God") is sublime. *The Iliad* is a magnificent poem about war, and the movie *Ran* turns combat into a ballet. Good can take root in evil, but to my way of thinking, religion is the soil.

I treasure your friendship too.

20120104-19 17:43 SteveB Re: Revolutionaries & Reactionaries (reply to Pam, above)

Thank you! And thank you for your courage.

Billy Collins: "Consolation" is very pertinent to my situation. "The First Dream" is magnificent and sublime. My favorite, I think.

Billy is in Winter Park, Florida, happy not to have New York's weather, but still missing New York (though he's back and forth pretty often, if you ask me).

20120104-10 14:57 Dennis "How Banks Are Using Your Money to Create the Next Crash"

"How Banks Are Using Your Money to Create the Next Crash" by Keith Fitz-Gerald, Money Morning

Jan. 4, 2012, (<http://moneymorning.com/2012/01/04/how-banks-are-using-your-money-to-create-next-crash/>)

20120104-12 15:22 SteveB Fw: New Orleans Roadfood Festival
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Now, this would be some good eatin'! Damn, I'd love to be able to get to this!

Savor Authentic Regional Eats



from Roadfood.com:

Have you made plans to attend the 4th Annual New Orleans Roadfood Festival March 23-25? If not, now is the time to put it on your calendar and make reservations. It is likely the city will soon be sold out that weekend. Flights from most places remain cheap, and rooms at the historic Monteleone Hotel on Royal Street still are available at the special Roadfood rate. Follow this link to book reservations: (<https://gc.synxis.com/rez.aspx?tps=fml&arrive=2012-3-21&adult=1&step=1&hotel=27003&shell=MSYHM&chain=10237&template=MSYHM&avcurrency=USD&group=RFF21C>)

New Location, New Vendors and Returning Favorites



Due to overwhelming attendance that outgrew the French Quarter last year, the festival is moving up to the French Market (est. 1791: America's oldest public market). There is shopping, dining, and entertainment all around, and the new location offers room for more Roadfood vendors as well as a stage with musical performances throughout the weekend.

Favorite foods from last year will be returning (Louie Mueller brisket, anyone?); and new dishes from near and far will be making this the most delicious concentration of regional eats ever! Details to be announced.

"The Splendid Table" Comes to Town: The Crawfish Boil Returns!



In addition to the Saturday and Sunday street festival, which remains free and open to all (pay for what you eat), two ticketed events promise special fun for attendees.

Friday Night: "Behind the Scenes with the Splendid Table." The festival kicks off in the Grand Ballroom of the Royal Sonesta Hotel, where Public Radio's award-winning weekly food show, "The Splendid Table," will be on stage live hosted by WWNO's Poppy Tooker with the show's star, Lynne Rossetto Kasper, Roadfood creators Jane & Michael Stern, and a host of notable chefs who are bringing their good food to the festival. A limited number of tickets will be available soon.

Saturday Night: Back by popular demand, a full-bore crawfish boil in the Cajun tradition. Don't forget: late March is the peak of Louisiana's crawfish season, when they are fattest and easiest to eat! A limited number of tickets will be available soon.

And of course Sunday morning, all are welcome to attend the beignet-eating contest when New Orleans' firefighters compete to see who can eat six beignets in the fastest time and take home the World Beignet Eating Champion Belt.

See you in New Orleans, March 23-25, 2012. Keep your eyes on Roadfood.com for further information about what there will be to eat and for ticket sales for the Friday night radio show and the Saturday night crawfish boil.

20120104-14	16:37	Ben	Re: New Orleans Roadfood Festival (reply to SteveB, above)
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Susette and I made it to the Key West Seafood Festival a year ago. Yum!

20120104-18	17:27	Pam	"Our Economy Has Failed—Until We Admit That, We're Screwed"
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"Our Economy Has Failed—Until We Admit That, We're Screwed" by Kai Wright, ColorLines/AlterNet

Dec. 30, 2011, (<http://www.alternet.org/module/printversion/153614>)

At the foot of Manhattan's Broadway Ave., just below Wall Street, stands one of the city's most reliable tourism draws: Arturo Di Modica's 3.5-ton statue of a charging bull. Since 1989, the sculpture has been an iconic symbol of American wealth, of the aggressive capitalist spirit that, it is argued, made this country great and powerful. Visitors flock from around the world to rub the bull's horns for good luck. Or they used to, at least. Now, tourists snap pictures from behind police barricades.

For more than two months, the raging bull of wealth has sat caged, facing eye-to-eye with a New York Police Department cruiser as cops have worked around the clock to protect it from the Occupy Wall Street movement. The park's administrator has called the security "Orwellian." That's to say the least.

If you're looking for visuals to encapsulate 2011, look no further than the bizarre scene at Di Modica's bull. Daily, the country's largest police force mobilizes to protect the idea of American prosperity from an imagined threat, while the actual economy lays gored and gutted by demonstrable and ongoing crimes.

In the immediate, this perversity results from a spectacular failure of political leadership. We traveled a long, winding road to the point at which no-brainers like a modest payroll tax cut and an extension of unemployment benefits demand political brinksmanship. People of varying ideologies and partisan affiliations may debate endlessly who's more at fault, but to do so is to truly miss the forest for the trees. The ugly reality is no leader in either party has yet shown the mettle to rise and meet the enormity of today's challenges.

That's not to suggest moral equivalencies. Republican leaders have been openly obstructionist, preferring a broken economy to a successful Obama presidency. Their cynicism has rarely been as bald as the recent House vote on the payroll tax cut, but they've never made much effort to conceal it.

Still, even if President Obama had been given a willing Congress, the solutions he has championed aren't nearly on par with the problem. Like his congressional opponents, he insists the structural foundation of our economy remains

strong. Rather than confront the core issues—inequity and instability—Obama has thrashed around with Republicans in the margins—over how to control debt, over the degree to which health care should be a commodity rather than a right, over which borrowers were the least irresponsible and thus deserving of help. Meanwhile, at each crucial juncture in his reform-branded presidency, Obama has left financial players to voluntarily take responsibility for their behavior. They remain steadfast in their refusal to do so.

These bipartisan leadership failures have prolonged the immediate crisis, which dates back to 2007, when the foreclosures that would bring down the system first began consuming working-class communities of color in particular. Four years later, Republicans and Democrats alike are still working off of the optimistic notion that we need only contain the immediate problem until we can get back to growth—that we need only protect the bull with barricades until those pesky protesters disappear and allow its charge to resume. With each year that our chosen leaders have indulged this fantasy, a cancer has spread. Each year has brought new records in the poverty, hunger and inequality that will ultimately consume this country.

But that's just the immediate crisis. As we move into an election year, in which U.S. residents will have prolonged debate over our collective priorities and values, we must pursue answers to a broader question. Since at least 1981, when the Reagan revolution overtook public policy, we have built an economy on two related fictions. The first is that boundless growth is sustainable. The second is that unrestrained capitalism, particularly in the financial sector, will create wealth for everyone. These are discredited ideas, and the question of 2012 must be how we begin building a society based on something different.

This broader question is crucial because, in truth, the problem extends past the economy. Look around and you'll find one broken institution after another, each of them buckling under the weight of the late 20th century consensus that greed is good, that a winner-takes-all individualism will somehow improve our collective endeavors. Industries, communities, natural resources, even sports leagues have collapsed as Ronald Reagan's corrosive vision has become dominant.

Meanwhile, racism and racial injustice remain rooted in our society in no small part because they are necessary to explain why unrestrained capitalism and unfettered growth fail so spectacularly in creating widespread wealth. The entrenched, generational poverty that has gripped so many black communities and the yawning racial gaps that persist in wealth and income, among other things, can only be explained if they are blamed on the individuals hurt by them. Thus "welfare queens" and "super predator" youth and cheating "illegals" and "lazy Indians" and on and on. These caricatures continue to inform public policy on poverty, education, immigration and more. They continue to explain away inequity and provide villains against which struggling whites can define themselves without questioning the larger system. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s quote about slave owners—the original unrestrained capitalists—still rings true: "The Southern aristocracy took the world and gave the poor white man Jim Crow."

Di Modica offered a quote on capitalism, too. In November, Newark's Star-Ledger asked the artist what he thought about the security around his statue. He didn't like it. "The bull is for the people," he declared. "The bull is for everyone, the people with money and the people with no money." If only it were so.

Wall Street's bull markets have proven to be for the benefit of a very few. But as the financial industry's largest players have been unleashed to pursue profit for themselves at all costs, the dreadful consequences have surely impacted everyone. Pensions have been wiped out. Family homes have been stripped of value, many taken away altogether. Small businesses have been locked out of credit markets. More than 14 million people are exiled from the labor force. A galling one in three black children and nearly as many Latino children are growing up in poverty right now, while the president brags about ferreting out fraud in the food stamp program rather than getting more money for it.

Our chosen political leaders have tolerated all of this in order to maintain the fiction that our economic system still works, that the organizing principles of our society remain valid. So the central question of 2012's likely all-consuming political debate must be simple: How do we acknowledge that our current economy is built on lies and then start erecting a new one based on equity and sustainability?

(Kai Wright is a freelance journalist in Ft. Greene, Brooklyn.)

[20120104-20](#) 19:29 Art Photo: Dog People (Who Also Go to Heaven)

Good one. We have to make up in numbers what we may lack in size. Of course there is that alert factor also.

[That "alert factor" looks really deadly, Art. ^_^ How do they decide who gets the couch? Seniority? Size? FCFS? FIFO? -SteveB]



[20120104-21](#) 19:55 SteveG "*Citizens United* Unleashed a Monster: Why the Real Winner in the Iowa Caucuses Is the Big-Money Super PAC"

"*Citizens United* Unleashed a Monster: Why the Real Winner in the Iowa Caucuses Is the Big-Money Super PAC" by Steven Rosenfeld, AlterNet

Jan. 4, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153645/>)

The real winner of the 2012 Iowa Caucuses may not be any of the Republican candidates, but a new political animal that is ugly, loud, anti-democratic and coming to your state in the upcoming primaries and caucuses: the super PAC.

These creatures—unleashed by the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* ruling allowing direct corporate funding for "electioneering ads"—are satellite political campaigns that supposedly act independently of the candidates.

They can raise and spend unlimited amounts of money. They don't disclose donors until after the votes are counted. And they have been deluging Iowa with millions of dollars of harsh negative TV ads, from groups that are run by political consultants who have previously worked for the candidates.

On Tuesday morning, Newt Gingrich—who was targeted by nearly one-third of the more than \$14 million in super-PAC advertising spent in the weeks before the Iowa Caucus—went on CBS's "The Early Show" and called Romney "a liar" for claiming there was no link between his official campaign and a pro-Romney super PAC.

"Well, you seem shocked by it!" said Gingrich, when asked if he just called Romney a liar. "This is a man whose staff created the PAC. His millionaire friends fund the PAC. He pretends he has nothing to do with the PAC – it's baloney. He's not telling the American people the truth."

Gingrich has been the target of most super PAC ads in Iowa. These PACs are the bad cop half of the good cop-bad cop dance surrounding the presidential campaign. The candidates themselves tend to appear in TV ads saying mostly positive things and making slight swipes at Obama while their supposedly independent friends throw the political mud. And then the candidates hypocritically decry their mudslinging allies.

A super PAC supporting Ron Paul accused Gingrich of "serial hypocrisy." Another by a pro-Rick Perry group claimed he "got rich" through ties to Freddie Mac and also took a swipe at both Gingrich and Romney as political insiders. And that was just the beginning. There were more than 1,200 anti-Gingrich TV ads in the state before Christmas, according to the *Los Angeles Times*. In the week since, the pace has picked up. The super PACs poured vast sums into network television coffers while journalists reported that many Iowans felt their state's political process had been hijacked.

"Oh goodness," Jill Jepsen, 57, a retired department store employee told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I just don't listen to it. I can't listen to it. It makes me sick."

The super PACs are required to report their donors, but as the *Sacramento Bee* pointed out in a Tuesday editorial, their lawyers have been busy filing papers to push back the deadline for doing so until after the presidential primaries or caucuses in early states. Such intentional secrecy means the handful of big money donors behind these groups—there were 264 registered PACs as of last week, with assets of \$32 million—will not be accountable to anyone other than their candidate of choice.

To date, the registered super PACs have only spent about half of the money raised thus far, according to the Washington-based Center for Responsive Politics. In other words, they will be playing big roles in the mostly small upcoming primary states.

The question of who benefits from this style of political campaigning has been raised on newspaper editorial pages, where super PACs have been called "slush funds" that distort the democratic process. But there is little prospect they will be slowed or stopped in 2012. Progressive law groups such as Democracy 21 have gone before the Federal Election Commission to seek better, real-time disclosure. However, the FEC is one of the most gridlocked bodies in Washington, a condition that seems to serve the interests of both political parties.

The bottom line is that in *Citizens United*, the U.S. Supreme Court majority believed there should be no restraints on what has been called the "marketplace of political ideas." In short, more political speech, political advertising and messaging—no matter the source or sponsor—should be permitted. The Court also took the view that modern corporations play a valuable role in American life and thus deserve constitutional free speech rights.

In many respects, the super PACs are a perfect representation of "the face of American capitalism," Kendall Thomas of Columbia Law School told a panel convened by the Brennan Center for Justice shortly after the *Citizens United* ruling in January 2010. The decision would unleash outsized and unaccountable players into the American political arena, he predicted, just as globalization has ushered large corporate players into the international economic order. "We need to contest the vision of politics, and the vision of politics embraced in *Citizens United*, which views citizenship and constitutional democracy as part of the world of commodities," he concluded.

And so in the very states that vie for national attention in the start of the nominating process—Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina, Florida, Nevada—voters are likely to find themselves overwhelmed by negative messaging from the latest big-money political behemoth. Few people watching the super PAC ads in Iowa would suggest they are legitimate proxies for ordinary citizens in a struggling economy. If anything, this messaging may

be a factor behind the 41 percent of Republicans in the state that pollsters said were undecided just before the Caucuses.

Indeed, the losers in the Iowa Caucuses are not just the Republicans with the fewest supporters. They are that state's voters—and voters in the primary and caucus states to follow—who will experience a political process increasingly distant from their lives.

(Steven Rosenfeld covers democracy issues for AlterNet and is the author of *Count My Vote: A Citizen's Guide to Voting* (AlterNet Books, 2008).)

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20120104-22 22:53 SteveG Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong

from Alan Grayson:

Maybe I should leave it alone. Maybe I should just let Rick Santorum enjoy the 15 minutes of fame that comes with getting 30,000 Republicans to vote for you. (Less than one-hundredth of one percent of the U.S. population, by the way.)

But there is something that Rick Santorum said last month that really bothers me. And I'm going to tell you what it is.

On December 5, Santorum was talking to a group of about 100 students at Dordt College, a small Christian college in Iowa. A student referred to a 2009 Harvard study showing that 44,000 Americans die each year because they don't have health coverage. The student then asked Santorum what that meant for the Christian responsibility of caring for the poor. Specifically, the student questioned whether "God appreciates the fact" that all those Americans die each year for lack of healthcare.

Santorum's response?) Rick Santorum "rejects" the idea "that people die in America because of lack of health insurance." (<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=kw8wI4hWiz7HCpmiMilPFUICRun1uToi>)

Wake up, Rick.

The student was referring to the same study that I publicized on the Floor of the House two weeks after it was published in the American Journal of Public Health. Here it is (below). It documents that 44,789 Americans die each year because they have no health insurance. In fact, if you take two Americans who are physically identical – same age, same gender, same race, same weight, same smoking history – and one of them has health insurance and one does not, then the one without health insurance is 40% more likely to die each year.

(<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=SfiltvB1pFrY0zuRIHN%2F5EICRun1uToi>)

Here is a link to my speech on this, entitled "I Apologize to the Dead and Their Families."

(<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=gAUK2%2B8GTgxdKHC8FT2Da58YdQxyCzZa>)

I remember the same response from right-wingers then as we hear from Santorum today – anyone can go to an emergency room. I ask them to show me an emergency room that will provide chemotherapy to a cancer victim. There isn't one.

But to answer that challenge, I started a website called <http://www.NamesOfTheDead.com>. I invited surviving family and friends to tell me about people whom they had loved and lost, because they had no health coverage. And they did – thousands of them. I read some of their stories on the House Floor.

(<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=t22BZw3EwFAPDrrrh5FjuEICRun1uToi>)

Then I gave a speech identifying how many people died each year for lack of health care in each district represented by a Republican healthcare opponent. The Republicans interrupted that speech for two hours, until the

House Parliamentarian told them that they had to let me continue. A reporter who has covered Capitol Hill for more than 25 years told me that that kind of interruption had never happened before.

(<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=IrVaxYA91%2F5YdrGaCIIdDTkICRun1uToi>)

But Rick Santorum apparently never got the memo. He thinks that no one in America ever dies because he has no health care.

Why does Santorum think that? Because he has to. He has to engage in flat denial of the reality that 50 million Americans – one out of every six of us – face each day. Because to face that reality would mean that Santorum would have to face the brutality, the swinishness, the cruelty and the savagery of the policies that he so enthusiastically espouses.

For God's sake – every single other industrialized country in the entire world has universal health care. Why can't we? How many more people have to die? How many more sacrifices on the altar of Almighty Greed?

Any health care system that denies necessary care on the basis of wealth is evil. It doesn't matter how you micromanage it, or tinker with it. It's evil.

When Justice Harry Blackmun began voting against death in every death penalty case, he gave this simple and eloquent explanation: "From this day forward, I no longer shall tinker with the machinery of death."

We need to reach the same kind of realization in health care. Forget about the tinkering. This is America, not Myanmar. People who are sick need to be able to see a doctor. Because we are human beings, not cattle. End of story.

Are you listening, Rick Santorum?

Courage, Alan Grayson

P.S. To the tens of thousands of us who helped our campaign during 2011, thank you. From my heart, thank you.

(<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=eBbgfmYTECONq67%2FMLKpg0ICRun1uToi>)

<http://grayson.salsalabs.com/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=aCepfV2D%2BHMsTLyckerakw%2Fnelx37cf0s>

(Paid for and Authorized by the Committee to Elect Alan Grayson, 8419 Oak Park Road, Orlando, FL 32819)

20120104-24	23:15	Bill	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG, above) & "Santorum Surge Brings Ethics Questions"
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Check out the MSN story, courtesy of ABC, story on ethics problems that Santorum appears to have. He needs to go to a monastery.

"Santorum Surge Brings Ethics Questions" by Matthew Mosk and Brian Ross, ABC News

Jan. 4, 2012, (<http://abcnews.go.com/m/story?id=15287424&sid=3029941>)

Rick Santorum's powerful finish in the Iowa caucus is bringing fresh attention to his tenure in Congress, including ethics questions that dogged him about a preferred mortgage he received from a bank run by campaign donors, and federal funds that went to a real estate developer who backed his charity.

One of the top donors to Santorum's charity was also the beneficiary of an \$8 million Santorum-sponsored federal earmark, according to published reports. Melanie Sloan, a former federal prosecutor who filed an ethics complaint against Santorum in 2006 on behalf of a watchdog group, said her organization's website received a tidal wave of

visitors in the past 24 hours, and in an interview she said she believes people will discover that the GOP presidential contender is "hardly the moral paragon he purports to be."

"There were several instances in which Santorum appeared to have taken campaign contributions in direct exchange for legislative assistance," said Sloan, whose organization, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW), spent months investigating Santorum's activities while he was in office. "He violated Senate gift rules by accepting a mortgage from a bank in which he had no interest and which otherwise made loans only to its own investors."

Santorum has rarely responded to such attacks, but at one point he wrote a letter to a Philadelphia newspaper criticizing the ethics complaints as a series of "disingenuous innuendo and half-truths." The Senate Committee on Ethics never responded to CREW's complaint, and the two-term senator left Congress in 2007 after losing a reelection bid. A Santorum campaign spokesman has not yet responded to phone messages and email requests for comment.

For months, Santorum's record and background have escaped presidential-caliber scrutiny from rivals and reporters because he never appeared to have traction with voters in the early Republican contests. But as Santorum's GOP rivals have learned, the national spotlight can be searing. Questions about Newt Gingrich's consulting work for Fannie Mae surfaced in attack ads against him. Herman Cain bowed out of the race after reports of sexual harassment complaints dogged him for weeks. If the pattern holds true as the winnowed GOP field heads from Iowa down the rural roads of New Hampshire, Santorum will be the latest to undergo intensified scrutiny from rival campaigns and from the national media.

Perhaps the most jarring detail from his tenure in office is the unorthodox \$500,000 mortgage that Santorum and his wife secured on the home in rural Virginia they had purchased for \$643,361. According to a series of reports in the Philadelphia Daily News, the mortgage came from Philadelphia Trust Company, a fledgling private bank catering to "affluent investors and institutions" whose officers had contributed \$24,000 to Santorum's political action committees and re-election campaign.

In advertising, the lender said it only offered its preferred rates to well-heeled borrowers who also used their investment services. But Santorum's public disclosure forms showed he did not have the required minimum \$250,000 in liquid assets and was not an investor with Philadelphia Trust. His ability to secure the five-year loan led Sloan to file a complaint under a Senate ethics rule that specifically prohibits members from accepting a loan on terms not available to members of the general public. At the time, a Santorum spokeswoman told the Daily News that the mortgage terms were set at "market rates," but did not provide further comment.

After leaving Congress in 2007, Santorum sold the house for \$850,000.

The other issue that captivated Santorum critics involved a non-profit charity called Operation Good Neighbor. Santorum founded the organization to "illustrate compassionate conservatism" but did not take a formal role in its day-to-day operations. The charity was run by his campaign staffers. It operated out of the same building as his campaign headquarters. And its board included several top Washington, D.C. lobbyists who had clients with millions of dollars in business before the U.S. Senate, according to a 2006 report by WTAE, the ABC News affiliate in Pittsburgh.

The chairman of Operation Good Neighbor was Michael O'Neill, CEO of Preferred Real Estate. The company was involved in a waterfront development in Chester, Pa., that, with Santorum's help, benefitted from more than \$8 million in federal grants, according to local reports.

O'Neill told ABC News that accusations suggesting the charity work and his development were connected were "crazy."

"My answer is absolutely not," said O'Neill, who is now out of the real estate business. "I was never told, 'If you do this, we'll help with that.' They were completely unrelated."

O'Neill said Santorum was a figurehead with the charity and that the senator derived no benefit from the work the charity performed -- doling out contributions to small groups around the state. "He was proud of the work of the charity," O'Neill said. "Rick helped bring exposure, but other than that, he didn't get anything out of it."

20120104-25	23:41	SteveB	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG & Bill, above)
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Have you googled "Santorum"? Gross, but hilarious! I guess he can't let his many kids google their own father.

20120104-23	22:57	SteveG	"Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S."
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How far have we fallen as a country?

"Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." KNDU/MSNBC

Jan. 4, 2012, (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45879624/ns/local_news-tri_cities_wa/t/church-nigeria-donates-us/#.TwV_WtRSQhI)

(KENNEWICK, Wash.) We often hear about local charity groups sending donations to less fortunate communities around the world, but for one local group the roles are reversed.

The Family Research Center for Children of Special Needs in Kennewick received a \$3,000 donation from the Synagogue Church of all Nations in Nigeria. The money will benefit those in need in the Tri-Cities.

"The name itself is pretty self-explanatory—it's called Synagogue Church of all Nations, so he doesn't just believe to give to his own nation but to all around the world, and that even includes the United States of America," says Mariana Parkhotyuk, Good News Church.

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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>
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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

NEWSLETTER #46 — JAN. 6, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Who Can Be Screwed?

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 6, 2012)

Let me just talk simply about one of the top two Republican dogmas currently in vogue. I guess #1 would have to be NO MORE TAXES FOR THE RICH!.

And, for the purposes of this piece, I'm going to assume that #2 is something about welfare, etc. The whole social services area of government. I really don't want to state the Republican position unfairly or too harshly. Some of you Republicans help me out here, please.

I could say something like, Republicans want to throw the poor out into the streets to die. That sounds harsh. Let me try again, they don't think everyone is entitled to healthcare. What do those who aren't entitled do? In the interest of keeping it simple, let's just say Republicans want to cut back on all of these services. They want to spend less money in these areas. They want to privatize. De-regulate. Get those big corporations in there doing these jobs efficiently, cheerfully serving the public interest. Republicans don't like Social Security or Medicare or Medicaid or Obamacare, even though, from what I've been reading lately, small businessmen and workers should love Obamacare. It's already bringing down insurance costs, and what's wrong with forcing insurance companies to play fair concerning pre-existing conditions, preventive medicine, and not dropping paying customers?

OK. So substitute your own description of the Republican position on government social services. You know what I mean. LESS!

Sooooo, let's talk about less for whom, shall we?

The party of Family Values. The party that wants to come into our bedrooms and tell us what we can and cannot do. The Christian party. Anti-birth control, Anti-sex education. Anti-abortion. (A zygote is a fetus is a person and a person is an act of God and that person must be protected by the government, even from his or her own mother. That baby person has rights that are absolute, like the entire Constitution.) Homophobic. Sword rattling. Got to preserve those gun rights (only!) in the Constitution. Censor the internet. Book burning Creationists. Hypocritical adulterers and clientele of prostitutes. Law and order! Anti-alcohol. Pro-tobacco. Anti-drug. Bible thumpers. Born again. The teachings of Jesus, right? Care for the poor. Love and forgive your enemies. Family values.

Who do these Christians want to give less to? Who gets squeezed? The billionaires? LOL!

And remember that another key tenant of Republican dogma is that we all have to be individualists, suck it up, and no matter what, make our own way in the world, without help from the government, just like each and every

Republican evidently claims to have done, except the ones like R0mney, who were born with golden plates from God in their mouths.

Candidates for Who Can Be Screwed:

1. **Children** — Let's say there is an orphan who has no family. Private agencies are nearly broke, yet do heroic work, but it's not enough. No government responsibility? Weird. What about children being sexually abused in their homes? Save money by letting the abuse continue? What if a child is hungry? Republican hearts don't break? Aren't we all ultimately responsible? Aren't Republicans very, very responsible for the children who are here who would otherwise not be? Aren't they the true parents of those children? Republicans forced their conception and/or their birth. But no responsibility?
2. **Oldies** — For this one there's even that Biblical injunction to "honor thy parents". Are we going to help these people? Are we even going to allow programs to continue that citizens have paid a fair price for— Social Security and Medicare? When Republicans call them "entitlements," it sure sounds like they think the programs are something that can be taken away. Thanks. Thanks for the sense of security the elderly must feel, that same sense of security and stability Republicans claim is so essential for business to create jobs. A sin and a crime, as my mother used to say.
3. **The Unemployed** — These people were working and/or want to work. We need them paying taxes. They want to pay taxes. It's hardly their fault, collectively, that the jobs don't exist anymore. That's the result of Washington and Wall Street policies and agendas over decades. Screw the workers, right?
4. **The Homeless** — Many of them have other, serious problems. Republicans should see them as eyesores and security risks, if nothing else. "There but for the grace of God go I" never occurs to them. Mostly the homeless don't vote. Maybe we could just pretend the problem doesn't exist? That it doesn't exist in the midst of millions of empty, decaying houses the banks foreclosed on, right after destroying the economy and getting their bail-out. Where exactly is their right to happiness for the homeless? Ah, they have the pursuit! If the unemployed, the oldies, and the children (according to Newt) would only **get off their lazy butts and get to work!** People say there aren't enough jobs. Republicans say, "Go create some yourself, like we did, lazy butt!"
5. **Vets and Homeless Vets** — Well, here's a problem. Some of the unfortunate people who are responsible for their own problems and have to take care of themselves are the heroes the Republicans sent into battle for "truth, justice, and the American Way." Long may it wave. No responsibility here? Then why is the job so far from finished? The VA is a heroic organization, doing much with little. I suppose it's all their fault? Surely Republicans would have to admit that there should be no homeless vets. Then surely, in a country where all are equal, there should be no homeless. Period.
6. **The Handicapped** — I know the Access laws were a big expense and imposition. Too bad we couldn't have kept all these folks in the back of the bus, right? That would have saved a lot of what's important— \$\$\$\$. Why help them? They should help themselves, like Republicans did. For instance, it's a little known fact that many of these independent, conservative Republicans didn't even have parents. They raised themselves from babyhood up with no thanks to anyone else, thank you. Now, if Republicans can do that, why can't the handicapped cope with a little handicap and **get off their lazy butts!**
7. **The Mentally Retarded and Mentally Ill** — They should just take their medication and leave us the f*ck alone! I liked that trailer park in Indiana where a little girl was recently murdered by a neighbor. The neighbor didn't happen to be one of the 14 registered sex offenders who live in the neighborhood. This little girl probably deserved to live in such a terrible place, where society essentially fed her to the wolves. We should all be so proud. Oh, I forgot. Children aren't important enough to be taken care of after they're born! (see #1, above)
8. **Patients in Comas** — Well...it may or may not be their fault... They certainly aren't going to contribute anything to the solution of their problems or vote or pay any taxes or do anything but demand resources.

Surely they are expendable if money is going to be saved somewhere. Can ethnic cleansing be far behind? What would be a good location for the first gas chamber? Maybe Texas? Mississippi?

You see, it might sound cool to talk about how everyone should just take care of themselves, but it doesn't really get us anywhere. We, all mankind, learned long ago that it just doesn't work like that. Why turn our backs on those hard-won lessons? This Republican talking point of individual responsibility is defeatist, elitist, and unworkable, unless you want fighting in the streets. We as a society have responsibilities that are really responsibilities to ourselves, our families, and our tribe. Or society is in real trouble. If Republicans deny their responsibilities to the above groups, I just want to hear them openly admit it, or shut up about it and open their wallets. I want to hear them admit it's hypocritical to impose unwanted babies on women, then say they owe those children nothing. These babies apparently have the vaunted Right to Life, but no further rights to true liberty or a meaningful pursuit of happiness. I want Republicans to break down and admit they're secretly, deathly fearful that they're flamingly gay!

Let's all simply run away from our responsibilities to those more unfortunate than we are and go count our money before the lazy rioters come and destroy everything.

[20120105-22](#) 18:58 Ben Re: Who Can Be Screwed? (reply to SteveB, above)

You were angry when you wrote this...

[20120105-23](#) 19:02 Art Re: Who Can Be Screwed? (reply to SteveB, above)

Well, I think you're going a little light on them, but OK. [:-) -SteveB]

Funny thing is, and we all know this, most Republicans don't see themselves this way at all. Further most right wing tea bag conservatives think they are the salt of the earth and it is us godless socialist, communist, Nazis who are the representatives of evil. (I think maybe they may have some of that 'ist' stuff a little confused.) It reminds me of early talk in WW I when both Allies and Central Powers were absolutely convinced that God was on their side. Someone responded that God was really just on the side of the big battalions.

Personally I do not see how Republicans can reconcile their position with what you have laid out below. Time and again we see smart well thought out and factually documented studies that repute most of their positions. That is why I sent that article on the USA vs. Europe on meritocracy. Turns out they by in large Europe is much more merit based than we are and it shows in their productivity. Why does health care costs so much more over here compared to Europe and yet collectively we get less? It goes on and on. It's not a matter of picking Europe over America, which will be the first finger pointed, the facts are there, we have examples where other things seem to work better and we need to deal with that.

During the period after Vietnam the Army, and to a lesser degree the other services took a hard look at themselves and discovered we really weren't very good at what we are supposed to be doing. We were living on our reputations from WW II and our self inflated opinions of ourselves. It wasn't going to win any battles in the next fight. So, we took a long look, set up some rigorous testing concepts at the new National Training Center and using newly developed technology like the Multiple Integrated Laser Engagement System (MILES) which ended the old playground cowboy and Indian "bang, bag, I got you first!!" Instead with laser emitters on every weapon and laser sensors on each person and vehicle, you could tell who actually did what. We trained an aggressor force equipped largely with Soviet weapons, and then sent out best rated battalions commanded by many self proclaimed of our finest to kick their ass. Instead, the aggressors kicked these hot shot battalions and their commanders all over the ballpark, again and again. From that we learned that talk doesn't cut it, you have to pay attention to facts, learn, and train and work hard to get really good.

That's where it seems to me the country is today. We can either stop telling ourselves we are the best at everything and start paying attention to facts or we can continue to slide downhill in the self delusional slide we are in. And oh by the way, trying to go back won't solve anything. The only historical case I can think of where a

country tried to go back was Japan in 1603. Given the nature of the world at that time, it worked internally for awhile but meanwhile the rest of the world progressed and when Admiral Perry showed up in the 1850s Japan found itself throwing rocks at cannons. They eventually sort of recovered but because so much of their society was so far out of date it took a long time and a lot of bloodshed.

So, to end this long winded discourse, I still think we need to hone in on what are the real issues facing the nation and which group is best suited to address them. I do believe the Republicans are best equipped to address the issue of the sometimes funky renditions of the National Anthem.

[And, actually, having served briefly in the Army myself, I think that a military organization has got to be one of the most difficult things to change in the world. They do it only when their backs are to the wall, I think. The military is inherently conservative, and rightfully so. Yet, as Art explains, they were able to change. A hopeful sign. –SteveB]

[20120105-24](#) 19:10 Pam Re: Who Can Be Screwed? (reply to Art, above)

This is really good, Art. The military reboot is a good example of what a realistic approach and a willingness to learn can do.

Since you brought up Japan--you all might enjoy *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet* by David Mitchell. It's about Japan before whites were allowed ashore and only a small contingent of Dutch traders were permitted to trade from an island offshore that they were forbidden to leave. It's kind of esoteric, but very interesting and full of drama. It's a novel.

[20120105-16](#) 15:07 SteveB Quote: Stephen Colbert on Serving the Poor



"If this is going to be a Christian nation that doesn't help the poor, either we have to pretend that Jesus was just as selfish as we are, or we've got to acknowledge that He commanded us to love the poor and serve the needy without condition and then admit that we just don't want to do it."

[20120105-01](#) 10:25 Pam Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Is Wrong (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #45)

I want Alan Grayson to be our next President. He's terrific. If his actions match his words, we have a new hero.

[20120105-02](#) 10:30 Pam Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #45)

This speaks volumes.

[20120105-04](#) 11:11 Art Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #45)

More here than meets the eye methinks. Any background? I've been to Nigeria, nothing good ever came out of that area.

20120105-05 11:19 Pam Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to Art, FotM above)

Methinks you might be right, Art.

There's a thing called "the authority of print." If something is printed, it must be true. I'm sure the internet is filled with gobblidygook.

Don't know if the Nigerians are in the business of sending aid to the U.S. Perhaps some are. But I wouldn't bet the farm on it.

20120105-06 11:57 SteveB Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to all, above)

No, no. This is what Snopes.com doesn't say: This is yet another of those Nigerian email scams. The church in Washington got an email telling them a rich benefactor had died and the church had inherited \$6,000,000, but first, they had to wire \$50,000 to a special bank account in Nigeria. So, having faith in their fellow man, they took the money intended for the orphan's home and wired it to the account. The lord would make it grow. The \$3000 is what the church thinks is the first installment on the \$6,000,000, but it's all they're going to see.

The truth is not always like soft sand. Sometimes it is like rock, and you have to keep hitting it with your pick until you break through. Either way, it takes a little digging, but it's worth it.

Truth: I did find a couple of links to the story and put one in yesterday's Newsletter. Don't know if that proves anything. There appears to be only one source. (http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/45879624/ns/local_news-tri_cities_wa/t/church-nigeria-donates-us/#.TwV_WtRSQhI)

20120105-07 11:58 SteveG Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to Pam, above)

Wasn't in print, was on the local news station filmed at the church in Kennewick.

20120105-08 12:08 SteveB Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)

Then it MUST be true! Ya, right, and astronauts landed on the moon too. LOL! And Dick Cheney had nothing to do with 9/11. And I have a bridge I want to sell you.

Just kidding...I imagine it's a true story...and a sad one in one way, yet a happy one in another...

20120105-09 12:16 SteveG Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveB, above)

I have no idea and no investment in the story being fact or fiction. The mere fact it was on the news is disturbing.

20120105-10 12:25 Pam Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)

I think there's a lot on the news that is untrue or only partially true. I always liked Daniel Schorr, but long ago during the Watergate hearings, I was watching the news and heard someone testify that someone had had a hard time making up his mind about something. My memory is vague, but it was along those lines. The program cut to Daniel Schorr, who summarized what had just been shown in real time. Schorr said, So-and-so is wishy washy and

all over the place. My point is, the interpretation or characterization of what was really said came totally from Mr. Schorr. In the space of a few seconds an entirely new spin had been set in motion. If I hadn't seen the two side by side, I'd have assumed Schorr's description was the right one. I don't think he was trying to be misleading, but the news is a bit like the telephone game, don't you think?

[20120105-11](#) 12:49 SteveB Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)

Well...look at how many homeless people we have, let alone the number of people in poverty. Government isn't doing enough, but more importantly, the rich and big corporations aren't doing enough. There's no reason for there to be a problem. There's no reason for CEO's to make more than they do in Germany or for doctors to make twice as much in the U.S. as in Europe. They have the higher cost of living over there.

What do these people think happens if wealth doesn't get redistributed somehow, if not voluntarily, by taxation?

It's amazing to me that investors (the shareholders) of corporations permit the kinds of abuses we see in the US. But they are invariably the most complacent groups of sheep in the world. Led to slaughter.

[20120105-12](#) 12:50 Pam Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveB, above)

Yeah, shareholders need to step up. Someone else suggested that as well--Art? I know when I get stuff from my portfolio (a grand term for not much), and they ask me to vote, I never bother. I don't know any of the people anyway, so I leave it to those who do. I'd hate to see CEOs campaigning like politicians, but how are we to know who's good and who's not?

When I lived in Canada, doctors were paid about the same as university professors--a comfortable living but not extravagant. I've got nothing against doctors making money, but they do (some of them, not all) seem to live pretty high on the hog. My cousin's son is a pulmonologist, and his house is not to be believed.

[20120105-29](#) 23:59 Bill Re: "Church in Nigeria Donates to the U.S." (reply to SteveG, above)

Let me give the strong suggestion that it's a scam. I used to get grifter e-mails from Nigeria all the time. There is a large e-criminal class in Nigeria, and I'm sure they laugh every time they send out one of their bunco-grams. The probability is very high that this was just one more crooked twist on the innumerable, seedy little scams sent by these people. And, by the way, I want every one of you to send me a check for \$5,000 to escrow against the huge endowment I'm about to bestow on you.

[20120105-03](#) 10:42 Pam Re: New Orleans Roadfood Festival (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #45)

I know crawfish (crayfish?) are delicacies--like mini-lobsters--but the picture with the corn on the cob looks like a pot full of bugs to me.

[20120105-13](#) 13:27 Tom "Oklahoma Woman Shoots, Kills Intruder: 911 Operators Say It's OK to Shoot"

Good story. Randy has an important intro, please read his comments. Note how these "predators" stalked and planned this attack on this very young widow. (Her husband died less than a week before!)

fwd. from Randy:

This story is a good example of why women, and men, should be armed and trained to defend their homes.

An 18 year old mother was on the phone for 21 minutes with the 911 dispatcher before the stalker broke down her door and came after her with a 12" knife in his hands. She shot and killed him with a shotgun. This happened on New Year's Eve, after her husband had just died of cancer on Christmas day. Apparently her German Shepard dog was not enough deterrent for her attacker.

There are three videos on this incident, all on the same page. It is interesting to see how the story is covered differently in each story. One of the three talks about the Castle Doctrine, which allows you to shoot someone coming into your home. It notes that many still have not yet adopted that law. In those states, the law demands that you retreat from an attacker, even in your own home. After being on the phone with 911 for 21 minutes, how far should this young widow have to retreat while carrying her 3 month old baby?

"Oklahoma Woman Shoots, Kills Intruder: 911 Operators Say It's OK to Shoot" by Kevin Dolak and Ryan Owens, ABC News

Jan. 4, 2011, (http://abcnews.go.com/US/okla-woman-shoots-kills-intruder911-operators-shoot/story?id=15285605#.TwWbuVZ_lgh)

A young Oklahoma mother shot and killed an intruder to protect her 3-month-old baby on New Year's Eve, less than a week after the baby's father died of cancer.

Sarah McKinley says that a week earlier a man named Justin Martin dropped by on the day of her husband's funeral, claiming that he was a neighbor who wanted to say hello. The 18-year-old Oklahoma City area woman did not let him into her home that day.

On New Year's Eve Martin returned with another man, Dustin Stewart, and this time was armed with a 12-inch hunting knife. The two soon began trying to break into McKinley's home.

As one of the men was going from door to door outside her home trying to gain entry, McKinley called 911 and grabbed her 12-gauge shotgun.

McKinley told ABC News Oklahoma City affiliate KOCO that she quickly got her 12 gauge, went into her bedroom and got a pistol, put the bottle in the baby's mouth and called 911.

"I've got two guns in my hand -- is it okay to shoot him if he comes in this door?" the young mother asked the 911 dispatcher. "I'm here by myself with my infant baby, can I please get a dispatcher out here immediately?"

The 911 dispatcher confirmed with McKinley that the doors to her home were locked as she asked again if it was okay to shoot the intruder if he were to come through her door.

"I can't tell you that you can do that but you do what you have to do to protect your baby," the dispatcher told her. McKinley was on the phone with 911 for a total of 21 minutes.

When Martin kicked in the door and came after her with the knife, the teen mom shot and killed the 24-year-old. Police are calling the shooting justified.

"You're allowed to shoot an unauthorized person that is in your home. The law provides you the remedy, and sanctions the use of deadly force," Det. Dan Huff of the Blanchard police said.

Stewart soon turned himself in to police.

McKinley said that she was at home alone with her newborn that night because her husband just died of cancer on Christmas Day.

"I wouldn't have done it, but it was my son," McKinley told ABC News Oklahoma City affiliate KOCO. "It's not an easy decision to make, but it was either going to be him or my son. And it wasn't going to be my son. There's nothing more dangerous than a woman with a child."

[20120105-14](#) 13:44 Dennis Stupid Person's World Map



[20120105-15](#) 14:35 SteveB Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)

Whoever did this map has truly been a round. I like Iceland and the Philippines, especially.

[20120105-17](#) 15:37 Ben Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)

Hoot!

[20120105-18](#) 17:28 Art Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)

I love it. Sadly I suspect it pretty well sums up the general geographic knowledge of most Americans.

[20120105-19](#) 17:37 Pam Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Art, above)

Ain't that the truth?!

Those of you who went to junior high in Greencastle, do you remember Mr. Hammond, the geography teacher? I learned almost everything I know today about geography from him, and that's quite a lot compared to most people. I still remember coloring in those maps that he would put up on the bulletin board. I always hoped mine would be picked as the best, and sometimes it was. :-)

[20120105-20](#) 17:41 Art Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Pam, above)

I had a college professor who taught a basic geography course. He was known to be a terror. The first day of class he handed out about three sheets, single spaced and two columns each of place names and told us you probably

won't see any of these again except on a test, and then you'll see a lot of them. Great professor and we learned a lot, including how geography and climatic patterns shape our weather, all of it. I still remember.

[20120105-21](#) 18:46 SteveB Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Pam, above)

HALITOSIS HAMILTON! But you learned your geography. He made it easy. Why doesn't everybody know geography?

The map is just precious, I think.

[20120105-25](#) 19:39 Dennis Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Pam, above)

from SteveB:

Why doesn't everybody know geography?

Geography at GHS was not considered an "academic course." It was just me and the greasers and "Little Boo" was the teacher.

I had a minor in Geography at Western Michigan along with double majors in Social Science (mostly history) and Sociology. And look where all those liberal arts classes got me!

[20120105-26](#) 20:24 SteveB Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)

Uh...liberal?

[20120105-27](#) 20:35 SteveG Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to Dennis, above)

They got you around the world a few times.

[20120105-28](#) 22:25 Bill Re: Stupid Person's World Map (reply to all, above)

I also had Reese Hammond for geography, and, despite the halitosis, he was a good and conscientious teacher. I had heard that he was graduated from DePauw, where he was on the football team and known to be tough. What has become of his daughter? Can't remember her name; dark hair; smart and pleasant.

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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>
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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #47 — JAN. 9, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Why Not Just Throw the Rest of Us in Prison Right Now?

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 9, 2012)

The United States already holds more people within its jails and prisons than any other nation on Earth. By the end of 2010, there were 1,404,053 prisoners in state prisons alone.

from *The New York Times*, Apr. 23, 2008:

The United States has less than 5 percent of the world's population. But it has almost a quarter of the world's prisoners. Indeed, the United States leads the world in producing prisoners, a reflection of a relatively recent and now entirely distinctive American approach to crime and punishment. Americans are locked up for crimes — from writing bad checks to using drugs — that would rarely produce prison sentences in other countries. And in particular they are kept incarcerated far longer than prisoners in other nations. Criminologists and legal scholars in other industrialized nations say they are mystified and appalled by the number and length of American prison sentences. The United States has, for instance, 2.3 million criminals behind bars, more than any other nation, according to data maintained by the International Center for Prison Studies at King's College London.

Now, the military is getting in on the act, big time, and they're free from the bothersome bother of the courts. The Republican Party wants to come knocking at our bedroom doors, demanding to be able to inspect (for the protection of society) for possible abortion activities, birth control, sodomy, bestiality, all manner of gay stuff, pornography, and any and all terrorist stuff you might have lying around. The Democratic Party wants to come in and take our guns, but they'll at least knock first.

I guess the prison population is going to explode, especially if the Republicans have their way. Brick by brick, word by precious word, the Constitution is dismantled. And they'll even let you keep your beloved guns, Teabaggers. What good are handguns, rifles, and shotguns when you have no other rights and the Army is against you? What good is your gun when you're in prison, without charges, without a judge, jury, or lawyer, being waterboarded? American citizens, arrested by the Army, vaguely charged with "terrorism" or "terrorist ties", will be the next folks to be welcomed at Guantanamo. You see, once the government wall allowed to set foot on this slippery slope, we put our freedoms in the hands of imperfect human nature, forsaking the Constitution.

from "The Evil of Indefinite Detention and Those Wanting to De-Prioritize It" by Glenn Greenwald, Salon

Jan. 8, 2012,

([http://politics.salon.com/2012/01/08/the evils of indefinite detention and those wanting to de prioritize them/singleton/](http://politics.salon.com/2012/01/08/the_evils_of_indefinite_detention_and_those_wanting_to_de_prioritize_them/singleton/))

This Wednesday will mark the ten-year anniversary of the opening of the Guantanamo prison camp. In *The New York Times*, one of the camp's former prisoners, Lakhdar Boumediene, has an incredibly powerful Op-Ed recounting the gross injustice of his due-process-free detention, which lasted seven years. It was clear from the start that the accusations against this Bosnian citizen — who at the time of the 9/11 attack was the Red Crescent Society's director of humanitarian aid for Bosnian children — were false; indeed, a high court in Bosnia investigated and cleared him of American charges of Terrorism. But U.S. forces nonetheless abducted him, tied him up, shipped him to Guantanamo, and kept him there for seven years with no trial.

In September, 2006, the U.S. Congress passed the Military Commissions Act (MCA) which, among other things, not only authorized the detention of accused Terrorist suspects without a trial, but even explicitly denied all Guantanamo detainees the right of habeas corpus: the Constitutionally mandated procedure to allow prisoners at least one opportunity to convince a court that they are being wrongfully held. Habeas hearings are a much lower form of protection than a full trial: the government need not convince a jury beyond a reasonable doubt that someone is guilty, but rather merely present some credible evidence to justify the imprisonment. But the MCA denied even habeas rights to detainees.

Only once the U.S. Supreme Court, in a 2008 decision bearing Boumediene's name, ruled that this habeas-denying provision of the MCA was unconstitutional, and that Guantanamo detainees were entitled to habeas corpus review, was the U.S. government finally required to show its evidence against Boumediene in an actual court. A Bush-43 appointed federal judge then ruled that there was no credible evidence to support the accusations against him, and he was finally released in May, 2009. Please first go read Boumediene's short though gripping account of what this indefinite detention did to his life, and then consider the following points:

1. Since the Supreme Court's *Boumediene* decision, dozens of Guantanamo detainees like Boumediene were finally able to have a federal court review whether there was any credible evidence against them, and the vast majority have won their cases on the ground that there was no such evidence (at one point, 75% of Guantanamo detainees prevailed, though the percentage is now somewhat lower). Had the Military Commissions Act been upheld as constitutional, Boumediene — and dozens of other innocent, now-released Guantanamo detainees — would undoubtedly still be indefinitely imprisoned.

Put another way, if those who voted for the MCA had their way — and that includes all GOP Senators except Lincoln Chafee along with 12 Democrats, including Jay Rockefeller, Debbie Stabenow, Robert Menendez, Frank Lautenberg, and current Interior Secretary Ken Salazar — then Boumediene and dozens of other innocent detainees would still be wrongly imprisoned. Moreover, the Democrats had 46 Senators at the time and could have filibustered but did not; indeed, even many Democrats who voted against the bill anointed John McCain as their negotiator and were prepared to vote for the MCA until the very last weekend when some unrelated changes were made without their input and they were offended on that procedural ground. As Boumediene's Op-Ed reflects, acting to empower the President to imprison people indefinitely with no charges is one of the most pernicious and dangerous steps a government can take, and yet the U.S. Congress in 2006 did exactly that.

2. The *Boumediene* Supreme Court decision was a 5-4 vote; thus, four Justices of the U.S. Supreme Court voted to uphold the constitutionality of imprisoning human beings indefinitely, possibly for life, without even the minimal protections of a habeas hearing. Had Anthony Kennedy voted with his conservative colleagues, not only would Boumediene and dozens of others still be wrongly imprisoned, but the power which the U.S. has long taught its citizens is the defining hallmark of tyranny — the power to imprison without due process — would have been fully enshrined under American law.

3. Post-*Boumediene*, indefinite detention remains a staple of Obama policy. The Obama DOJ has repeatedly argued that the Boumediene ruling should not apply to Bagram, where — the Obama administration insists — it has the power to imprison people with no due process, not even a habeas hearing; the Obama DOJ has succeeded in having that power enshrined. Obama has proposed a law to vest him with powers of

“prolonged detention” to allow Terrorist suspects to be imprisoned with no trials. His plan for closing Guantanamo entailed the mere re-location of its indefinite detention system to U.S. soil, where dozens of detainees, at least, would continue to be imprisoned with no trial. And, of course, the President just signed into law the NDAA which contains — as the ACLU put it — “a sweeping worldwide indefinite detention provision,” meaning — as Human Rights Watch put it — that “President Obama will go down in history as the president who enshrined indefinite detention without trial in US law.” Those held at Guantanamo will continue to receive at least a habeas hearing, but those held in other American War on Terror prisons will not. Read Boumediene’s Op-Ed to see why this is so odious.

4. As we head into Election Year, there is an increasingly common, bizarre and self-evidently repellent tactic being employed by some Democratic partisans against those of us who insist that issues like indefinite detention (along with ongoing killing of civilians in the Muslim world) merit high priority. The argument is that to place emphasis on such issues is to harm President Obama (because he’s responsible for indefinite detention, substantial civilian deaths, and war-risking aggression) while helping competing candidates (such as Gary Johnson or Ron Paul) who vehemently oppose such policies. Thus, so goes this reasoning, to demand that issues like indefinite detention and civilian deaths be prioritized in assessing the presidential race is to subordinate the importance of other issues such as abortion, gay equality, and domestic civil rights enforcement on which Obama and the Democrats are better. Many of these commentators strongly imply, or now even outright state, that only white males are willing to argue for such a prioritization scheme because the de-prioritized issues do not affect them. See here (Megan Carpentier), here (Katha Pollitt) and here (Dylan Matthews) as three of many examples of this grotesque accusatory innuendo.

[20120106-01](#)

08:35 SteveB

Photo: Brotherhood (If Only Republicans and Democrats Could Get Along Like THIS!)



[20120107-03](#)

21:25 SteveG

Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, above)

Dad used to have a horse, a Labradoodle, and a duck. The horse and dog would play tag and romp around the field – the dog would then curl up around the duck for a nap and the duck would clean the dog up.

[Even animals seem to have an instinct that drives them sometimes to take care of each other...I hope. And I hope so do we. –SteveB]

[20120107-04](#) 23:00 Larry Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, above)

This is tops, SteveB, it really speaks to me.

[20120108-03](#) 13:02 Art Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, above)

I grew up on a farm out near Fillmore and had a dog and a pig that were best friends and playmates. They would wrestle for hours. The dog being much faster would harass the pig unmercifully but every now and then the pig would get a grip on the dog and literally lift him up off the ground, and then gently set him down and they'd start all over.

[I love it! I had a friend in Cloverdale who had a pig for a pet and the pig acted just like a dog, greeting the school bus, etc. –SteveB]

[20120106-02](#) 09:30 SteveB Ancient Andean Astronauts

This is a photo of the Inca blanket I use as curtains in my office—that's why it's a little wavy. There's a *chola* on the right spinning alpaca or *vicunya* yarn. On the left is *Inti*, the Inca sun god. The patterns on these blankets go back, they think, thousands or millions of years. These Indians are incredibly conservative about ever changing. That's just the way they are. So, what I'm saying is...this depiction of the sun god goes back a long, long way.

Yet...look how *Inti* looks almost exactly like a microprocessor chip!!!!!! Those ancient people knew sh*!t!

SHADES OF UFO'S!!!!



[20120106-03](#) 13:01 Ben Re: Ancient Andean Astronauts (reply to SteveB, above)

Yes indeed! "Flat pack" was what I thought consciously when I opened the mail, before ever I read the text.

Very cool.

Have you read *In the Courts of the Sun* by Brian D'Amato? It was one of the most cosmically amazing things I read last year... face-time in ancient Maya, at the peak of its glory, as an offshoot of modern terrorism. (Yes, it's a time-travel thing.)

20120106-05 14:42 Phil Fw: Another Anti-Obama Email

I laugh at all the political crap that people email relative to both sides of the aisle, but I thought this was immensely humorous.

I thought the Groundhog Day and State of The Union address coincidence was clever as well. [Except it turns out to be based on a lie too. They aren't on the same day. -SteveB]

[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

KIM JUNG UN

I am really concerned about North Korea's appointment of the "dear leader", Kim Jung Il's youngest son to be the new leader of North Korea - a nuclear power! After all, Kim Jung Un (pronounced Kim's young-un?) had NO military experience whatsoever before daddy made him a four-star general in the military. This is a snot-nose twerp who has never accomplished anything in his life that would even come close to military leadership: he hasn't even so much as led a cub scout troop, coached a sports team or commanded a military platoon.

So, setting that aside, next they make him the "beloved leader" of the country. Terrific!

Oh, crap! I'm sorry. I just remembered that we did the same thing here. We took a community organizer who has never worn a uniform and made him Commander-in-Chief; a guy who has never led anything more than an ACORN demonstration and made him the leader of this country.

I'm sorry I brought this up, never mind.

20120106-04 13:56 SteveB From the Right: "Refighting Old Fights" & "Obama's 'Abuse of Power' threatens to Shut Down Senate"

"Refighting Old Fights" by Erick Erickson, Daily Events, Jan. 6, 2012, (from an email)

We are about to begin refighting old fights within the Republican Party. In large part we can blame George W. Bush for this. Seriously.

Bush did not leave an heir apparent to run for President and either win or lose. Consequently, we have never really had a referendum within the Republican Party on Bush's brand of big government conservatism. McCain is not a real proxy because McCain opposed Bush and a number of Bush initiatives.

But because the GOP likes orderly processes, without an heir apparent in 2008, the GOP had to go back to 2000 with McCain and refight some of these fights. Had there been an heir apparent in 2008, Mitt Romney would either have supplanted that person as the leader or been beaten in a reaffirmation of President Bush's policies.

The party has never rebooted from 2008. Now we are in the fun situation of practically carrying over the 2008 primary to fight for the future of the party. But, the two front runners are, in effect, big government conservatives. Mitt Romney introduced the nation to gay marriage (you can blame the courts in Massachusetts for the first step, but Romney did not adequately fight) and the predecessor to ObamaCare.

Rick Santorum supported No Child Left Behind, Medicare Part D, filibustered the National Right to Work Act, opposed repeal of the Davis-Bacon Act, championed giving felons the right to vote, opposed food stamp reform and Medicaid reform and TANF reform, supported raising cigarette taxes to pay for healthcare and on and on and on.

It really is amazing that after the successes of the Tea Party movement in 2010 to reduce the size and scope of the federal government, the two front runners within the GOP have rarely ever opposed the creeping expansion of the federal state.

"Obama's 'Abuse of Power' threatens to Shut Down Senate" by Audrey Hudson, *Human Events*

Jan. 6, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=48593>)

Key Republican Senators are bracing for legislative battles and Constitutional challenges to President Barack Obama's unprecedented end-run around Congress to install several controversial political appointees.

Obama announced the decision Wednesday to make the so-called recess appointments -- even though the Senate is not in recess -- putting Richard Cordray in charge of a contentious new consumer protection agency and also naming three appointments to the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) -- Sharon Block, Richard Griffin and Terence F. Flynn.

"Business as we know it in the Senate is over for this administration in terms of accomplishing anything legislatively or finding any cooperation from this side of the aisle," said Sen. John Barrasso (R. --Wyo.). "He has poisoned the well."

"Apparently, advise and consent called for in the Constitution doesn't apply to this Chicago-style politician. He's more interested in rewarding his friends than living under the law Americans need to abide by," Barrasso said.

The Constitution allows the president to make recess appointments, but the controversy in this case is whether or not the Senate is in recess.

"I believe it's an abuse of power. Now he is saying he's above the law -- the law doesn't apply to him," Barrasso said.

Republicans have kept the Congress in a pro forma session, gaveling in for a few minutes of official business every three days. It's a tactic that was used by Democrats during the Bush administration to block recess appointments. Additionally, Obama's own Justice Department argued before the Supreme Court in 2010 that Congress is not in recess unless it's absent for more than three days.

Republicans say they are frustrated because Obama did not nominate the NLRB picks until last month -- just two days before the Christmas holiday -- allowing no time for the Senate to hold hearings.

Meanwhile, Senate Democrats have stalled the confirmation of the lone Republican nominee for the labor board, Brian Hayes, since July 2009.

Another contentious factor in Obama's maneuver, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau created by the Dodd-Frank Act, requires that the new director be confirmed by the Senate, so Cordray's appointment puts the agency's legal authority in limbo.

"I don't think he has the full authority to run this agency," said J.W. Verrett, an assistant professor of law at George Mason University and a senior scholar at the Mercatus Center.

"The president's decision is a purely political one, and not about consumer protection," Verrett said. "In fact, he's sacrificed consumer protection. He's more interested in being tough on Congress than being tough on predatory lenders."

Sen. Mike Lee (R. –Utah), a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said these actions were not ordinary recess appointments but “egregious and inexcusable” acts of a president who thinks he’s above the law.

“As a matter of raw political force, can he do it? He just did,” Lee said.

“I think the president wanted to pick a really big fight, and he has surely chosen one,” Lee said. “This is a direct affront to the American people and the constitutional system of government that we have.”

Republicans are hesitant to give away their game plan on how they will respond to Obama’s move, but Lee suggested that Congress could withhold the salaries for the new federal appointees.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R. Ky.) said Obama “upped the ante” and set “a terrible precedent that could allow any future president to completely cut the Senate out of the confirmation process, appointing his nominees immediately after sending their names up to Congress.”

“This was surely not what the framers had in mind when they required the president to seek the advice and consent of the Senate in making appointments,” McConnell said.

Sen. Orrin Hatch (R. –Utah) said Obama made the appointments to placate his “big labor allies,” but that it might not be enough to save him come Election Day.

“The president put his own political future and the radical views of his far-left base ahead of constitutional government. The president will have to answer to the American people for this power grab,” Hatch said.

Vincent Vernuccio, a labor policy lawyer with the Competitive Enterprise Institute, said the NLRB appointees are a gift to Obama’s labor backers, and that Griffin comes to the board directly from a labor union.

“The vacancies on the Board have occurred because Obama has insisted on nominating pro-union ideologues too controversial to pass Senate confirmation,” Vernuccio said.

Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, congratulated Obama on overcoming what he called “Republican obstructionists.”

“Working families and consumers should not pay the price for political ploys that have repeatedly undercut the enforcement of rules against Wall Street abuses and the rights of working people,” Trumka said.

(Audrey Hudson, an award-winning investigative journalist, is a Congressional Correspondent for HUMAN EVENTS. A native of Kentucky, Mrs. Hudson has worked inside the Beltway for nearly two decades -- on Capitol Hill as a Senate and House spokeswoman, and most recently at The Washington Times covering Congress, Homeland Security, and the Supreme Court.)

[20120106-06](#)

14:57

SteveG

“Rick Santorum-Linked Universal Health Services Facility: Fraud, Assault & Alleged 'Exorcism'”

Worth a read:

[“Rick Santorum-Linked Universal Health Services Facility: Fraud, Assault and Alleged 'Exorcism'” by Jason Cherkis, Huffington Post](#)

Jan. 6, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/06/rick-santorum-uhs_n_1186443.html?ref=daily-briefutm_source=DailyBrief&utm_campaign=010612&utm_medium=email&utm_content=NewsEntry&utm_term=Daily%20Brief)

"Arms Dealer Obama Will Win by Default" by Robert Scheer, TruthDig

Jan. 6, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/arms-dealer-obama-will-win-default-1325862035>)

Barack Obama will be re-elected not as a vindication of his policies but because the Republicans are incapable of providing a reasonable challenge to his flawed performance. On the central issue of our time—reigning in the greed of the multinational corporations, led by the financial sector and the defense industry—a Republican presidential victor, with the possible exception of the now-sidelined Ron Paul, would do far less to challenge the kleptocracy of corporate-dominated governance. [Why is Ron Paul "sidelined"? –SteveB]

As compared to front-runner Mitt Romney, who wants to derail even Obama's tepid efforts at regulating Wall Street, and who seeks ever more wasteful increases in military spending, the incumbent president appears relatively enlightened, but that is cold comfort.

Not only has Obama been a savior of the banking conglomerates that so generously financed his campaign, but he also has proved to be equally as solicitous of the needs of the military-industrial complex. He entered his re-election year by signing a \$662 billion defense authorization bill that strips away some of our most fundamental liberties and keeps military spending at Cold War levels, and by approving a \$60 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia.

Those two actions represent an obvious contradiction, since the attack on American soil that kept defense spending so high in the post-9/11 decade was carried out by 15 Saudis and four other men directed by Osama bin Laden, a wealthy Saudi primarily using funding from his native land. Now Saudi Arabia is to be protected as a holdout against the democratic impulse of the Arab Spring because it is our ally against Iran, a nation that had nothing to do with 9/11. Saudi Arabia, it should be recalled, was one of only three nations, along with the United Arab Emirates and Pakistan, to recognize the Taliban government that harbored bin Laden before 9/11.

This is the same Saudi monarchy that rushed its forces into Bahrain last March to crush a popular uprising. But that doesn't trouble the Obama administration; for two years it has been aggressively pushing the Saudi arms deal, which includes \$30 billion in fighter jets built by Boeing. Forget human rights or the other good stuff Democrats love to prattle on about. As White House spokesman Josh Earnest put it: "This agreement reinforces the strong and enduring relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia and demonstrates the U.S. commitment to a strong Saudi defense capability as a key component to regional security."

The rationale for the first big arms deal with the tyrannical Saudi monarchy since 1992 is that a better-armed Sunni theocracy is needed to counter the threat from the Shiite theocracy in Iran. Once again the U.S. is stoking religious-based fratricide, just as we did in Iraq. Only this time, we are on the side of Saudi Sunnis oppressing Shiites both at home and in neighboring Bahrain. That oppression—along with a U.S. invasion that replaced Tehran's sworn enemy in Sunni-led Baghdad with a Shiite leadership that had long been nurtured by Iran's ayatollahs—is what enhances the regional influence of Iran.

If Iran ever does pose a regional military threat because of its nuclear program or any other reason, real or concocted, it will be NATO forces that will take out the threat, not the Saudis, who will still be polishing their latest-model F-15s as icons of a weird conception of modernism.

The real reason for this deal is that it is the only sort of jobs program that Democrats are capable of pushing through an obstructive Congress. The administration boasts that the arms package will result in 50,000 jobs in 44 states, underscoring the warning from Dwight Eisenhower, the last progressive Republican president, about the power of a military-industrial complex that has tentacles in every congressional district. As Sen. Claire McCaskill of Missouri, an Armed Services Committee member who championed this sale, put it: "The F-15 is a world-class aircraft built by hardworking folks right here in St. Louis. I am thrilled for all of the skilled men and women on the F-15 line that this important, big order that I have stood side-by-side with them in working to secure is finally happening."

A Democrat running for re-election, McCaskill added, "These are important jobs in our community. I will continue advocating for sales of Boeing products wherever appropriate." Being a good Democrat, she doesn't reference Boeing's profits, which are increasingly dependent upon arming the rest of the world.

That's the win-win of government-generated profits and jobs on which the Democrats are counting to defeat the Republicans, both through campaign contributions from the more rational among the wealthy and the votes of ordinary people who, despite being seriously hurt in this economy, have nowhere else to turn.

20120106-08 17:51 SteveG Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Just Hand-Out the Prozac

from Alan Grayson:

I think that I figured out what happened in Iowa. Here's what I think.

Results of the Iowa Republican Caucus, Jan. 3:

Romney 25%
Santorum 25%
Paul 21%.

Reliable earlier polling results:

Dec. 18: Paul 24%, Romney 18%, Perry 16%.
Nov. 28: Gingrich 28%, Paul 13%, Romney 12%.
Oct. 16: Cain 37%, Romney 27%, Paul 12%.
Aug. 31: Perry 29%, Bachmann 18%, Romney 17%.
July 11: Bachmann 29%, Romney 16%, Cain 8%.
May 29: Romney 21%, Cain 15%, Gingrich 12%.

So the lead went from Romney to Bachmann to Perry to Cain to Gingrich to Paul and back to Romney. That is waaaaaaaaay more complicated than Tinker to Evers to Chance. Seven leaders in seven months. And that doesn't even count the boomlets for Donald Trump at the beginning, and Rick Santorum at the end.

And it's not as though we saw some kind of "character development" in these characters that would account for the change, as if the Iowa race were like some Stendhal novel, "The Red and the Redder." The only change that I saw in any of them is that on November 28, when he was ahead in the polls, Newt Gingrich was a sour megalomaniac, and on January 3, when he came in fourth, Gingrich was a bitter megalomaniac. Sour, bitter, what's the difference?

Also, leaving Herman Cain aside, there were no extraordinary revelations about any of the Republican candidates that could possibly account for their rise and fall. For instance, I gently noted on December 15 that Newt Gingrich is "a philanderer; a corporate shill; a crass greedhead; an egomaniac; and a cranky, crabby, crotchety, caustic, cantankerous, choleric cus." None of that was exactly news. I could have said the same thing about Newt Gingrich on December 15, 1995, and it wouldn't have surprised anyone.

I looked at those Iowa polling numbers again and again, and I asked myself what possible rational explanation there could be for them. And then I realized that there is no possible rational explanation. Only an irrational one.

And it's not the candidates. It's their voters.

Let's see. Severe highs and lows. Violent mood swings. One day, a person thinks that someone is the messiah, and a week later, the devil. And did you see the audience during the Iowa Republican debates? Violent temper tantrums. Inexplicable angry outbursts.

Hmmmm. What does that sound like?

It sounds like manic depression to me.

All of those manic depressives, about a third of the vote, were forced to choose among Romney, Santorum, Paul, Gingrich, Perry, Bachmann, Cain and Huntsman. But the only candidate whom they really could have related to would have been the late, great Thomas Eagleton. (George McGovern's 1972 running mate for 18 days, until all that nasty stuff about electroshock therapy came out.)

I don't know why this would surprise anyone. Roughly 10% of the population of the United States is on anti-depressants. And only 4% of the population of Iowa actually voted in the 2012 Republican caucuses. Just who did you think those 4% were?

So now I understand it. Romney won the paranoid vote, everyone who thinks that the brown people are trying to steal all their stuff. Why? Because no one is more white than Mitt Romney. As I said earlier today, it's as though Romney is on a strict diet of sour cream and cottage cheese, small curds only.

Perry and Bachmann split the schizophrenic vote, all the people who hear a voice in their head, and think that it's God. Because Perry and Bachmann can listen to the radio whenever they want to, even when it's turned off.

Ron Paul got the obsessive-compulsive vote, the folks who think that America is like some kind of mechanical wind-up toy, and the Articles of the Constitution are the gears.

And Santorum ended up with the manic-depressive vote. Maybe because they like the way that Santorum cries in public. Boehner was their second choice.

By the way, I'm not the first person to notice this about the other side. Noted Nixon-hater Philip K. Dick actually wrote a novel about this in 1964, called "Clans of the Alphane Moon." Except that Dick placed that story in outer space, not Iowa. Minor difference.

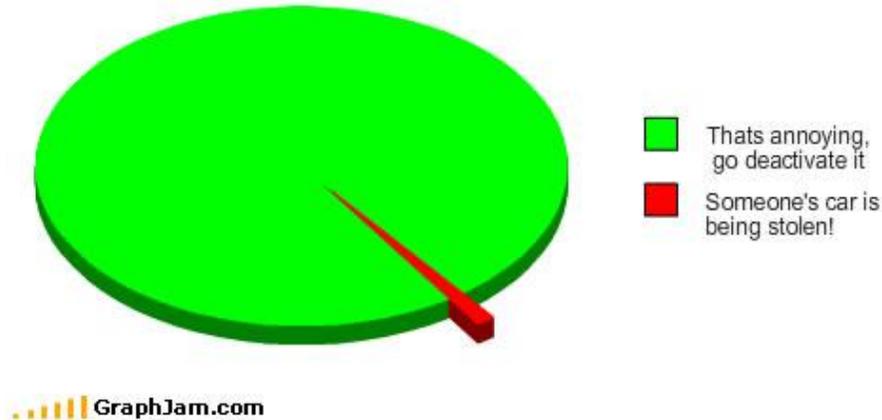
Anyway, I'll tell you one thing. If these are the kind of people who are choosing one of the two major-party candidates for President this year, then I'm voting for the other guy. I'm definitely voting for the other guy.

Courage, Alan Grayson

20120106-09	19:05	SteveG	SteveG Action: Sign-up for Huffington Post's 'Daily Briefs' Emails!
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Sign-up for the Huffington Post's "Daily Brief" emails: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huffingtonpost/new-daily-brief_b_811083.html.

Thoughts When A Car Alarm Goes Off



If only I hadn't flunked my draft physical, I could be there laughing along with this guy:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrhA0sEkuaM>.

I think you may be on to something!

Rachel Maddow nailed it!

Want to know one of the biggest – and as yet locally unreported – reasons why the GOP is trying to jam through its divisive, wage-shrinking "right-to-work" legislation in one week?

Two words: Super Bowl.

<http://video.msnbc.msn.com/the-rachel-maddow-show/45894457#null>

Interesting article, long and is only Part 1:

from "2012: A Year of Choices" by John Mauldin, Millennium Wave Advisors

Jan. 7, 2012 (http://www.advisorperspectives.com/commentaries/millennium_010712.php)

2012 will be the year that the consequences of the choices made by the developed world will begin to manifest themselves in the economic realm. We are in the closing chapters of the current Debt Supercycle, with different countries strewn out along the path, and all headed for a destination that will force major decisions if politically painful actions are not taken. Some countries (e.g., Greece) have a choice between the dire and

the disastrous. The option for merely difficult choices was long ago, and there is no going back to where you started without a different but equally painful outcome.

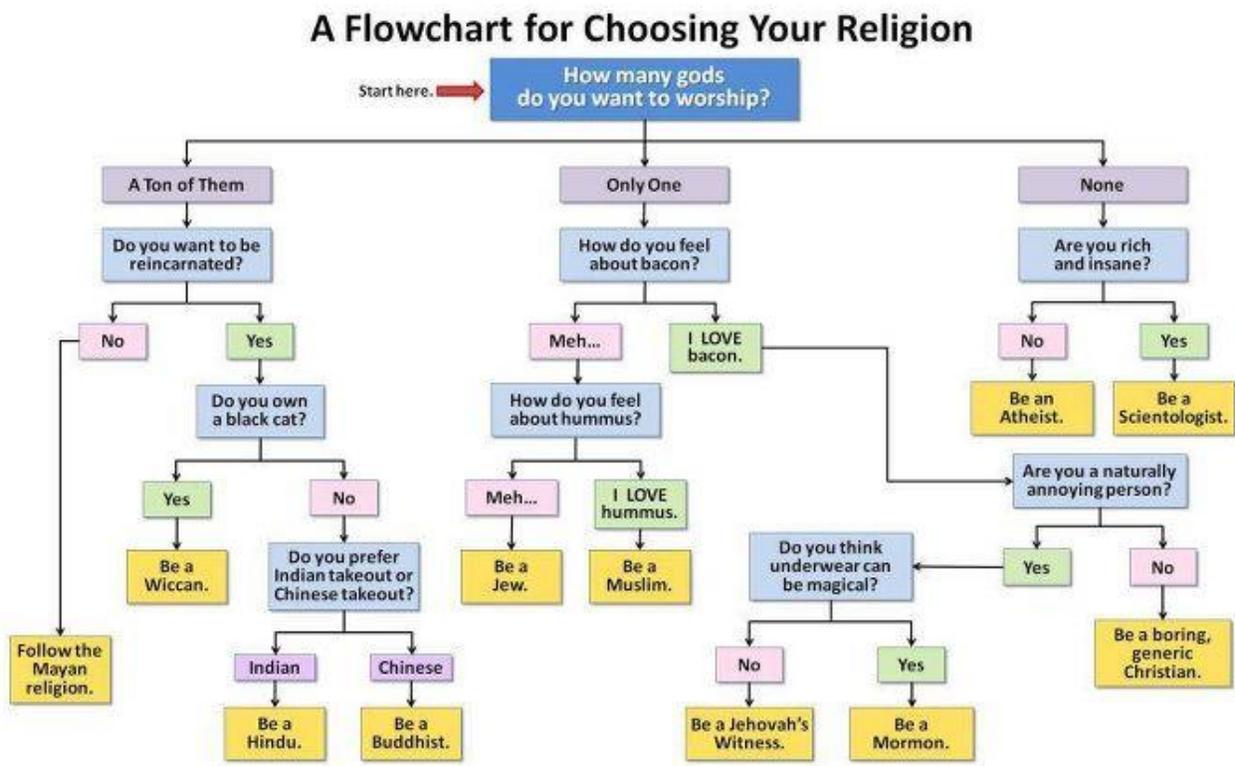
20120108-04 17:29 Dennis Re: "2012: A Year of Choices" (reply to SteveBA, above)

Thanks SteveBA. The only thing I learned from this article is that I'm glad I bought stock in Biotime.

20120108-07 23:08 SteveBA Re: "2012: A Year of Choices" (reply to Dennis, above)

Well played.

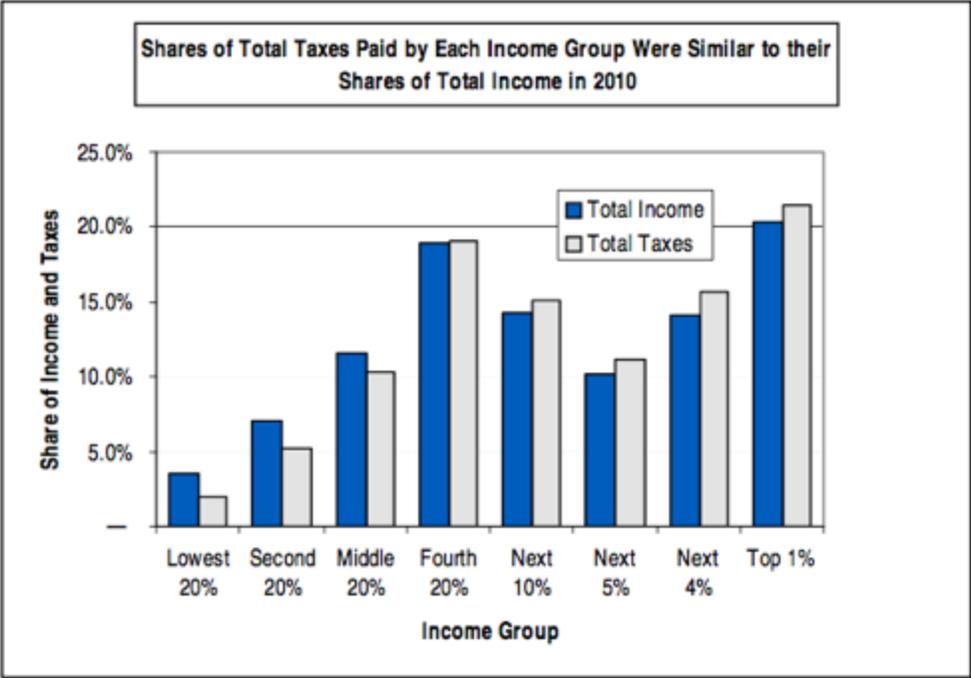
20120108-05 18:20 Dennis Flowchart: Choosing Your Religion



"The Top 5 Tax Myths to Watch Out for This Election Season" posted by Sara, MoveON.org

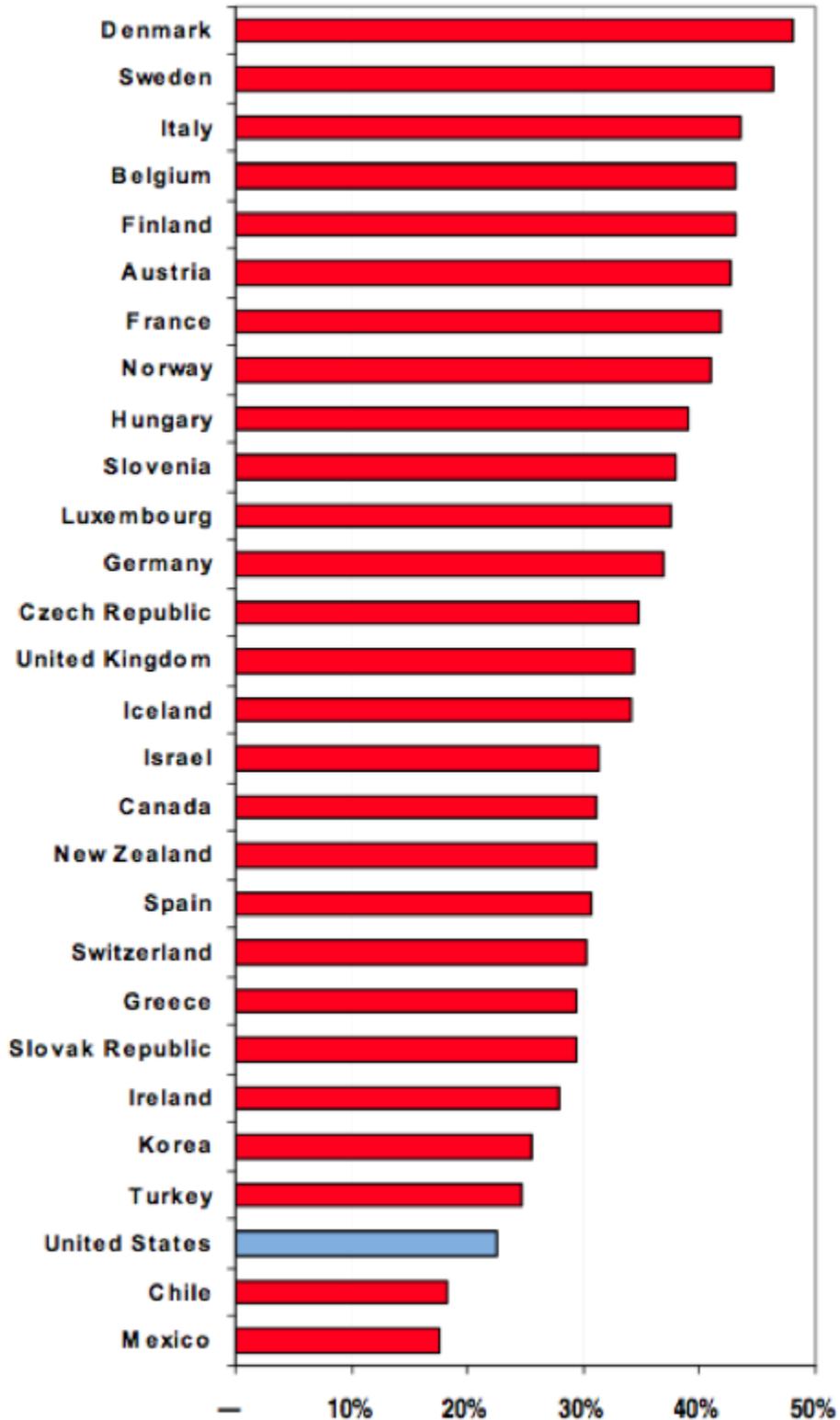
Jan. 6, 2012, (<http://front.moveon.org/the-top-5-tax-myths-to-watch-out-for-this-election-season/>)

MYTH #1: 47% of Americans do not pay taxes.
FACT: All Americans pay taxes.



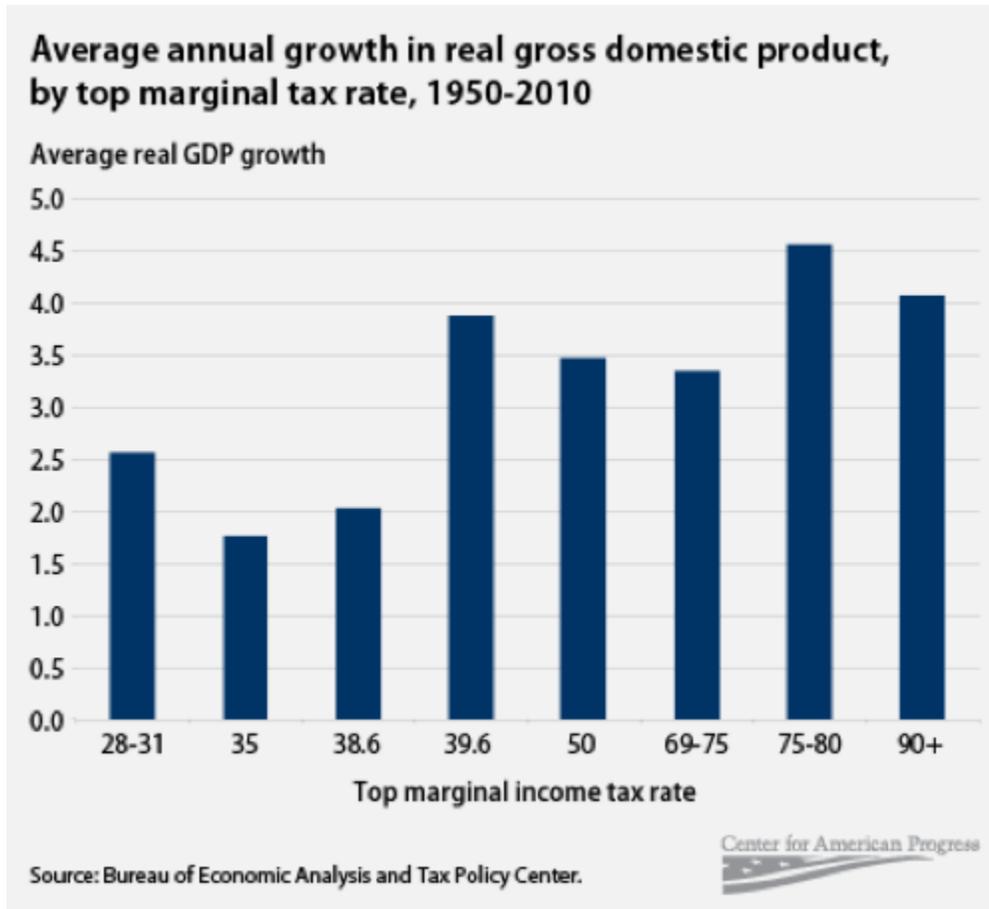
MYTH #2: The American people and corporations pay high taxes.
FACT: The US has the third lowest taxes of any developed country in the world.

Total 2009 Taxes as a % of GDP



MYTH #3: Cutting taxes creates jobs and raises revenue.

FACT: Tax cuts reduce revenue and are not associated with economic growth.



MYTH #4: The US tax system is very progressive because wealthy individuals already pay a disproportionate amount of taxes.

FACT: At a time of growing income inequality, the US tax system is basically flat.

When you take into account all of the taxes that individuals pay, the truth is that our tax system is relatively flat. The top one percent of income earners receives 20.3 percent of total income while paying 21.5 percent of total taxes and the lowest 20 percent of income earners receive 3.5 percent of total income while still paying out two percent of total taxes.

In other words, wealthy individuals pay a high percentage of taxes because they earn a highly disproportionate amount of income. This is a consequence of growing income inequality in the United States, which is at a level not seen since before the Great Depression.

MYTH #5: The "Fair Tax" or a flat tax would be more fair.

FACT: The "Fair Tax" or a flat tax would make our tax system even more regressive.

Impact of Specter "Flat Tax" in 2010		
Income Group	Average Income	Average Tax Change
Lowest 20%	\$ 12,400	\$ +1,485
Second 20%	24,900	+2,299
Middle 20%	40,100	+2,678
Fourth 20%	65,500	+3,576
Next 10%	99,600	+5,182
Next 5%	140,100	+4,323
Next 4%	243,900	-5,834
Top 1%	1,327,700	-209,562
Bottom 95%	\$ 48,000	+2,887

**Source: ITEP Microsimulation Model,
February 2010**

Over the weekend, part of our group enjoyed quite a discussion of times we shared in junior high and high school, back in Indiana. Normally I exclude almost all personal-type communications from this Newsletter, but I thought maybe this could be instructional to someone, maybe at some point in the future, so, at the risk of boring some of you, I'll try to present the exchange as concisely as possible. Some of this appeared in the last Newsletter (#46) in a different format. Just trying to present a complete conversation of this type to see what it looks like. Besides, it was kind of fun (for us!).

Blame it all on Dennis, who sent us the wonderfully ridiculous "Stupid Person's World Map" that appeared in FotM Newsletter #46. Here's a little smaller version as a reminder:



SteveB: Whoever did this map has truly been around. I like Iceland and the Philippines, especially.

Ben: Hoot!

Art: I love it. Sadly I suspect it pretty well sums up the general geographic knowledge of most Americans.

Pam: Ain't that the truth?! Those of you who went to junior high in Greencastle, do you remember Mr. Hammond, the geography teacher? I learned almost everything I know today about geography from him, and that's quite a lot compared to most people. I still remember coloring in those maps that he would put up on the bulletin board. I always hoped mine would be picked as the best, and sometimes it was. :-)

Art: I had a college professor who taught a basic geography course. He was known to be a terror. The first day of class he handed out about three sheets, single spaced and two columns each of place names and told us you probably won't see any of these again except on a test, and then you'll see a lot of them. Great professor and we learned a lot, including how geography and climatic patterns shape our weather, all of it. I still remember.

SteveB: HALITOSIS HAMILTON, Pam! But you learned your geography. He made it easy. Why doesn't everybody know geography? The map is just precious, I think.

Dennis: Geography at GHS was not considered an "academic course." It was just me and the greasers and "Little Boo" was the teacher. I had a minor in Geography at Western Michigan along with double majors in Social Science (mostly history) and Sociology. And look where all those liberal arts classes got me!

SteveB: Uh...liberal?

SteveG: They got you around the world a few times, Dennis.

Bill: I also had Reese Hammond for geography, and, despite the halitosis, he was a good and conscientious teacher. I had heard that he was graduated from DePauw, where he was on the football team and known to be tough. What has become of his daughter? Can't remember her name; dark hair; smart and pleasant.

SteveBA: What I remember about that class was the competition he had to find some of the most obscure places in the world.

Pam: Poor Mr. Hammond, being remembered for so long by so many for his breath. The last time I saw his daughter Janine (sp?) was at a GHS reunion. She was single and had just adopted three kids from Guatemala, I think it was. That was over thirty years ago. I think she became a French professor. I used to teach with her mother at South Putnam H.S. Ruth was a great help to me when I was a fledgling teacher.

Pam: When I lived in Canada, a family of Nigerians lived across the street from us. The husband was a professor at the U. of Guelph. They were sweet people. Still, I would rather be in Canada than in Nigeria.--

Clark: Agree on the unfortunate aspect. I think it's because Halitosis Hammond was alliterative and easy to remember. On such things are reputations born and live on. Speaking of nicknames, who ever came up with the brilliant Big Boo and Little Boo? I'd love to know -- an unsung hero. Regardless, Reese Hammond was probably my favorite teacher in junior high and those maps helped the world come alive for me. He was also a pretty good tipper at Christmas time (he was on my paper route). Real money rather than the ballpoint pen that some of my other customers handed out...though I would have been happy with a Hammond Atlas.

Bill: Thanks for refreshing my memory, Pam. I think she spelled it Jeannine, but, given the fluid nature of geriatric memory, you may be right, or it may be somewhere in between. What a heroine to have adopted THREE children. Yes, I remember she was studying French and had spent some time in Paris. I don't think I ever met Ruth. She should have told Reese to floss, damn it all.

SteveB: It's kinda cool when we all put our imperfect memories together. Does anyone remember when Mrs. Franklin backhanded Jim Beamon (?) across the face with her ring hand? For making some remark about Mr. Franklin, I think. 7th grade?

SteveB: And the fact that his breath could kill you. Bill's right' I wonder why his wife never told him? Maybe she was extremely jealous and knew that would keep other women away? Not that I'm trying to start any rumors. I'd love to know the genesis of the Boos. It's older than we are. Remember in 7th grade, when the high school was there. I think Big Boo was Bog Boo then. Don't remember Little Boo in 7th grade...

Bill: Yes, I was there. It was **John** Beamon, and it cut his face. I suppose John did have an attitude problem. He eventually had to do some prison time.

SteveB: Yes! John Beamon! It definitely gave him an attitude adjustment at the time. The Franklins were good teachers too, if a little violent and kinky. We had incredible teachers! How lucky we were!

Bill: Agree!

Pam: I don't remember that, but I do remember the Franklins. I thought they were incredibly cool.

SteveB: Well, because of your precociousness, you were in the wrong class, Pam. The "cool" class was right behind you. You missed it. :-) Didn't Mr. Hardman have some alliteration going too? Harvey Hardman? No... Bill...help?

Phil: It was Harold Hardman.

Bill: Harold Hardman. Good guy, if not galvanizing in his classroom presentation. Had a breakdown at some point in his career. It's hard to teach junior high school kids. Little bastards.

Pam: SteveB, I always thought I'd be better off with you guys. ;-)

SteveB: I wish you had been! I would have been right up there with the guys too intimidated to ask you out. Our class had a great time. Wonderful people! Your class too, I bet.

Pam: I can't imagine anyone being intimidated by me. I was so shy I was practically speechless. I didn't know Mr. Hardman had a breakdown. Did he recover? I remember him too. Not galvanizing but nice and mild-mannered.

Clark: Harold Hardman, correct, and he taught ninth grade algebra, or at least that's when I had him. The story I heard was that he had shell shock from the war -- whether WWII or Korea, I don't know -- but hence the breakdown. I did like Mr. Franklin, not Mrs., but I guess putting a tack on your teacher's chair does lead, eventually, to prison.

SteveB: I think there is almost a straight path, Clark. I hope I didn't put him up to it...

Phil: The old memory thing again, but I remember that he had placed a tack on her chair.

SteveB: Is that what it was, Phil? Not some remark? Harold Hardman. Another good teacher. I can remember hearing about the mental breakdown thing or whatever. I never knew if it was true or not. He was a calm guy. Wasn't he in the war?

SteveG: That was it – a tack. I never did like the Franklins and have no memory of having a class with them. Didn't like Mrs. Lynch in high school either and she definitely did not like me. Gilbert, Gooch, Garriott, Peterson, McCammon, O'Hair, Irwin, Minnie Mae, etc. all great teachers.

SteveB: I wonder if a kid put a tack in a teacher's chair today, and she sat on it, if the police would be called and he would be charged with assault with a deadly weapon? Here's a hard trivia question? Did Mrs. Franklin actually sit on it, or see it in time? Then I guess Beamon raised his hand and confessed, then smack!??? That tack trick is nasty. I know I was often tempted, but I don't think I ever actually did it to anyone, not even my little brothers. I'm hoping none of you remember otherwise. :-)

Clark: Nor could a teacher hit a student these days...suspensions all around.

Pam: Miss O'Hair was so cute, the perfect little school mistress. I think she even tucked a lace handkerchief up her sleeve. Mrs. Gooch and Mrs. Garriott are why I am where I am today.

SteveG: Mrs. Gooch's research papers – RickK used mine at Ball State and got an A, I used it at DPU and got a B. The 4 English teachers plus Jim McCammon really helped prepare us for college.

Bill: Mrs. Gooch, Mrs. Garriott, and Mrs. Peterson (Charlotte) were tops. Wish we had had as much quality on the math side.

SteveB: We had great if tough English teachers. What an advantage I had when I had to teach grammar years later—I still remembered the stuff. Mercurochrome and merthiolate and iodine, itself. All off the market now, contain mercury and other poisons. My Mom depended on that stuff. One was awful, one not so bad. Can't remember which. Miss O'Hair was the perfect 19th Century lady.

Bill: Mercurochrome wasn't bad, but merthiolate definitely had a sting. These cut and abrasion remedies probably cost us ten or twenty IQ points.

SteveG: Miss O'Hair lived north of Greencastle on US 231 – west side of the road after a curve. Her established family home was further north on the eastside of the highway – long history of O'Hair's in the Greencastle area.

Clark: I remember her [Miss O'Hair] house burning down -- though if she had two houses available, that was a plus.

SteveG: The house up the road was the old family home, not certain she had it available. She built an underground home on the site of the fire – it is still there. Just south of her house was a road that went to the east, a house on the corner. Dad always referred to it as Murdock corner – in one conversation with Miss O’Hair he mentioned Murdock corner and that brought the Irish out of the red head wanting to know why that was Murdock corner and not O’Hair corner – she didn’t like it.

Clark: That's hilarious, SteveG. And an underground home -- amazing. She was one of a kind.

SteveG: In her geometry class she gave us a problem and said if we could solve the problem it was an automatic A, regardless of what else we did. I spent 90% of my time trying to solve the problem & did, but my solution did not adhere to geometric theorems – got a B

Bill: Pam’s observation that Miss O’Hair kept her handkerchief in her sleeve, a la ladies’ practice in the nineteenth century, rang the bell for me. She did indeed. And she lived in a nineteenth century house, one of those Italianate brick edifices with twelve- or fourteen-foot ceilings that would have been the center of a large farm. SteveG may know how old she was when she passed. I’ll guess there was some superannuation there. Maybe the underground home doubled as a final resting place.

SteveG: Not certain when she passed, but here is her family tree from 1830 on:
<http://www.johnreckel.com/OHair/BrannPages/Page231.htm>.

Bill: Thanks. Daughter of Cyrus and Lena Leota O’Hair. Granddaughter of Greenberry.

SteveG: Don’t you just love some of the old names – Greensberry, can’t get better than that.

SteveG: SteveB (lower right) and friends:



SteveBA: I remember SteveB playing the sax at a convocation, I think it was the “Theme from Peter Gunn.”

Pam: SteveB, Doug Stauch, and who are the other two?

Bill: Wow, great picture! And what a forelock on that boy Baker. Who is the blondish guy? I know Harry MaGinnity and Doug Stauch but not the other guy. I don’t know where you get all those old pix. Fabulous. By the way, Harry MaGinnity—a year or two older than we are—works for the Indiana Department of Transportation as its public information officer.

SteveB: Hey, that's pretty cool!! Thanks, SteveG! Harry McGinnity also on guitar (he's on Facebook and we've communicated a little). Doug really played, mainly, drums, of course. I can't place the other sax player. Doug died quite a few years ago. He must have been pretty young. Saw him last about 1989. I think he always lived in Ellettsville, home of some Spudnuts for a long time. Yum. Where did the photo come from?

SteveG: Facebook, Greencastle, In Past and Present. I remember Harry's little Reanult – riding with him one night, he would stop under a street light, shoot it out with a pellet gun, and speed away in his Dauphine.

SteveB: Thanks again. I loved that little car. We used to load it up with everything but Stauch's drums and drive all over Indiana to play places...not places like Indianapolis, but places like Fincastle and Lake Shaffer and Clinton. Belleville? The first time I ever got drunk was with those guys...I must have been 15, not quite driving yet. At Harry's house where we'd all stay over sometimes, either there or at Stauch's. But this was at Harry's and it was peach brandy and I puked and I still can't stand even the smell of the stuff. Had to go to work at Kersey Music the next morning with a b-i-g hangover.

SteveG: Did Harry live in the big house on the west side of 231 – the old Forbes mansion?

SteveB: That sounds like it. I don't know if it was named that, but it was a big place. I thought it was east off 231 a little...

Art: Why am I dealing with all these children? —Uncle Art

SteveB: Uncle Art, it's got to be pretty boring if you didn't attend GHS in 1963, 1964. ^_^

Pam: I think by this time of life it all sort of levels out. I spoke with a woman on the phone yesterday, who informed me she is 71. She sounded about 35. We're not getting older--we're getting--ta-da--younger. When my grandmother was the age I am now, I thought she was ancient. She SEEMED ancient. God forbid I should seem such a thing, at least not for a few years yet. My grandson told me the other day that I don't look my age. Bless his sweet, little heart!

SteveB: Man, I've forgotten so much. It's great when we all remember together! Thanks!

Pam: Sock hops in the gym. Dances at the Armory. Butterscotch sundaes at Fleenor's. Chet Coan. Mr. Matthews at Prevo's. The old ladies with too much make-up who worked behind the counters at Prevo's. The Dairy Queen. Basketball games in the old gym that gave me headaches from all the noise. My moment of fame in "The Thread That Runs So True." (I had one line.)--Whew! It's all there.

Art: By then I was a sophisticated young man going on to bigger and, well maybe not, better things. :o)

SteveB: I want to go back and just do it all over again, even if not one thing were different! That would indeed be heaven.

SteveG: That would work – where in the hell is that damn time machine. By the mere fact of going back, something or one thing might be different. Marty McFly help us all.

Bill: A life of no regrets is a beautiful thing, SteveB. But that may not be exactly what you suggest. But would you want to live it all again with memories from the first cycle or just live it again *do novo*?

SteveB: I'd be happy either way, though, with memory, everyone would do some things differently, I think. With memory, it might be something other than I was thinking of. With memory, it would be power. Without memory, it would be a mini-reincarnation. And, for me, just the mini would be enough. I don't need the full blown, multiple cycles of karma thing. ^_^

Bill: Great thoughts. With memory, one would always be a little distant from the flow as thoughts about how to do it better intruded. But without memory, you wouldn't know you were repeating, and I suppose that's the karmic thing you mentioned.

Pam: You all must have had a way better time in high school than I did. I enjoy remembering the past, but I sure don't want to relive it. With distance, I can convince myself that I had an idyllic, interesting adolescence, but beneath that conviction lurks the truth. I had fun, don't get me wrong, but there was an awful lot of angst that went with it. I'm a lot more comfortable with myself now. Maybe it's different with guys.

Dennis: Not for this guy. I had plenty of angst. Took a lot of keggers in college to get over the shyness as I remember. Still, I have some fond memories of GHS, if only I could remember them.

Pam: A kindred spirit.

SteveB: I think I remember a little angst...and not to minimize anyone's...but to be young and full of life and innocent...things were far from perfect yet perfect...the tomatoes on the vine had a ripeness and taste that no longer exist...the crisp football wind scattering the maple leaves we raked into piles to leap into...throwing a line from my bamboo pole into the Big Walnut, my heart skipping a beat when the bobber got pulled under...playing basketball with my friends into the dark of night and you couldn't see a thing...thud...swish...lying in bed in the hot summer listening to the jukebox and laughter at the Dog 'n Suds in the distance, imaging what it's like to be all grown up and now I know.

SteveG: Since you put it that way, let's do over and get rid of the angst. Had fun at GHS and through college - got drunk a hell of a lot from 16 through age 24 - binge drinking was the norm. Used to go to Baker's at Purdue on a Friday night and wake up on Sunday afternoon with little recognition of what had happened - not a good plan.

Pam: Well put, SteveB. Yesterday as I was taking a walk, I swear I could smell burning leaves. There's nothing else quite like that. I think I'd have to go back to pre-adolescence to have unblemished memories, but I have plenty of those, even if I did skin my knees a lot. Remember mercurochrome? Ouch.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #48 — JAN. 10, 2012

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Ron Paul

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 10, 2012)

“You have to ask a question: **Is capitalism really about the ability of a handful of rich people to manipulate the lives of thousands of other people and walk off with the money?**”—Newt Gingrich
(<http://us.cnn.com/2012/01/09/politics/gop-nh-main/index.html>)

Today’s New Hampshire Primary is considered to be a shoo-in for Mitt Romney. The cranky old codger, Ron Paul, could finish as high as second, with the downhill run of southern conservative states ahead. Romney seems unable to increase his national level of support past about 25% of Republicans—hardly a winning formula for the upcoming election against a slick opponent. He comes off as artificial and robotic and, lately, seems to share a proficiency at gaffes with several of his current and former opponents.

With his reputation firmly tied to Bain Capital Management, which he led, and whether he was a job creator or job destroyer (a key question this campaign cycle), Mitt had this to say yesterday:

I like being able to fire people who provide services to me. If someone doesn't give me the good service I need, I want to say I am going to get somebody else to provide that service to me.

Hardly the stuff to craft victory from. And the weaker and more unacceptable Mitt seems to the Base, the more the thoughts and hearts of conservative Republicans (as they did all last year) seek to find an alternative. Maybe soon it will be Dr. Strange’s turn in the sun.

“Paul's 1,000 Points of Darkness” by James Hohmann and Charles Mahtesian, Politico

Jan. 9, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0112/71249.html>)

MEREDITH, N.H. — It’s a nation that permits the assassination of private citizens, a place where the military can arrest you at will. The unemployment rate is higher than officials let on. The economy is careening toward crisis. Violent street demonstrations are on the horizon. The government edges toward tyranny and dictatorship.

Welcome to Ron Paul’s America.

There's no gauzy, uplifting imagery in the Texas congressman's stump speech, no city on a hill. It's a grim, thousand-points-of-darkness jeremiad that makes the rest of the GOP field's somber depiction of Obama-era America seem sunny.

But in a moment when voters' own optimism has faded, Paul's message is clearly resonating. After finishing a close third in Iowa, the most recent New Hampshire poll has him in second place behind Mitt Romney, and he's got crowds showing up at event after event to hear his gloomy scenario of a nation "where our personal liberties are under attack" and an economy that could "go over a cliff and suddenly sink rather rapidly."

"In an economic crisis, which I anticipate will come, if we don't clean up our act the economy is going to get much worse, the conclusion of the destruction of currency can have a lot of violent repercussions [and] a lot of demonstrations in the street, if not violence," Paul said Friday night at a town hall in the student union at the University of New Hampshire in Durham. "So they have all these laws against this. Who knows? If you happen to belong to a group that happens to be considered anti-war, ... you can't tell what they might do."

Paul's an opponent of federal spending, but rather than focusing his attention on the standard conservative targets his GOP rivals attack at the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Education, Paul also complains about the Central Intelligence Agency and the Department of Defense. The rest of the field worries about an America threatened by the creeping hand of socialism. Paul warns about a tightening fist of fascism.

"Most of the world is run by tyrants and dictators," he told a crowd in Atlantic, Iowa, recently, "and we're drifting that way."

In Durham, he cautioned: "We shouldn't be so intimidated and frightened that we allow our presidents to assume this power to assassinate an American citizen with no charges."

The dark tone adopted by Paul represents a dramatic departure from the traditional presidential campaign speech — it's dusk in his America, not morning. His rhetoric is also distinctly different from what his rivals are saying, even as they criticize President Barack Obama's stewardship. Where they see waste, fraud and ineptitude in federal government and Congress, Paul sees lying, scheming and conspiracy.

"When you count the way they did during the Depression ... unemployment is probably closer to 20 percent. That's why there's a disconnect. People feel worse than the government tells you you're supposed to feel," Paul said. "The unemployment rate is much bigger, the inflation rate is much worse."

Town halls held in New Hampshire on Sunday by Paul and Jon Huntsman measured the chasm between Paul and his competitors. Here in Meredith, Paul accused the federal government of "propping up the statistics" to hide the true state of the economy, noting that "Europe is collapsing right now" and warned of a pending American debt crisis.

Huntsman, meanwhile, painted a more hopeful vision. Speaking in Keene, the former Utah governor said the nation is more divided and saddled with debt than generations before, but also asserted that "we are on the cusp of a manufacturing renaissance in this country" before musing about "the magic of America."

Paul's supporters say they appreciate the Texas congressman's bleak stump speech, noting that he's been proven right on the issues before and insisting that they welcome the refreshing candor of his Cassandra-like message.

"That's the harsh reality of it. It is a grim situation," said Chris Fleming of Manchester, who attended a Nashua event last week. "The whole media blackout plays a role; they don't like having that message put out. Why would we want to walk around like horses with blinders on?"

Ed Aichinger, a Bedford resident who attended the Meredith town hall with his wife and daughter, hosted Paul at their home in 2011. He wasn't a big Paul supporter four years ago but, like many other Paul backers interviewed for this story, now welcomes the warnings.

"Everybody's just in a daze and clueless about what's going on," Aichinger said. "The lights are going to go out pretty soon. I want to keep 'em on a little longer. ... I'm an adult. I don't need sugarcoating."

Paul's campaign chief Jesse Benton said the congressman is simply being honest about the serious problems confronting the nation — which puts him at odds with his foes, who aren't upfront.

"He's telling the truth," Benton said. "That's just who he is. He's running out of deep concern. He has very little personal desire to be president. ... He feels so strongly about trying to help and solve these problems that he's running for president."

Benton also makes the point that Paul offers more than just doom and gloom.

"Ron is always, always very careful to end on a positive note — and that is that he believes in liberty. He believes liberty is the best system and he sees our country waking up — particularly young people — waking up to these issues. And that's inherently a positive thing. But we face a lot more challenges than the establishment candidates want to admit."

In any case, for all his sky-is-falling rhetoric, at one recent event Paul pointed out that there is a reason for hope: his campaign.

"There's no reason to be despondent about how this country is going right now if we do the right thing," he said.

20120109-01 05:35 SteveG "Why the Capitol Clamor? Money"
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The Republican battle against unions continues, one state after another:

"Why the Capitol Clamor? Money" by Heather Gillers, *Indianapolis Star*

Jan 9, 2012, (<http://www.indystar.com/article/20120109/NEWS05/201090320/Money-heart-Indiana-General-Assembly-fight-over-right-work-some-say?odyssey=tab|topnews|text|IndyStar.com>)

(Labor-union campaign cash at heart of 'right to work' battle, experts say.)

20120109-02 10:50 SteveB "Warm South Carolina Welcome for Perry"
--

Oops! Darn! It's that pesky 'ol truth again!

"Warm South Carolina Welcome for Perry" by Alexander Burns, Politico

Jan. 9, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/> -- temporary)

As if Rick Perry didn't have enough problems. The Texas governor was greeted at a restaurant in Anderson, S.C., by a young woman who posed for a photo with the Texas governor while saying it is "**good to see someone as homophobic and racist as you.**" He smiled, took the photo and moved on.

20120109-03 13:16 Pam Reminiscences

Math and I came to a final parting of the ways in Mr. Irwin's 8th-grade math class. I existed in a state of terror the whole time and felt numbers were in some way out to get me. I still sort of feel that way. I did read a book that made me feel better: *Here's Looking at Euclid*. It's ALL about math, and I found it fascinating. I didn't have to do

any problems, but I learned a lot about the majesty of math. It might even be interesting to the math whizzes among you.

[20120109-04](#) 15:12 Dennis "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters"

I have to agree that Paul Krugman is wrong on this one. Seems to me he makes the same mistake about economics that the right continually makes. That is, that economic development can be determined (commanded) by political ideology. This also is the mistake made by Mao Zedong with his *Politics in Command* theory during China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Look how well that one turned out.

"Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" by Shah Gilani, Money Morning

Jan. 9, 2012, (<http://moneymorning.com/2012/01/09/paul-krugman-is-dead-wrong-debt-matters/>)

[20120109-05](#) 16:13 SteveB Re: "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" (reply to Dennis, above) & "Mitt Romney & the Bain Bomb"

Yet, in many places in the world today, China included, governmental policy (call it political ideology, if you want) is successfully commanding economic development. India and Brazil are also examples. Canada is a great example, though they have us to help out. In fact, the article points out the amazing accomplishment of the Federal Reserve in keeping interest rates and inflation low in a time of massive public borrowing—something that economists always thought was impossible.

This is what America used to be good at. This is what good governments do. This is what we have to get back to—structuring taxes and trade to improve our economic circumstances as a nation, not dismantle the whole edifice.

Republicans tell us government is not the solution to our problems. They are right. But they are wrong, also, when they say that business is the solution to our problems. Only a partnership between the two, working for the betterment of all, can drive the economy to where it needs to be.

As even Mitt Romney knows, "In the business world, we understand that things are not static, they are dynamic and by incentives you can make behaviors change."

"Mitt Romney & the Bain Bomb" by Reid J. Epstein and Jim Vandehei, Politico

Jan. 9, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0112/71231.html>)

[20120109-06](#) 17:13 Dennis Re: "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" (reply to SteveB, above)

No, SteveB, I don't want to call political ideology governmental policy. When ideology narrowly dictates policy, then it distorts economic forces. I think what you are outlining is a pragmatic approach of a collaboration of government and business.

[20120109-08](#) 17:17 SteveB Re: "Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" (reply to Dennis, above)

Yep!

from Alan Grayson:

It's getting really hard to be topical. In the issue of *New Yorker* magazine dated January 9, 2012 -- that's today -- the lead article is about the rise of Newt Gingrich.

Newt who? Newt Gingrich? Is he the guy who thought that if he stuck four fingers between the buttons in his shirt, he actually became Napoleon?

(By the way, America, Newt Gingrich is very disappointed in you. I just thought you should know that.)

But this note is not about Newt Gingrich; it's about Rick Santorum. Who remains topical until 8 p.m. tomorrow, when the polls close in New Hampshire. Because New Hampshire Republicans are finding it difficult to square a Santorum state ban on contraception with the motto "Live Free or Die."

But this note is not about contraception; it's about weather forecasts. Which are always topical.

Rick Santorum tried to ban weather forecasts. Actually, not all weather forecasts. Just government weather forecasts.

I realize that you could possibly be a little skeptical about that, so here is the bill, at the official Senate website (<http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c109:s786>:). Sections 2(b) and 2(d) of the National Weather Services [sic] Duties Act of 2005, S. 786, 109th Cong., 1st Sess.

By the way, Santorum introduced this bill a few months after four different hurricanes hit Central Florida, where I live. In one of those hurricanes, a big chunk of my roof collapsed, right into the living room. So weather forecasts are sort of important in my community. A matter of life and death, you might say.

Now you must be thinking, "Wow, that guy Santorum is a REAL conservative." Santorum recognizes that government weather forecasts are meteorological socialism; they are a serious infringement on your constitutional right not to know whether it will rain tomorrow. Santorum sees that weather forecasts are a government takeover of the skies. In fact, Santorum is such an astute and profound conservative thinker that he probably realizes that traffic lights are a government takeover of the roads.

But this note is not about traffic lights. It's about Rick Santorum and government weather forecasts. And why Rick Santorum tried to ban them.

Here's why. It's because AccuWeather is a commercial weather forecasting company, and AccuWeather employees gave Santorum more than \$5,000 in campaign contributions. Then he introduced the bill. Which subsequently and consequently led to Santorum being named as one of Congress's "most corrupt politicians." Which is saying a lot.

I can picture the conversation:

AccuWeather lobbyist: "Here is \$5000 in bundled contributions from AccuWeather. Now introduce a bill to ban government weather forecasts."

Santorum: "OK. Sure. Why not? Whatever. I love this cheesecake."

And that is what I've seen over and over again. This thing called "conservative ideology" has degenerated to the point where it exists simply to spew out rationalizations for something else entirely: whatever the corporate lobbyists want.

A topic that will remain topical, I'm sure, well after the polls close in New Hampshire tomorrow night.

Courage, Alan Grayson

20120109-12	18:58	Art	Re: (from Alan Grayson) Rick Santorum Tried to Ban Weather Forecasts (reply to SteveG, above)
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Probably the most bought off candidate running today for anything, and that's saying a lot.

20120109-09	18:01	SteveG	"Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq"
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"Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq" by: Dahr Jamail , *Al Jazeera*

Jan. 7, 2012, (<http://www.truth-out.org/western-oil-firms-remain-us-exits-iraq/1326134840>)

(The end of the U.S. military occupation does not mean Iraqis have full control of their oil.)

On November 27, 38 months after Royal Dutch Shell announced its pursuit of a massive gas deal in southern Iraq, the oil giant had its contract signed for a \$17bn flared gas deal.

Three days later, the U.S.-based energy firm Emerson submitted a bid for a contract to operate at Iraq's giant Zubair oil field, which reportedly holds some eight million barrels of oil.

Earlier this year, Emerson was awarded a contract to provide crude oil metering systems and other technology for a new oil terminal in Basra, currently under construction in the Persian Gulf, and the company is installing control systems in the power stations in Hilla and Kerbala.

Iraq's supergiant Rumaila oil field is already being developed by BP, and the other supergiant reserve, Majnoon oil field, is being developed by Royal Dutch Shell. Both fields are in southern Iraq.

According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), Iraq's oil reserves of 112 billion barrels ranks second in the world, only behind Saudi Arabia. The EIA also estimates that up to 90 per cent of the country remains unexplored, due to decades of U.S.-led wars and economic sanctions.

"Prior to the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, US and other western oil companies were all but completely shut out of Iraq's oil market," oil industry analyst Antonia Juhasz told Al Jazeera. "But thanks to the invasion and occupation, the companies are now back inside Iraq and producing oil there for the first time since being forced out of the country in 1973."

Juhasz, author of the books *The Tyranny of Oil* and *The Bush Agenda*, said that while U.S. and other western oil companies have not yet received all they had hoped the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq would bring them, "They've certainly done quite well for themselves, landing production contracts for some of the world's largest remaining oil fields under some of the world's most lucrative terms."

Dr Abdulhay Yahya Zalloum, an international oil consultant and economist who has spent nearly 50 years in the oil business in the US, Europe, Asia and the Middle East, agrees that western oil companies have "obtained concessions in Iraq's major [oil] fields", despite "there being a lack of transparency and clarity of vision regarding the legal issues".

Dr Zalloum added that he believes western oil companies have successfully acquired the lions' share of Iraq's oil, "but they gave a little piece of the cake for China and some of the other countries and companies to keep them silent".

In a speech at Fort Bragg in the wake of the U.S. military withdrawal, US President Barack Obama said the U.S. was leaving behind "a sovereign, stable and self-reliant Iraq, with a representative government that was elected by its people".

Of this prospect, Dr Zalloum was blunt:

The last thing the U.S. cares about in the Middle East is democracy. It is about oil, full stop.

A strong partnership?

A White House press release dated November 30 titled, "Joint Statement by the United States of America and the Republic of Iraq Higher Coordinating Committee", said this about "energy co-operation" between the two countries:

The United States is committed to supporting the Republic of Iraq in its efforts to develop the energy sector. Together, we are exploring ways to help boost Iraq's oil production, including through better protection for critical infrastructure.

Iraq is one of the largest oil exporters to the U.S., and has plans to raise its overall crude oil exports to 3.3m barrels per day (bpd) next year, compared with their target of 3m bpd this year, according to Assim Jihad, spokesman for Iraq's ministry of oil.

Jihad told Al Jazeera that Iraq has a goal of raising its oil production capacity to 12m bpd by 2017, which would place it in the top echelon of global producers.

According to Jihad, Iraq's 2013 production goal is 4.5m bpd, and in 2014 it is 5m bpd. The 2017 goal is ambitious, given that Iraq did not meet its 2011 goal, and many officials say 8m bpd capacity is more realistic for 2017.

Unexplored regions of Iraq could yield an additional 100bn barrels, and Iraq's production costs are among the lowest in the world.

To date, only about 2,000 wells have been drilled in Iraq, compared with roughly one million wells in Texas alone.

[My God, Texas must look like Swiss cheese in places. –SteveB]

Globally, current oil usage is approximately 88m bpd. By 2030, global petroleum demand will grow by 27m bpd, and many energy experts see Iraq as being a key player in meeting this demand.

It is widely understood that Iraq will require at least \$200bn in physical and human investments to bring its production capacity up to 12m bpd, from its current production levels.

Juhasz explained that ExxonMobil, BP and Shell were among the oil companies that "played the most aggressive roles in lobbying their governments to ensure that the invasion would result in an Iraq open to foreign oil companies".

"They succeeded," she added. "They are all back in. BP and CNPC [China National Petroleum Corporation] finalised the first new oil contract issued by Baghdad for the largest oil field in the country, the 17 billion barrel super giant Rumaila field. ExxonMobil, with junior partner Royal Dutch Shell, won a bidding war against Russia's Lukoil (and junior partner ConocoPhillips) for the 8.7 billion barrel West Qurna Phase 1 project. Italy's Eni SpA, with California's Occidental Petroleum and the Korea Gas Corp, was awarded Iraq's Zubair oil field with estimated reserves of 4.4 billion barrels. Shell was the lead partner with Malaysia's Petroliaam Nasional Bhd., or Petronas, winning a contract for the super-giant Majnoon field, one of the largest in the world, with estimated reserves of up to 25 billion."

Zalloum says there is a two-fold interest for the western oil companies.

"There is development of the existing fields, but also for the explored but not-yet-produced fields," he said. "For the old fields, there are two types of development. One is to renovate the infrastructure, since for most of the past 25 years it has depreciated due to the sanctions and turmoil. Also, some of these fields have different stratum, so once they use innovative techniques like horizontal drilling, there is a huge potential in the fields they have explored."

But there are complicating factors. As a spasm of violence wracked Baghdad in the wake of the US military withdrawal and political rifts widen, Iraq's instability is evident.

"Iraq has lots of cheap-to-get oil, but it also has a multitude of problems - political, ethnic, tribal, religious etc - that have prevented them from exploiting it as well or as quickly as the Saudis," says Tom Whipple, an energy scholar who was a CIA analyst for 30 years. "Someday it may turn out that Iraq has more oil underground than Saudi Arabia. The big question is how stable it will be after the US leaves? So far it is not looking all that good."

Jihad, Iraq's ministry of oil spokesman, however, said attacks against Iraq's oil pipelines have minimal effect on production capabilities, and claimed "sabotage will not affect our oil production and exports because we can fix these damages within days, or even hours".

Whipple, a fellow at the Post-Carbon Institute, says Baghdad had driven a hard bargain with western oil companies.

"The only reason they are participating is because everybody else is and they hope to get a foot in the door in case some new government in Iraq changes its policies to let other outsiders make more money. Remember it is not all the traditional western oil companies that are in there; the Chinese, Russians and Singapore all want a piece of the action."

Wrong idea?

Spokesman Jihad told Al Jazeera that the reason many Iraqis think western oil companies are operating in Iraq is simply to steal Iraq's oil.

"These ideas were obtained during the regime of deposed dictator Saddam Hussein, and these are the wrong ideas," he said. "The future will help Iraqis understand these companies have come to work here to help Iraq sell its oil to help the people, and they work to serve the country."

Jihad admitted that his media office works "to help Iraqis understand the nature of the work of these companies and their investing in Iraq".

Despite the efforts of Jihad's office to prove otherwise, Iraqis Al Jazeera spoke with disagree.

"Only a naïve child could believe the Americans came here for something besides our oil," Ahmed Ali, an unemployed engineer, told Al Jazeera. "Nor can we believe their being here has anything to do with helping the Iraqi people."

Basim al-Khalili, a restaurant owner in Baghdad's Karada district, agrees.

"If Iraq had no oil, would America have sacrificed thousands of its soldiers and hundreds of billions of dollars to come here?"

Oil analyst Juhasz also agrees.

The US and other western oil companies and their governments had been lobbying for passage of a new national law in Iraq, the Iraq Oil Law, which would move Iraq from a nationalized to a largely privatized oil market using Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs), a type of contract model used in just approximately 12 per cent of the world's oil market.

She explained that this agreement has been summarily rejected by most countries, including all of Iraq's neighbours, "because it provides far more benefits to the foreign corporation than to the domestic government".

But it has not been an easy road for the western oil companies in Iraq.

Major western companies, such as Chevron and ConocoPhillips, that had hoped to sign contracts were unable to do so. A third round [of contracts] took place in December 2010 and saw no major western oil

companies (except Shell) win contracts. I believe that there was an Iraqi backlash against the awarding of contracts to the large western major oil companies. Thus, in December 2010, fields went to Russian oil companies Lukoil and Gazprom, Norway's Statoil, and the Angolan company Sonangol, among others.

Unlike under Iraq's Oil Law, these contracts do not need to go through parliament, according to the central government. This means the contracts are being signed without public discourse.

"The public is against privatization, which is one reason why the law has not passed," added Juhasz. "The contracts are enacting a form of privatization without public discourse and essentially at the butt of a gun - these contracts have all been awarded during a foreign military occupation with the largest contracts going to companies from the foreign occupiers' countries. It seems that democracy and equity are the two largest losers in this oil battle."

Iraq's oil future

Under the current circumstances, the possibility of a withdrawal of western oil companies from Iraq appears remote, and the Obama administration continues to pressure Baghdad to pass the Iraq Oil Law.

Nevertheless, resistance to the western presence continues.

"The bottom line is that it seems clear that the majority of Iraqis want their oil and its operations to remain in Iraqi hands," said Juhasz. "Thus far, it has required a massive foreign military invasion and occupation to grant the foreign oil companies the access they have thus far garnered."

While Iraq's security remains as volatile as ever, as does the political landscape - which can change dramatically at any moment - there is one thing we can always count on as being at the heart of these conflicts, and that is Iraq's oil.

20120109-10	18:46	SteveB	Re: "Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq" (reply to SteveG, above)
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"Prior to the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq, U.S. and other western oil companies were all but completely shut out of Iraq's oil market," oil industry analyst Antonia Juhasz told Al Jazeera. "But thanks to the invasion and occupation, the companies are now back inside Iraq and producing oil there for the first time since being forced out of the country in 1973."

Says a lot, huh? Though, if somebody's got to pump it, better us than the Chinese. I hope there are a few spoils to such a costly war.

I just thought of this: **Obamanomics—an economic system which produces economic recoveries just in time for elections.** (WE HOPE!)

20120109-14	20:01	SteveG	Re: "Western Oil Firms Remain as U.S. Exits Iraq" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Probably 90% of the reason we invaded Iraq. Seriously doubt that we will see a decrease of gasoline prices in this country. We may see an increase in exportation of refined oil to other countries. I think it is also interesting that Shell is a Netherlands based company, BP is a British based company, and CITGO is a Venezuelan based company. Wonder where they park their profits?

20120109-13	19:50	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Order a Full Federal Banking Investigation!
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from MoveOn:

Last Wednesday, President Obama stood up to Wall Street by appointing Richard Cordray as director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. For months, Republicans have been blocking the appointment, and Obama's action will finally allow the agency to get to work.

Now, President Obama has a choice to make: whether or not to order a full federal investigation into bank practices during the housing crisis.

Progressive attorneys general have temporarily blocked a sweetheart deal that would have given broad immunity to the banks. Now, the president can decide whether or not to move forward with a full federal investigation that would hold the banks accountable.

The president has the power to order this investigation today and start the year off right. It's up to us to make sure he hears loud and clear that progressives are counting on him to continue taking bold and immediate actions to help the 99%.

Can you sign the petition calling on the president to order a full federal investigation today? Click below to add your name:

<http://pol.moveon.org/bankfraud?id=34566-18997482-mRqjWmx&t=2>.

Who was hurt by the greed of Wall Street's 1%? Fellow MoveOn members like Eleanor., who was sold a high-interest subprime loan even though she qualified for a safer one. Now she is struggling to make payments after her home lost over a third of its value.

There are plenty of examples of Wall Street banks pushing bad loans on unsuspecting homeowners and lying about the value and risk of mortgage-backed securities. But without an investigation, we can't hold them truly accountable for the \$7 trillion they cost the global economy, and homeowners can't get fair compensation.

The president has the power to order a full investigation. Can you help send him a strong message today?

Click here to tell President Obama to launch a full federal investigation into the Wall Street banks and the housing crisis, and insist on a fair deal for homeowners.

Thanks for all you do, Elena, Stephen, Milan, Lenore, and the rest of the team

20120109-15	21:34	PamB	Re: Photo: Brotherhood (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #47)
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Love this!!! And keeping up to date with the Newsletter.

20120109-16	22:05	Paula	Quote: Donald Trump on Obamacare
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No one can sum it up better than Trump:

"Let me get this straight . . . We're going to be 'gifted' [What a smart-a*s! –SteveB] with a health care plan we are forced to purchase and fined if we don't, Which purportedly covers at least ten million more people, without adding a single new doctor, but provides for 16,000 new IRS agents, written by a committee whose chairman says he doesn't understand it, passed by a Congress that didn't read it but exempted themselves from it, and signed by a President who smokes, with funding administered by a Treasury chief who didn't pay his taxes, for which we'll be taxed for four years before any benefits take effect by a government which has already bankrupted Social Security and Medicare, all to be overseen by a Surgeon General who is obese, and financed by a country that's broke!!!!'What the hell could possibly go wrong?"



[20120109-17](#)

22:35

SteveB

Re: Quote: Donald Trump on Obamacare (reply to Paula, above) & "Donald Trump: We Need a Health Care System Like What Canada Has"

Thank you for the email, Paula. I only find one problem. Now, in your quote above, the Donald appears to be against the President's healthcare plan. But who knows what his position really is? When he said we need a system like Canada's, I believe he was 100% correct. The rest is just politics as usual.

And I seriously wonder if Donald Trump has read the bill himself? Odds must be at least 100,000 to 1 against it.

"Donald Trump: We Need a Health Care System Like What Canada Has" by Doug Mataconis, Outside the Beltway

Apr. 15, 2011, (<http://www.outsidethebeltway.com/donald-trump-we-need-a-health-care-system-like-what-canada-has/>)

Donald Trump may be running as a supposed conservative now, but ten years ago he was sounding a lot like Barack Obama:

For a few months, Trump hashed out a policy agenda. It wasn't much, but it was enough to fill a quickie book: *The America We Deserve*, published in January 2000. The Trump of 11 years ago sounds a lot like the Trump who has taken over cable TV and the Huffington Post top banner these past few weeks: He's against immigration amnesty. He's worried about terrorism. He's rending his hair over America's economic decline. Oh, and there were a few other things.

"We must have universal healthcare," wrote Trump. "I'm a conservative on most issues but a liberal on this one. We should not hear so many stories of families ruined by healthcare expenses."

The goal of health care reform, wrote Trump, should be a system that looks a lot like Canada. "Doctors might be paid less than they are now, as is the case in Canada, but they would be able to treat more patients because of the reduction in their paperwork," he writes.

The Canadian plan also helps Canadians live longer and healthier than Americans. There are fewer medical lawsuits, less loss of labor to sickness, and lower costs to companies paying for the medical care of their employees. If the program were in place in Massachusetts in 1999 it would have reduced administrative costs by \$2.5 million. We need, as a nation, to reexamine the single-payer plan, as many individual states are doing.

Trump also didn't think much of Republicans back then:

The year was 1999. Pets.com stock was trading at \$11 per share. Nobody was all that interested in Bill Clinton's birth certificate. More important, the Republican Party's nomination looked ungettable, sure to be captured by George W. Bush. So Trump left the party.

"I really believe the Republicans are just too crazy, right?" he told Tim Russert on "Meet the Press". "I mean, what's going on is just nuts."

You're being played, Republicans. It's really rather obvious, and the extent to which you're pandering to this guy makes you the kind of sucker that would make P.T. Barnum giddy with delight.

[20120109-11](#) 18:56 Art Video: Auld Lang Syne

This a little late but really well done. Beautiful voice and lovely pictures. Makes me think we really ought to try to save this planet.

Anyone recognize the ski run at the start of the video. It looks familiar but I can't quite place it. Reminds me a little of the Valluga run at St. Anton but don't think that's it?

<http://biggeekdad.com/2011/01/auld-lang-syne/>

[20120109-18](#) 23:05 SteveB Re: Video: Auld Lang Syne (reply to Art, above)

Cool. Haha. Ya, maybe we ought to save the planet. No, on second thought, it's not worth it. ^_^

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

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #49 — JAN. 11, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

Capitalism and Good Government

(posted by Pam McRae, Jan. 11, 2012)

I like Paul Krugman, and I like Robert Reich. They are my go-to economists. But I take exception to the point in this article (see below) that our nation's debt is not unimportant. (I doubt that Krugman believes that either.) I hate to say it--patriotic American that I am--but I wonder why no one seems to question the whole idea of capitalism. It's not as if it were the perfect system that will solve all problems, any more than communism, mercantilism, feudalism, or raid your enemy and steal all their stuff--ism were. I know Marx is anathema to many, but I believe he was right about capitalism being a stage on the way to something else. I have no idea what that will be, and I doubt very much that I will be around to see whatever it turns out to be, but despite what Francis Fukuyama said, we are not at the end of history. We cling so tenaciously to our precious capitalism, without allowing ourselves to imagine another way. We are so bound up with ideology that our politics, our morals, and our laws are hobbled by preconceptions and unexamined principles.

I heard a young woman on the radio tonight talking about how she likes Rick Santorum because he stands for THE FAMILY. I think I know why she said that. I'm guessing that she is between 26 and 40, is married, and has at least two children. I'm guessing that she trusts her husband but worries about his fidelity--though she would never admit it. She is a mama wolf guarding her cubs, and there is nothing fiercer. It's the same phenomenon as the good women of old Salem condemning Hester Prynne. Living outside the law--or custom, or tradition--threatens those cubs, and Mama wolf can't have that. The young are strict because they fear anarchy, the old because habit is comfortable. But clinging to the status quo is never a way to the future. We must make room for creativity--in industry, in education, in family structure, in economics and politics.

I am a believer in the good government can do. Good government can protect individual autonomy and assure equity and fairness (at least in theory). But I'm not so sure government is ever creative. Maybe FDR showed creativity and daring, but most of our leaders are like pit bulls that won't let go, even the Democrats. They say the army is always fighting the last war. I think politics is always a few steps behind where history is already taking us. In a hundred years Gingrich and Obama will seem as archaic as Jefferson and Madison. Differences will fade, and everything will be subsumed into one gray fog of nostalgia. However we find our way out of the morass we're in, we'll be seen as heroes, just as Lincoln is for getting us through the Civil War or Roosevelt and Truman (two VERY different men) are for getting us through WW II. It will all be turned into myth, and nothing will seem quite so serious to our descendants as it does to us today. Either that, or our progeny will rain curses on our heads.

If we don't destroy the planet--and I really don't know how that will go--I believe solutions will be found that will carry the human species into the future. A remnant (at the very least) will remain. What troubles me is the terrible cost to those who just happen to be in the wrong time or the wrong country and die of untreated AIDS, starvation, genocide, or simple neglect. I'm optimistic about the survival of the species, even of the planet. Nothing will be

the same in a hundred years, that's for sure. But each individual casualty matters. People are always more important than ideas. The danger is that so many allow loyalty to cause, ideology, religion, ethnicity, tribe, or leader to override simple human fellow-feeling. There are no simple answers, but I sure wish I could find just one before I shuffle off this mortal coil.

"Paul Krugman is Dead Wrong: Debt Matters" by Shah Gilani, Capital Waves Strategist, Money Morning

Jan. 9, 2012 (<http://moneymorning.com/2012/01/09/paul-krugman-is-dead-wrong-debt-matters/>)

Paul Krugman, the Princeton University economics professor, Nobel Prize winner, and regular New York Times op-ed contributor says, "Debt matters, but not that much."

Not only is he off the reservation on this one, but he's completely fallen off his high horse.

In the real world, debt actually matters a lot.

In a Houston Chronicle opinion piece last week, Krugman, riding his horse - whose name might as well be Liberal Conscience - trampled conservatives under the guise of an economics lesson that derided "deficit-worriers" for wrongly seeing "America as being like a family that took out too large a mortgage, and will have a hard time making the monthly payments."

According to Krugman, that's a bad analogy and "the way our politicians think about debt is all wrong, and exaggerates the problem's size."

Decide for yourself. Either debt matters a lot, or not that much...

The World According to Paul Krugman

Professor Krugman calls all the conversation in Washington about debt and deficits a "misplaced focus" and says all of the economic experts "on whom much of Congress relies have been repeatedly wrong about the short-run effects of budget deficits."

He derides the fears that deficits will cause interest rates to soar by pointing out that they haven't moved.

What he doesn't say is that they haven't moved because they're not free to move.

The fact is that the U.S. Federal Reserve has corralled the free market in interest rates by knocking short-term rates to almost zero through successive open market operations and extraordinary quantitative easing measures.

Mr. Krugman mocks those waiting for rates to rise and notes that while they wait "rates have dropped to historical lows."

Maybe what he doesn't realize is that the Fed's actions themselves have been nothing short of historical.

The crux of Mr. Krugman's supposition that debt doesn't matter much is based on his bashing of the popular analogy comparing America's debt problems to those of a mortgaged homeowner.

All of which Krugman claims is "a really bad analogy in at least two ways."

He says, "First, families have to pay back their debt. Governments don't - all they need to do is ensure that debt grows more slowly than their tax base."

"Second," he says, "an over-borrowed family owes the money to someone else; U.S. debt is, to a large extent, money we owe ourselves."

He goes on to say that the debt from World War II was never repaid and didn't make postwar America poorer.

In fact, the Professor points out, "the debt didn't prevent the postwar generation from experiencing the biggest rise in incomes and living standards in our nation's history."

Krugman is Flat Out Wrong

First off, the homeowner analogy is excellent--not irrelevant.

Mr. Krugman is wrong when he says that homeowners have to pay back their debt. The truth is they don't have to.

Just like the government, as long as their creditworthiness is intact and money is available, at whatever cost, homeowners can refinance their mortgages over and over. That's no different than how the government rolls over its own debts.

We saw this phenomenon play out in stark reality during the housing bubble.

Not only were homeowners refinancing their homes to take out money for consumption purposes, they leveraged themselves to buy more homes to multiply the wealth effect they were already experiencing.

In the case of the housing crash, borrowers were counting on rising property values to finance their expanding debts. That's the same as what Krugman says governments should do: make sure debt expansion doesn't outpace revenue growth, in this case taxes.

In the end, though, didn't the bursting of the housing bubble prove that debt eventually matters?

To me, the housing bubble was a pretty darn good analogy as to what happens when mounting debts aren't repaid. When it happens on a systemic basis, the entire economy suffers.

Doesn't our nation's expanding debt and deficit in the face of falling tax revenues and worse, a lower base, portend similar problems on an even larger scale?

Of course, Krugman has it all figured out.

We just have to grow our debt at a slower pace than our tax base grows. Who knew the answer was so simple...

We'll just meet our expanding debt obligations by raising taxes faster. Perfect!

Second, to claim that U.S. debt doesn't matter because we owe it to ourselves, and that homeowners' debts do matter because they owe them to someone else, is absurd.

It is as if we are all going to say to the government, "It's okay you took all of those taxes from us and spent them on stuff we'll mostly never see, wipe the slate clean, we're good. And all the stuff you promised us that you didn't budget for, or worse, those set aside budgets you stole from, it's okay, we're good, we relieve you of what you owe us." It's just stupid.

Also, if you are a homeowner you are paying yourself too, in a sense.

While you are paying the mortgage to your bank you are also paying into a capital asset known as your home. You end up with something of fairly equal value, or more when home prices appreciate.

The Truth about Debt

But we screwed that all up because debts do matter.

Too much debt leads to depreciation and deleveraging, which leads to lower demand, lower production, fewer jobs and a lower tax base.

The last piece of Krugman's argument that our World War II debts were never repaid and that the huge deficits to pay for the war effort led to an extraordinary peacetime expansion is also frighteningly off the mark.

Of course, the savings bonds issued to fund the War have matured and been paid off. And the portion of our national debt brought on by the War was paid off a long time ago.

Just because the U.S. continues to add to its deficit and has to continually rollover debts doesn't mean that we're rolling over debts from 70 years ago.

Mr. Krugman's own argument even addresses that. Rising incomes and our rapidly expanding economy in the postwar period generated a vastly rising tax base and led to prosperity.

But, that had nothing to do with deficits not mattering.

That had everything to do with soldiers returning home and being educated under the G.I. bill, being able to find work in revved-up manufacturing facilities, and the ensuing baby boom that would lead to a substantial increase in the population and tax base.

A Political Axe to Grind

There are a lot of problems with Professor Krugman's argument that deficits don't matter.

But, the biggest problem I have is that instead of addressing deficits in an organic, holistic and objective way, Mr. Krugman addresses these important issues from his political perspective rather than a purely economic perspective.

Bashing conservatives who say deficits matter and spending cuts along with a smaller government are the best way to solve our long-term fiscal problems, and arguing that "responsible governments -- that is governments that are willing to impose modestly higher taxes when the situation warrants it" are the answer to deficits that don't matter much, is polarizing at best and dangerous at worst.

What economists should be advocating is an apolitical approach to both our short-term and long-term problems.

We need smaller deficits over time and a smaller, more responsive government in the long-term.

In the short-term, we need real infrastructure spending, not quantitative easing for banks to increase their bonus pools. We need a massive investment in education and we need an industrial policy that promotes manufacturing and job growth - not the exportation of our capital to less developed countries where labor cost advantages fatten up public corporations that don't pay enough U.S. taxes and hide the money from Uncle Sam in the loopholes Congress digs for them.

Both deficits and politics matter. And if we don't figure out how to bridle both we are all going to end up in the dirt being trampled by stampeding emerging economies everywhere.

(Shah Gilani is considered one of the world's foremost experts on the credit crisis. He not only called for the implosion of the U.S. financial markets, he also predicted the historic rebound that began in March 2009. Shah is the editor of Capital Wave Forecast and Spin Trader. He also writes Money Map Press's most talked-about publication, the Wall Street Insights & Indictments e-letter, where he reveals how Wall Street's high-stakes game is really played, and how to win it.)

20120110-04

17:07

Dennis

Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to Pam, above) & "Have the Super-Rich Seceded from the United States?"

from Pam:

I hate to say it--patriotic American that I am--but I wonder why no one seems to question the whole idea of capitalism.

Capitalism works relatively well for a lot of people and predatory capitalism works absolutely great for a few more..... "Who Is John Galt?"

"Have the Super-Rich Seceded from the United States?" by: Mike Lofgren, Truthout

Jan. 10, 2012, (<http://www.truth-out.org/have-super-rich-seceded-united-states/1326127151>)

It was in 1993 during Congressional deliberation over the North American Free Trade Agreement. I was having lunch with a staffer for one of the rare Republican members of Congress who opposed the policy of so-called free trade. I distinctly remember something my colleague said: "The rich elites of this country have far more in common with their counterparts in London, Paris and Tokyo than with their own fellow American citizens."

That was just the beginning of the period when the realities of outsourced manufacturing, financialization of the economy and growing income disparity started to seep into the public consciousness, so at the time it seemed like a striking and novel statement.

At the end of the cold war, many writers predicted the decline of the traditional nation state. Some looked at the demise of the Soviet Union and foresaw the territorial state breaking up into statelets of different ethnic, religious or economic compositions. This happened in the Balkans, former Czechoslovakia and Sudan. Others, like Chuck Spinney, predicted a weakening of the state due to the rise of fourth-generation warfare and the inability of national armies to adapt to it. The quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan lend credence to that theory. There have been hundreds of books about globalization and how it would break down borders. But I am unaware of a well-developed theory from that time about how the super-rich and the corporations they run would secede from the nation state.

I do not mean secession in terms of physical withdrawal from the territory of the state, although that happens occasionally.¹ It means a withdrawal into enclaves, a sort of internal immigration, whereby the rich disconnect themselves from the civic life of the nation and from any concern about its well-being except as a place to extract loot. Our plutocracy now lives like the British in colonial India: in the place and ruling it, but not of it. If one can afford private security, public safety is of no concern; if one owns a Gulfstream jet, crumbling bridges cause less apprehension - and viable public transportation doesn't even show up on the radar screen. With private doctors on call, who cares about Medicare?

To some degree, the rich have always secluded themselves from the gaze of the common herd; for example, their habit for centuries has been to send their offspring to private schools. But now this habit is exacerbated by the plutocracy's palpable animosity toward public education and public educators, as Michael Bloomberg has demonstrated. To the extent public education "reform" is popular among billionaires and their tax-exempt foundations, one suspects it is as a lever to divert the more than one-half trillion dollars in federal, state and local education dollars into private hands, meaning themselves and their friends.² A century ago, at least we got some attractive public libraries out of Andrew Carnegie. Noblesse oblige like Carnegie's is presently lacking among our seceding plutocracy.

In both world wars, even a Harvard man or a New York socialite might know the weight of an Army pack. Now, the military is for suckers from the laboring classes, whose subprime mortgages you just sliced into CDOs and sold to gullible investors in order to buy your second Bentley or rustle up the cash to employ Rod Stewart to perform at your birthday party. Courtesy of Matt Taibbi, we learn that the sentiment among the super-rich toward the rest of America is often one of contempt rather than noblesse; Bernard Marcus, co-founder of Home Depot, says about the views of the 99 percent: "Who gives a crap about some imbecile?"

Steven Schwarzman, the hedge fund billionaire CEO of the Blackstone Group who hired Rod Stewart for his \$5 million birthday party, believes it is the rabble who are socially irresponsible. Speaking about low-income citizens who pay no income tax, he says: "You have to have skin in the game. I'm not saying how much people should do. But we should all be part of the system." But millions of Americans who do not pay federal income taxes pay federal payroll taxes. These taxes are regressive and the dirty little secret is that over the last several decades they have made up a greater and greater share of federal revenues. In 1950, payroll and other federal retirement contributions constituted 10.9 percent of all federal revenues; by 2007, the last "normal" economic year before federal revenues began falling, they made up 33.9 percent. By contrast, corporate income taxes were 26.4 percent of federal revenues in 1950; by 2007, they had fallen to 14.4 percent. Who has skin in the game now?

As is well known by now, Schwarzman benefits from the "Buffett Rule": financial sharks typically take their compensation in the form of capital gains rather than salaries, thus knocking down their income tax rate from 35 percent to 15 percent. But that's not the only way Mr. Skin-in-the-Game benefits: the 6.2-percent Social Security tax and the 1.45-percent Medicare tax apply only to wages and salaries, not capital gains distributions. Accordingly, Schwarzman is stiffing the system in two ways: not only is his income tax rate less than half the top marginal rate, he is shorting the Social Security system that others of his billionaire colleagues like Pete Peterson say is unsustainable and needs to be cut.

This lack of skin in the game may explain why Willard Mitt Romney is so coy about releasing his income tax returns. It would also make sense for someone with \$264 million in net worth to joke that he is "unemployed," as if he were some jobless sheet metal worker in Youngstown, when he is really saying in code that his income stream is not a salary subject to payroll deduction. The chances are good that his effective rate for both federal income and payroll taxes is lower than that of many a wage slave.

The real joke is on the rest of us. After the biggest financial meltdown in 80 years - a meltdown caused by the type of rogue financial manipulation that Romney embodies - and a consequent long, steep drop in the American standard of living, who is the putative front-runner for one of the only two parties allowed to be competitive in American politics? None other than Romney, the man who says corporations are people. Opposing him, or someone like him, will be the incumbent President Barack Obama, who will raise up to a billion dollars to compete in the campaign. Much of that loot will come from the same corporations, hedge fund managers, merger and acquisition specialists and leveraged buyout artists the president will denounce in pro forma fashion during the campaign.

The super-rich have seceded from America even as their grip on its control mechanisms has tightened.

Footnotes:

¹Erik Prince, who was born into a fortune, is related to the even bigger Amway fortune and made yet another fortune as CEO of the mercenary-for-hire firm Blackwater, moved to the United Arab Emirates in 2011.

²This stratagem follows the template of Halliburton's privatized military logistics activities as well as George Bush's proposed Social Security "reform": funneling public dollars into corporate hands.

20120110-05	18:30	Art	Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to Dennis, above)
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Pretty good article. I know during the medieval age a French noble felt much closer to an English noble than to any French peasant. Why is today any different?

20120110-06	19:08	SteveBA	Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to Pam & Dennis, above)
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I have to agree with Dennis that command economies are doomed to fail. Everybody is enamored with china but but corruption and selfish leaders will doom them. Think Japan in the 80's. Free vmarkets like democracies are messy, but over time work better than any other system we have seen.

[Beyond tribal living, we seem to have found no economic engine that works better than capitalism, though it might be argued that it also works too well. –SteveB]

[20120110-07](#) 20:05 Dennis Re: Capitalism & Good Government (reply to SteveBA, above)

Or think the U.S.A. right now. It's as much a command economy as China. China was a command economy when it was Communist, but it's more of a predatory capitalist economy since the Communist Party of China started believing they were just like the Republicans. Both are authoritarian and rigged (distorted) by the bankers.

[20120110-01](#) 13:06 SteveG Fw: CREDO Action Petition: End Indefinite Detention and Close Guantanamo!

from CREDO Action:

"Indefinite detention without charge or trial is fundamentally contrary to the democratic values that our system of government rests upon. The recent law that authorizes the indefinite military detention of American citizens is an outrage and must be rolled back. Additionally, the detention facilities at Guantanamo Bay, which continue to be a dark spot on our national conscience, should be closed."

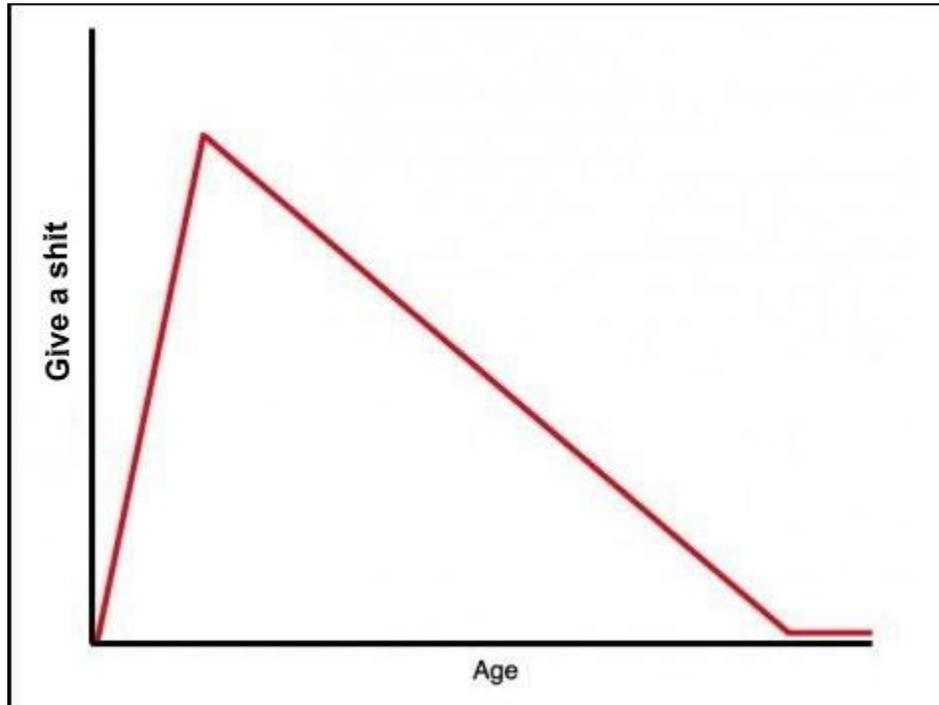
Tell President Obama and Congress: End indefinite detention and close Guantanamo:

<http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/gitmo/?r=366373&id=33280-3891339-HomE7Px>.

[20120110-02](#) 13:12 GaryF Cartoon: Internet



This is a deceptively simple philosophy that I have been working on and refining for most of my life. I am delighted to say that I believe I have refined it down to its essence sufficiently to share it with a select group of friends that may appreciate its elegance and simplicity.



[Verified by Snopes.com. –SteveB :-)]

For the privilege of not having to pay taxes corporations create no jobs, grossly overpay their CEOs and accumulate almost all the money that exists in the world.

"Over Two-Thirds of Corporations Pay No Federal Corporate Income Tax" by Huff Post Business

Jan. 10, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/10/corporations-pay-no-tax_n_1196875.html?utm_campaign=011012&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Alert-business&utm_content=FullStory)

At a time when the federal government is starved for cash -- and facing layoffs and cuts in services across the board -- more and more corporations are sidestepping their traditional tax rate and keeping millions of dollars for themselves.

The number of U.S. corporations structuring their businesses in such a way that they can avoid higher taxes has skyrocketed in the past quarter century, *The Wall Street Journal* reports.

In 1986, about 24 percent of corporations were what's known as nontaxable businesses -- meaning the companies themselves pay no federal income taxes -- instead passing on the earnings to individual investors to pay taxes on. By 2008, these businesses accounted for about 69 percent of all corporations, a designation that can save companies hundreds of millions of dollars in a single year

Advocates for the business community have expressed frustration with the country's 35 percent corporate income tax rate, calling it unreasonably high. In practice, though, it's common for big businesses to pay much less, thanks to a cornucopia of tax-code loopholes and exemptions won by lobbyists.

The issue of corporate tax participation has become especially pressing in recent years, as the country struggles to manage its ballooning deficits. Corporate taxes for non-financial companies have fallen more than 13 percent since 2007, according to Bloomberg. At the same time, the national debt grew to \$15.23 trillion from \$9.13 trillion -- a number larger than the economy itself.

According to a recent analysis of nearly 300 Fortune 500 companies by the Citizens for Tax Justice, the average company was paying just 18.3 percent in taxes -- a little more than half the official rate. And by using techniques like industry subsidies, stock option packages, and moving assets overseas where they can't be taxed, 30 companies mentioned in the report -- including Wells Fargo, Verizon, Boeing and General Electric -- didn't pay a cent in federal taxes in 2008, 2009 or 2010, the report found.

The phenomenon affects state income taxes as well as federal. Last month, another study from the Center for Tax Justice found that corporate tax avoidance had cost states a combined \$42.7 billion between 2008 and 2010 -- a period when budget shortfalls forced states to cut spending for health care, public schools and care for the elderly and disabled.

[The tax situation, in my humble opinion, is not what this article makes it out to be. --SteveB]

20120110-09	22:34	Art	Re: "Over Two-Thirds of Corporations Pay No Federal Corporate Income Tax" (But Their Owners Usually Do) (reply to SteveG, above)
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I would only add that in your hypothetical example the business running screaming to the Congress rep will also use the Republican holy words "JOB KILLING!!!!"

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

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INDEX: Click here.

Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 12, 2012)

Who Are They Trying to Kid?

It seems like one of the favorite Republican talking points during the recent 1% and 99% tax fights was that everyone, even the poor, should pay some taxes. You've read the catch phrase in this forum. **The poor need to "have some skin in the game."** Republicans complain vehemently as they voice this claim that the poor don't pay taxes. They never seem to complain about the rich who pay no taxes. Funny. Republicans complain even more bitterly about the most efficient government-run welfare system ever devised by man—the Earned Income Tax Credit—because it gives a tax refund to poor people who pay no taxes to begin with. I guess the jargon confuses the Right. Just remember, Republicans, if it quacks like a duck...maybe it has more to do with a slightly hidden social program than actual tax policy.

I want to talk about two groups of people and the taxes they pay—the poor and businessmen (shorter than businesspeople, but you know what I mean). And I'm really talking about very broad groups of people here. You could include the whole middle class with the poor. And I mean all businessmen who own or run a business of any size. All that's important is that they pay federal taxes as a business.

What I intend to show is that all these groups of people pay taxes (more or less), and those taxes are surprisingly flat in actuality. Here's how it works. Here's the big secret. Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever. They make their customers pay the taxes. They pass the taxes on to somebody further down the food chain. Taxes are simply another business expense that gets figured into the price you pay for goods and services.

It's that simple. It works this way for a "C" corporation where the CEO is an employee (both pay taxes) or an "S" corporation, LLC, partnership, proprietorship, where taxes devolve to the owner(s) of the business.

My Republican friends want to grab the microphone right now and tell you that, accounting-wise, income taxes are not treated the same way as other business expenses. Income is taxed after expenses are deducted, as everyone knows. Expenses are the other outflow, not taxes. And it's profit that is taxed. But, normally, a business has some control over how big that profit is. And, normally, it knows in advance about how much tax it will have to pay. If I am a businessman who must live on the proceeds of my company, or if I run a larger business that must meet its cash flow, earnings, and budget targets, in either case, it's really the bottom line that interests me most. After everything is paid, how much is left for me and mine?

What a businessman always tries to do is build his expenses into his pricing structure and that invariably includes taxes. Don't believe that? Have Mr. Obama threaten to raise taxes on business and see how long it takes for

businessmen to call their Congressmen yelling and screaming that they'll have to raise prices if the increase becomes law. Exactly. Pass those expenses on to the consumer. There are constraints from competition on pricing, but they can be managed. You see, unlike other competitive business expenses, taxes are relatively equal for most competitors. It's just a fixed expense of doing business, as a percentage of sales. That's how it really works.

And businesses are pretty free to claim all kinds of things as legitimate business expenses, including ski trips to Aspen, baseball tickets, and fine Cuban cigars. Seriously.

So who really pays all the taxes? Consumers! (And, to some degree, that includes businesses, but they pass these costs on to consumers too.) **Who pays essentially no taxes? Businesses!**

Now who's got skin in the game and who doesn't???

Every time a poor person buys something from a rich businessman (however indirectly), he's paying the rich dude's taxes! Fact! The lies and deceptions have to stop!

[20120111-01](#) 09:55 Pam Re: Graphic: Giva-a-Sh*t vs. Age (reply to Phil, FotM Newsletter #49)

I love your graph, Phil. [Age vs. Give-a-Sh*t] It says it all.

[20120111-02](#) 10:30 Pam Re: Capitalism and Good Government (reply to Dennis, FotM Newsletter #49.) & "Have the Super-Rich Seceded from the United States?"

"Who is John Galt?"

This article just confirms what I've been thinking ever since NAFTA was signed into law. It seemed odd to me at the time that we would want to eliminate trade barriers with Mexico, when it was so obvious that corporations were just waiting to go down that drain. I get these hunches, then I tell myself I'm being crazy, that other people who are smarter and know more than I surely know what they're doing. I keep knocking my head against plausibility and come up reeling when what seemed impossible actually happens: the Iraq War, any hope that Afghanistan can be brought into the modern age, that corporations are people, that America is not a theocracy, etc.

You can tell how worried the super-rich are when they carry on about "class warfare." You can tell how disconnected they are when they ascribe massive unemployment and foreclosures on laziness and poor judgment. I agree that the super-rich are retreating from not just America but from every wealthy country. Places like Dubai are virtual country clubs for the best-off, with immigrants to do the work and have few, if any, rights. Just as I cannot imagine what life would be like if I lived under a bridge, the super-rich cannot imagine that "normal" families might not be able to afford to take their kids to McDonald's or buy them school supplies and soccer uniforms. The super-rich live in another world from the rest of us, yet they control all the mechanisms that control our lives. We serve at their pleasure. The rich giveth and the rich taketh away, and there's not much we can do about it.

Our leading politicians are either corrupt or crazy. The only ones I can think of who aren't are Alan Grayson and Elizabeth Warren. I hope there are others, but no names spring to mind. I just read a mystery novel by Donna Leon; some of you may know of her. Her books are set in Venice, and after reading about the corruption at every level of Italian society, I no longer consider Tuscany my dream escape destination. I'm not anti-Italian, but if this run-of-the-mill novel, which is not primarily concerned with corruption but describes it as an ordinary part of the background, is any indication, I don't want to live there, thank you very much.

I find systematic corruption incredibly dispiriting. Just the thought of the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, many African nations, and countries where bribes are part of doing business makes me crazy. What I find really upsetting is my suspicion that human nature is basically corrupt and honesty and generosity are the anomalies. If that is true, then we are doomed to repeated cycles of repression and exploitation that will never end. If I don't stop this line of thinking, I'm going to make myself depressed.

So, here's my solution--for today anyway. We live in a fallen world. The Garden of Eden may be a myth, but the idea of original sin is absolutely correct. Human animals, for all their intelligence and strength, are deeply flawed creatures, which means the world in general will never be substantially better in the long term. In the long term, Nature always wins, and if that means the earth freezes over and species go extinct, or if it means that we exhaust our resources and back ourselves into an existential corner, all we can do here and now is try our best to ameliorate the worst. And think small.

At the end of *Candide* Voltaire swears off philosophy and urges man to "cultivate your garden." Do the work that lies closest at hand, grow your food, be kind, and let the rest go. I have a confession. If it weren't for literature I would have despaired long ago. I firmly believe (and read somewhere recently someone else who thinks so too) that people who read novels are more empathetic, and empathetic people are more moral. Also more understanding. Chaucer saw the sins of us all without flinching, but turned them into cautionary tales that teach and delight (Horace's purpose of art). Examples are too numerous to list. Art takes the tragedy of life and transmutes it into something bearable.

They say a change is as good as a rest, so yesterday I rearranged my living room furniture. I now have a cozy little reading corner from which I can survey the entire room and see out the front window. I have a little table for my tea, a good light, and a stack of books just waiting for me to get off this computer. When I hear Newt pontificating like the jackass he is, I can tell myself that Dante, Shakespeare, and George Eliot would have a place for him, where I could read about him without weeping.

Sorry this is so long, but you don't have to read it, do you? :-)

20120111-03 13:09 GaryF Fw: Letter to Former Sen. Alan Simpson

Truer words were never spoken! The "greediest generation"!

[Source of original email unknown. It appears to be a legitimate email in response to Alan Simpson's famous gaffes of Aug., 2010. -SteveB]

Patty is P*SSED!!! I agree!!! Regardless of one's Party affiliation.

Alan Simpson, former Senator from Wyoming, Co-Chair of Obama's deficit commission, calls senior citizens the Greediest Generation as he compared "Social Security" to a Milk Cow with 310 million teats.

Here's a response in a letter from PATTY MYERS in Montana ... I think she is a little ticked off! She also tells it like it is!

"Hey Alan, let's get a few things straight..

1. As a career politician, you have been on the public dole for FIFTY YEARS.
2. I have been paying Social Security taxes for 48 YEARS (since I was 15 years old. I am now 63).
- 3 My Social Security payments, and those of millions of other Americans, were safely tucked away in an interest bearing account for decades until you political pukers decided to raid the account and give OUR money to a bunch of zero ambition losers in return for votes, thus bankrupting the system and turning Social Security into a Ponzi scheme that would have made Bernie Madoff proud.
4. Recently, just like Lucy & Charlie Brown, you and your ilk pulled the proverbial football away from millions of American seniors nearing retirement and moved the goal posts for full retirement from age 65 to age 67. NOW, you and your skill commission is proposing to move the goal posts YET AGAIN.

5. I, and millions of other Americans, have been paying into Medicare from Day One, and now you morons propose to change the rules of the game.. Why? Because you idiots mismanaged other parts of the economy to such an extent that you need to steal money from Medicare to pay the bills.

6. I, and millions of other Americans, have been paying income taxes our entire lives, and now you propose to increase our taxes yet again. Why? Because you incompetent bastards spent our money so profligately that you just kept on spending even after you ran out of money. Now, you come to the American taxpayers and say you need more to pay off YOUR debt.

To add insult to injury, you label us "greedy" for calling "bullsh*t" on your incompetence. Well, Captain Bullsh*t, I have a few questions for YOU.

1. How much money have you earned from the American taxpayers during your pathetic 50-year political career?
2. At what age did you retire from your pathetic political career, and how much are you receiving in annual retirement benefits from the American taxpayers?
3. How much do you pay for YOUR government provided health insurance?
4. What cuts in YOUR retirement and healthcare benefits are you proposing in your disgusting deficit reduction proposal, or, as usual, have you exempted yourself and your political cronies?

It is you, "Captain Bullsh*t", and your political co-conspirators called Congress who are the "greedy" ones.. It is you and your fellow nutcases who have bankrupted America and stolen the American dream from millions of loyal, patriotic taxpayers. And for what? Votes. That's right, sir. You and yours have bankrupted America for the sole purpose of advancing your pathetic political careers. You know it, we know it, and you know that we know it.

And you can take that to the bank, you miserable son of a b*tch .

If you like the way things are in America delete this. If you agree with what a fellow Montana citizen Patty Myers says, PASS IT ON!!!!

20120111-04 13:25 SteveB Re: Letter to Former Sen. Alan Simpson (reply to GaryF, above)

Here's a good reply I found online to the letter, above:

from <http://politicsorpoppycock.com/2011/11/11/greediest-generation-not/>

Patty, I wholeheartedly concur with your poignant response to Senator Simpson. He is a career politicians and as such is only interested in advancing his cause (self-preservation) not the preservation of our beloved US.

That is why I am dedicated to their removal. Visit my website: Throw All Bums Out of Office, <http://www.throwallbumsoutofoffice.com>. I welcome your support and all others who are tired of the lies and double dealing in DC. Please join me in ousting them all.

--Ron Wilner, Founder and Creator of the Taboo Party (Taboo is an acronym for Throw All Bums Out of Office)

20120111-05 14:57 Pam David Brooks Gets It Right

David Brooks has a good piece in yesterday's *New York Times* about the paucity of liberal voices in this country. Corruption is rampant, in government and out. No one trusts Wall Street, but no one trusts government either. What we need, Brooks says, is a Martin Luther, someone who will take a stand, nail his theses to the church door, and cleanse the Augean stables (how's that for a mixed metaphor?). The Catholic Church was corrupt, rich, and

powerful, yet Luther was able to turn the world in a new direction. The point is not that Luther was followed by peace and tranquility, but that challenging an established institution can be done. Brooks calls for a Steve Jobs, who can simplify government, the tax structure, Medicare, and make them all user-friendly. What we have now is a nest of snakes, where there's lots of pointless activity fueled by vicious motives. This truly is the moment for a good man or woman to rise to the occasion, forget about political expediency and personal self-interest, and shift the nation's gears. I'm no Libertarian, and I think Ron Paul has his head in a bucket, but at least he's not afraid to talk straight. The rest of the Republican herd has become so tangled in the traces they can't stay on their feet. Things must change. I hope that if Obama can't be our Martin Luther, someone else can. But the status quo won't get down without a fight. Things could get ugly.

20120111-06	15:35	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Start Your Own Petition!
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from MoveOn:

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

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

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

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

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

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=263094&id=34639-20195165-XgHgZ0x&t=1>.

Thanks for all you do.

--Steven, Anna, Michael, Adam Q., Stefanie, and the rest of the team

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https://civic.moveon.org/donatec4/creditcard.html?cpn_id=457.

20120111-07	18:27	SteveG	"5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today"
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"5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" by Rob Boston, AlterNet

Jan. 10, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153727/>)

(Thomas Jefferson believed that a coolly rational form of religion would take root in America. Was he ever wrong.)

To hear the Religious Right tell it, men like George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison were 18th-century versions of Jerry Falwell in powdered wigs and stockings. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Unlike many of today's candidates, the founders didn't find it necessary to constantly wear religion on their sleeves. They considered faith a private affair. Contrast them to former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (who says he wouldn't vote for an atheist for president because non-believers lack the proper moral grounding to guide the American ship of state), Texas Gov. Rick Perry (who hosted a prayer rally and issued an infamous ad accusing President Barack Obama of waging a "war on religion") and former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum (whose uber-Catholicism leads him to oppose not just abortion but birth control).

There was a time when Americans voted for candidates who were skeptical of core concepts of Christianity like the Trinity, the divinity of Jesus and the virgin birth. The question is, could any of them get elected today? The sad answer is probably not.

Here are five founding fathers whose views on religion would most likely doom them to defeat today:

1. George Washington

The father of our country was nominally an Anglican but seemed more at home with Deism. The language of the Deists sounds odd to today's ears because it's a theological system of thought that has fallen out of favor. Deists believed in God but didn't necessarily see him as active in human affairs. The god of the Deists was a god of first cause. He set things in motion and then stepped back.

Washington often employed Deistic terms. His god was a "supreme architect" of the universe. Washington saw religion as necessary for good moral behavior but didn't necessarily accept all Christian dogma. He seemed to have a special gripe against communion and would usually leave services before it was offered.

Washington was widely tolerant of other beliefs. He is the author of one of the great classics of religious liberty – the letter to Touro Synagogue (1790). In this letter, Washington assured America's Jews that they would enjoy complete religious liberty in America; not mere toleration in an officially "Christian" nation. He outlines a vision of a multi-faith society where all are free.

"The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to Mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation," wrote Washington. "All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens."

Stories of Washington's deep religiosity, such as tales of him praying in the snow at Valley Forge, can be ignored. They are pious legends invented after his death.

2. John Adams

The man who followed Washington in office was a Unitarian, although he was raised a Congregationalist and never officially left that church. Adams rejected belief in the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, core concepts of Christian dogma. In his personal writings, Adams makes it clear that he considered some Christian dogma to be incomprehensible.

In February 1756, Adams wrote in his diary about a discussion he had had with a man named Major Greene. Greene was a devout Christian who sought to persuade Adams to adopt conservative Christian views. The two argued over the divinity of Jesus and the Trinity. Questioned on the matter

of Jesus' divinity, Greene fell back on an old standby: some matters of theology are too complex and mysterious for we puny humans to understand.

Adams was not impressed. In his diary he wrote, "Thus mystery is made a convenient cover for absurdity."

As President, Adams signed the famous Treaty of Tripoli, which boldly stated, "[T]he government of the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion...."

3. Thomas Jefferson

It's almost impossible to define Jefferson's subtle religious views in a few words. As he once put it, "I am a sect by myself, as far as I know." But one thing is clear: His skepticism of traditional Christianity is well established. Our third president did not believe in the Trinity, the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus, the resurrection, original sin and other core Christian doctrines. He was hostile to many conservative Christian clerics, whom he believed had perverted the teachings of that faith.

Jefferson once famously observed to Adams, "And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

Although not an orthodox Christian, Jefferson admired Jesus as a moral teacher. In one of his most unusual acts, Jefferson edited the New Testament, cutting away the stories of miracles and divinity and leaving behind a very human Jesus, whose teachings Jefferson found "sublime." This "Jefferson Bible" is a remarkable document – and it would ensure his political defeat today. (Imagine the TV commercials the Religious Right would run: Thomas Jefferson hates Jesus! He mutilates Bibles!)

Jefferson was confident that a coolly rational form of religion would take root in the fertile intellectual soil of America. He once predicted that just about everyone would become Unitarian. (Despite his many talents, the man was no prophet.)

Jefferson took political stands that would infuriate today's Religious Right and ensure that they would work to defeat him. He refused to issue proclamations calling for days of prayer and fasting, saying that such religious duties were no part of the chief executive's job. His assertion that the First Amendment erects a "wall of separation between church and state" still rankles the Religious Right today.

4. James Madison

Jefferson's close ally would be similarly unelectable today. Madison is perhaps the most enigmatic of all the founders when it comes to religion. To this day, scholars still debate his religious views.

Nominally Anglican, Madison, some of his biographers believe, was really a Deist. He went through a period of enthusiasm for Christianity as a young man, but this seems to have faded. Unlike many of today's politicians, who eagerly wear religion on their sleeves and brag about the ways their faith will guide their policy decisions, Madison was notoriously reluctant to talk publicly about his religious beliefs.

Madison was perhaps the strictest church-state separationist among the founders, taking stands that make the ACLU look like a bunch of pikers. He opposed government-paid chaplains in Congress and in the military. As president, Madison rejected a proposed census because it involved counting people by profession. For the government to count the clergy, Madison said, would violate the First Amendment.

Madison, who wrote the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, also opposed government-issued prayer proclamations. He issued a few during the War of 1812 at the insistence of Congress but later

concluded that his actions had been unconstitutional. As president, he vetoed legislation granting federal land to a church and a plan to have a church in Washington care for the poor through a largely symbolic charter. In both cases, he cited the First Amendment.

One can hear the commercials now: "James Madison is an anti-religious fanatic. He even opposes prayer proclamations during time of war."

5. Thomas Paine

Paine never held elective office, but he played an important role as a pamphleteer whose stirring words helped rally Americans to independence. Washington ordered that Paine's pamphlet "The American Crisis" be read aloud to the Continental Army as a morale booster on Dec. 23, 1776. "Common Sense" was similarly popular with the people. These seminal documents were crucial to winning over the public to the side of independence.

So Paine's a hero, right? He was also a radical Deist whose later work, *The Age of Reason*, still infuriates fundamentalists. In the tome, Paine attacked institutionalized religion and all of the major tenets of Christianity. He rejected prophecies and miracles and called on readers to embrace reason. The Bible, Paine asserted, can in no way be infallible. He called the god of the Old Testament "wicked" and the entire Bible "the pretended word of God." (There go the Red States!)

What can we learn from this? Americans have the right to reject candidates for any reason, including their religious beliefs. But they ought to think twice before tossing someone aside just because he or she is skeptical of orthodox Christianity. After all, that description includes some of our nation's greatest leaders.

(Rob Boston is senior policy analyst at Americans United for Separation of Church and State.)

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20120111-08	20:14	Art	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Good article. That's why the Constitution separates church and State. Need to keep it that way. Thanks.

20120111-09	21:27	Pam	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
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I LOVE this article. It should be required reading in every classroom in America--and every church. I'm with Voltaire, who called the [Catholic] church, "That infamous thing." When people have to make excuses for institutions--government, church, family, the military, whatever--then you know the institution is flawed. OK, we're all flawed. But it is rank hypocrisy to exempt religion from the same standards we apply to everything else. People say, "It's not the church that's bad, it's the people in it."

People say that about communism as well. Why is skepticism so frightening? Why is moral ambiguity so threatening? All I can conclude is that most people have teensy, weensy minds. (Forgive my choler, but this article has my juices flowing.)

20120111-10	21:42	SteveG	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Pam, above)
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If you ask most people on the street or in typical classrooms a question the usual answer starts with "because" – "Because that is what I read", "Because that is what my parents said", "Because that is what the teacher said", and the "because" go on and on and on. Critical thinking is and has not been a priority in the home environment or

the educational settings for decades and decades. People, on the average, do not know how to problem solve, to think for themselves, to find the answer – it is easier to say and believe the answer is because. I know of factories that openly stated that their largest need in hiring entry level workers was finding people with critical thinking.

Pam – you are increasing my vocabulary and reminding me of Mrs. Gilberts' English class at GHS when I pitted myself against Steven S. Stevenson in writing.

20120111-11	21:59	SteveB	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)
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And you have a truly incredible memory, SteveG!!!

--Steven Stephenson Stevens (aka Dick Travis)

20120111-12	22:28	SteveG	"Mitt Romney Tells the 99% to Stop Being Jealous & Bend Over Quiet Down" & "Romney: Any Concern For Income Inequality Is 'About Envy'"
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Right... Just bend over. Idiot can't tell the difference between jealousy and anger.

"Mitt Romney Tells the 99% to Stop Being Jealous & Bend Over Quiet Down" by ThinkProgress War Room

Jan 11, 2012, (<http://thinkprogress.org/progress-report/mitt-romney-tells-the-99-to-stop-being-jealous-quiet-down/?mobile=nc>)

(Mitt Romney: We Shouldn't Be Critical of Wall Street or Our Broken Economy in Public.)

As we reported earlier this week, Mitt Romney's record at Bain Capital is one of a rapacious corporate raider who amassed a quarter-billion dollar fortune by bankrupting companies and laying off thousands of hardworking Americans. What's more, Romney takes advantage of unfair tax loopholes to pay a lower tax rate on his millions of dollars in ongoing annual profits from Bain than tens of millions of middle class Americans pay on the wages they earn.

Romney has come under withering criticism for his record at Bain in recent days, with much of it coming from fellow Republicans. This morning, Romney responded by calling such criticism un-American "class warfare" that is simply motivated by "envy." Romney added that our broken economy — one that is only working for the wealthy few right now — should not even be discussed in public, saying discussions of income inequality were only fit for "quiet rooms."

Don't believe Romney actually said that? [See below.]

"Romney: Any Concern For Income Inequality Is 'About Envy'" by Tanya Somanader, ThinkProgress

Jan 11, 2012, (<http://thinkprogress.org/economy/2012/01/11/402671/romney-any-concern-for-income-inequality-is-about-envy/?mobile=nc>)

As GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney begins to solidify his frontrunner status, his pitch as the "business" candidate who understands the "real economy" is faltering under heavier scrutiny of his time at Bain Capital. As CEO of the private equity firm, Romney "maximized returns by firing workers, seeking government subsidies, and flipping companies quickly for large profits" while a significant number of those companies went bankrupt and thousands of workers lost their jobs. "Make a profit. That's the name of the game, right?" he said.

Now even members of his own party are damning the callous nature of his work. Chafing from the criticism, Romney blasted his “desperate” opponents yesterday for joining President Obama in “put[ting] free enterprise on trial” and engaging in “the bitter politics of envy.”

This morning on the *Today Show*, host Matt Lauer asked Romney — twice — whether he truly believed any questions regarding the practices of Wall Street or the distribution of wealth and power is merely “envious” or more about “fairness.” Both times, Romney insisted that it was solely an “envy-oriented” attack on “millionaires and billionaires and executives and Wall Street”:

LAUER: When you said that we already have a leader who divides us with the bitter politics of envy, I’m curious about the word ‘envy.’ Did you suggest that anyone who questions the policies and practices of Wall Street and financial institutions, anyone who has questions about the distribution of wealth and power in this country, is envious? Is it about jealousy, or fairness?

ROMNEY: You know, I think it’s about envy. I think it’s about class warfare. When you have a president encouraging the idea of dividing America based on the 99 percent versus one percent — and those people who have been most successful will be in the one percent — you have opened up a whole new wave of approach in this country which is entirely inconsistent with the concept of one nation under God. The American people, I believe in the final analysis, will reject it.

LAUER: Yeah but envy? Are there no fair questions about the distribution of wealth without it being seen as ‘envy,’ though?

ROMNEY: I think it’s fine to talk about those things in quiet rooms and discussions about tax policy and the like. But the President has made it part of his campaign rally. Everywhere he goes we hear him talking about millionaires and billionaires and executives and Wall Street. It’s a very envy-oriented, attack-oriented approach and I think it will fail.

Watch the video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=ismksjp10q0

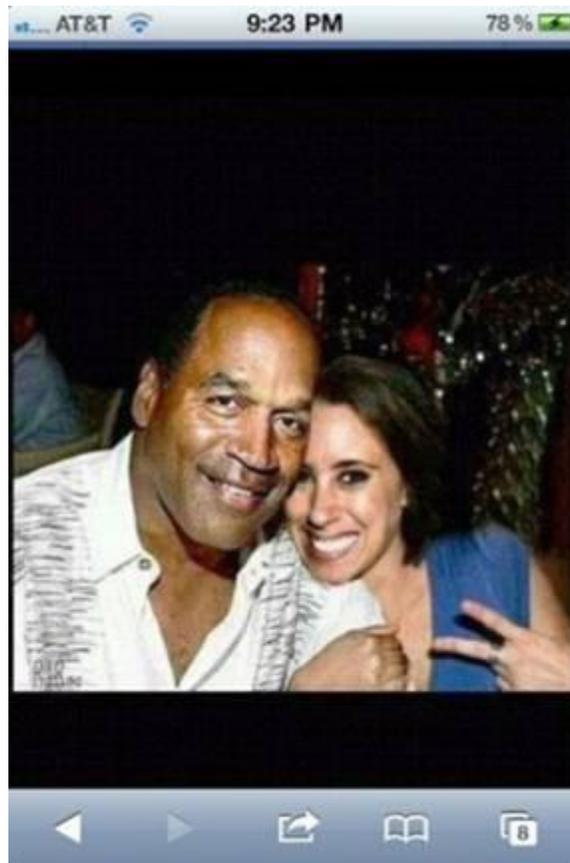
The exchange is indeed shocking in what it reveals. In a time when income inequality is at its worst level since the Great Depression and Americans are increasingly concerned over the shrinking middle class, Romney is insisting that anyone who questions — let alone tries to reform — the unfair advantages of the extremely wealthy or the destructive practices of the financial industry that single-handedly shoved America into a recession is nothing more than “envious” of these people’s success.

Perhaps his answer shouldn’t be so surprising given how myopic the view is from his high perch. Romney is, after all, a millionaire who is still making money from the predatory equity firm while paying little in taxes and owes much of his political viability to Wall Street’s pocketbook. Indeed, he suggested the public office should be the province of rich people. Perhaps he’s just defending his own.

As the Washington Post’s Greg Sargent points out, “Romney was twice given a chance to nod in the direction of saying that concerns about these problems have at least some legitimacy to them, that they are about something more than mere envy or class warfare, and that they are deserving of a public debate. And this is the answer he gave.” Fellow candidate Newt Gingrich had another description for Romney’s answer: “baloney.”

20120111-13 23:55 Tom Photo: Just Wrong!

Look Close at this lovely photo. Such a good-looking couple?! Think about it??!!!



20120111-14 23:59 SteveB Re: Photo: Just Wrong! (reply to Tom, above)

This is so awful it's great! Thanks, Tom.

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

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #51 — JAN. 13, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

Government Needs De-Regulation: People Don't Need No Stinkin' Rights!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 13, 2012)

OVER 200 SUBSCRIBERS AND GROWING! PASS THE FotM NEWSLETTER ON!

Here is a cautionary tale for you, my friends:

"Death in the Devil's Chair: Florida Man's Pepper Spray Death Raises Questions About Jail Abuse" by Radley Balco, Huffington Post

Jan. 11, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/11/jail-abuse-nick-christie-pepper-spray-florida_n_1192412.html)



Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=9nssw1bzBic

When he left his home in Ohio to visit his brother in Fort Myers, Fla. in March 2009, Nick Christie was already breaking down, physically and mentally. His wife Joyce was concerned about his well-being. Rightly so. By the end of the month, the grandfather of two, whose only prior run-in with the law was a DUI in the 1980s, would be strapped to a restraining chair in the Lee County, Fla. jail, coated with a thick layer of pepper spray, smothered in a "spit hood," then finally taken to a Florida hospital where, two days later, he would die.

Christie, 62, a retired boilermaker, suffered from heart disease as well as emphysema, the latter the likely result of his former smoking habit and years of exposure to asbestos. A bout with diverticulitis had forced him to cancel a fishing trip the year before, and he slipped into a depression after he was hospitalized for chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, a condition that further constricted his breathing.

Christie had been taking medication for his depression, but the doctor who was treating him had recently moved. That left no one to manage Christie's spiraling emotional state, and no one to control the possible side effects of his medication. Christie's wife worried about his trip to Florida, to the point where she contacted police in Lee County herself to ask that they keep an eye out for her husband. At her request, a captain from the Girard, Ohio police department also called Lee County officials and asked them to take Christie to a hospital if they found him.

Christie was first arrested on March 25, for public intoxication. Though there's evidence Christie had been drinking, he was also beginning his mental deterioration, and may have merely been disoriented. One fast-food worker he interacted with that night said she thought he was suffering from Alzheimer's. Though confused (he couldn't remember his wife's or brother's phone number), Christie did inform the jail attendants of his various medical conditions, and gave them a list of the medications he was taking. He was released the next day.

Christie was then arrested again on March 27, this time for misdemeanor trespassing. Nicholas DiCello, whose Cleveland firm Spangenberg Shibley & Liber has filed a civil rights lawsuit on behalf of Joyce and Christie's estate, says the second arrest was for a minor offense. "It was for trespassing at the hotel where was staying," DiCello says. "He was having another mental episode. He was bewildered, acting crazy, and so the hotel got fed up and asked him to leave. When he didn't go, they called the police."

According to DiCello, the jail staff and the staff for Prison Health Services, the private company contracted to provide medical service to the jail, ordered no advanced physical or mental health screening for Christie before he was jailed, despite the long list of medical conditions already in his file from his prior arrest. There is also no indication that anyone was made aware of Joyce Christie's notification of Lee County officials, in which she informed them about her husband's conditions. According to the lawsuit, after the second arrest, Lee County deputies locked Christie's medications in his truck. During his 43 hours in custody, he was never given medication.

Christie was uncooperative and nonsensical from the time he was arrested, but at some point after his incarceration, he became combative. Lee County deputies responded by either directly spraying him or fogging his cell with pepper spray at least 10 times. (According to police, Christie was sprayed eight times. A cell mate was sprayed two other times, which may have affected Christie.) He was never allowed to "decontaminate" -- to wash the spray off. Other inmates in the jail, who weren't targeted with the spray, told the Fort Myers *News-Press* the blasts were so strong that the secondary effects caused them to gag.

The deputies then put Christie into a restraining chair, a controversial device that binds inmates at both wrists, both ankles, and across the chest. In depositions, the other inmates, along with a deputy trainee named Monshay Gibbs, testified that Christie was sprayed at least two more times after he had been strapped to the chair. He was also stripped naked, and outfitted with a "spit mask," a hood designed to prevent inmates from spitting on jail personnel. In Christie's case, the mask kept the pepper spray in close proximity to his nose and mouth, ensuring he would continue to inhale it for the full six hours he was in the restraint chair.

According to Gibbs' testimony, Christie pleaded with the deputies, telling them he had a heart condition and numerous other medical problems, and that the spit mask made it difficult for him to breathe. Other inmates have confirmed Gibbs' account, adding that Christie began to turn purple.

When Joyce Christie heard of her husband's second arrest, she flew down to Florida to find him. "She was actually relieved to hear he had been arrested," DiCello says. "She thought they had responded to her pleas for help, that they would take him to a hospital to be treated." She eventually made her way to the Lee County jail. Joyce Christie would later learn that at one point in the night, when she was pleading with police to take her husband to the hospital, at the same time and in the same building he was being tortured to death in the restraint chair.

"She left frustrated," DiCello says. "They weren't listening to her. She didn't know what to do."

In the early afternoon of March 29, Nick Christie went into respiratory distress. He was taken to the Gulf Coast Medical Center in Fort Myers. Joyce Christie told journalist Jane Akre that according to hospital staff, her husband was so covered in pepper spray that doctors had to repeatedly change their gloves as they became contaminated. Christie would suffer multiple heart attacks over the next two days before he was finally declared brain dead and his life support was removed on March 31. Two days after Christie had been transported out of the jail, Deputy Medical Examiner Dr. Robert Pfalzgraf noted in his autopsy report that Christie still had brown-orange liquid pepper spray all over his body.

Pfalzgraf determined that Christie's heart gave out due to stress from his exposure to pepper spray. He ruled the death a homicide.

The Devil's Chair

"I look at this story, and all I can say is, what in the world were they thinking?" says David Klinger, a former police officer who now teaches at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Klinger specializes in the use of force. "As a general rule, you don't use pepper spray on someone who is restrained. There might be some limited circumstances where, say, you have a suspect in handcuffs who is banging his head against the window of a patrol car. You might give him a quick burst of pepper spray. But never, never someone who is secured in a restraint chair. It just makes no sense at all."

The Lee County deputies appear to have violated accepted use of force guidelines a number of different ways, including the length of time they kept Christie strapped to the chair, pepper spraying him after he had been restrained (as well as their failure to clean the pepper spray off of him), their failure to properly evaluate him for mental and physical health problems, and their failure to allow him to take his medication.

While the Florida Sheriff's Association told HuffPost that it has no guidelines on the use of restraint chairs, there seems to be a strong consensus that the use of pepper spray, stun guns, or other compliance tools after a suspect has been restrained is at minimum excessive force, and possibly a crime.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit has found that pepper spraying suspects suffering mental illness is a violation of their constitutional rights, and several federal appeals courts have ruled that spraying someone who is already restrained is an excessive use of force. The state of Vermont forbids the use of restraint chairs for punishment, and requires approval from a medical professional and a mental health professional before a chair can be used. In the event that an inmate poses an immediate risk, a mental health professional is to be contacted immediately after the inmate is strapped in. The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice forbids the use of restraint chairs and pepper spray on incarcerated minors entirely.

The Florida State Prison System doesn't use restraint chairs, either. A spokeswoman told the Orlando Sentinel in 2006 that the state's Department of Corrections has determined the chairs are a safety risk, and inappropriate for prisoners with mental illness. The problem, some experts say, is that inmates with mental illness are particularly prone to "excited delirium," an escalating set of respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms that can lead to death. (Though the diagnosis is still controversial.)

Steve Yerger has been training law enforcement agencies on the use of force for 20 years, and gives what he says is the only course on restraint chairs in the country. Yerger says the complete restriction of movement to which the chair subjects inmates can trigger physiological effects -- both respiratory and circulatory -- and that the problem can be exacerbated in patients with mental health problems. "They can just go through the roof, and then they crash. You need to make sure you have constant monitoring, and that you always have medical professionals close by," Yerger says.

But inmates with mental illness are also more likely to present a threat to themselves or others, which means they're more likely to need restraint. A 2009 report by the Maryland *Frederick News-Post*, for example, found that in the previous year, 64 percent of inmates put in a restraint chair by the Frederick County Sheriff's Department had mental health problems.

While there's no universal policy on how long an inmate can safely be left in a restraint chair, the Oklahoma Department of Corrections limits it to two hours. Texas limits the time to five hours in any 24-hour period. Montana limits restraint to four hours. Iowa law also limits the time to four hours (though Iowa jails that exceed that limit appear to suffer little more than some public criticism.) Utah banned restraint chairs entirely after inmate Michael Valent died of blood clots -- the result of being strapped to a chair for 16 hours. Though in Utah too, several counties continued to use the chair after the ban.

There have been a number of deaths over the years at least in part attributed to what critics call "the devil's chair" or the "torture chair." In a 2000 article for *The Progressive* Anne-Marie Cusac documented 11 deaths, including several inmates with mental illness as well as cases in which inmates were pepper sprayed after they had been restrained. Cusac notes that in the 1999 case of James Arthur Livingston, who died after being strapped to a restraint chair in Tarrant County, Texas, the first deputy who attempted to give Livingston CPR wrote in his report, "I then removed myself from the area and walked into the sally port, where I threw up from inhaling pepper gas residue from inmate Livingston."

In 2004, the *Dayton City Paper* wrote about three restraint chair-related deaths in Dayton County, Ohio, alone.

Restraint chair-related lawsuits alleging patterns of abuse have proliferated across the country, including in Iowa, Georgia (PDF), Colorado, Texas, California, New Jersey and Maricopa County, Arizona, where the chairs were finally replaced in 2006 after three deaths and several million dollars paid out in settlements.

Florida has also had its share of restraint chair problems. Four of the 11 deaths Cusac chronicles in her 2000 article took place in Florida jails. In 2007, Lake County paid out a \$500,000 settlement to the family of a woman who suffocated in a restraint chair, though the settlement didn't bar the county from using the chair in the future. The state has also been the scene of a years-long, high-profile controversy following the use of a restraint chair on the daughter of the Florida State Attorney in 2005.

Like Klinger, the former police officer, Yerger says the use of pepper spray in conjunction with the chair was particularly over the line. "This is a tool for restraint, and there's no reason to pepper spray someone once they're restrained. That's punishment, and it's a form of torture. At minimum, that sort of thing should cost someone his job. And it should probably lead to criminal charges."

But the pepper spray-restraint chair combination has happened in other jurisdictions as well. Last year, a Harrison County, Indiana, officer was accused of putting pepper spray in a hood, then putting it over the head of an inmate already nude and bound to a restraining chair. In the following months, more accusations came out against the department, many again involving abuse of the restraining chair. In 2006, deputies in another Harrison County -- this one in Mississippi -- emptied an entire can of pepper spray into a hood that they then placed over the head of Jesse Lee Williams, while he was confined to a restraint chair. Williams, who was also severely beaten, later died of kidney failure.

Yerger says the other problem in Lee County is that once Christie had been securely restrained, he needed medical treatment. While the officers in Lee County were clearly out of line, Yerger says, the problem in many other cases is more a lack of training.

"Several years ago, I was researching the restraint chair for a case where I was going to be an expert witness. I found that all of these police departments across the country were using the chairs, but none of them were getting any training," Yerger says. "There's no training on the proper way to put someone into the chair, but more importantly, you have these people who have mental problems, or who are on alcohol or drugs. These are medical problems, that require medical attention. This isn't criminal behavior. But that's sometimes how it's treated."

This collection of deaths, injuries and reports of abuse involving restraint chairs has moved both Amnesty International and the United Nations Committee Against torture to call for a ban on the devices.

In her 2000 article, Cusac points to a deposition of Dan Corcoran, president of AEDEC International Inc., the Beaverton, Oregon, company which manufactures the Prostraint Violent Prisoner Chair. Corcoran acknowledges that the only testing he did of the chair before marketing it was to put some friends in it. He says the chair had never

been tested in any scientific way for its effect on someone impaired by drugs, alcohol or mental illness (in fact, he specifically recommends the chair for the first two), or for other hazards like deep vein thrombosis, the sometimes-fatal blood clotting that can occur after remaining in the same position for more than a few hours.

But both Yerger and Klinger say calls for banning the chair are misplaced. They say restraint is sometimes critical when a prisoner poses a threat to himself or others, and there's nothing particularly sinister about the restraint chair. "Once you take care of the immediate threat -- and you really do need to take care of that -- then you treat the case like it needs to be treated. That means if it's someone having a mental crisis, you get them to a hospital," Yerger says.

"Any new device or piece of technology can be helpful, or it can be abused, whether it's a restraint chair, a Taser, or baton," says Klinger. "If you have officers who are willing to punish and abuse a restrained prisoner, it's going to happen whether he's in a restraint chair, handcuffs, or a restraint bed or gurney. The device isn't the problem. It's the officers."

"It's really about culture," says Yerger. "You need to instill a distinct code, especially in a correctional facility, that emphasizes control over punishment."

Yerger cites Philip Zimbardo's famous 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment which, though it later came under criticism, showed how quickly students randomly chosen to be guards in a hypothetical prison resorted to abusing students randomly chosen to be prisoners. "It's a constant thing. It has to be hammered home, over and over."

In Christie's case, that puts the bulk of the blame on the deputies and Lee County Sheriff Mike Scott, not on the restraint chair.

No Accountability

When Joyce Christie finally got a phone call in March 2009 letting her know that her husband had been taken to the hospital, the call was anonymous, and the caller didn't say what hospital. She used caller I.D. to determine the call had come from the Gulf Coast Medical Center. When she arrived, the police wouldn't let her see her husband. Fortunately, someone in the waiting room overheard her conversation and gave her the card for a bail bondsman. She left to get the bond, and only after posting bond was she allowed to see him. By then, Nick Christie was close to death. As a deputy at the hospital got up to leave, he told Christie to make sure her husband -- now with eyes taped shut and tubes protruding from his face -- showed up for his court date, or else he'd be arrested.

Scott's office conducted its own internal investigation of Nick Christie's death and, perhaps not surprisingly, found no wrongdoing on the part of any Lee County deputy. That conclusion may come back to bite the county. Municipalities have what's known as sovereign immunity from civil lawsuits. But one way to get around sovereign immunity in a civil rights case is to show that a government agency has displayed a pattern or practice of improperly training employees about citizens' rights. Since using pepper spray on a restrained inmate and neglecting to get him medical attention are both clearly established civil rights violations, in concluding that none of his officers acted outside of department policy, Scott may have given DiCello an opening.

And in fact, none of the deputies involved with Christie's death were disciplined in any way. Florida State Attorney Stephen Russell declined to press criminal charges. DiCello says that Russell's review was based almost entirely on the sheriff's department report. Samantha Syoen, communications director for Russell's office, says the investigation did use much of the sheriff department's investigation, but that the possible bias of that report was taken into consideration when deciding whether or not to pursue criminal charges. "We've prosecuted police officers before." Syoen says. "We've prosecuted judges, we've even prosecuted our own."

Syoen says the state attorney's office didn't clear the deputies involved with Christie's death, it only determined that under Florida law there wasn't enough evidence for criminal charges.

"Our office was very concerned about what happened to Mr. Christie," she said. "But the memo concluded that this would be a matter better settled at the federal level, either with possible criminal charges or with a lawsuit."

According to DiCello, the office of U.S. Attorney Robert O'Neill has yet to show any interest in the case. (O'Neill's office referred HuffPost to the FBI's Fort Myers regional office. That office did not return HuffPost's request for comment.)

Joyce Christie returned to Girard, Ohio shortly after Nick, her husband of 40 years, had died. A few days after she returned, she received something in the mail from Lee County, Florida. It was a warrant for her husband's arrest.

20120112-01	11:11	Phil	Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #50)
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from SteveG:

People, on the average, do not know how to problem solve, to think for themselves, to find the answer – it is easier to say and believe the answer is because.

Not only do most people not have the ability for problem solving, most do not have the character or moral compass to lead them to implement positive action should the "light bulb" go off.

20120112-03	13:39	Pam	"Some Additional Reflections on My Arrest at a Romney Event in Hudson, NH"
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Something is rotten in Denmark, people.

"Some Additional Reflections on My Arrest at a Romney Event in Hudson, NH" by Matt Bieber, The Wheat and the Chaff

Jan. 10, 2012, (<http://www.thewheatandchaff.com/arrest-reflections/>)



About Me

My name is Matt Bieber. I study politics, religion, and public discourse at Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard Divinity School. I've drafted speeches for Vice President Biden and crafted communications strategies for NGOs in East Africa. I also spent two-and-a-half years in the corporate sector. I'm currently thinking about how to raise the quality, rigor, honesty, and inclusiveness of public conversations in America. This blog is where I share my questions and tentative answers in that area, along with some personal thoughts on obsessive-compulsive disorder. If you're into what I'm up to, you can join the email list, follow me on Twitter or Facebook, or email me directly at mbieber@gmail.com.

On Friday, January 6, I took a bus from my home in Boston to Manchester, NH. I was planning to attend a few Republican primary events, write a few posts for this blog, maybe cross-post them on HuffPo, and head home the next day.

But the famous retail politics atmosphere of New Hampshire was exhilarating. I was watching the candidates up close, trading notes with citizens and reporters about the campaigns, and then slurping up diner food while I processed my thoughts. I decided to stick around for a few more days, so I rented a car and found a family friend in Nashua who offered a spare bed.

On Monday, January 9, I drove a couple of towns over to see Mitt Romney speak at the Gilchrist Metal Fabricating Company in Hudson, NH. I walked into the big machine shop, put my backpack and jacket down on a seat near the stage, asked a neighbor to watch them, and went off to find a restroom. Afterward, I was chatting up a campaign staffer when a police officer approached. Sir, we have to ask you to leave the premises.

"Sir, is this about my backpack? I'd be happy to show you – there's nothing dangerous in there."

"No, sir – we'll explain it to you outside."

I gathered my things and walked past a group of citizens and press, humiliated and confused.

Outside, the officer said, "Sir, the campaign has identified you as someone who was at a protest at Romney's office in Manchester."

Now I was really confused. Protest? I didn't even know there had been protests at Romney's headquarters, and if there had been, I certainly hadn't been at them. (Later, after I got out of jail, I looked on the web; I still haven't found any news stories about protests at Romney's offices here, though Occupy protesters have attended several of his events.)

I explained to the officer – his name was Lamarche, and his partner's was Ducie – that there must have been some misunderstanding. Could I speak to someone from the campaign to clear this up? No. I'd have to leave immediately.

I asked about his authority to remove me. "We're working for the Romney campaign," he said. I asked if he was on-duty; he said he was. My confusion deepened. So was he working for the town of Hudson today, or for the campaign? "Both." (Later, I think I got it straight: the campaign hired the police for the day, sort of like a private security detail.)

I thought about Romney's campaign staff inside. They had mistaken me for someone else, and that was enough – I was out. They had imagined trouble and whisked it away, out of sight. And the police – my police – were being paid to do their bidding.

I asked again to speak to someone from the campaign or the company who owned the plant. The officer refused; the company had delegated authority to the campaign, and the campaign had authorized the police to remove anyone the campaign didn't want present. But wouldn't it be simple for me to just talk to someone and explain the mistake? Too many people around, the cop said. Apparently it would be too big a bother. I either had to leave the company's property or face charges for criminal trespass.

My reason-seeking brain couldn't take in what was happening. I had come here to be a part of the primary process, to see it first-hand and to write about it. I came because I was curious, and on my own nickel. I wasn't part of any protest group or in anyone's employ. Couldn't we just have a reasonable conversation and figure this out?

I asked another question or two, and the cop had had enough: "You're under arrest." He took my things, handcuffed me behind my back, searched me, and tucked me into a nearby cruiser. I could overhear him talking about going through my things, and he answered a question from the media. I was "the subject."

A few minutes later, an officer removed me from the cruiser and had me lean up against another police car and spread my legs for a second search. Two or three TV crews had their cameras trained on us; I felt ashamed in a wholly unfamiliar way. I wanted to look directly at the cameras and explain what had happened, but I feared the police officers' reaction.

I was tucked into the second cruiser and driven away. The camera crews continued filming. A protester – oh, did I mention that there was an actual protest there? – yelled, "Free the prisoner."

The holding cell at the Hudson Police Department. (I was allowed to use my own phone to make phone calls, and I snapped these pictures as well.)

At the police station, an officer put me in a cage and asked to remove my shoes, belt, and sweatshirt and place them on the floor between us. He asked me to lift my feet so he could inspect them. He did so tentatively, from a distance.

An officer named Manni and another officer processed my paperwork. As they did so, they told me not to go back to "that area" when I was released. I indicated that I understood I wasn't permitted to be on the company's land or in their facilities, but surely I could go back to the street if I so chose – it's public property, after all. Don't go back to that area, they said. If you go back, you might cause a disturbance or a riot, and you could be arrested for disorderly conduct.

I tried to keep calm and ask even-keeled questions. Were they telling me I wasn't even permitted in the street near the facility? And if so, on what grounds? (I wondered, Is the Romney campaign just permitted to cordon off a whole neighborhood?)

And then the following exchange took place. I began to ask, "If I express my First Amendment freedoms –

And Officer Manni interjected, "You'll probably be arrested."

I couldn't locate words. (I'm not entirely sure he said 'probably,' but I want to give him the benefit of the doubt.)

It was clear to me that the two officers had no interest in discussing what the law actually said, or what my rights actually entailed. I was paperwork, and they wanted to get it over with. I kept asking questions, and at one point, one of them opened up the New Hampshire legal code and read me the definition of disorderly conduct. He read the words dully, as if they were just syllables, with no interest at all in what they meant.

I asked the officer if he could help me connect what he'd just read with my situation and understand why it would be a problem to return to the street outside the event. He told me that I might return and say things that "aren't what others think." [It might have been "aren't what others believe" or "aren't what most others believe." I'm not 100% sure.] It was incredible – he actually paused before he said those words, as if searching for something politically correct to say. I don't think he realized that the words he found had so little to do with the letter and spirit of our laws and Constitution.

My cell was down the hall and to the left.

An officer returned, and I given a choice: I could either post bail or spend the night at a nearby jail and see a judge for an arraignment in the morning. Neither option seemed particularly fair: I could either pay money for not having done anything wrong, or I could go to jail and take my chances with a judge for not having done anything wrong. I wasn't sure I'd hold up very well in jail. I was already shaken and lightheaded, and my heart was still going hard.

I opted for bail, and I was brought back out to the holding cell for mug shots. (Officer Manni made sure that I knew not to smile. "The court doesn't like that. They take it as an insult.") He then took a second set of mug shots in a different room. (The first, if I remember correctly, were for the local police department's records. The second would be sent to other state and local law enforcement agencies and the FBI.)

Last came fingerprints. The prints involved no ink; instead, a digital machine captured my "finger slaps." Each time the laser-reader scanned my fingerprints and recorded the image, it read "Scan Complete!"

Officer Manni put me back in the holding cell to wait for the bail bondsman, and I sat there for the next couple of hours. At some point, he offered to let me make a call, and he allowed me to use my own phone to do so. "Can I make more than one?" I asked. He didn't care: "You're not a murderer."

So I called a journalist friend, hoping she was nearby. (I only had \$16 in my wallet, and I wasn't sure if I'd need help making bail.) I called my dad, too, and a couple of other friends. Then, remembering I had internet access, I searched for news of the arrest. It had been reported by a local CBS affiliate. Unfortunately, the reporters (or the police with whom they interacted) had gotten the facts wrong. (Contrary to what the story had indicated, I had never spoken with the owner of the company where the event had been held. In fact, I had asked Officer Lamarche for that very privilege and been denied.)

I was humiliated again. There was a picture of me looking like a thousand other pictures I'd seen, being cuffed and taken away. I saw myself like I imagined others did: Just some jerk who refused to play by the rules and got himself arrested by good, upstanding policemen. And I was in a cage with no way to respond.

I sat and talked with Officer Manni. After what had felt like a tense conversation earlier, he was friendly with me – I was freezing in the holding cell, and he let me have my sweatshirt and jacket. We chatted about his time as a cop in Boston, and we joked about Hahvahd. He answered my questions about what might happen at the arraignment as best he could.

Eventually, nearly four hours after Officer Lamarche had first taken me aside, the bail bondsman appeared. He was friendly enough, though he – like some of the other policemen at the station – seemed to think I had been protesting down at the event. I explained otherwise, and he brushed it aside. What had happened or hadn't happened wasn't his concern; he was interested in getting through the procedure and making sure I didn't get in any more trouble.

He issued me an order to appear at an arraignment in Nashua on January 26th; I would face a charge of criminal trespass. I told him I didn't have enough money to pay my bail, but that I'd be happy to go to a nearby ATM and get it. He offered me a ride, and we chatted along the way.

I liked him. He didn't seem to think I was a bad guy, and he treated the whole thing matter-of-factly. I asked if there was any way this wouldn't appear on my record, and he said no. Make sure you appear at that court date, he said. He explained how things might shake out at the arraignment – what my plea options were, that kind of thing. He seemed to genuinely want things to go well for me. And when he dropped me off at my car, he had some last words of advice, "Don't hang around this area." Apparently, even hours after the event had ended, the Romney campaign and the local police were still present, nibbling away at my freedoms.

20120112-02	11:47	Pam	"Killing the Competition: How the New Monopolies Are Destroying Open Markets"
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I encourage you all to read this ("Killing the Competition," by Barry C. Lynn, *Harper's*, Feb., 2012, <http://www.harpers.org>, see below), because I don't want to be the only one in the room with an exploding head. Barry Lynn describes how, since Reagan's reign, monopolies have squeezed out open competition, locking in their employees, and frightening them into silence. Silicon Valley, once the avatar of entrepreneurship, is now one of the worst offenders, right along with chicken producers, and the mighty Amazon.com. I must quote at length:

The revolutionary achievement of the American people two centuries ago was not merely to establish an independent republic. It was to prove that every citizen in that republic could be independent, economically as well as politically. This vision was not atomistic. It was not based solely, as libertarians like to claim, on a realization of individual rights. Instead, the belief was that self-conscious, self-reliant citizens would come together as equals and use their collective power to protect their communities, their nation, and themselves. The practical challenge was to enable citizens to exchange their goods, ideas, and labor with one another as

freely as possible....These open markets swiftly proved to be as fundamental to our democracy as the ballot box...distributing power among many sellers and many buyers and by promoting a more equitable distribution of wealth.

I always wondered why Woodrow Wilson was the great bugaboo of the Right. Now I know. According to Lynn, "Alexander Hamilton, the nation's first treasury secretary, attempted to use a government bailout of speculators to concentrate power in banking estates controlled by his friends and allies....And for more than half a century after the Civil War, we lost many of our markets entirely, as a small clique of men seized control of the new railroad and telegraph systems..." Here's what Wilson had to say in 1913, "Some of the biggest men in the United States, in the field of commerce and manufacture, are afraid of somebody, are afraid of something...They know that there is a power somewhere so organized, so subtle, so watchful, so inter-locked, so complete, so pervasive, that they had better not speak above their breath when they speak in condemnation of it." What was it Romney said about discussing "class warfare." "It should be talked about in quiet rooms."

I think that when I began my association with Friends of the Middle I was rather naive. I probably still am, but not as much as before. I have learned a lot through these discussions, and one tentative conclusion I have come to is, neither our economic nor our political systems are to be trusted. All the powers-that-be distort language in a sort of double-speak. They've been doing it forever, as George Orwell was well aware. Some of Lynn's examples are, "Corporate monopoly? Let's just call that the 'free market.' The political ravages of corporate power? Those could be recast as the essentially benign workings of 'market forces.'" Silly me. I thought the age of the Robber Barons was over. I thought "trust busting" was a fait accompli. I thought bribery and political payoffs were endemic in banana republics or corrupt dictatorships; I didn't want to see what was going on in my own country. I expect those ordinary Russians waiting on a train platform for their ride home didn't want to see the political prisoners being carted off to the gulag in those same trains either. So often I have looked back at history's "evil doers" and wondered, What were they thinking? Didn't they realize the harm they were causing when they infected uninformed prisoners with syphilis, or when workers were tied down in company towns, burdened with debt to the company store they could never repay, or when dynastic families tried to outdo each other by building fabulous palaces in Newport and calling them "summer homes?" I believed such "legal" abuses were relics of less enlightened times. Now I realize that we have learned nothing, absolutely nothing from the mistakes and injustices of the past. We have the same lessons to learn all over again, and nothing lasts forever. Not even the U.S. of A. We don't have to fail, but I believe we will.

"The best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity." —W.B. Yeats

"Killing the competition: How the New Monopolies Are Destroying Open Markets" by Barry C. Lynn, *Harper's*

February, 2012, (<http://harpers.org/archive/2012/02/0083788>)

(Barry C. Lynn is the author of *Cornered: The New Monopoly Capitalism* and *The Economics of Destruction*. He directs the Markets, Enterprise, and Resiliency Initiative at the New America Foundation.)

Fear, in any real market, is a natural emotion. There is the fear of not making a sale, not landing a job, not winning a client. Such fear is healthy, even constructive. It prods us to polish our wares, to refine our skills, and to conjure up—every so often—a wonder.

But these days, we see a different kind of fear in the eyes of America's entrepreneurs and professionals. It's a fear of the arbitrary edict, of the brute exercise of power. And the origins of this fear lie precisely in the fact that many if not most Americans can no longer count on open markets for their ideas and their work. Because of the overthrow of our antimonopoly laws a generation ago, we instead find ourselves subject to the ever more autocratic whims of the individuals who run our giant business corporations.

The equation is simple. In sector after sector of our political economy, there are still many sellers: many of us. But every day, there are fewer buyers: fewer of them. Hence, they enjoy more and more liberty to dictate terms—or simply to dictate.

Over the past four years of financial collapse, many of us have come to view markets as a fantastical scam: a giant mechanism geared to transfer our hard-earned dollars into the hands of a few select bankers. And when it comes to the Wall Street markets we rely on to trade our equities and debt and commodities, this sentiment is not all wrong.

But as every previous generation of Americans understood, a truly open market is one of our fundamental democratic institutions. We construct such markets to achieve some of our most basic rights: to deal with whom we choose, to work with whom we choose, to govern our communities and nation as we (along with our neighbors) choose.

And so, as every previous generation of Americans also understood, monopolization of our public markets is first and foremost a political crisis, amounting to nothing less than the reestablishment of private government. What is at stake is the survival of our democratic republic.

This rush back to the feudal past is nowhere more evident than in that region of California we have so long viewed as the incubator of our future.

Until recently, few places in the world could boast of markets as open as those of Silicon Valley. Yes, large corporations thrived here for decades. But true denizens of the Valley would rarely let themselves get caught inside those walls. Why should they? Their skills were portable, venture capital was abundant, and California refused to enforce the "non-compete" agreements that tech firms elsewhere often used to control their employees.

It was in Silicon Valley that America's entrepreneurs seemed to rediscover their roots—or rather, their primal rootlessness. Serial founders staked out tech venture after tech venture, in much the way Daniel Boone once cleared homesteads as he wandered from Carolina to Kentucky to Missouri. And behind these pioneers swarmed freelance engineers and cowboy coders, hardly distinguishable from the first-generation entrepreneurs and soon in direct competition with them.

These days the Valley is once again abuzz. Headlines report bulging wallets and a smorgasbord of new perks. Venture capitalists hum down Route 101, and angel investors lurk and listen in the bars. But instead of a disruptive melee like that of the late 1990s, with its diversity of players and voices, the overwhelming tendency today is a further consolidation of power by the already powerful.

During the past decade, a few giants have managed to fence in market after market for hardware, software, and content. Some did so simply by buying up their competitors. Oracle CEO Larry Ellison once said that acquiring another company was "a confession that there's a failure to innovate." But Ellison himself decided to opt for the more reliable profits that come from buying one's competitors, which in Oracle's case included PeopleSoft, Siebel, BEA, Sun Microsystems, and more than sixty other firms. During the same period, Google—even while branding itself as the dreamiest of inventors—vacuumed up close to a hundred companies, including such core components as YouTube, DoubleClick, and ITA.

John D. Rockefeller, whose Standard Oil ruled the energy industry for decades, liked to present his predations as acts of altruism. "We will take your burdens," he would tell his target. "We will unite together and build a substantial structure on the basis of cooperation." But all understood perfectly the ultimatum hidden in the honeyed words: Join or be crushed.

So, too, today's lords of the Valley, who enjoy the power to choreograph competition among the latest generation of upstarts and then buy whom they please, when they please. Yet this de facto license to govern a trillion-dollar industry—and with it, entire swaths of the American economy—appears to have left these high-tech headmen unfulfilled. Or so we learned when the Justice Department complained in 2010 that senior executives at Apple, Google, Intel, Pixar, and two other corporations had "formed and actively managed" an agreement that "deprived" the engineers and scientists who work for them of "access to better job opportunities."

Even in those reaches of society long accustomed to the rule of the few, the fact that some of the biggest and the richest had agreed not to poach one another's workers managed to shock. In an editorial, the New York Times wondered "What Century Are We In?" Yet in the Valley itself, from those most directly affected, we've heard only the rarest of whimpers. The anger is there. But it's tamped down by fear.

To see how these employees react to their bosses getting busted for running a labor cartel, I recently toured Apple's hometown of Cupertino, California. I strolled the Infinite Loop, the road encircling the six edifices at the heart of the empire. I wandered the side streets lined with low-slung buildings adorned with discreet Apple logos. I ambled down North De Anza Boulevard to the center of town. All around I saw Apple employees, easily identifiable by the white badges dangling from their necks or clipped to their pants pockets. And I approached many of them to ask what it felt like to work in the company's town.

An older fellow named Steve, with scraggly white hair, told me he had read all about the settlement, and that the news had come as no surprise. "They treat us like dirt," he said before unleashing a string of curses. "Market capitalism should be a two-way street, no? If they get to make us compete against one another, then they too should have to compete." At this point Steve walked off. He'd like to talk more, he said. But his contract renewal was coming up, and someone might see him with me.

At a crossroads just south of Apple headquarters, in front of a Valero gas station, I caught up with John, who was speed-walking to the dentist. "Of course I don't like it," he told me, and proceeded to recount the facts of the settlement in detail. "But what can we do? It's not like anyone ever dares to speak about it. I mean, they actively encourage us not to talk to one another. It's all taboo."

Outside the Bagel Street Café, in the lines for the shuttle buses that carry employees north to San Francisco, at BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse, I come upon the same urge to talk, followed by the same mumbled apologies as prudence takes hold. Sometimes the fear kicks in almost instantaneously. One employee actually spun on his heel, jumped back into his pickup truck, and sped away, though not before hissing that "even if I did know anything, I wouldn't ever be able to talk about it."

Eventually I did find one employee willing to speak up. Last spring, a San Francisco law firm announced plans to file a class-action lawsuit against Lucasfilm and the six corporations named in the DOJ settlement. Such lawsuits require at least one person to publicly represent the class, and finally a former Lucasfilm software engineer named Siddharth Hariharan stepped forward. After some back-and-forth with his lawyers, Hariharan (who also goes by the name Neil Haran) agreed to discuss how the masters of these estates treat their tenants.

Over lunch in San Francisco, Hariharan, dapper in a stylish sport coat, starts by telling me all the reasons he loved his job, especially the opportunity to take part in sprawling, complex projects. Sure, the pace was grinding, the hours crazy. One team, he recounts, worked for 110 hours per week for nine months straight. But "everyone believed they were making something important."

Hariharan says his attitude began to sour after Lucasfilm completed a particularly ambitious project. The very next day, he says, shaking his head, executives came in and "fired almost everyone." These were employees who hadn't had a day off in months. "People were running around the office," says Hariharan, whose own job was not affected. "They were running around crying. It was a bad sight."

He pauses, and looks at me. "Then, on top of that, I hear they were conspiring to lock people in a box?" It was the allegations about the labor cartel, Hariharan says, that angered him sufficiently to join the lawsuit. "It's simple," he says. "If you do something bad, you should be punished."

Many entrepreneurs and workers in Silicon Valley want to speak out, Hariharan believes. Many would love to restore the open job market of the early 1990s. But for most, "it would be career suicide." Even Hariharan might have thought twice if he hadn't already established himself as an independent entrepreneur. "I'm not rich," he says, "but I never have to work for anyone else again. So I felt I had to do something. I had to stand up for those who couldn't."

No matter how adept Silicon Valley CEOs have become at corralling the men and women who actually make what they sell, they are still relative beginners when it comes to manipulating fear for profit. To get a sense of what the future may hold for America's computer engineers—and, for that matter, our teachers, lawyers, and doctors—I recently drove through a notch in the Allegheny Mountains into West Virginia's Sweedlin Valley. There I visited with

poultry farmers who supply birds to a plant in Moorefield owned by the Brazilian food giant JBS. (The largest meat processor in the world, JBS operates the plant under the name Pilgrim's.)

The broiler industry was one of the first in which the generation of monopolists unleashed by Ronald Reagan succeeded in replacing open markets with vertically integrated systems designed to be controlled by a single local buyer. The men who rule America's chicken-processing plants have therefore had decades to master the art of setting individual farmers—who still own the land, equipment, and liabilities—against one another. And the goal of this competition is not merely to extract the most work from each individual, but also the most capital.

The concept of such competitions—or “tournaments,” as the industry calls them—is generally credited to the economist Edward Lazear, who served as one of George W. Bush's top advisers and now teaches at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. The idea, first laid out in a 1981 paper titled “Rank-Order Tournaments as Optimum Labor Contracts,” is straightforward enough. Rather than pay all workers at the same rate for any particular task, Lazear wrote, why not set up a “labor market contest,” in which those who produce more also get paid more per task or per piece? Such a system of reward (and, for those at the bottom, punishment) would, he claimed, increase the incentive to work harder.

The problem with Lazear's theory becomes clear when we recall some of the basic characteristics shared by all real markets. Most important is an equality between the seller and the buyer, achieved by ensuring that there are many buyers as well as many sellers. Second is transparency. Everyone sees the quantity and quality of the product on offer, and the price at which each deal is done. A third characteristic is a tendency to deliver egalitarian outcomes. On any given day, once the supply of a product has been hauled to market and appraised, all sellers receive roughly the same price per unit. Offer a seller less than the prevailing price, and you walk away empty-handed. Demand more from buyers, and your goods sit untouched.

Lazear repeatedly uses the term “market” to describe his tournaments. But his theory has almost nothing in common with how open markets actually function. For starters, he assumes that the sellers of goods and services must have, for all intents, nowhere else to go. A 2003 study of tournament theory by economists Tom Coupé, Valérie Smeets, and Frédéric Warzynski, which builds explicitly on Lazear's work, makes this point painfully clear. “Tournaments take place,” the authors explain, “in the context of an internal labor market with no explicit role for outside options.”

The political aim of tournaments, in other words, is exactly opposed to that of real markets. Citizens structure markets, first and foremost, to protect individuals from massed capital. Lazear's tournaments are designed to maximize return to capital. They do so precisely by setting individual citizens against each other, like cocks in a pit.

This sounds bad enough. But when I sit down with poultry grower Mike Weaver in his snug rambler to learn how such tournaments work in practice, he seems astonished at my naïveté. “That's not even the half of it,” he begins.

Weaver, a former fish and game officer who can raise flocks as large as 94,000 birds on his farm, slides a “settlement sheet” across the table. It records the amounts JBS paid to seventeen farmers who delivered their flocks to the plant on one particular day. The company, he shows me, paid the top-ranked chicken grower 63 percent more per pound than it paid the bottom-ranked grower. “Naturally,” he says, “this sort of differential will tend to make a man work harder to stay ahead of the next fella.”

What makes the system truly insidious, Weaver adds, is that the whole competition takes place without any set standards. “There is no baseline,” he explains. For one thing, JBS requires the farmers to procure from the company itself all the chicks they raise and all the feed they blow into the houses. Yet the quality of the chicks and the feed can differ tremendously, from day to day and from farm to farm.

What's more, the full-grown chickens are weighed after being trucked off the farm. The farmer is not allowed to see whether the figure on the scale is accurate—nor can he tell whether the chickens he's being paid for even came from his farm. He is simply expected to take the money he is given and say thank you.

As much as he resents being forced into a gladiatorial relationship with his neighbors, Weaver says an actual tournament with a level playing field would be “far better than what we have now.” Under the current regimen, the

processors “don’t just force us to compete against each other. They rig the competition any way they like. They can be as sloppy as they wish or as manipulative as they wish. We are entirely subject to the company.” After a moment, Weaver modifies his statement. “Really, we are entirely subject to the foreman at the plant, to the technician who keeps a watch on us. Those men can make us and they can break us, and they know it.”

His face reddens. “The market in this valley is very simple to understand. They give preferential treatment to those who kiss their ass.”

For the local community, the outcome of this arrangement can be devastating. Traditionally, farmers have tended to join politically with their neighbors. But Weaver, who heads the local poultry-growers association, says nowadays many farmers end up viewing their neighbors as rivals. Most of the 400 or so farmers who sell into the Moorefield plant “try to resist such feelings,” he says. But over time, the system wears them down.

It also makes them highly reluctant to speak out in public. “Most of the farmers are afraid to say boo for fear the companies will take away their chickens,” Weaver tells me. The processors “know we have our house and our land in hock to pay for the equipment. They know we are honorable people who won’t walk on a promise. And they exploit this.”

Weaver has learned this from bitter experience. In 2010, he spoke at two Department of Agriculture hearings on the consolidation of the packing and processing industries. Ever since, he tells me, the foremen have rated his chickens near or at the bottom, after years of ranking them near the top. This costs him thousands of dollars per flock.

“I can’t prove a thing,” Weaver says when I ask if there’s any way to verify that the company is retaliating against him for speaking out. “That’s the beauty of the system. They know everything and we know nothing. They get to decide what’s real.”

Like Hariharan, Weaver dares to talk openly only because he possesses a measure of financial independence. “I can speak because I don’t need the company,” he says. “They can cut me off tomorrow and I have enough saved up so I won’t go flat-out bankrupt.” But this is not true for many of the farmers who sell chickens to the Moorefield plant, he adds. “They have nowhere else to go. They have to take what they’re given.”

The revolutionary achievement of the American people two centuries ago was not merely to establish an independent republic. It was to prove that every citizen in that republic could be independent, economically as well as politically.

This vision was not atomistic. It was not based solely, as libertarians like to claim, on a realization of individual rights. Instead, the belief was that self-conscious, self-reliant citizens would come together as equals and use their collective power to protect their communities, their nation, and themselves.

The practical challenge was to enable citizens to exchange their goods, ideas, and labor with one another as freely as possible. And so Americans mastered the political art of making public markets, and used their new legislatures to closely restrict trading companies, industrial estates, and other forms of private corporate government.

These open markets swiftly proved to be as fundamental to our democracy as the ballot box. They buttressed our system of checks and balances, both by distributing power among many sellers and many buyers and by promoting a more equitable distribution of wealth. They helped to foster open debate and prodded citizens to speak out against competitors who bent or broke the rules.

Right from the beginning, however, these markets proved hard to keep.

George Washington’s administration was barely a year old when Alexander Hamilton, the nation’s first treasury secretary, attempted to use a government bailout of speculators to concentrate power in banking estates controlled by his friends and allies. (Hamilton later touched off the Whiskey Rebellion with a tax that steered the distilling business away from yeoman farmers to local landlords.) And for more than half a century after the Civil War, we

lost many of our markets entirely, as a small clique of men seized control of the new railroad and telegraph systems, then consolidated their power over many other important sectors of the economy.

By 1913, the apex of the plutocratic era, President Woodrow Wilson was decrying the rule of fear that had been imposed on the American entrepreneur and worker. "Some of the biggest men in the United States, in the field of commerce and manufacture, are afraid of somebody, are afraid of something," Wilson said. "They know that there is a power somewhere so organized, so subtle, so watchful, so interlocked, so complete, so pervasive, that they had better not speak above their breath when they speak in condemnation of it."

Yet in two great pushes—during the early years of the Wilson Administration, and then during the Second New Deal in the 1930s—the American people succeeded in restoring many of the open markets we had lost. Even as the lords of industry and the prophets of socialism joined hands to defend the "scientific" rationalization of productive activities, the people forced their representatives to enact law after law designed to disperse power.

Adapting the principles of eighteenth-century republicanism to the industrial landscape of twentieth-century America proved to be remarkably easy. Where there was no compelling reason to concentrate power—as in retail, agriculture, services, and light manufacturing—the goal now was to promote a wide distribution of both property and opportunity.

In practice, this required not merely heading off further monopolization, but unwinding many existing powers. The legislation used to achieve these ends—including the Packers and Stockyards Act and the fair-trade laws of the 1930s, which allowed manufacturers to set minimum retail prices for their goods—are seldom recalled today. However, their long-term impact was profound. In the 1920s, the five largest beef packers controlled upward of 70 percent of the U.S. market; by 1975, that figure had dropped to roughly 25 percent. In 1933, the four largest grocery chains controlled 27 percent of the market; by 1982, that figure had dropped to 16 percent.

Where some concentration of capacity and control was viewed as necessary—as in heavy industry—the goal was not to break up the monopolies. Instead, markets were restructured to ensure that at least three or four companies competed to make any particular product. In 1945, for instance, the government forced Alcoa to share its aluminum monopoly with Kaiser and Reynolds. This also meant restraining the power of the capitalist over these quasi monopolies, mostly by reinforcing the rights of the worker, the engineer, the local community, and the small investor.

This bottom-up reconstruction of our economy was one of the great political achievements of the twentieth century. At a time when every other industrial nation of the world was engineering corporatist structures that tended toward authoritarianism, the United States went in the opposite direction. It was, arguably, a second American Revolution.

By the 1970s, however, our open markets were under siege once again. And this time, the assault was more subtle, and camouflaged by myth, euphemism, and outright falsehood. The generation of Rockefeller and Morgan had acknowledged its power openly and defended that power on its merits, such as they might be. Yes, they had centralized control over entire industries, and yes, they ruled their realms as despots. But they claimed to wield such power for one purpose only: to organize production and trade more efficiently. And wasn't efficiency a great benefit to the commonweal? Such honest impudence, in turn, made it easier for citizens to identify and beat back the political threat.

Today, our overlords not only refuse to defend the power they hold—they deny that it is even possible for any American to accumulate such power. And to make such an absurd claim stick, they (or the more politically sophisticated of the academic economists in their employ) have undermined our language itself. Their most impressive act of lexical legerdemain was the coinage of various misnomers, some so audacious as to be worthy of Orwell's Ministry of Truth. Corporate monopoly? Let's just call that the "free market." The political ravages of corporate power? Those could be recast as the essentially benign workings of "market forces."

Even more dangerous was the transformation of *efficiency* into the highest economic good. For centuries, dating back to the British East India Company's promise to manage our tea trade for us, Americans have used antimonopoly action and law to protect our liberties as producers. Along the way, we learned to distrust most talk

of efficiency as a justification for reducing the number of buyers. It was this very sentiment that inspired Justice Louis Brandeis to celebrate the political and economic virtues of “friction” in a 1926 Supreme Court decision.

Little more than a generation ago, however, economists of the “Chicago School” began to publish studies claiming that the enforcement of our antimonopoly laws was harming the interests of that defenseless figure, the American consumer, by promoting “wasteful” competition. After Ronald Reagan took office in 1981, his new head of antitrust enforcement, William F. Baxter, swiftly abandoned efforts to promote competition and promised instead a policy “based on efficiency considerations.” The goal now was to promote the “welfare” of the consumer, theoretically by increasing his or her access to cheap goods.

No gun was ever fired, no protest ever mounted, no direct attack on our antimonopoly laws was ever unleashed. Yet the most fundamental purpose of these fundamental laws—to protect the liberty of the citizen and to ensure the safe distribution of power—was flipped on its head by the innocent-sounding substitution of a few key terms. And in the three decades since, the impact of this rhetorical sleight of hand has only grown. The “consumer welfare” framework has provided its creators with exactly the cover they need to write their efficiency argument straight into the mainstream of American law and to erect their private corporate governments right in the town square of the American political economy.

To understand the true architecture of power in our America of 2012, we must set down the hymnals of the economists and speak directly to those of us who strive every day to make, to grow, to build, to serve—but who find that some immense power blocks their way.

Take the craft-beer brewer I met recently in Chicago. Worshipped by his ever-thirsty fans, he grinned proudly for a photo shoot as I watched from the sidelines. But in the privacy of the hotel hallway, he whispered about how Anheuser-Busch InBev is slowly strangling his company. The multinational colossus controls much of the beer distribution in the United States and has a huge influence over who rides those rails. “When I want to get my beer on a store shelf, I don’t call the retailer,” he explains. “I have to beg ABI.”

The backstory in brewing is much the same as in Silicon Valley. In 1978, the production of beer in America was divided among forty-three firms, with the biggest controlling only a quarter of the market. Today, more than 1,750 companies make beer in this country. But ABI and MillerCoors have locked down more than 90 percent of the U.S. market. This gives them the power to jack up prices almost at will. More important, it gives this cadre of capitalists the ability to decide which American craft brewers thrive and which don’t.

Or take the advertising executive who recently told me about her decision to ditch her career and become a teacher. Over the course of a decade, this executive steadily accumulated responsibility as she moved from Wunderman to Omnicom to Young & Rubicam, confident she was destined for a corner office. Then, a couple of years ago, she hit a wall. “Every place I wanted to work was already owned by WPP,” she said, referring to the British giant that controls Y&R and many other firms. “And I realized that to move, I’d need the approval of some grand poobah.”

Again we encounter the familiar story. Well into the 1980s, power on Madison Avenue was dispersed among more than a dozen large agencies and scores of vibrant smaller firms. But over the past thirty years, four sprawling holding companies—WPP, Interpublic, Omnicom, and Publicis—swallowed up almost the entire industry. WPP alone controls more than 300 ad agencies, including such once iconic shops as the Grey Group, Ogilvy & Mather, and Hill & Knowlton. And the four giants vigorously shore up this power with strict non-compete employment contracts.

You’ll hear the same thing if you talk to the musicians who find themselves subject to the caprices of Live Nation. Or if you talk to the legions of doctors watching helplessly as hospital corporations begin to regulate medical services across entire regions. Where only a few short years ago these citizens controlled their own destinies, they wake today to find themselves the de facto chattel of some domestic (or increasingly, foreign) lord.

But perhaps the best way to understand the true structure of America’s political economy in the twenty-first century is to talk to some of the people who publish, edit, and write books in America.

These days, most articles on the book industry focus on technology. The recent death of the retailer Borders is depicted as a victory of Internet sales over brick-and-mortar stores, the e-book market as a battle between the Kindle e-reader and the iPad. But if we look behind the glib narrative of digitization, we find that a parallel revolution has taken place, one that has resulted in a dramatic concentration of power over the individuals who work in this essential, surprisingly fragile industry.

A generation ago, America's book market was entirely open and very vibrant. According to some estimates, the five largest publishers in the mid-1970s controlled only about 30 percent of trade book sales, and the biggest fifty publishers controlled only 75 percent. The retail business was even more dispersed, with the top four chains accounting for little more than 10 percent of sales. Today, a single company—Amazon—accounts for more than 20 percent of the domestic book market. And even this statistic fails to convey the company's enormous reach. In many key categories, it sells more than half the books purchased in the United States. And according to the company's estimates, its share of the e-book market, the fastest-growing segment of the industry, was between 70 and 80 percent in 2010. (Its share of the online sale of physical books is roughly the same.)

Not surprisingly, then, we find the same sort of fear among our book publishers as we do among the chicken farmers of the Sweedlin Valley. I recently sat down with the CEO of one of the biggest publishing houses in America. In his corner office overlooking a busy Manhattan street, he explained that Amazon was once a "wonderful customer with whom to do business." As Jeff Bezos's company became more powerful, however, it changed. "The question is, do you wear your power lightly?" My host paused for a moment, searching for the right words. "Mr. Bezos has not. He is reckless. He is dangerous."

Later that same day, I spoke with the head of one of the few remaining small publishers in America, in a tattered conference room in a squat Midtown office building. "Amazon is a bully. Jeff Bezos is a bully," he said, his voice rising, his cheeks flushing. "Anyone who gets that powerful can push people around, and Amazon pushes people around. They do not exercise their power responsibly."

Neither man allowed me to use his name. Amazon, they made clear, had long since accumulated sufficient influence over their business to ensure that even these most dedicated defenders of the book—and of the First Amendment—dare not speak openly of the company's predations.

If a single event best illustrates our confusion as to what makes an open market—and the role such markets play in protecting our liberties—it was our failure to respond to Amazon's decision in early 2010 to cut off one of our biggest publishers from its readers.

At the time, Amazon and Macmillan were scrapping over which firm would set the price for Macmillan's e-books. Amazon wanted to price every Macmillan e-book, and indeed every e-book of every publisher, at \$9.99 or less. This scorched-earth tactic, which guaranteed that Amazon lost money on many of the e-books it sold, was designed to cement the online retailer's dominance in the nascent market. It also had the effect of persuading customers that this deeply discounted price, which publishers considered ruinously low, was the "natural" one for an e-book.

In January 2010, Macmillan at last claimed the right to set the price for each of its own products as it alone saw fit.* Amazon resisted this arrangement, known in publishing as the "agency model." When the two companies deadlocked, Amazon simply turned off the buttons that allowed customers to order Macmillan titles, in both their print and their e-book versions. The reasoning was obvious: the sudden loss of sales, which could amount to a sizable fraction of Macmillan's total revenue, would soon bring the publisher to heel.

*For most of the twentieth century, manufacturers enjoyed the right to set minimum prices for their products. In 1975, however, Congress shifted this right to the retailer and the trading company, theoretically to enlist these powers in the fight against inflation. In 2007, the Supreme Court's decision in *Leegin Creative Leather Products v. PSKS, Inc.* shifted at least some of the right to price back to the producer, in an act that surely heartened Macmillan's legal team as it went head-to-head with Amazon. Many other nations, including France, Germany, Japan, and Switzerland, forbid discounting by publishers and booksellers.

This was not the first time Amazon had used this stratagem. The retailer's executives had previously cut off small firms such as Ten Speed Press and Melville House Publishing for bucking their will. But the fight with Macmillan was by far the most public of these showdowns.

In the late 1970s, when a single book retailer first captured a 10 percent share of the U.S. market, Congress and the regulatory agencies were swift to react. As the head of the Federal Trade Commission put it: "The First Amendment protects us from the chilling shadow of government interference with the media. But are there comparable dangers if other powerful economic or political institutions assume control...?"

In the intervening years, however, we have failed time and again to protect our open market for books. We did nothing as the super chains rolled up retail. We did nothing as six enormous conglomerates—four of them foreign-owned—absorbed many of our publishers. These failures are inexcusable. Yet always we could reassure ourselves that the absolute worst had not come to pass, that there was still some competition in our market for books, that no sovereign boss had emerged.

Today, by contrast, a single private company has captured the ability to dictate terms to the people who publish our books, and hence to the people who write and read our books. It does so by employing the most blatant forms of predatory pricing to destroy its retail competitors. It does so by gathering up massive amounts of information about the most private thoughts, interests, and habits of the American citizen. And all the while, this new sovereign justifies its exercise of raw power in the same way our economic autocrats always do: it claims that the resulting "efficiencies" will serve the interests of the consumer.

Meanwhile, all these manipulations—as audacious as any ever pursued by the antique bosses of steel or oil—have raised only the rarest murmurs of concern from Congress, the Obama Administration, and the FTC. (Antitrust enforcers in Washington and Brussels did launch investigations. Blinded, however, by the Orwellian framework of "consumer welfare," they have mostly taken aim at the publishers, for daring to seek some control over the prices of their own products.)

Not that there have been no warnings at all. In his capacity as head of the Authors Guild, novelist Scott Turow has repeatedly condemned what he says is Amazon's intent to, as he put it recently, "drive paper publishers out of business." Oren Teicher, who heads the American Booksellers Association, told me that "Amazon is threatening the whole ecosystem of how ideas are created, how they are developed, how they are sold."

In the event, Amazon did turn Macmillan's buttons back on (but only after more than a week). And it did allow publishers to price their own e-books (though not their physical books). Still, there is little doubt the individuals who run Amazon got exactly what they wanted. They displayed the full extent of their dominance to the people most directly subject to it.** They proved to those same people that most of the American public no longer understands the nature—or the political danger—of that dominance.

**In December, the e-commerce giant continued its assault on brick-and-mortar merchants by offering promotional discounts of up to \$5 to customers who scanned the prices of products in a store and then purchased them online at Amazon. This tactic, which Amazon defended in the name of "price transparency," elicited loud protests from retailers as well as Senator Olympia Snowe (R., Maine), who called it "an attack on Main Street businesses."

In rare moments of disquiet, we like to assure ourselves that all shall turn out well. Surely some Schumpeterian upstart will emerge, as if by magic, to disrupt Amazon's reign. Or Apple or Google will choose to intervene, in some fashion that avoids the political dangers posed by Amazon's control, even though these firms wield powers at least as awesome as the online retailer's.

Then we drift back into our private utopias, there to marvel at all the wonders of modern technology and the freedoms that await us if only we are patient and trust the great corporations to deliver what they promised. And truth be told, it is an amazing world we live in. I mean, who would ever have imagined that one day we'd be able to read Common Sense right on our Kindles?

For years, America's upper-middle classes—of all political leanings—have tended to gaze on our political economy with a certain smug self-confidence. Even as our new masters imposed their rule over the markets once run by our farmers and small shopkeepers, and smashed the unions that empowered industrial workers and flight attendants to bargain as equals with their bosses, we turned away.

Servility, our political fabulists assured us, was for the little person. For our refined skills, competition was becoming every day only more intense. America, or at least our cozy enclave within it, was being transformed into a "free-agent nation."

Well, it's clear now that we never quite managed to slip the hold of the ancient truths. It was 150 years ago that Alexis de Tocqueville condemned top-down, long-distance control over any task that a community or individual could manage just as easily on its own. Observing the widespread sycophancy of French society under the July Monarchy, he noted how men routinely subjected to such power become accustomed "to set their own will habitually and completely aside; to submit, not only for once, or upon one point, but in every respect and at all times. Not only, therefore, does this union of power subdue them compulsorily, but it affects their ordinary habits; it isolates them, and then influences each separately."

And so our new masters administer us in America today. They use their great nation-spanning and world-spanning corporations to isolate us as individuals, and then to pit us against our neighbors. They capture and hide away the information that until recently spilled from our open markets. And so they shatter our ability to speak coherently to one another from a base of common experience, to process even the most rudimentary of economic and political facts.

To step outside the open market is to step outside the rule of law and to come under the rule of whim. To step outside the open market is to step outside the rule of reason and to enter a realm of nonsense. We have a choice in America today. We must learn how to make real markets once again—or bend our knees, perhaps forever.

20120112-05	20:14	Art	Re: "Killing the competition: How the New Monopolies Are Destroying Open Markets" (reply to pm, above)
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As always well said Pam. You know, none of this should surprise any of us. Companies have one goal, MAKE MONEY. Individuals, who are functioning parts of the company, may have some noble thoughts about caring for other aspects of the issue such as jobs, safety of product etc, but the company collective thought has one motive, PROFIT, the more the better. Nothing wrong with that but when the Supremes make company collectives for the purposes of political intervention, people, that presents a problem.

If my premise is right, then, when you think about it, one way to better assure the Company continues to make money is to eliminate the competition.

Makes sense and again from a corporate point of view, nothing wrong with that. If this Company is the only one to make this product, it has a lock on the price and availability.

Following this line of logic now goes to several well written and presented articles on capitalism, the general consensus being it is the best form of economic application since it encourages initiative and competition. Here is the issue, however, capitalism, if practiced to the ultimate end, eliminates all other competition if possible and eventually become no longer really competitive. We saw this in the United States back in the late 19th century when companies like Standard Oil formed vertical monopolies and others like railroads became horizontal monopolies.

People like Teddy Roosevelt made their names as Trust Busters. During that period the country was in many ways in a similar shape to what it is now (hint - the Great Depression is 1929 wasn't the only economic depression this country ever went through)and it may be that we need similar action now.

I think only by a combination of encouraging capitalism coupled with government (AKA - the people) oversight can we really make progress. Otherwise we are back to the basics, dog eat dog, survival of the fittest and the hell with the rest.

Now which party will best correct the imbalance. Apparently Romney doesn't think there is an imbalance, just envy.

[20120112-04](#)

16:40

SteveG

Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama to Investigate the Banks!

from CREDO Action:

Wall Street greed fueled the housing bubble, and it's not hard to find evidence of what appears to be widespread and pervasive fraud by the biggest players in the mortgage industry.

Yet, despite the work of a handful of brave state attorneys general, there has been an astonishing lack of investigation into the misdeeds and outright crimes that caused the financial crisis.

The investigations that do exist have barely begun to scratch the surface.

And without meaningful investigations, there won't be any accountability for the Wall Street crooks who drove our economy off a cliff.

Tell President Obama: Announce a full investigation into the cause of the housing bubble and foreclosure crisis. Click here to sign the petition:

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

The collapse of the housing bubble caused trillions of dollars in homeowner equity to evaporate, which directly led to our economy grinding to a halt.

And the ensuing wave of foreclosures — caused in no small part both by predatory loans designed to fail and out-and-out foreclosure fraud — has destroyed communities across the country and shrank the tax base of local governments right when there was the most need for the services they provide.

Yet with all the resources at its disposal, the Department of Justice and other federal entities have yet to announce a full investigation of the cause of this man-made economic catastrophe.

Quite the opposite. Thus far the president's advisors have been pushing for a bad settlement with the banks that lets them off the hook. But a bad settlement has been stopped so far by courageous progressive attorneys general supported by an army of grassroots activists like you.

We now have an opportunity to change the White House's strategy as the reelection campaign heats up, and get the president to come out on the right side of this issue.

[20120112-06](#)

20:51

SteveBA

Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Art & SteveG, FotM Newsletter #50)

Most who came here from England were seeking religious freedom, you may remember that the church of England was very powerful and persecuted the puritans and others. The last thing they, founding fathers, wanted was the state dictating their beliefs. Fortunately we have freedom of religion so we can have Unitarians as well as Southern Baptists. Quoting our first presidents as a slam on religion is not convincing to me. They are dead and the church lives on.

20120112-08 22:07 Art Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveBA, above)

Interesting point but don't think fleeing the oppression of the Anglican Church is why most people came to the colonies, only a few. Need to keep the facts straight.

20120112-09 22:17 SteveG Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveBA, above)

I have read the article several times, similar articles numerous times, the constitution a couple of times, and the Treaty of Tripoli a few times – in no way have I interpreted anything said as a slam on religion. All of us die and of course they have died. When you say the church, I assume you mean all religions and that is accurate and pretty much always will be. Our federal government recognizes 30 plus religions including atheism and Wicca. My relatives came to the US in the early 1600's from England – none because of religious persecution. Other branches came from the Netherlands and Germany – again because they wanted. Christmas was not declared a federal holiday in the US until 1870.

Pertinent Documentation:

<http://www.virginiaplaces.org/religion/religionw.html>.

http://www.adherents.com/people/pa/John_Adams.html.

<http://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/jeffersons-religious-beliefs>.

http://www.infidels.org/library/modern/john_murphy/jamesmadison.html.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/paine-deism.asp>.

http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/treaty_tripoli.html.

20120112-07 21:42 Bill Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #50)

Your assertion that corporations don't pay taxes isn't accurate. I understand your interpretation, that taxes are assessed after the corporation's expenses are met, but if you examine this a bit deeper, I think you'll retreat from this assertion. Let me suggest that the fault in what you assert is the erroneous assumption that a corporation can control the prices it charges to its customers. Follow this, please: What a corporation must do to survive, or at least to remain a rational enterprise, is earn a reasonable rate of return, one comparable to similar enterprises.

Circumstances or poor decision-making by management may result in the corporation having a sub-standard return after expenses and taxes. Can the corporation, whether a C or and S, simply jack up the prices of its products or services to remedy a rate of return that is sub-standard? If it happens to enjoy a monopoly, it could. Most businesses, despite their efforts to identify their products as irreplaceable or unique, aren't without competition and can not raise prices without consequences in the market.

The consequences? Selling less. (A further note: If a company has some degree of monopoly and/or ability to extract economic rents, the competitors will move in and take it away. Is such competition perfect? No, but it's there. Drug companies are probably the most notorious in hanging on to economic rents gained from proprietary drugs that are winners, but patents only last so long.

Back to rates of return: The shareholders in a C corporation that is not earning something close to the return that other corporations in the same market earn, may not want their corporation to pay taxes, but the taxes will still be

due, despite that sub-standard return. Q. E. D. that corporations are not free to reimburse their tax bill via prices charged to their customers. Earnings of an S corporation, of course, are not taxed at the corporate level but inure to the shareholder(s), who is taxed at individual rates. The same logic applies.

If your assertion were accurate, I think I can tell you that there would be many, many fewer corporations that go bankrupt.

I think you also contemplated sales taxes. In almost all states, the retailer acts as a conduit for the state with the retailer retaining a modicum of the tax as compensation for collecting it. The unfair dimension dimension, of course, of sales taxes is that people pay the same rate, regardless of their financial status, although states typically ameliorate this unfairness through exemption food and medicine from being subject.

I've written more than I should, but it's just not accurate that corporations are always able to unload their obligations on someone else.

[20120112-10](#)

23:05

SteveB

Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)

I'm really happy to be challenged on this one. Especially in the lead article, I try to be as provocative as possible (while adhering to truth) in the way I state things, and it's a disappointment when I don't stir-up any controversy. If I'm not challenged, how am I ever going to develop my talents as a gadfly and a pr*ck? It's hard to find challenges right now, especially with most of the Right apparently afraid of me.

I have to admit that this is a kind of complicated subject that both of us have to over-simplify a little to explain. I believe both our points are valid. Let me try to explicate.

I believe, first of all, we have to try to look at this "problem" from a different perspective, outside of any normal investor or accounting comfort zones, from (I hate to say it) "outside the box". We need to look at business taxes with an entirely fresh view, and let's see if any truth resides. We seek the ultimate dark heart of capitalism, even Conrad would shudder.

Foundation

1. Your arguments assume a free marketplace, mine do not. From a businessman's perspective, I believe we have a real mix of monopolies and free markets and things in between. Also, a business can differentiate it's product to the point where it has no competition. Apple achieves this to a degree. Intel, Microsoft, Google, and Oracle achieve this to the point of nearly complete monopoly, in some cases.
2. Businesses don't operate alone. They operate, more or less loosely, as a community. A community that sets prices based on an awareness, at a minimum, of competitors' pricing.
3. Remember, except for the personal compensation of its employees and owners, a corporation only pays taxes on profit. This "profit" is a highly fluid commodity. Most businesses can manipulate their taxes by manipulating their profit. In the case of small business, profit can be a wildly misleading figure, because of that great outing to Aspen, or that company car or jet.
4. Competitors in a market generally face similar tax situations. If taxes go up or down for one, they generally do the same for all. This reduces pricing competitiveness slightly. All the businesses in a market must make enough money for investors and workers to remain. All must get over similar tax hurdles to accomplish this.
5. As you point out, there is not only competition in the marketplace, but also the all important competition for investment, in the first place. Taxes are always important considerations here. Why not in business and pricing too?

6. The customer is always going to pay for the total costs of the business, including taxes. Otherwise, if that money has to come from somewhere else, the business if failing, at least temporarily. What other pot of money is there to pay taxes from? More investor money? Not good. The businessman's pocket? You're going to hear a lot of screaming.

7. A business that can't set its prices high enough to make a profit and pay its taxes won't be in business long (unless it's an airline).

Structure ("Happy Spices" Spice Cabinet Company)

I tried to generalize in the article instead of talking about personal experience, which might have weakened my points a little. Let me correct that now. This is a case from a recent venture.

I wanted to start a company manufacturing wooden spice cabinets for people to mount on their kitchen walls. They would have doors to keep out the sun, shelves just right for spice bottles, and bright colors to fit any décor. There is some competition in my marketplace, but nothing exactly like mine. All they sell are metal things that take up counter space, or cumbersome things that attach to the inside of cabinet doors. So I have competition in general, but not in particular. This is often the case in business. And, usually, I can differentiate my product from my competition to give me more of a monopoly situation where I can truly set prices. That is the case with my spice cabinets. They have competition, but not exactly.

So, the first thing I did was to see a need in the marketplace for my product. Then I sat down and designed a spice rack. Actually, I designed four different models. Then I had a prototype made of the biggest model, mounted it on my kitchen wall, and continued to do market research, especially among our visitors, who were seemingly impressed. Everything looked good. I still didn't know how much the products would cost me to manufacture or how much I could sell them for, but I was beginning to hone in on these all important numbers.

I went back to my guy, David, at the local factory here in Santa Cruz, Bolivia. It's actually as much a bunch of craftsmen as a factory, but I guess I don't need that level of detail here. I tried to pretend I was Wal-Mart. I said, "Look, a*s-hole, let's get serious. I need 4000 spice cabinets, of this mix of models, with a contract for future work, and I need these prices or you won't get any of my business." That's not exactly what happened, but let me use that as a representation of a business negotiation. That's the rough and tumble we engaged in, over a period of days, until we both thought we had the best deal possible. Now I had production costs. My distribution costs were worked-on in parallel, so that duck was in order.

Now it was time to think about selling price. You are right, competition introduces limits to pricing. But, in the case of this example at least, customer needs, expectations, money available, etc., played just as large a role. Regardless of what similar products sell for, regardless of what my total costs (including taxes) might be, what will customers actually reach into their pockets to pay? And is that amount enough for me to make a profit? More market research. Still not much investment made, right? Right!

Once I have the product manufactured and actually being sold, I can experiment a little with prices to try to find the sweetest spot for me on the supply/demand curve. But I can't do that yet. I also don't want to invest a bunch of money, then learn I have to sell the product for a loss. Now is the time to learn such things, and taxes must always be part of the equation.

Yet, it's not as simple as an equation. I wish it were. But pricing, to me, is almost as much of an art as a science, especially where a small business, such as mine, lacks the big marketing, risk assessment, accounting, etc. departments of a large corporation. First, I thought about my customers (What will they pay?), then about my distributors (What do they need?), then about my competitors (What do they sell and for how much?), then about my costs. The answer gradually became clear. I could sell my top-of-the-line cabinet, like the one in my kitchen, for 300 *bolivianos*, the two medium ones for 200 *bolivianos* each, and the small one for 150 *bolivianos*. I became pretty sure that I could sell thousands of cabinets at these prices in a city of 2 million. And I could probably adjust prices a bit, later. What will the market bear? That's always an important thing to discover.

But...could I make the investment and make a profit given all the realities of my pricing limitations, costs, the marketplace, and my exact, effective tax situation? Here in Bolivia they make the tax situation very simple because many small businessmen can't read or write. It's a flat 13% on sales, less the 13% you pay for cost of sales. In the U.S. it's more complicated. There, specific tax rates for personal income, corporate income, capital gains, retained profits, etc. would not only play into pricing decisions (see below) but even decisions as to what kind of legal structure is best for the company. Taxes are always an important consideration in any business decision in the U.S. This is actually further evidence that the cost of taxes is built into pricing.

Now it's just math. Can I make a profit? If so, how much? And what is important to me is: **how much after taxes?** There are competing investments (always) with different tax structures. None of these investments can be analyzed in lieu of the tax aspects. That would be like trying to decide whether to invest in municipal bonds without taking into account that you don't pay taxes on the income.

Looking at all this, I try to project out what things might look like for the first year. I would need to invest \$X to make \$Y. \$Y must be after taxes, else I'm comparing apples to oranges with my other investment alternatives. Also important is the assessment of relative risk of the investment alternatives. Obviously, spice cabinets, in a city where they essentially don't exist yet, present a greater risk than municipal bonds (usually). How do I not take taxes into account too?

The day of reckoning finally comes. The numbers look pretty firm and for me, and I think to most small businessmen at least, there are two vital aspects to these figures:

1. What return can I expect on my investment for what period?
2. What return can I expect on my time?

Since "return" for all practical, if not accounting, purposes must take taxes into consideration, then taxes are just another business expense like labor or cost of goods or overhead that is paid by the customer.

At this time, I might decide that the return on investment is not worth the risk. I might learn that I could make money, but only at the rate of, say, \$10/hr. Then I might say, "Scr*w it," or I might say, "Man, with these taxes, I'm going to have to charge higher prices. Then recompute everything based on that. In this analysis, taxes would be treated just as cost of capital, cost of goods, labor, overhead. Taxes are built into prices automatically and inevitably—always. Just as the other costs of doing business are.

And if taxes go up while I'm making and selling my product, I may have to raise my prices. Just as with any of my expenses, I have a little cushion built into the analysis. My prices can sustain modest cost increases, but not more drastic. Taxes too. This proves that taxes are just a normal business expense built into prices.

It doesn't matter that I have competition and am not completely free to set prices, that does not remove taxes as a cost of doing business, a cost that is passed on to the customer via pricing. The business **MUST** pass the taxes on. It has no other viable alternative in the long run.

Therefore, as radical as it sounds, **the customer (buyer) pays all the taxes. The business pays none or it's in trouble.**

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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #52 — JAN. 16, 2012

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

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Genius, Courage, Triumph: The Story of Brian Wilson

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 16, 2012)



Brian Wilson, similarly to Steve Jobs, is a California icon and a hero of our generation. Seemingly the most fragile of the Beach Boys, he has outlived both of his famous, sturdier brothers, Dennis and Carl, and so many others. There is always that element of chance...or destiny, if you are so inclined.

Perhaps one can see this more clearly in an artist than, say, in a businessperson...and, generally, we are much more familiar with the biographies of our creative artists, in total, than of our money creators.

Brian Wilson has more talent in his little finger than most of us have in our entire bodies. Lucky birth. Not his fault or responsibility. He used that tremendous individual talent, as he says, "...to make one thing work with another." As the author of the piece puts it, "What Brian had was an ability to combine established forms into something new." This is what all successful artists do. It's often what someone does who builds a business.

Brian Wilson didn't, he couldn't, use his individual talent in a vacuum. No artist can. No businessman can. No billionaire can. Brian Wilson took! He took the richness of what all others had created before him—family, the community, the nation, the culture, the society, the music—and synthesized something new and good. Something

that teaches us what is good—in the case of the Beach Boys, how good it is to be young, maybe in love, but at least getting laid, on the beach havin' a good time, set to a unique and wonderful soundtrack. And, you know, he was completely right.

Brian Wilson, so much more than John Gault, embodies our deepest aspirations for what we want in ourselves, in those we love, and in mankind. His individual genius is immense. His destruction was imminent, yet he persevered, and he admits he was "lucky". He didn't run away and hide, thought he wanted to and tried to: "I'm lyin' in bed, just like Brian Wilson did."

And what he accomplished, which was a lot, **he did not do alone**, and he gracefully and humbly admits this. Maybe all of us should realize our interconnectedness and interdependencies, and work to solve our problems with that understanding.

Exactly like Brian, Dennis, and Carl Wilson, we are brothers. Let's have some fun and build something new together! How about an America that works?

"The Creative Struggle of Brian Wilson" by Todd Leopold , CNN

Jan. 14, 2012 (http://us.cnn.com/2012/01/13/living/brian-wilson-creativity/index.html?hpt=hp_c1)

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zRdyIAGVxlg> and http://www.cnn.com/video/?hpt=hp_c1#/video/showbiz/2012/01/13/orig-thespark-brian-wilson.cnn

(Editor's note: This is the first in a weekly series on characteristics of creativity. Next Saturday's piece will focus on Pulitzer Prize-winning author Jennifer Egan, failure and determination.)

Los Angeles (CNN) -- Lives are messy.

Maybe that's why we try to put them in little boxes with neatly printed labels. Albert Einstein becomes "brilliant physicist." Ezra Pound is "crazy poet." Actors, musicians, authors, scientists -- all boiled down to a handful of words.

Such has become the case for Brian Wilson. He's the "troubled musical genius."

In this sound-bite version of the Beach Boy's life, there's "California Girls" and "Good Vibrations" and the "Pet Sounds" album, an invented West Coast soundscape of fast cars, pretty girls and endless summers: Genius.

"What we have from the Beach Boys is such an unmistakable sound that it's instantly recognizable," says Paul Levinson, a pop culture professor at Fordham University. "You hear the Beach Boys, and within 10 seconds, you know that it's them."

But then there's the sandbox in the house and the endless days in bed, the substance abuse, flying too high, crashing so fast. "Lying in bed, just like Brian Wilson did," the Barenaked Ladies sang, and that's become as defining an image as any.

It's accurate, but hardly adequate.

Brian Wilson is 69 now. His hair is gray. His belly threatens to peek through the untucked, colorfully striped button-down shirt he's wearing, a throwback to the Pendleton attire he and his Beach Boys brethren wore in the early '60s. His shoes, Louis Vuittons with bold "LV" logos stamped on the throatline, look cozy and well-worn.

He sits in a suite at the top of the Capitol Records building in Hollywood, surrounded by a makeup artist, an assistant and a public relations manager, all the support necessary for a big-ticket release. In November, the label issued "The Smile Sessions," a multidisc collection of songs and recordings from the famed Beach Boys album that fell apart in 1967. Portions of it have appeared previously, and Wilson revived the project with his touring band for a well-regarded 2004 album. But the original Beach Boys tapes were more or less shelved for 44 years.

On an L.A.-sunny day in October, Brian is gamely participating in all this music-business showmanship. But you get the feeling he'd be happier in one of the studios downstairs or at home with his wife, children and dogs. Maybe his pensiveness has nothing to do with "Smile" but revisiting the period in which it was recorded can't help.

"Smile" is the pivot point, in popular lore, between "genius" and "damaged." The project became engulfed by legend, and you know what they say: When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.

But listen to "The Smile Sessions," and the sound bite goes away. What's left is not just a "genius," but a creative man in full.

For creativity is not just defined by untethered, high-flying talent that flashes like lightning then fades into the darkness. It requires sustainability. It includes, to overlapping degrees, risk taking, genre-mixing skill, an aptitude for improvising and -- above all -- passion. Experts make a distinction between everyday creativity and big-C Creativity, and Wilson has the latter in spades.

"Big-C creators do not necessarily think differently than the rest of us, but they are more open to new ideas, acquire some degree of domain expertise and are highly motivated to pursue an idea until they have realized its creative potential," says psychologist and creativity expert Dean Keith Simonton.

You can try to put Brian Wilson in a box. But he won't stay there. Creativity is too complex for that. It's all of a piece with him, angelic voices chasing innocence while going through hell.

'We had to do it'

If there's a theme that runs through the hours of recordings featured on "The Smile Sessions," it's "again." Over and over, as songs are developed and pieces are recorded, you hear Brian's voice asking -- insisting -- for one more take, as he tries to get the music in his head on record.

That passion was apparent from the very beginning of the Beach Boys. At a time when rock 'n' roll artists were considered as pliable and disposable as chewing gum, Brian took creative control, producing the Beach Boys -- featuring his brothers Carl and Dennis, their cousin Mike Love, and friend Al Jardine -- himself. He wrote the songs - - sometimes on his own, other times with collaborators -- picked the studios and directed the musicians.

He was the "Stalin of the studio," according to Love.

He drew from his influences and then leapt beyond them, adding a classically inspired opening to "California Girls," inserting a sharp silence in "The Little Girl I Once Knew," invoking the deity in "God Only Knows" -- all unusual in the Top 40 pop music of the mid-'60s.

It was that kind of drive that led to the "Pet Sounds" album and "Smile," which combined unusual arrangements, orchestral themes and -- in the case of "Smile" -- expansive, imagistic lyrics.

"You have to have what I call a 'persistent obstinacy,' " says Julie Burstein, creator of the public radio show "Studio 360" and the author of "Spark: How Creativity Works," which profiles 35 creative people and partnerships. "It's a willingness to say, 'I don't care what you think. I'm making this happen.' "

That's how the Beach Boys started, Wilson points out. On Labor Day weekend 1961, with the Wilson boys' parents on vacation, the nascent band blew an emergency fund the couple had left behind on musical instruments and recorded Brian's song "Surfin'."

It wasn't easy to explain to their father, Murry, a mercurial man who often terrorized his sons. "I thought he was going to go, 'Get in the bathroom, you're going to get beat with a belt,' you know, like he usually does," Brian told CNN's Larry King in 2004.

But Brian, who had demonstrated an aptitude for music since childhood, defended the choice.

"We had to do it because we wanted to write a song," he says, his voice taking on the hardness of a determined teenager, as if still addressing his parents.

"Surfin' " became a local hit, which led to a contract with Capitol, which led to all the rest. And Brian became a one-man music machine. Until "Smile," most everything he touched turned to gold records.

Getting to 'Smile'

By 1966, he'd already picked up the reputation as a genius, thanks to some well-placed hype. Even today, he still doesn't quite buy it.

"The genius part is being able to make one thing work with another thing, like having the bass play this and the piano play that, or having the lead sing this and the background singers sing that," he says. "It's all a matter of balance."

What Brian had was an ability to combine established forms into something new, the kind of genre-bending that's a highlight of creativity. The initial Beach Boys sound was a mix of Four Freshmen-style vocal harmonies and Chuck Berry-tough guitar riffs, with a little Phil Spector production thrown in.

With "Pet Sounds" -- which included "Wouldn't It Be Nice," "God Only Knows" and the revealing lament "I Just Wasn't Made for These Times" -- and "Smile," Brian expanded the palette to include folk, sound effects and classical elements, including touches of his beloved George Gershwin.

Brian Torff, a jazz musician and music professor at Fairfield University in Connecticut, marvels at the Beach Boy leader's command.

"[Brian] could take his incredible gift, combine it with a craft -- and not many people had that craft in pop music at that time ... and could be a mastermind because he knew music so thoroughly," he says. "The thing that was great about 'Pet Sounds' is here was a guy who could craft something that was almost symphonic. Before the Beatles, before 'Sgt. Pepper's,' he was already doing incredible things ... really expanding the boundaries of what rock and pop music could be."

"Pet Sounds," released in spring 1966, was just the warm-up. The idea for "Smile" essentially began with a new song inspired by his mother's comment about people giving off "vibrations." The resulting single was "Good Vibrations." Brian thought of it "as a smaller, psychedelic version of 'Rhapsody in Blue,'" according to biographer Peter Ames Carlin. It was recorded in four studios, cost a then-unheard-of \$50,000 and shot to No. 1 near the end of 1966. Brian called it his "little pocket symphony."

He planned to do the same thing on a grander scale with "Smile," his next project. The songs would be built in pieces, like "Good Vibrations," with elaborate orchestration and recurring motifs. The lyrics would be expansive, telling a story in both word and metaphor. It was going to be as much of a leap from "Pet Sounds" as "Pet Sounds" was from, say, "Fun Fun Fun."

For Brian, it was "a musical mission, to spread the gospel of love through records," he writes in the "Smile Sessions" liner notes. He famously called the album a "teenage symphony to God."

In 1966 pop music, such great plans were not unprecedented. The times were a continuous game of one-upmanship, with artists soaking up ideas from everyone and everywhere. Eventually, even the so-called Establishment took notice: In April 1967, CBS News aired a documentary called "Inside Pop: The Rock Revolution," hosted by New York Philharmonic conductor Leonard Bernstein, which showcased -- among other personalities -- Brian Wilson.

It was the kind of hothouse atmosphere conducive to creative advances, as science author Steven Johnson points out: "An idea is not a single thing," he writes in "Where Good Ideas Come From." "It is more like a swarm."

"Smile" started strongly. Brian found a lyricist in Van Dyke Parks, whose fondness for puns and imagery resonated with Brian's plans for a Technicolor epic steeped in America. The first day they met they wrote "Heroes and Villains," one of "Smile's" cornerstones. Other songs quickly followed, including an "Elements" suite -- featuring songs referencing air, water, fire and earth -- and the gorgeous "Surf's Up," with a coda that reached for heavenly transcendence, the aural equivalent of watching a vividly hued sunset from a golden beach.

And then it all fell apart.

'The yin and the yang'

While reaching for heaven, Brian Wilson was entering hell. It was a place he'd been before.

Though the "tortured artist" has long been a cliché, there does appear to be a relationship between mental illness and creativity. Studies indicate that the brains of highly creative people react differently to information than those of "normal" people.

"Highly creative people are probably highly creative because of certain cognitive mechanisms that also would predispose them to symptoms of mental disorder if they didn't have additional protective factors," says Harvard psychology instructor Shelley Carson, author of "Your Creative Mind."

Their childhoods often "force them to spend time in their inner world. ... They can develop their own ideas about things rather than being dependent upon the ideas that are sort of forced down their throat."

Brian Wilson's childhood followed that template. Growing up in Hawthorne, California, a working-class suburb of Los Angeles, Brian showed an aptitude for music, constantly listening to "Rhapsody in Blue" and other records, harmonizing with his family. He and Mike Love idolized and emulated the Everly Brothers. Mentors noticed: His high school music instructor was impressed by his grasp of harmony.

And then there was the abuse.

Dad Murry Wilson was afflicted with bouts of depression and easily provoked to rage. Among the brothers, observed Timothy White in his Beach Boys chronicle "The Nearest Faraway Place," middle son Dennis was the rebellious one, shooting out windows with a BB gun, setting brush fires and cutting class to enjoy the young, mostly unknown pastime of surfing. Carl, the youngest, was generally the peacemaking observer. And Brian, the oldest, was the sensitive soul, something Murry -- who'd lost an eye in an industrial accident -- took advantage of when in a foul mood.

"Murry would repay Brian's mild subordinations by removing his artificial eyeball, grabbing a sobbing Brian by the scruff of the neck, and forcing him to peer at the mangled interior of his father's empty eye socket," White wrote.

Murry, who managed the band, antagonized many around them.

"His father created lots of problems," remembers drummer Hal Blaine, a member of the Wrecking Crew, the L.A. studio musicians who frequently recorded the Beach Boys' instrumental tracks. "His father once had a [song on a] Lawrence Welk record, and he wanted all of Brian's music to be like he wanted.

"And it finally blew up one day -- he told his father, 'You're not coming to any more sessions.' His father was a tough guy, and his attitude was, 'You guys are never going to amount to anything.' "

In the "Smile Sessions" press materials, Al Jardine adds, "They were like dynamic opposites -- the yin and the yang. There couldn't be two more opposite people in the world. The failed songwriter and the prodigy."

Brian was known for occasional eccentricities -- he famously built the sandbox in his house in the mid-'60s so he could feel the beach under his feet as he composed -- but as he got older, his psychological problems began manifesting themselves acutely. In late 1964, he had to be taken off a plane after having a nervous breakdown. By the time he started working on "Smile," he had stopped touring and was taking drugs, including hashish, the

amphetamine-barbiturate combination Desbutal, and a small amount of LSD. He believed angels were helping him write.

For various reasons, "Smile" started faltering, and Brian's mind started slipping. At one point, he went to see the Rock Hudson movie "Seconds," a thriller about a man who adopts a new life. Elements of the movie -- including the name of the Hudson character, Wilson -- freaked Brian out. And when Brian recorded "Mrs. O'Leary's Cow," the "fire" section of the "Elements" suite, he noticed a rash of fires in downtown Los Angeles and believed he was responsible.

Though "Smile" was almost done, the project was abandoned in May 1967.

" 'Smile,' " Brian says in the liner notes, "was killing me."

Retreat and rebirth

"Smile" could have been the end for Brian Wilson. Having spent months pouring heart and soul into a big project that crashed, it would have been understandable, even at age 24, if he'd channeled his passions elsewhere.

But he didn't. In creativity, failure is just another word for learning experience. Wilson had taken risks with his music. With the "Smile" chapter ended, he was forced to retrench and find his way anew.

The turnaround didn't happen quickly. While his bandmates rallied, Wilson went on a well-chronicled descent. This was the era in which he wrote a charming song called "Busy Doin' Nothin' " but also lay in bed for days on end, particularly after his father died in 1973. Brian's health seesawed for the next 20 years. It wasn't until the late '80s that he managed to be rid of his enablers, including a domineering therapist, and recover himself.

The lessons of "Smile" were not forgotten. For one thing, having moved on, Brian kept composing. He still had a passion for music. For another, "Smile" never really went away. Stray songs appeared on Beach Boys records. By the 1980s, the album had been bootlegged enough to stir fans' blood. In 1993, Capitol released a career-spanning Beach Boys boxed set that included about 30 minutes of the "Smile" tapes.

Wilson initially ignored the clamor -- "That was just a bunch of fragments that didn't even add up to songs," Brian once said. "I hated it" -- but eventually Brian was intrigued enough to listen again to a part of his former life.

So, instead of shoving it away, he incorporated "Smile" into his solo career. The resurrected album was performed live in London in February 2004 and earned a standing ovation. A studio version was released later that year; it won Brian his first Grammy -- for "Mrs. O'Leary's Cow," of all tracks.

The album proves to be a showcase for Brian's genre-mixing abilities. He took almost everything he knew about composition, added Parks' evocative lyrics and created something distinctive and new.

"When you listen to 'Smile,' " says Torff, the Fairfield music professor, "you've got everything -- you've got incredible choral arranging going into doo-wop, there's a very strong jazz influence on a couple of these, he's got banjo and harmonica on 'Cabin Essence,' which kind of shows a whole country sort of influence, and there's this rhapsodic Broadway element through the whole thing.

"He's obviously a guy who has absorbed so many kinds of American music."

One 'Smile' at a time

Sitting in the Capitol Records suite, Brian cradles the fresh-from-the-factory box of "The Smile Sessions." Along with the CDs, it includes a 60-page book, two vinyl LPs, a collection of photos, even a light switch that illuminates the store pictured on the cover. He perks up at the sight, momentarily slipping into a bright DJ voice. That's a side of "Smile," too -- humor, something that's been lost in all the stories around it.

Indeed, from more than four decades on, "Smile" is a window into Brian, then and now.

The newly released "Sessions" features the younger Brian on lead vocals, with a voice not yet ravaged by cigarettes and alcohol. The musicians include the other Wilson brothers, Carl and Dennis, both long dead. But the music, something startling and new for pop then, has become an accepted part of the overall mix in 2011. Brian's own career reflects that: the former rock 'n' roller's solo albums include nods to Disney standards and Gershwin.

He's also in a healthier place mentally, even returning to the concert stage in the past couple decades. In fact, putting aside years of enmity, the surviving Beach Boys recently announced they'll be reuniting for an extensive 50th-anniversary concert tour in 2012, along with a new album.

Painful as it was to put "Smile" aside, perhaps its years in the shadows provided Brian some breathing room to re-establish what it means to be Brian Wilson, accomplished composer, not just Brian Wilson, "troubled genius."

"The unfinished 'Smile' -- for all that it was a great part of his legacy -- was also an emotional millstone," says biographer Peter Ames Carlin. "I think it's been hugely rewarding for him for it to come out and be as richly celebrated as he had always hoped it would be."

And Brian, whose music once combined influences from his life, is now an influence himself. He's become part of a creative dialogue: The Beach Boys' impact is such that the group has become an adjective, the way "Beatlesque" is used to describe a certain kind of catchy pop song. In recent years, R.E.M. ("Near Wild Heaven," "At My Most Beautiful"), Fountains of Wayne ("The Senator's Daughter"), Wilco ("Pieholden Suite") and Sufjan Stevens (the "Illinois" album) have showcased their Beach Boys fixations.

His career has been far from a straight line, of course. He could have stayed with songs about cars 'n' girls. He could have given up after "Smile." He could have succumbed to the madness, the addictions, the enabling. But his passion -- his creativity -- has carried him through.

He's ready for the next thing, he says. He and his wife have five adopted children, including two who are younger than 5, and he's working on new music. He's inspired. After all he's gone through, he's smiling.

"My wife, my family, myself, my collaborators," he says, pondering his muses. "All of that makes me want to go to the piano and write a song."

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[20120113-01](#) 09:34 Pam

Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveBA & SteveG, FotM Newsletter #51)

The thing is, you can't cherry-pick Founding Fathers' quotations. If the Constitution is set in stone, as conservatives seem to believe, then the things they said about religion are equally relevant. To misrepresent them is in itself an injustice. The Founding Fathers were not all of one mind, quite the contrary, but they were strongly influenced by Enlightenment philosophy. A little history lesson on 18th c. thought would go a long way.

If memory serves, I believe the Puritans who came to the New World forbade the celebration of Christmas, and the Founding Fathers worked on Christmas day.

[20120113-02](#) 10:41 SteveG

Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Pam, above)

Christmas did not become an established federal holiday until 1870.

[20120113-03](#) 11:03 Phil Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Pam, above)

Please do not mix quotations, uttered by whomever to whomever, with the written constitution. One man's quotation does not equilibrate in any way to the Constitution. The Constitution was the result of agreement by many intelligent and influential people, not just a thought by one, uttered or not.

[20120113-04](#) 11:15 DaveY Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Phil, above)

I totally agree!

[20120113-05](#) 11:17 Pam Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Phil, above)

This little quotation dispute is not terribly serious, but it does point to a deeper issue: Constitutional originalism. Any religion or political system that relies on a document(s) faces the difficulty of changing times. Aside from Ben Franklin, most (all?) of the Founding Fathers were young men, most well under 40. I grant that they were intelligent and far-sighted, but they were mortals just like the rest of us and young to boot. If they could argue with each other, then why can't we argue with them upon occasion? Having a constitution is a good thing, and changing it should only be done reluctantly and after much deliberation. But it is not a sacred text. It was a political document created to address a particular crisis in American history. It was a mission statement, if you will. Anyone who has worked for an organization that has a mission statement knows how much time and effort goes into coming up with one and also knows how often real practice seems to leave it behind. We need a certain amount of flexibility, lest we break instead of bend.

[20120113-06](#) 11:20 SteveG Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to Phil & Pam, above)

I am confused. Who or whom is confusing quotes with the constitution?

The Constitution as I have read it and a company's mission statement are all living documents that have various interpretations over time. In the case of the US constitution the Supreme Court interprets the Constitution over time and it is clear the interpretations change over time.

[20120113-07](#) 11:26 Pam Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to SteveG, above)

Unless you're Antonin Scalia.

[20120113-09](#) 12:15 SteveB Re: "5 Founding Fathers Whose Skepticism About Christianity Would Make Them Unelectable Today" (reply to all, above)

Ya, I didn't see any mixing, myself. Very good points, I think, that the Constitution is very important, but we have to be careful not to assume the U.S. to be a sacred country or founded on God or embedding God in our Constitution, etc. We are a secular nation and the Constitution is a secular piece of paper with changes past due. If you are a Christian, more power to you. Many of the Founding Fathers would barely deserve the name, at best.

[20120113-08](#) 12:08 SteveB LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY!

I make this modest proposal in all seriousness. I realize it's an idea more far Right than Ron Paul or the KKK. Bear with me and I will try to explain.

I got to thinking along these lines because of:

1. SteveG's article (ref. below, even though I consider they're simply talking about "S" corp's, which pay no tax because the owners do).
2. My exchange in today's FotM Newsletter #51 with Bill about whether businesses actually pay any taxes.
3. Arguments from the Right about the obvious need for American business to be as competitive as possible if it is to provide the jobs, growth, and prosperity we need and so richly deserve.

Fair enough?

For this to work, all profit (net income) from all business, large and small, would have to be either dispersed to the owners (in which case they pay personal income tax), or reinvested in the business. Otherwise, a 50% tax is imposed. No funny accounting. Foreign profit must be treated the same as domestic profit, with the following exception: any profit retained in a foreign country and not dispersed in the U.S. as income or dividends, or not reinvested in the U.S., will also have a 50% tax imposed.

All personal income would be treated the same. All income would ultimately be personal income and have taxes paid or, alternatively, every dollar not paid to someone as income would be reinvested in America. Capital gains would be taxed at some flat rate (for now).

ZERO BUSINESS INCOME TAXES. (the rest is up to the states)

IN RETURN: NO PERSONHOOD FOR BUSINESS "ENTITIES"!!! (No political contributions permitted whatsoever, only citizens can contribute modest amounts to campaigns.)

AND, THE PERSONAL INCOME TAXES WE'RE LEFT WITH MUST BE PROGRESSIVE (The rule has to be this: regardless of a person's income, the last dollar paid in tax should cause an equal amount of pain to each. What else could be fair? Bye, bye, Bush tax cuts!)

Does that sound like a fair set of compromises to you?

Why eliminate all business income taxes?

1. 69% of corporations pay no federal income tax (see below). These business are already essentially operating under my system. We just need to expand this to all business.
2. Come on! No business pays any tax anyway. It's all paid by the customer. What other pocket could it possibly come out of? The investors? Big problem! The owners? Big problem! The workers? Bigger problem! I's out of pockets and I'm left only with the pockets of the customers of the business. Period! Also, have you noticed that if taxes on a product go up, the price of the product goes up immediately to cover the tax? Who pays that? The customer.
3. To the extent that businesses pass these costs on, prices could fall. This could help our foreign competitiveness, especially.
4. To encourage re-investment is good. To discourage foreign investment and retaining of earnings would strengthen America.
5. Good to eliminate the cost of compliance. Individuals are paying taxes anyway. Less burden on business, so it can be lean and mean and compete!

[20120113-10](#) 12:20 GaryC Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)

You do realize that as soon as the Socialist Party sees this, you'll lose all rights in the lodge?

Seriously, this is a good start except for one minor issue. Good corporate governance could not possibly allow all profits to be disbursed every year. Good managers know there are good times (Reagan) and bad times (Obama), so a good corporate manager keeps his powder dry and well preserved in order to weather the bad times. Even union bosses would not want good managers to disburse all of the funds as the consequence could be no money in reserve when times are bad. However, many corporations do find that they are better off disbursing earnings to the shareholders (who many times are union employees) than keeping the money in the bank when no good projects for business expansion are available. Good governance can't be mandated by government.

[20120113-12](#) 13:26 SteveB Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to GaryC, above)

(as stated in my original email) AND reinvestment! Your choice. Very damned liberal, if you ask me.

We tried trusting the monopolies. Read history. It failed miserably. That's the only alternative to regulation by law—unless you want Christian control.

My proposal gets together the best provisions of the S and C corps. The income flow and personal taxes of the S, with the profit investing advantages of a C.

You say, "Good governance can't be mandated by government."

Let me ask you this, especially in light of the 2008 debacle, if good governance cannot be mandated by regulation and law and vigilance (the government's very reason for being), then how?

[20120113-11](#) 13:10 Larry Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)

Smart thinking! [Published just to show everyone that this sort of thing does happen sometimes. :-)] –SteveB]

[20120113-13](#) 16:16 Art Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)

Brilliant!!! [See above. I couldn't resist! –SteveB]

[20120113-14](#) 17:48 SteveG Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)

All costs in one way or the other are always passed onto the customer. I remember in the 1950's when Meis Department store in Terre Haute had people operating the elevators – most were people with some type of disability. Minimum wage went into effect and soon the elevators were replaced with the controls that the passengers operated and the people with disabilities were unemployed. When minimum wage goes up there is usually a corresponding increase of product price or a corresponding decrease in the number of employees. If a company is unable to increase prices or decrease employees technology is used to increase efficiency and decrease the amount of time to do a job.

[20120114-02](#) 08:08 Charis Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to SteveB, above)

What about those of us, like myself, who own businesses overseas and already pay taxes overseas and reinvest overseas? Our beloved Obama has already passed a law, which will take effect on January 1st, 2013 requiring us to pay taxes to the U.S. on all foreign-earned income, and I'm still unclear as to why. My company is not a U.S. company and I am not an employee of a U.S. company. So basically I will already be living on less than 50% of what I earn by then. And since I live overseas I will see no benefits from the taxes I will pay to the U.S.

[20120114-04](#) 10:28 SteveB Re: LET'S ELIMINATE BUSINESS INCOME TAXES COMPLETELY! (reply to Charis, above)

It's more complicated than that. And unless you make a lot of money, you will receive a free tax refund bonus.

[20120113-23](#) 23:34 Bill Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #51)

Your assertion was "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever." This simply isn't correct, and I want once again to try to explain why this assertion isn't correct and is a simplistic approach to how an income statement works and how finance works. Perhaps it isn't easy to learn—or to convey—but bear with me, if you would:

If you are an investor in a business, you want to earn what is appropriate for the kind of business in which you invest. And I assume you'd be content to earn at a rate better than that, if possible. It isn't crucial to this discussion, but you should know that a rational investor would also want a return commensurate with the risk of the enterprise and the market in which it operates: Greater risk demands greater return is the principle here.

If the kitchen accessories business in which you invest is in a market in which the average return—after taxes, of course!—to the investor is 5 per cent, then you would want the same return in the long run, would you not? If you know you can't get such a return, then you wouldn't invest, would you?

It so happens that a few businesses earn more than the usual return for their chosen market; conversely, many earn less. In this latter case, income taxes, payroll taxes, excise taxes, business privilege taxes, state income taxes, local property taxes, and every other species of tax will still be due to the taxing authority.

From whose pocket do those taxes come in the case of the business that earns less than the prevailing rate? Do bear in mind that most businesses fail in the long run (viz. GM and other companies).

I think you are forced to an answer here. In case you're not, put yourself in the place of management of a business. You are responsible for payment of all taxes due, and if you are not tax-compliant, you are liable for, and probably will, experience pain from both investors and the taxing authority.

The investor in an entity in essence buys a package of risk. The hope is that a good or even superior return is received from that investment, but there is no guarantee that the business will generate enough to cover those taxes, income and all its companions. The business of course wants embed all taxes in the prices charged for products and services sold, but the market is fickle—and often ruthless. It is that corpus of capital accumulated from investors that is finally liable for payment of taxes, so I don't believe you can assert "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever."

As far as 69 per cent of corporations not paying taxes, do observe that a very large proportion of businesses are either not formed as corporations or are S corporations that are conduits for earnings to investors. I think the Huffington Post article says that about 24 per cent of businesses are legally formed as S corporations, so their not paying federal income taxes is moot.

Finally, investor capital is liable for payment of taxes, income and otherwise, and that's how the capital markets look on the situation.

20120114-03

09:53

SteveB

Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)

I'm smiling!

Mmmmmmm???

I approach economics as a child, even though I've studied it. Forget everything we've ever learned and just use plain logic. Let me ask these simple questions, which I hope will cover the pertinent permutations:

1. Assume a given business is successful and making a profit. From where does it get the money to pay its taxes (any taxes)? Normally, it would come from gross income (property tax, etc.—expenses), or net income (income tax). The latter, especially, would tend to come at the end of a period of time (quarterly, yearly) during which profits, hopefully, have been banked.
2. Accounting-wise, expenses and income tax are importantly different. But aren't there also important similarities? Both are expenditures by nature. They are both cash someone has to take out of some pocket, are they not?
3. Where does gross or net income originate? Does it not derive, ultimately, from cash flow from customers? It is not even remotely possible for it to come from anywhere else. It cannot come from loans or owners' equity (investment). Neither of those are allowed to contribute a dime to either type of income.
4. I suppose a business could also borrow the money to pay its taxes. Where would the money come from to repay the loan? Does it not derive, ultimately, from cash flow from customers?
5. Otherwise, in the case of either #3 or #4, above, it would be the investor(s) who would have to come up with the cash. This is, by definition, a business in trouble, is it not? The investors were hoping it would never come to this juncture. They were hoping to have the cash flow flow in the other direction, were they not? Will they not hope and expect, should they have to pay the taxes or the loan for the taxes, that any money paid in the wrong direction will, eventually, come back to them? Otherwise the business has failed. Where would the money come from to repay the investors' out-of-pocket tax expenditures? Would it not derive, ultimately, from cash flow from customers?
6. Granted, there is often a pool of money available to a company that would be used to pay taxes. This pool might contain business receipts, loans, proceeds from the sale of stock or owner's equity (investor money). Are you saying that, if this is the case, it is the investors or the loan paying all or part of the tax? If this is the case, it is not a thriving business and cannot exist in this state forever. At some point in time, the business must get its customers to pay its expenses and taxes or it fails...completely. True?
7. And specifically, when taxes (expenses) rise for all businesses in a marketplace, we have all noticed that prices also tend to rise. This is certainly the accepted theory, is it not? Rising labor, material, or energy costs would have the same tendency to produce higher prices. Why would income taxes be any different? Are you also saying that totally eliminating business taxes, for example, would not make business more competitive internationally? If such a tax change lowered prices, wouldn't it mean that the tax is somehow "included" in the price? If it's included in the price, does it not derive, ultimately, from cash flow from customers?
8. As a human person, I sure know that I have to pay my taxes out of my income (or I am in big trouble). How is a business any different? Where does business income come from?

9. So...aren't all business taxes of all even marginally successful businesses (not the business failure) ultimately paid by the customers of that business? Doesn't that mean that, like everything else, the cost is built into the price, by whatever mechanism?

And so, as I've said. **The customers pay all the taxes. The businesses pay zero, except when they fail as businesses.** This is the nature of business.—pass all your costs on to your customers, plus enough for you to live on. If you don't do that, you won't be in business for long. One of the fairest and best things about capitalism.

Thanks again for the discussion, Billy!

Anyone else? What am I missing here?

20120114-06	11:20	Pam	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to all, above)
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This is a great discussion. All I can do is sit back in wonder.

20120114-08	13:21	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
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You're dancing on me now, old boy. Your assertion, I'll recall once again, was "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever." This is tantamount to saying that the taxing authority cancels any responsibility for payment when you, or the corporation, doesn't have the capital to pay what is due. This just isn't the case (unless you're AIG or GM and being bailed out by the taxpayers). For you and me and the average corporation, whether we have the funds or not, the tax is due and payable. For those corporations that don't have revenue from customers to pay taxes—and there has been an epidemic of them the last four years—the capital comes from the shareholders, i. e. the owners.

What follows in the instance of non-payment is legal process to force payment. If the corporation doesn't have the capital to satisfy the taxing authority, then bankruptcy is the succeeding step.

You seem to suggest that whatever capital the corporation may have come from customers. Aside from start-up capital committed to the enterprise by investors, yes, it would have come from customers, but it doesn't belong to the customers; it belongs to the corporation. It is what is earned by the investors for their commitment of capital to the enterprise. When the corporation or any species of business has to pay taxes from that accumulated capital or from the investors' start-up capital, you simply can't say that "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever."

Let's say that a delinquent corporate taxpayer finds a bank that will lend money, based on its belief in the corporation's prospects for earnings, for payment of the corporation's taxes that are due. It's the bank's funds then, and the corporation may or may not be repaid, depending on customers' willingness to continue patronizing the corporation. The bank's funds are at risk in this case. (And, of course, the bank will have secured itself by either claim on the corporation's assets or through someone else's credit commitment. You simply can't assert that "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever."

This isn't quantum mechanics. This is the way the world works. The corporation definitely hopes that it can embed in its prices sufficient amounts to cover taxes that it will owe, but there simply is no guarantee of that, leaving the corporation responsible for the taxes.

20120115-19	17:29	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
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I think we're getting very close! I hope I didn't obfuscate my point with the hype. Remember my original subject line: "Most Businesses Pay Zero!"

You say below, "The business, of course, wants to embed all taxes in the prices charged for products and services sold." [Just like all their other costs of doing business!]

This is exactly my point. In reality, income taxes are just like all other business expenses. They are paid for by the customers, 100%, or the business is in serious danger if it has to borrow this money or take it from investors or the investment fund of the business for long. Then it would always be expected that this money would be re-paid by funds from sales—money from the customers!

I discussed all the investor, risk, liability, S corporation, etc. points in my emails. Of course I never meant to even imply that customers are legally responsible for the taxes of corporations. That would make no sense.

It's just that in the truest sense of the word, I see this as an important revelation. Businesses don't pay income taxes (many of them literally) anyway, so why tax them at all (with income tax...all other taxes should apply)? S corporations work fine with no corporate tax. (Except when the media erroneously accuses them of being tax cheats!)

But, to get this Zero Business Tax, the Republicans would have to compromise on the issues I listed in my first email on the subject—elimination of the Bush tax cuts, maybe slight increases in the rate for top personal income tiers, 50% income tax on all business income not disbursed to investors or reinvested (both within the U.S. only!) in the business in a fiscal year. What could be more fair?

Customers pay all the taxes of successful businesses and most of the taxes of the failures. INDIRECTLY! Which does not change the reality.

Thanks again!

20120115-03	12:15	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
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I realize that I can lead you to water but that I can't make you drink. Nevertheless and once again, My quarrel was with your statement that "Businesses don't pay taxes. Ever." It's simply not true.

When that capital of the business generated from its revenue from customers is inadequate, taxes must be paid by owners. It's that simple. And when the owners (corporate shareholders or individual owners) don't meet the taxing authority's legitimate demands by paying their own capital, then there will be bankruptcy or other involuntary satisfaction of the taxing authority's demands. In the latter case the shareholder or owners are liable to lose still more of their capital.

Where I believe we agree is that businesses will seek to embed all costs, including taxes and return to capital, in prices charged to customers. Businesses simply aren't able to do that in many cases, and they fail, consuming their own capital to meet their obligations, including taxes.

Can we, in fact, agree on that?

20120115-09	14:45	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
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Definitivamente. As I said, successful businesses pass these costs on.

Unsuccessful businesses try to.

Failing businesses (or start-ups) have to borrow money or use owners equity, as you state, to pay their income taxes. (Though it's rare for them to have income taxes, given their losing situation—no profits to tax.)

And, when the unsuccessful or failing businesses are S corporations, play their accounting tricks right, or don't make a profit (that's why they're failing) THEY PAY NO INCOME TAXES ANYWAY.

So the number of cases where the customers of a business do not pay its taxes must be miniscule. Of course, "never" is too strong a word, but not by much, and I said so in my headline ("Most Businesses Pay Zero"). As I said, I was trying to be as provocative as possible. I would bet that 99%+ of all U.S. business taxes are paid by the customers (out of sales receipts). To me, this is a revelation. Our U.S. tax code is built on an entirely different foundation that may not actually exist.

My real point is...S-o-o-o-o...**why should the government mess with business income taxes at all? Just eliminate them! It would benefit all and be a great bargaining chip for the Democrats.**

20120115-23	18:20	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
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You're backing and filling. What I went after from the beginning was your statement that "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever." That just isn't the case, and I showed why.

20120115-24	19:02	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
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[New! The system is just not set-up or meant to collect income taxes from profitless businesses, or even businesses made to look profitless! –SteveB, 6/20/12)

I'm sorry to see what I thought was a useful, maybe even a valuable, idea, buried under one misstatement, completely contradicted by my repeated headline and all my lengthy, detailed explication.

I stand by what I so obviously meant, but was stretching (very slightly) for effect only. In fact, I myself obviously contradicted the statement, "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever." many times myself, in every email, more precisely stating exactly what I meant.

I wish I had the ability to always get every little detail right and still get my work done. But I accept your correction.

Very rarely do American businesses of any size ever pay income taxes. Therefore, these useless taxes should be negotiated away in a revenue neutral deal. (See details in previous emails on this thread.)

Isn't this really the important and even astounding point? I guarantee you most Congressmen don't know this, or there would be no business income tax. All income tax should be personal.

20120115-26	19:39	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
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I get it with respect to your suggestion that corporations not be taxed. Corporations would rather not have to pay taxes on income, but would you instead want a sales tax to generate what corporations currently pay? Would anyone want individual taxes to replace what is now generated at the corporate level? Congress, I would suggest, would utterly balk at such a prospect. It would eliminate the double taxation of corporate income, but it's very problematic both politically and practically. It has been lengthily discussed, by the way, in Congress and in a thousand articles.

Forgive me for being a stickler for accuracy, but your statement—I won't repeat it—was one that needed to be corrected. Large numbers of corporations, the ones that can't price in all costs and taxes, still have to pay income taxes, and it comes out of capital, not from customers. So I wouldn't agree with your revised headline that "Very rarely do American businesses every pay any income taxes." You could instead say that viable corporations

generate sufficient capital from revenues to pay their income taxes. As far as ending corporate income taxes and generating the same revenue otherwise, don't expect it to happen any time soon.

20120115-27	21:22	SteveB	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)
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Yes, except it almost never ever comes out of capital. That would be a company in dire straits. Most aren't.

Show me one healthy company paying taxes out of investor funds which are not then "paid back" by receipts from sales.

Rarely, rarely do investors pay a company's taxes, however indirectly. Only companies in birth or death spirals, and in the birth spiral they expect to be paid back, in the death spiral they hope to be.

To be revenue neutral, I talked about ending the Bush tax cuts, etc. If my theory is correct, and I know it is, there should be a zero-sum economic displacement and government revenues should hold. Business should prosper, according to the theories of the businessmen, and prices should fall for all consumers. Taxes cannot be raised on the lower 50% of earners. More taxes would be collected from CEO's, etc. than are now collected from corporations. My plan includes a provision for foreign profits and mucho domestic reinvestment, which should also create more jobs. All I see is win, win, win, but it would take guts. So did freeing the slaves. So did fighting the British. We just fought two wars at once (or 3 or 4 at times), are you saying we can't change a little tax code sometime after the 2012 election?

I have never once read the theory that business income taxes might as well be eliminated because they fall on the wrong people, not on business at all. And I read a lot. It's the customers who pay.

For all practical and worldly purposes, it is business customers who pay business income taxes in the good old U.S. of A. What could be more logical?

20120115-28	22:06	Bill	Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB, above)
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You acknowledge that there are companies in dire straits; let me suggest that there have been large numbers of them in the last four years. For those companies that recover and are able to price into the market with product prices that cover taxes, that's great. Many won't; many haven't. They instead consumed their capital by paying taxes and other expenses.

A typical scenario is the company using accelerated depreciation for its tax books. When times become tough and the company can't afford new capital expenditure, or the IRS ends the accelerated depreciation preference, then the company in its next period will have comparatively little expense to offset its revenues. This causes artificially high taxable earnings and consequently high tax load. At the same time the company's sales are weakening. Prices times volume of sales can not be expected to cover taxes. The company must pay taxes from its accumulated capital. This is a typical; there are many other scenarios of weakness, when the company must reach into its accumulated capital—if it happens to have any. GM's failure had a significant component of this typical scenario.

With respect to your new headline, you must remember the failure of many corporations (one if five fails) and bear in mind what happens when capital is eroded.

Something will happen one day to cure the severely unbalanced budget. It almost certainly will involve higher taxes for many and significant cuts in the expenditures. Gotta happen.

[20120115-29](#) 22:20 SteveG Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Bill, above)

Reality versus theory in taxes have nothing to do with slavery or the British are coming.

[20120115-06](#) 13:33 Art Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to SteveB & Bill, above)

If I could interject a note on this really very interesting exchange, there may be another different approach here. Despite the current interpretation of the Supreme Court, corporations are not people. They have no conciseness or soul and they are never either happy or sad or remorseful or anything else. They, by themselves are things, just like a rock. Corporations however, are made up of and controlled by people. People, individuals, make all the decisions, bear all the responsibility and have all of those attributes listed above that corporations do not.

As to taxes, corporations don't care if they pay taxes or not or make a profit or loss or not, only the people within a corporation do. The reason they do is because these things affect their personal loss or gain. My thought is no corporate taxes for the company itself (also helps to reinforce the argument that corporations are not people) but very healthy graduated income tax for those individuals who derive gain from the corporation. That includes especially income but also thing like use of corporate jets or other vehicles, per diem pay, hotel accommodations etc etc. Equally there can be no law suits against corporation but only against individuals and they must compensate, if they lose, from personal not corporate funds.

May sound a little goofy and naive, but what it says is, if you plow the vast majority of the profits back into the corporation, you will not have to face any tax issue (no matter whether you merely get those funds by increasing the price of the items or service you sell or whatever) and this will encourage corporate growth but, if you decide to take for personal use a large amount of the profits made, you will pay the taxman. And, oh by the way, watch those decisions made for the corporation, because you will be held personally and fiscally responsible.

Does anyone recall when Madoff was marched off to prison how his wife was absolutely indigent that she had to give up the company car and jet. The unfairness of it all.

Just a naive thought.

[20120115-13](#) 15:23 SteveB Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Art, above)

No, not goofy or naïve, just out of the box, Art. This is the right idea, I think.

[20120115-17](#) 16:13 Pam Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Art, above)

Yeah, make CEOs, CFOs, and the gang personally responsible for their companies' losses. Now that would really change things up.

[20120115-21](#) 18:07 Bill Re: Yet Another Tax Scam: Most Businesses Pay Zero (reply to Art, above)

You're indicting the whole of the tax regimen; I'm addressing one assertion Steve made earlier: "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever" That simply isn't the case. Please see my responses to SteveB.

As to the existence of outrageous things—CEO salaries, wasteful expenses and capital purchases—I'd be the first to acknowledge there's plenty of it and that there oughta be a law agin' it With respect to the double taxation that is associated with ownership of C corporations, well, it could be replaced with individual taxation, but those

individual rates on all of us will be raised substantially. And about preferences (sometimes called loopholes) enjoyed by corporations, they are exceedingly abundant and probably the larger part of what makes the IRS Code such a monster.

[20120113-15](#) 19:10 SteveG Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)?

I saw on ESPN today the results of a poll. The question was if there is divine intervention in close games for Tim Tebow and the Denver Broncos. 43% responded yes. Something is really wrong if God is intervening in a football game instead of curing cancer, stopping wars, etc. Just saying, something is wrong.

[20120113-18](#) 20:20 Pam Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)

from SteveG:

Something is really wrong if God is intervening in a football game instead of curing cancer, stopping wars, etc.

You've got that right.

[Ah, but, then who is to tell Him what He should be doing? –SteveB]

[20120113-17](#) 20:10 Art Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)

Who did they poll? Tea Party intellectuals? Both of them?

[20120113-16](#) 19:19 Dennis Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)

Wonder if Tebow's Bible-thumping fans know that he is gay. Not that there's anything wrong with that (Tebow, not his fans).

[20120113-19](#) 20:21 Pam Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Dennis, above)

Really?! I love it.

[20120113-21](#) 20:28 Art Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Dennis, above)

Do we really know that? Personally I think he is an outstanding young man (I could care less which team he plays on) who the religious right is secretly trying to demonize to show the rest of us how religiously biased the rest of us pagans are. I mean who really gives a hoot if he bends his knee in prayer after a touchdown???? Better one of those goof ball dances????

It's a lot like the gun nuts who, every time there us a shooting, respond that really millions of Americans are saved every years by guns but the liberal press just won't report it.

[20120113-20](#) 21:27 Pam Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Art, above)

Art: always the voice of reason. Of course, it's just a rumor. And if it's true, so what? I'm not as tolerant of his public displays of religion as you though. I find his posturing ridiculous, rather like the sole survivor of a plane crash thanking god for looking out for him. But those goofy end-zone dances are just as irritating. You know what? People can really get on your nerves.

[20120113-22](#) 22:35 SteveG Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to all, above)

"Divine intervention in a football game is like divine intervention in finding a parking place." —SteveG

[20120114-05](#) 11:17 Bill Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to SteveG, above)

Couldn't agree more. I'm in the minority, I'm sure, but big sports tends to be a racket, motivated mostly by money. The players are the best, and the moves are often amazingly good, but it's all about money. Sports still seem to exist for the most part at the small college level, high school, and at lower levels.

[20120114-07](#) 11:52 Pam Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? (reply to Bill, above)

Are you all familiar with Taylor Branch's article in a recent Atlantic about how college athletes at the big schools are being exploited so the NCAA can make a bundle? It won't happen, but I wish all college sports could be "amateur." Money is so corrupting, as we all know it is in politics. It is in sports too. I'm not saying get rid of pro teams and TV contracts and all that, just take money-making out of our educational system. Why not have minor leagues in football and basketball as well as baseball? Sports in the university are great and should be encouraged, but what goes on at the big schools has nothing to do with education--unless you're Stanford maybe. But--too many are making too much, so things won't change.

[20120114-09](#) 14:05 Bill Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Indianapolis Superbowl (reply to Pam, above)

I had said in a previous remark that big sports is a racket. Please do not convey this remark, especially to those you know in Indianapolis, because I will be hunted down and stoned to death. There is a very loud and mounting clamor about the Super Bowl game that will be played here in Indianapolis. The amount of hoo-hah is absolutely astounding. People believe, I think, that Indianapolis will be lifted into some new and exalted state of being as a result of the Super Bowl being played here. Maybe so, but there will be one hell of a hangover and pile of trash to somehow recover from as a result. I'm not a believer that a Super Bowl will precipitate good times for all. Maybe for a few, while the rest of us are paying for stadium, team, clean-up, etc. It's nice to have a county fair, but the hype here is at absolutely looney levels.

[20120114-11](#) 14:39 Dennis Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Indianapolis Superbowl (reply to Bill, above)

from Bill:

People believe, I think, that Indianapolis will be lifted into some new and exalted state of being as a result of the Super Bowl being played here.

See what it did for Detroit. Indianapolis will be a vacant lot before you know it.

20120114-10	14:33	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Bill, above)
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My response to this is to say that I have never, ever paid for any sports event, college or professional. I know it is a small meaningless gesture, but that is how I voice my displeasure.

Once as part of a Harvard course I did attend a Boston baseball game at Fenway Park, I think it is. The University paid for it. I was amazed. It was on a maybe Thursday work night, in September, I think, and neither team was in contention for any playoff spot. There must have been 30 thousand screaming fans there. The game was a no hitter and went extra innings. My classmates and I were all bored to tears, and when they announced extra inning, several us asked "please just kill us now". Fortunately for the remainder of our sanity someone scored a run in the 10th inning and thankfully it was over.

The capper was the next day as we all caught breakfast at the student cafeteria and were looking at the daily paper, 'Boston Herald'? Headlines mind you, not the sports page "IT DOESN'T GET ANY BETTER THAN THIS". Go figure.

20120114-12	14:42	Dennis	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Art, above)
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Art, you didn't pray for divine intervention soon enough.

20120114-13	14:45	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Dennis, above)
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Well, there was that, Dennis, but who knew then?

20120114-15	17:59	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics & P.G. Wodehouse (reply to all, above)
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It's amazing, isn't it, how much energy, time, and money Americans spend on essentially trivial things? The millions generated by the Super Bowl are certainly not trivial, but--sorry, sports fans--football is trivial. That's not to say that there isn't a place for trivialities. I just read an essay about P.G. Wodehouse, who is nothing if not trivial, but the world would be a dimmer place without Bertie and Jeeves. We all crave entertainment, and tastes differ, and that's fine. I used to believe no one could live a really fulfilling life without Shakespeare; now I know that's just silly. (I think I'm sort of talking myself out of my own argument here.) Entertainment is important in principle. I guess what bothers me sometimes is the way we set our priorities. I read about a biologist who has left the computer and gone back into the field, where he counts things--like the life in tidal pools. As the climate changes, the creatures in the pools adapt or move to a more hospitable clime. They do not face one obstacle, solve it, then never change again--the way people do. This fellow is applying what he observes in tidal pools to homeland security. Rather than setting up rigid procedures, like we have at airports, we should be more flexible and we should anticipate the unexpected, not just what's happened already. I find this fascinating, and I wonder why we don't pay more attention to creative and innovative thinking and maybe a little less to which quarterback does or does not have his act together. My dad was a coach, and my husband is an avid sports fan, but we can be enthusiasts without forgetting what's really important. Do I sound like a pompous a*s?

20120114-19	21:09	Bill	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics & P.G. Wodehouse (reply to Pam, above)
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Was that "Bertie" Williams who was with the Steelers a few years ago?

[20120115-01](#) 09:48 Pam Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics & P.G. Wodehouse (reply to Bill, above)

Wooster. Bertie Wooster. :-)

[20120114-18](#) 20:15 SteveG Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above, 17:59)

It all depends on how people interpret things and how they define creativity. Some say sports are creative, others say books, others say dance, others say movies, others theater, etc. Division 1 college sports and AAU sports are entirely out of control – college presidents allow the Division 1 and parents allow the AAU. Both need to be cleaned up!

[20120115-02](#) 10:04 Pam Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to SteveG, above)

Some years ago (maybe 20), our chancellor (UNCG) decided to take us to Division I from Division III. My husband, sports fan extraordinaire, strongly opposed the move and said so from his position on the faculty athletics committee. He has never changed his mind about that. However, the university in its wisdom continues to pour millions, literally millions, into a basketball team that hasn't won a game in forever. (Not quite, but almost.) The U. leased the big coliseum for the men's basketball games, leaving a perfectly nice, adequately large venue on campus that students had easy access to. Now they have to take a bus into the dark city in a not-so-hot neighborhood to watch other teams beat the snot out of us in a practically empty arena. You should be there when we play Duke! When they made this move, I quit going to games. (A good excuse.) UNCG used to be a women's college and only went co-ed in '63. It has no big-sports tradition, though we've done pretty well in soccer because of all the Icelandic players. I know none of this affects any of you, but I use it to make the point that university administrations and boards of trustees (usually rich business people) just love the idea of their school's name in lights and have some idea that this will attract more students. Well, it doesn't attract more music and nursing students, and these are two of our most outstanding programs. There, I got that off my chest.

[20120114-16](#) 18:40 Art Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above)

Frankly I sometimes wonder if schools like Florida State or Oklahoma or Auburn even bother to have academic departments.

I am sure I insulted someone with this one. Sorry.

I think your theories about (larger) universities' governance is correct. They want to keep their U's name in a favorable light before the public, and the chauvinism surrounding their U's team is the most convenient vehicle for that individuation and favorable light. It's hard to do the same through a sociology program.

There was a professor at IU Bloomington, Murray Sperber, who was a high profile critic of sports programs' overreaching, both of IU and in general. He was an easy target for the chauvinists, but he made eminent sense. I think he has left IU, by the way. God help the poor man in his Sisyphean efforts. Anyway, I'd get out the pom-poms and cheer for him any day.

[20120114-17](#) 18:54 Clark Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Art, above)

The philosophy of football, the calculus of the forward pass and the biology of the offensive line are all very big in those fine schools.

20120115-04	12:30	SteveG	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above)
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:-) Sounds like the University of Evansville. They were a powerhouse in division 2 and went to division 1 – they cannot compete. Gym is about 10 miles away, student population is 2,400. They did quit football a few years ago.

If they are going to have such major sports programs as are currently in existence – the one year and done needs to get out of basketball (look at Kentucky as an example), University of Connecticut has to increase their graduation rate from 25%, coaches need to be held accountable for violations – Pete Carroll, Jim Trimel, Kelvin Sampson, etc. all break rules and at times leave the programs in shambles and yet they get raises as they go on to jobs in the pros. The governing body of sports NCAA needs to grow a pair.

20120115-16	17:56	Bill	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to SteveG, above)
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It's a racket, alas. People want it.

20120115-05	13:18	Pam	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to SteveG, above)
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I used to have a lot of respect for the NCAA. My dad was a vice-president of it for a time. But now it looks to me like it's morphed into a giant money machine, in league with the media and major universities. They all get a piece of a sizable pie. I guess I'm a little Anne Frankish, in that I do believe that most people are basically good. Does anyone really think he's a bad person, even those who awful things? The thing that gets me is how "good" people can do such bad things. I understand how bad things happen to good people, but when seemingly good people (Sandusky etc.) do bad things, do they realize what they're doing is bad, or do they convince themselves it's not? I know this sounds like a naive question, but I really wonder. Maybe the truth is, people are basically bad, and we should be grateful for the good they manage to do.

20120115-07	13:35	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & Professional College Athletics (reply to Pam, above)
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And that's the problem!

20120115-08	14:38	Art	Re: Does God Meddle in Mortal Affairs (Like Football)? & President Obama's Economy (reply to all, above)
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Getting away from the things most Americans really care about, sports, (somehow the divine intervention thing didn't go so well last night - still it was interesting after the game I saw St. Tebow surrounded by literally dozens of cameras and press, while Mr. Brady, who had just played perhaps the best four quarters of professional football I have ever seen, walked alone to the locker room - Hmmm?) couple of good articles in the news (WP) the last few days.

An editorial on Saturday sort of took apart the idea that the President, any president, can accomplish miracles, he is only one man. The thrust of the article is that any president can only advocate ideas, try to get some legislation passed and then wait for it to take effect, and all this takes time. He doesn't control foreign economies, the weather

or much less, even Congress. I think we all really know that, but the current political Republican rhetoric holding President Obama personally responsible for not turning the US economy around on a dime is just so much hot air.

Another article on Sunday about the Keystone Pipeline reveals that my favorite Speaker, Bonehead Boehner, had personally invested last year between \$10K and \$50K in seven different companies directly connected with the oil extraction. He has also received more than \$1M in campaign donations from these oil companies. Hmm, think there might be a connection??? Think there might be a conflict of interest??? Of course his office says that it is all in a blind trust and that "He doesn't have any control over day-to-day trades, so there's no conflict of interest on this or any other investment,". Right! And we are to believe that? Think maybe he should recuse himself from any further political connection with the Keystone Project? Au Contraire. Instead Speaker Bonehead has set up some kind of ticking clock on Facebook to try and force the President to make a positive decision. This is about as politically blatant and self serving as I can recall.

Finally and here is one for our Republican fiscally conservative friends. When Bush, a God fearing, business friendly, fiscally conservative politician came to office in 2001 the S&P index was at 1350 something, when he left office it was down to 850. A huge drop. When President Obama, a socialist pinko job destroying, business hating left/right wing Nazi Commie came to office it was, not surprisingly 850, and today it is 1290. A very significant jump back up. Hmmmm? How did that work?

[20120115-20](#) 18:06 Dennis Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Art, above)

The stock market has historically always done better under Democrats than Republicans, yet the Dems get smaller campaign contributions from business than Repugs. Would you want any of these business guys handling your investments?

As for calling Republicans fiscally conservative, I'm waiting to see some actual evidence.

[20120115-22](#) 18:17 Bill Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Art, above)

Agree. The bail-outs are repellent, but had they not been done, what we've been through would have been far more aggravated. There is extreme hypocrisy among the Republicans on this. And, as you suggest, many of the recent problems were brought to us by the %@# Bush administration. Now both parties must agree on means to reduce the national debt, a Mt. Everest of obligation that demands an ever larger share of each year's budget. I suppose I'm living in fantasy land in thinking that this will happen.

[20120115-25](#) 19:11 SteveB Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Bill, above)

I agree with you completely on this one, Bill. Isn't it amazing how quickly we've forgotten the lessons we didn't learn then? Duhhhh...it was all Obama's fault, right?

Since no human on Earth can say with any certainty whatsoever that the bailouts weren't necessary, it seems like such a waste of energy to bemoan them instead of tackling our many huge problems.

[20120115-10](#) 14:57 SteveG Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to Art, above)

Add to it all the Republicans wanting smaller government and lower expenditures. Watch them squirm as Obama proposed consolidating 6 bureaus into 1 that would save \$3 billion or so dollars and decrease the number of federal employees by over 1,000,000 (over the next 10 years). Questions are starting now: What is he trying to do, what is Obama up to?

[20120115-15](#) 16:12 SteveB Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to SteveG, above)

Good point. I think Obama must have the Republicans in Congress completely freaked out right now. They're noticeably reeling. Maybe the POTUS knew what he was doing all along. Please "make it so," Heavenly Intervention!

20120115-12 15:01 Art Re: President Obama's Economy (reply to SteveG, above)

Making sense! You're right they will squirm since I think the real and only Republican policy is to just oppose anything that might make President Obama look good.

20120114-01 00:20 Jim "Time to Talk Politics at the Dinner Table"

This lady makes sense and I believe her statistics about the ignorant state of current "adults" being the major problem. Forty per cent not knowing their legislators names is pitiful.

The statement about "voters knowing too much" not being the source of problems resonates.

"Time to Talk Politics at the Dinner Table" by Connie Schultz, *The National Memo*

Jan. 12, 2012. (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/content/time-talk-politics-dinner-table>)

We all have heard the admonishment that polite people never discuss politics or religion at the dinner table. Forgive me, but that sounds like a big part of the problem right now in America.

I grew up in a small working-class town in northeast Ohio. In our Protestant home, the dining room table faced the Jack-and-Jesus wall. Under Mom's watchful gaze in 1961, Dad had hung a painting of Christ next to an official-looking portrait of President John F. Kennedy. Once, a neighbor and fellow Presbyterian breathlessly pointed to the wall and declared that Kennedy was a Catholic. Mom smiled and assured her that God loved everyone -- even bigots. That was a short visit.

Our table manners were impeccable, thanks to my mother. Our politics were part of the menu, thanks to my father, who worked at the local power plant and was a proud member of the Utility Workers, Local 270. Reminders of Dad's work were everywhere in our house, from the potholders printed with images of Reddy Kilowatt, the cartoon mascot of the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Co., to the electrical outlets and light switches in every room. So often, I'd flick a switch and hear my mother chirp, "Thank your father for that light." As far as Mom was concerned, every volt of electricity to 1225 W. Prospect Rd. was delivered on the brawny shoulders of her husband, Chuck Schultz.

Another reminder of Dad's work came in a bound union contract that he tucked in his back pocket every day before he left for the plant. At night, he'd lay it next to his watch and wallet on my parents' dresser. Before I was 10, I was leafleting for candidates Dad supported. I saw my first presidential candidate in 1968, when my parents piled all four of us kids into the family car to drive to downtown Ashtabula for the chance to hear Vice President Hubert Humphrey speak. We have silent footage of that speech, filmed by Dad's shaky hand.

I knew "the personal is political" long before feminists declared this to be so. In a union home, you grow up knowing that some people -- our kind of people -- are only strong in numbers. You also know who's on your side. You learn all of this in the nightly discussions over family dinners. If you grow up talking over dinner about the role of government in your daily life, chances are you still will be doing that when it's your turn to be the grown-up at the table. It's also likelier you'll know the names of your elected officials and be a consistent voter, too.

In a column last week for *The Wall Street Journal*, Jonah Lehrer asked readers to consider the following statistics about today's voters in America:

1. The vast majority of them can't name their member of the House of Representatives or any single congressional candidate.

2. Forty-five percent of adults don't know that each state elects two senators.
3. Forty percent of Americans can't name the vice president.
4. Sixty-three percent can't name the chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court.

In most communities, you need only to ask 10 strangers to name their member of Congress to get that sinking feeling that Lehrer's numbers are not far off the mark. There's a reason that misleading campaign ads work, and it's never because the public knows too much.

The 2012 presidential race will see an onslaught of negative ads produced by groups with no discernible identities. The Supreme Court's decision in the Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission case unleashed wealthy donors to give unlimited amounts of money to independent groups that produce campaign ads. They can do this anonymously, so you won't even know who's trying to play you for a chump.

So let's be willing to make some people uncomfortable at the dinner table. Let's unravel the mystery of politics, one meal at a time, and start with the basics:

1. No matter what state you call home, you have two senators and one member of the House representing you. Libraries, newspapers and countless websites can tell you their names.
2. The vice president of the United States is Joe Biden.
3. The chief justice of the Supreme Court is John Roberts.
4. Election Day is Nov. 6 this year.

If you already know all this, speak up, even at the dinner table. Especially at the dinner table. This is no time to mind your manners.

(Connie Schultz is a Pulitzer Prize-winning columnist and an essayist for Parade magazine. She is the author of two books, including *...and His Lovely Wife*, which chronicled the successful race of her husband, Sherrod Brown, for the U.S. Senate. To find out more about Connie Schultz (con.schultz@yahoo.com) and read her past columns, please visit the Creators Syndicate Web page at www.creators.com.)

20120114-14	15:31	SteveG	"The GOP's Efficiency Deficit"
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A further indictment of American capitalism...

"The GOP's Efficiency Deficit" by Christopher Petrella, NationofChange

Jan. 14, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/gop-s-efficiency-deficit-1326558972>)

Save the word "Obamacare" there is not a single term in the GOP lexicon said with more vigor or ubiquity than "efficiency." Despite daily bloviation on the theme of annual deficit reduction, however, the Right has been cravenly silent on its own ideological deficit of efficiency. Republican apothegms are about as trite as they are tired: "reducing taxes on job creators will help to grow the economy," "government is a not a solution to our problems, government is our problem," and "efficient markets inevitably lead to economic stability."

But contrary to the claims of most conservatives, corporate capitalism is ruthlessly inefficient and irrational; it's socialism for the wealthy. They insist that the satisfaction of human need is best satisfied by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions. To this end, they charge that the marketplace is a rational, self-correcting mechanism that, despite booms and busts, will ultimately deliver the most efficient distribution of goods and

services. The unswerving drive for privatization of publicly owned resources –whether they be utilities, social programs, or public lands—draws cachet from the illusion that private ventures are always more “efficient” than public endeavors. “Efficiency,” of course, is not a value-neutral term and so we must pose the question: efficiency for whom? Efficiency for labor? For the poor? For people of color? For capital? The alluring but fallacious notion that efficiency is an objective, class-neutral concept dissolves when we consider examples of market-measured, profit-premised “efficiency”.

Conservative endorsement of efficient markets remains largely unsubstantiated when such assumptions are applied to three very simple interrelated economic measures:

1. The capacity utilization rate.
2. The U-6 unemployment rate.
3. Corporate profits.

The capacity utilization rate (also known as the operating rate), simply stated, is an index used to mark the rate at which potential output levels are being met or utilized. Exhibited as a percentage, capacity utilization levels offer insight into the overall excess or glut in the economy or in a company at any point in time. That is, the capacity utilization rate quantifies how much a company does produce as a percentage of what it could produce. For instance, if a company manufactures 1,000 shoes a day but could produce 2,000 for the same cost, then it has a capacity utilization rate of 50%.

Since 1989 the U.S. Federal reserve has calculated capacity utilization rates. The data are startling. Since 1990 the average total industry capacity utilization rate rests at 79.7% and since the beginning of the recession, 75.4%. The nadir occurred in 2009 with an average annual rate of 69.2%. What does this all mean? And why should it matter? This obscure measurement of capacity, and therefore productivity, suggests that nearly 25% of fixed assets (raw materials) and factory machinery is collecting dust at a time when 15.2% of the working population –23 million Americans—is without work.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “the U-6 unemployment rate counts and describes not only people without work seeking full-time employment, but also counts marginally attached workers and those working part-time for economic reasons. Note that some of these part-time workers counted as employed by U-3 could be working as little as an hour a week. And the marginally attached workers include those who have gotten discouraged and stopped looking, but still want to work.”

Such dispiriting examples of inefficiency, of course, also occur against the backcloth of corporate protectionism of profits. According to the U.S. Federal Reserve, American businesses are currently sitting on at least \$1.9 trillion in profits, or surplus. This is the highest figure recorded since the government began keeping data in 1959.

So let me get this straight...

U.S. corporations are sitting on at least \$1.9 trillion in surplus while 23 million citizens are jobless and 25% of our country’s fixed assets and machinery are collecting dust? Is this capital efficiency?

Capitalism’s first priority has never been, nor ever will be, the satisfaction of social need; I cannot imagine anything more financially unsustainable, irrational, inefficient, and unethical than an economic system that refuses to match surplus capital with surplus workers and machinery. After all, what is the market without morality? Freedom without fairness? Efficiency without ethics?

[“Free” trade prevents the surplus capital, workers, and machinery from getting together. One could also take the view that it is the high wages of American workers which do the preventing. I believe this latter view to be disastrous to our American way of life, while the elimination of the former might be its salvation. –SteveB]

Note most of the accelerating debt occurred after 1980 when the tax rate for the top 1% went down from 90% to 35%. From <http://www.connectthedotsusa.com/>.



[Here's a link to a better quality graphic and many more interesting graphs. A valuable resource: <http://www.connectthedotsusa.com/pdf/BudgetsOhMySlides.pdf>. --SteveB]

Good graphic. And the Republicans say they're so worried about the deficit their policies have actually have caused. THE BIG LIE!

Here is something to ponder. I took this from a book review by Hywel Williams, in the Dec. 23 *TLS*, of Simon Heffer's *A Short History of Power*.

Democratic politicians only differ from fascist and communist leaders because they recognize that a ballot box confers legitimacy. But that is not a sign of their willingness to yield power: they have just learned that 'they must go through certain procedures to earn the right to exercise it.'

Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #53 — JAN. 17, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Rupert Murdoch Craves Big Government Intervention: \$\$\$

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 17, 2012)

Sometimes the hypocrisy becomes too much, doesn't it? As we have stated in these pages often before, it is not so much that Republicans want small government and Democrats want BIG government. It is simply a matter of whom that government serves. I won't speak of other Republicans, but for Rupert Murdoch, it all has to do with the money. Freedom and the Constitution be damned! If the lives of those from whom the money is taken are diminished in the process, to hell with them!

\$\$\$\$!!!!

"Rupert Murdoch Attacks Google, Obama in Pro-SOPA Twitter Rant" by Alana Horowitz, Huffington Post

Jan. 15, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/15/ruPERT-murdoch-sopa-twitter-google-obama_n_1207615.html?ir=Politics)

Rupert Murdoch sounded off on Saturday about the White House's rejection of SOPA and PIPA, the controversial anti-piracy bills currently being debated in Congress.

"So Obama has thrown in his lot with Silicon Valley paymasters who threaten all software creators with piracy, plain thievery," he wrote on Twitter. "Piracy leader is Google who streams movies free, sells ads around them. No wonder pouring millions into lobbying."

Murdoch has lobbied aggressively for the bills, which many critics call web censorship. On Saturday, the White House announced that it would not support the legislation.

Supporters of the legislation--including Murdoch's News Corp, which owns 20th Century Fox films and various successful TV shows--argue that the bills would help protect copyright.

Google is one of the most vocal opponents of SOPA and PIPA. Co-founder Sergey Brin has said that the bills "give the U.S. government and copyright holders extraordinary powers including the ability to hijack DNS and censor search results (and this is even without so much as a proper court trial)."

You might like this for your conspiracy category. It speaks to the issue of our generation: the purchase of our government.

"Possible Deception Revealed in the Ratification of the 27th Amendment" by jpspr, Political Finance Reform

May 2, 2011, (<http://politicalfinancereform.org/ten-point-plan/the-27th-amendment.html>)

20120116-02 14:50 SteveG "Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?"

"Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?" by NPR Staff

Jan. 15, 2012, (<http://www.npr.org/2012/01/15/145271755/will-the-real-ronald-reagan-please-stand-up>)

It's no secret who the most popular Republican is in this year's GOP presidential race. In just one single debate last year, GOP candidates mentioned the former President Ronald Reagan 24 times.

Right now, each candidate is vying for the mantle of Reagan conservatism. Yet some historians, and even some of the folks who worked for Ronald Reagan, are now wondering whether Reagan himself was enough of a Reagan conservative — at least the way it is defined today.

So what exactly is a Reagan conservative anyway? If he were alive, could Reagan get the GOP nod?

Reagan biographer Craig Shirley tells weekends on All Things Considered host Guy Raz that it was against backdrop of the 1970s that Reagan first ran for president.

"You had rampant inflation [and] high interest rates; we were losing [the] Cold War," Shirley says. "Americans had become rampant cheap consumers of the '70s – disco music or pet rocks or leisure suits – all of those things that really summed up what was really a very bad time for the American people."

A young former Nixon aide named John Sears convinced Reagan he should run for president against the incumbent Gerald Ford in 1976. Against huge odds, Reagan actually came close to winning that year and would eventually go on to win in 1980.

Reagan had a cultural appeal with the New-Deal, blue-collar, urban-ethnic, lunch-bucket voters that other Republicans didn't, Shirley says.

"Nixon had a little bit, but not the way Reagan did. So this was the beginning of his reorganization of the two parties," he says.

The man who became the most important American conservative icon in the 20th century was, in many ways, a moderate, says Shirley.

In 1978, Reagan campaigned against a referendum in California called Proposition 6 that would have banned gays and lesbians, and possibly anyone who supported gay rights, from working in the state's public schools.

The bill was supported by the Christian right and sponsored by state legislator John Briggs. The measure failed, and Briggs later said it was solely because of Reagan.

In recent years, Sen. Lindsey Graham, former Gov. Mike Huckabee and Rep. Duncan Hunter Jr. — all Republicans — have suggested Reagan would have a tough time winning the GOP nomination today.

Reporter Walter Shapiro is covering his ninth presidential campaign, now for Yahoo! News and The New Republic. He tells NPR's Raz that there were plenty of Reagan-era policies that wouldn't sit well with the GOP today — like raising taxes.

In the early '80s there was a deficit problem, and after massively lowering taxes there was an adjustment upward. Reagan's tax reform of 1986, which basically eliminated a number of deductions in order to lower rates, would be attacked today, Shapiro says.

"In an attack ad today," he adds, "you'd say, 'Whose side is he on?'"

Also in 1986, Reagan's Immigration Reform and Control Act granted amnesty to millions of illegal immigrants who entered the U.S. prior to Jan. 1, 1982.

"This is the immigration bill that the Republicans are railing against when they say, 'No more amnesties' — and this was Ronald Reagan," he says.

Many of the GOP candidates running for president have repeatedly pointed out that many — mostly poor — Americans don't pay federal income taxes. But in his 1985 State of the Union address, Reagan said he'd propose the exemption of federal income taxes to those living at or below the poverty line.

"This is, again, the problem with this plaster-saint iconography," Shapiro says.

There are many ways in which Reagan was a genuine conservative, Shapiro says, but he wasn't consistent. If Reagan were running today, Shapiro can imagine superPAC ads referring to him as a "former liberal-Democrat" or "tax-raiser Ronald Reagan."

"The truth is that political figures, particularly when viewed from the lens of history, are far more complicated creatures than they are when they're viewed through the lens of bumper stickers," Shapiro says.

So how does Ronald Reagan compare to the modern definition of a Reagan conservative? David Stockman, Reagan's former budget director, tells Raz that he doesn't think Reagan quite matches up.

"Even though he was highly negative about the role of government ... he was also enough of a pragmatist to recognize facts," Stockman says.

The modern interpretation of who Reagan was is based on two things, Stockman says: a selective reading of history and a full-bore adoption of Reagan rhetoric.

"What the history books are going to show, I believe, is that the Reagan revolution never happened. It was a campaign slogan," he says. "Government wasn't reduced; taxes were cut marginally, but the basic functions of the federal government didn't change."

What is left, Stockman says, is a lot of slogans and campaign speeches that the current crop of Republican politicians like to repeat over and over.

Ultimately, Stockman says, it does matter that the Republican Party of today is so very different from the Republican Party of Reagan's era. He says in any democracy you can't have fiscal stability or discipline unless you have one party that advocates discipline.

"The Republican Party has given up the role that the conservative party needs to play in a democracy," he says. "As a result of surrendering that role, we're in a very difficult and I think dangerous position."

This year, Stockman is backing Ron Paul.

[20120116-03](#) 17:43 Bill Re: "Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?" (reply to SteveG, above)

Dave Stockman, a principal informant for this story, may have coined, or at least publicly used, the phrase "voodoo economics," when Reagan was drunk on supply-side economics. Stockman, then the budget director, was consequently, in his own words, "taken to the woodshed" for doctrinal deviation. I don't know how much longer after that episode it was that he resigned, but not a great stretch of time. Anyway, he was a candid guy and once again has given an accurate picture here. He represented a Michigan congressional district adjacent to where I lived in Indiana, and, in my newspaper role, I would talk to him now and then, especially during campaigns. He always impressed me as a very decent soul—and one usually willing to tell the truth.

[20120116-05](#) 17:52 SteveG Re: "Will the Real Ronald Reagan Please Stand Up?" (reply to Bill, above)

Had forgotten the "voodoo economics" phrase, thank you for the reminder. Brought out a little chuckle.

[20120116-04](#) 17:50 SteveG "Is This Land Made for 'You & Me'—or for the Super Rich?"

"Is This Land Made for 'You and Me'—or for the Super Rich?" by Bill Moyers, NationofChange

Jan. 16, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/land-made-you-and-me-or-super-rich-1326724787>)

The traveling medicine show known as the race for the Republican presidential nomination has moved on from Iowa and New Hampshire, and all eyes are now on South Carolina. Well, not exactly all. At the moment, our eyes are fixed on some big news from the great state of Oklahoma, home of the legendary American folk singer Woody Guthrie, whose 100th birthday will be celebrated later this year.

Woody saw the ravages of the Dust Bowl and the Depression firsthand; his own family came unraveled in the worst hard times. And he wrote tough yet lyrical stories about the men and women who struggled to survive, enduring the indignity of living life at the bone, with nothing to eat and no place to sleep. He traveled from town to town, hitchhiking and stealing rides in railroad boxcars, singing his songs for spare change or a ham sandwich. What professional success he had during his own lifetime, singing in concerts and on the radio, was often undone by politics and the restless urge to keep moving on. "So long, it's been good to know you," he sang, and off he would go.

What he wrote and sang about caused the oil potentates and preachers who ran Oklahoma to consider him radical and disreputable. For many years he was the state's prodigal son, but times change, and that's the big news. Woody Guthrie has been rediscovered, even though Oklahoma's more conservative than ever – one of the reddest of our red states with a governor who's a favorite of the Tea Party.

The George Kaiser Family Foundation has bought Guthrie's archives – his manuscripts, letters and journals. A center is being built in Tulsa that will make them available to scholars and visitors from all over the world.

Among its treasures is the original, handwritten copy of this song, Woody Guthrie's most famous – This Land Is Your Land. The song extols the beauty of the country Guthrie traveled across again and again; its endless skyways and golden valleys, the sparkling sands of her diamond deserts. Yet his eye was clear, unclouded, and unobstructed by sentimentality, for he also wrote in its lyrics:

In the shadow of the steeple I saw my people,
By the relief office I seen my people;
As they stood there hungry, I stood there asking
Is this land made for you and me?

"Is this land made for you and me?" A mighty good question. The biggest domestic story of our time is the collapse of the middle class, a sharp increase in the poor, and the huge transfer of wealth to the already rich.

In an era of gross inequality there's both irony and relevance in Woody Guthrie's song. That "ribbon of highway" he made famous? It's faded and fraying in disrepair, the nation's infrastructure of roads and bridges, once one of our glories, now a shambles because fixing them would require spending money, raising taxes, and pulling together.

This land is mostly owned not by you and me but by the winner-take-all super rich who have bought up open spaces, built mega-mansions, turned vast acres into private vistas, and distanced themselves as far as they can from the common lot of working people – the people Woody wrote and sang about.

True, Barack Obama asked Bruce Springsteen and Woody Guthrie's longtime friend Pete Seeger to sing This Land is Your Land at that big, pre-inaugural concert the Sunday before he was sworn in. And sing they did, in the spirit of hope and change that President Obama had spun as the heart of his campaign rhetoric.

Today, whatever was real about that spirit has been bludgeoned by severe economic hardship for everyday Americans and by the cynical expedience of politicians who wear the red-white-and-blue in their lapels and sing "America the Beautiful" while serving the interests of crony capitalists stuffing SuperPACs with millions of dollars harvested from the gross inequality destroying us from within.

But maybe – just maybe – the news that Woody Guthrie, once a pariah in his home state, has become a local hero is the harbinger of things to come, and that all the people who still believe this land is our land will begin to take it back.

comment by Michael Marowitz

First and foremost, a functioning democracy is but a sham when one voice shouts and drowns out all others. For over 30 years, the middle class has been losing wealth to the upper class because we've been conditioned to worship a form of capitalism that sounds good but delivers only middle class impoverishment. Whether you call it Reaganomics or "supply side economics" or "neoliberalism" or "Milton Friedman's laissez faire capitalism," or "austere capitalism," we deregulated our way into a world economic crises, we privatized hundreds of government activities to award private contracts to Republican campaign contributors, and we lowered taxes to supposedly spur economic investment, which the rich refuse to invest, at least until they've driven Obama from office.

And now, after defeating the Labor Movement, they're shrinking government to change us to a Third World country. The avalanche of disinformation appealing to our worst fears and prejudices will only increase unless we regain the ability to engage in campaign finance reform. And we can't do that until 2/3 of the states ratify a new constitutional amendment overriding Citizens United.

Nothing will dramatically change unless that happens.

20120116-06	18:49	Dennis	"A Voters' Rights Amendment as a Focus for Dissent"
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Suing Obama and uniting with the Tea Party. Has opposing corporate fascism come to this? [I believe there is no path forward except amending the Constitution. But I don't believe this amendment, as stated, is quite what I would want, but still better than what we have. Unfortunately, it doesn't even address campaign finance reform except maybe to get rid of *Citizens United*. –SteveB]

<http://www.truth-out.org/why-im-suing-barack-obama/1326735002>

"A Voters' Rights Amendment as a Focus for Dissent" by William John Cox and Helen Werner Cox, Truthout

Jan. 16, 2012, (<http://www.truth-out.org/voters-rights-amendment-unify-occupiers-and-tea-partiers/1325876815>)

Unification of the Tea Party and Occupy movements for a common goal - a Voters' Rights Amendment - will re-establish the United States as a democratic republic and will restore control of its government to the voters. The sort of cooperation I will suggest here is possible only to the extent that there is not more opinion-manufacturing or co-optation by political parties or private interests.

Although the corporate and wealthy elite is doing everything in its power - primarily through its mouthpiece, the mainstream media - to convince Occupiers and Tea Partiers that each is an enemy of the other, it is becoming increasingly clear that the two groups have much in common.

Not only do both groups march under the "Don't Tread on Me" flag, they both very strongly believe that corporations should not enjoy the constitutional rights of individuals, regardless of what the US Supreme Court may have ruled. Moreover, both groups believe that their government ignores their most critical concerns, including jobs, personal freedom, and the health, nutrition and well-being of their families, as their elected representatives feed at the trough slopped by the corporate and wealthy elite.

The time is ripe for an open consideration of unity between the two groups. The extensive media coverage amounting to the propaganda-style coverage and pandering of the Tea Party's far smaller demonstrations has given way to acknowledgment of the Occupy movement in the face of police brutality and that movement's staying power.

Support for the Tea Party is lagging with the nonaligned public, as it is increasingly evident that the populist movement has been and is being manipulated by Republican operatives. At the same time, the Occupiers are fighting off attempts by establishment progressives to co-opt their movement.

It is essential that both groups identify their common interests and take collective actions to unify their efforts, instead of attacking each other over other issues about which they may have an honest difference of opinion. Uniting with the increasingly large block of independent voters, Tea Partiers and Occupiers will organize a more effective defense of both of their basic principles, rather than those offered by either the Republican or Democratic party, both of which subvert the rights and interests of workers and small-business owners in favor of wealthy donors and corporate supporters.

The most basic issue that Occupiers and Tea Partiers may perhaps readily agree upon is a Voters' Rights Amendment to the Constitution that ensures that the future of the United States is decided by its voters rather than by the corporate and wealthy elite, which currently manipulates and controls the voters' representatives. The Voters' Rights Amendment provides that only natural persons are protected by the Constitution, establishes a national paid voters' holiday and calls for a national paper ballot, which includes a national policy referendum on critical policy questions and an alternative write-in vote.

The Voters' Rights Amendment to the Constitution of the United States of America

Section 1: Only natural persons shall be protected by this Constitution and entitled to the rights and freedoms it guarantees, including the freedoms of religion, speech, assembly, petition and privacy.

Section 2: Prior to the end of the calendar year preceding a presidential election, Congress shall adopt a joint resolution setting forth the 12 most critical policy questions that should be addressed by the next president and Congress. Failure of Congress to adopt a joint resolution prior to the end of the calendar year shall result in the disqualification of all sitting members of Congress to be eligible for re-election.

Section 3: Federal elections conducted every second year for senators and representatives shall be held on a national voters' holiday, with full pay for all voters who cast a ballot. Federal elections shall be conducted on uniform, hand-countable paper ballots and, for the presidential election, ballots shall include the 12 most critical policy questions identified by Congress, each to be answered yes or no by voters. Paper ballots shall provide space for voters to handwrite in their choice for all elective federal offices, if they choose, and all such votes shall be counted.

Section 4: In balancing the public benefit of maximum voter participation with the prevention of voting fraud, Congress and the states shall not impose any restriction on voting by citizens except for the most compelling reasons. The intentional suppression of voting in national elections is hereby prohibited and, in addition to any other penalty imposed by law, any person convicted of the intentional suppression of voting shall be ineligible for federal office for a period of five years.

Section 5: The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Section 6: This article shall become operative once it has been ratified as an amendment to the Constitution by conventions in the several states as provided in the Constitution, within seven years from the date of the submission hereof to the states by the Congress. [This should not be part of the amendment itself. –SteveB]

20120116-07 23:33 SteveG "U.S. Ranks 27th in Social Justice"

"U.S. Ranks 27th in Social Justice" by: Jim Hightower, Other Words Blog

Jan. 16, 2012 (<http://www.truth-out.org/us-ranks-27th-social-justice/1326737822>)

(Being at the bottom of the heap in terms of social justice confirms the reality of both economic and political inequality that the Occupy movement is protesting.)

"USA: We're No. 1!"

Oh, wait — Iceland is No. 1. But we did beat out Poland and Slovakia, right? Uh...no. But go on down the rankings and there we are! No. 27, fifth from the bottom. So our new national chant is, "USA: At Least We're Not Last!"

A foundation in Germany has analyzed the social justice records of all 31 members of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), ranking each nation in such categories as health care, income inequality, pre-school education, and child poverty. The overall performance by the United States — which boasts of being an egalitarian society — outranks only Greece, Chile, Mexico, and Turkey. Actually, three of those countries performed better than ours in the education of pre-schoolers, and Greece did better than the United States on the prevention of poverty.

Our bottom-of-the-heap ranking in social justice confirms the economic and political inequality that the Occupy movement is protesting. It also helps explain why this grassroots uprising in America has spread so rapidly to more than 600 communities and has generated such broad public support. After all, our nation is fabulously rich, ranking well ahead of nearly every other OECD member in national wealth, so there's no excuse for us sitting at the bottom of the list in education, health care, poverty, and other measures of a democratic and egalitarian society.

Bluntly put, We the People have let today's elites abandon America's founding principles of fairness, justice, and equal opportunity for all.

These privileged few have purchased our government, stolen the wealth and economic future of working families, and reduced America to a plastic imitation of the country we thought we had. The Occupy rebellion is long overdue and on target.

20120116-08 23:40 Larry 'Can We Then Add That Bit of Essence...'

I have enjoyed the entries in this post very much, and I don't know that I have much to add to it. Perhaps one way we try to understand difficult things is to categorize them, at least I do. I am sure that within each group (liberal Christians, conservative Christians etc.) there are a great number of opinions, and no one will be just like us. (Thank God.)

I found out a long time ago that it takes too much energy to hate people, so I try to be as accepting as I can be. I have known "Christians" whom I could hardly stand, and I have known people of great faith who didn't show it in any way until some spark of incredibly bright gentleness seeped from their "aura", and you knew. And when you knew, you kept it to yourself and you added that bit of essence to your own claim to a deity that you didn't even have to identify.

We all have to carry some baggage of pain from the past. We can't get away from it. If we have some gentle friends, in time maybe the burden will get a little easier to handle. Can we then add that bit of essence to the deity we don't have to identify?

Just asking.

20120116-09	23:49	SteveB	Re: 'Can We Then Add That Bit of Essence...' (reply to Larry, above)
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What a world you weave in so few short words! Thank you. I feel like I am back in the magical presence of my Zen teacher from so far and long ago. This is truly a beautiful thing you have crafted.

You speak to me of goodness as a gift and as a responsibility. When it comes from within us...well, that is a mystery, is it not? When we encounter goodness in others, we can see the power of its tiny, gentle light. But simply to see it is not enough, we need to make that spark our own.

And these sparks we gather and hold within us like the sacrament in open, gentle hands become the pathway to what cannot be known until we arrive at the end of the journey.

May I arrive at that distant destination (even if tomorrow) with just a tiny bit of the light I see in your words, my friend.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #54 — JAN. 18, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

Why Do the Candidates Lie?

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 18, 2012)

Wouldn't it be better to maintain a little credibility with the voters? Boy, Newt threw a zinger, huh? Take that, Juan!

"FACT CHECK: Distortions in Jan. 16 GOP Debate" by Calvin Woodward, AP

Jan. 17, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/fact-check-distortions-gop-debate-032506557.html>)

(WASHINGTON) Mitt Romney ignored the most significant expansion of trade ties in nearly two decades when he accused the Obama administration Monday night of doing nothing to open new markets. Rick Santorum claimed to be taking purely the high road in campaign ads even as a new one from him veered from that path.

Newt Gingrich mischaracterized the Chilean retirement system that he favors as a partial model for the United States, declaring that the system of private accounts is voluntary when it's not.

So it went in the latest Republican presidential debate as the candidates took shortcuts with complex realities and committed some outright distortions. A look at some of the claims and how they compare with the facts:

ROMNEY: "This president has opened up no new markets for American goods around the world in his three years, even as European nations and China have opened up 44."

THE FACTS: Actually, Obama revived Bush-administration-era free-trade pacts with South Korea, Panama and Columbia, all passed by Congress in October, in the biggest round of trade liberalization since the North American Free Trade Agreement and other pacts of that era.

In particular, the agreement with South Korea is designed to break down barriers between the United States and the world's 15th-largest economy. The South Korea deal has the potential to create as many as 280,000 American jobs, according to a recent assessment by the staff of the U.S. International Trade Commission, and to boost exports by more than \$12 billion.

Obama also, on a recent trip to Asia, endorsed an Asia-Pacific free-trade pact that would also boost U.S. exports to Asia. With economies weak, the benefits of freer trade may not be immediate but Romney was incorrect to say President Barack Obama has opened "no new markets."

SANTORUM: "My ads have been positive. The only ad that I've ever put up has contrasted myself with the other candidates, and does so in a way talking about issues."

THE FACTS: Santorum is coming out with an ad this week accusing Romney of being "just like Obama" and saying Romney "once bragged he's even more liberal than Ted Kennedy on social issues," two negative assertions that go beyond a mere look at issues.

As a Massachusetts senate candidate in 1994, Romney wrote to a group of gay Republicans that outlined a plan to do better than Kennedy to make "equality for gays and lesbians a mainstream concern." But that's not bragging about liberalism, and Romney is hardly more liberal than the late senator — or Obama — on social issues. Romney, for example, supports a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage.

Santorum has, in fact, stayed positive in the campaign but the new ad is a departure from that.

GINGRICH (on Chile's system of private retirement accounts): "First of all, it's totally voluntary. If you want to stay in the current system, stay in it. If you are younger and you want to go and take a personal savings account, which would be a Social Security savings account, you can take it."

THE FACTS: There is nothing voluntary about Chile's system. It requires that all workers contribute 10 percent of their salaries to private pension plans, plus other fees for insurance, instead of a government program like Social Security.

Workers had a choice when Chile created the private pensions in 1981 but after that phase-in, all new employees have been required to contribute 10 percent of their first \$33,360 in annual wages, choosing among five funds whose investments range from safe bonds to riskier stocks.

The Chile model was also a favorite of Herman Cain when he was in the Republican race. He, too, mischaracterized the system as optional.

ROMNEY: "We invested in well over 100 different businesses. And the people have looked at the places that have added jobs and lost jobs and that record is pretty much available for people to take a close look at."

THE FACTS: Romney's record as a venture capitalist at Bain Capital has been presented by his campaign highly selectively; namely, by detailing several big success stories and ignoring the job losses that resulted from Bain-owned plants and companies that closed or shrank their workforce.

His overall record is not even close to being known, because it is so complex. Many of the companies are private, without the public disclosure requirements that big corporations have, and his campaign has not released details.

Under scrutiny, Romney has stepped back from claiming that he created more than 100,000 jobs overall with his Bain investments. That claim was never substantiated. In the debate, he named four successful investments in companies that now — a decade after he left Bain — employ about 120,000 people, a more measured and accurate statement, but one that still does not account for losses elsewhere.

RON PAUL: "Taliban are people who want — their main goal is to keep foreigners off their land. It's the al-Qaida — you can't mix the two. The al-Qaida want to come here to kill us. The Taliban just says we don't want foreigners. We need to understand that or we can't resolve this problem in the Middle East."

THE FACTS: What Paul is missing is that the Taliban harbored foreigners in their land — al-Qaida terrorists who came to the United States and killed Americans— and that the Obama administration fears that might happen again if the Taliban regain control in Kabul.

He was correct that the U.S. prior to the 2001 terrorist attacks did not consider the Taliban to be a threat to the U.S. homeland.

ROMNEY: "Three years into office, he doesn't have a jobs plan."

FACT CHECK: Like them or not, Obama has proposed several plans intended to spur the economy and create jobs. The most well-known was his stimulus plan, introduced in February 2009, which included about \$800 billion in tax cuts and spending.

At the end of 2010, Obama struck a deal with GOP congressional leaders on a package intended to stimulate hiring and growth. The deal cut the Social Security payroll tax, which provided about an extra \$1,000 a year to an average family. It also extended an unemployment benefits program that provided up to 99 weeks of aid.

And in September, Obama introduced his most recent jobs plan, rolling it out in a speech to the full Congress in which he urged Congress to "pass it right away." It included \$450 billion in tax cuts and new spending, including greater cuts to payroll taxes and tax breaks for companies that hire those who've been out of work for six months or more. Almost none of it has been passed into law.

GINGRICH: Romney "raised taxes." vs. **ROMNEY:** "We reduced taxes 19 times."

THE FACTS: Both assertions were basically true, though decidedly one-sided.

Romney largely held the line on tax increases but there were notable exceptions. The state raised business taxes by \$140 million in one year with measures mostly recommended by Romney. As well, the Republican governor and Democratic lawmakers raised hundreds of millions of dollars from higher fees and fines — taxation by another name. Romney himself proposed raising nearly \$60 million by creating 33 new fees and increasing 57 others. Romney won praise from anti-tax advocates by firmly backing income tax cuts — and criticism over the business taxes and fees.

GINGRICH: "More people have been put on food stamps by Barack Obama than any President in American history."

THE FACTS: It's gotten easier to qualify for food stamps in the past decade but that is because of measures taken before Obama became president.

It's true that the number of people on food stamps is now at a record level. That's due mainly to the ailing economy, which Republicans blame on Obama, as well as rising food costs. The worst downturn since the Great Depression wiped out 8.7 million jobs, pushed the unemployment rate to a peak of 10 percent in October 2009 and increased poverty. More than 46.2 million people were on food stamps in October 2011, down slightly from a record 46.3 million in September. That's up from fewer than 31 million people three years earlier. Eligibility rules were relaxed in 2002 and 2008 during the Bush administration. Obama's stimulus package, passed in February 2009, relaxed the program's work requirements through September 2010.

(Associated Press writers Christopher S. Rugaber, Tom Raum, Steve Peoples, Robert Burns and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.)

20120117-01	13:54	Pam	Business Taxes
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I have a couple of questions. Remember, I am totally uneducated re. economics. I just go with my gut. What is an S company? Somewhere in this discussion someone has said that a corporation owes taxes, whether it makes a profit or not? How can that be? Isn't it precisely the profits that are taxed? Would that mean that "if corporations are people" and they lose money, the gov't. would owe THEM money? Like the earned income credit? Does the tax code really need to be so complex?

An S corporation is formed under Subchapter S of the IRS Code. The number of shareholders used to be limited to forty-five; it's some number larger than that now. The principal distinction of the S corporation is that it is not liable for income taxes. Instead, any earnings of the S corporation inure to the shareholders. The S corporation is, in other words, a conduit. S corporations are very common and typically used by smaller or start-up enterprises. (In contrast, the earnings of a C corporation are taxed at the corporate level. (So, if you're a shareholder of a C corporation, any dividends you receive from the C corporation will already have been taxed. You will, however, have to pay taxes again on those dividends that you may receive from the C corporation. This is the double taxation that irritates many shareholders.)

In the case of a C corporation, it is wholly possible that, because of certain preferences granted by the Code, you would have an income tax liability, despite having no or minimal earnings. The typical situation arises from what is known as "accelerated depreciation." This operates to allow the corporation to deduct as an expense a disproportionate amount of the cost of a capital asset, e. g. a production machine, a copier, a building and its fixtures. The result is creation of a timing difference that results in deferral of income taxes to later periods. This scenario of deferred taxes coming due is common in periods of economic distress, when the corporation has slowed or stopped its expenditures for capital assets.

That's the income-tax situation. Separately, however, a business is typically subject to many other taxes, e. g. employment taxes, property taxes, business-privilege taxes, and others. Again, in the case of slim or non-existent earnings or losses, these taxes will still be due to the taxing authority. The result of this scenario and the one above is that the C corporation must pay its tax obligations from its own, i. e. its shareholders', capital. In the separate case of an S corporation, when losses occur at the corporate level, those losses are then distributed among the shareholders, who may or may not be able to use them to offset their individual income.

This isn't an easy area, I realize, and, in answer to your question whether the Code needs to be so complex, I can only answer that corporations and individual interests lobby frenetically in Congress and in legislatures to get the preferences (e. g. the accelerated depreciation mentioned above) that may enhance their earnings. The Code and its regulations are absolutely massive, and the courts, both federal and state, generate still more interpretation of the Code and the state tax laws. Yes, it's very complex, and my heart lies with those who want to simplify this monstrous thing, but overhauling the Code means confronting myriad financial interests whose clout may be significant.

The earned income credit lies in the area of individual taxation and is intended to help those who are working but don't earn much. We definitely don't want that for corporations.

Well, this clear everything up. :-) Really, it's all so complicated I don't know how anyone makes heads or tails of it. It always amazes me that members of the same species as me can have so much knowledge in their heads, like economics, brain surgery, or astrophysics. I wonder if back in prehistoric times there was as much diversity of intelligence as there is today. I know intelligence and knowledge aren't the same thing, but when it comes to rocket science, it is.

As I was on my way to pick up my grandson from pre-school today, I heard part of a program on NPR about whether democracy/capitalism just needs to be tweaked or whether the whole thing needs to be rethought completely. I didn't get to hear the whole discussion, but what I heard was very interesting. The guy who believes things are worse than we think believes we need a complete overhaul. Things have gotten so screwed up that untangling the mess seems nigh onto impossible. Our government is paralyzed, and our economy is cracking badly. I learned that one third (1/3) of Americans are either below or just barely above the poverty line. That is horrifying. The experts say you have to go where the work is--like to North Dakota or the back of beyond, where the oil industry toils away. But what's happening there is an influx of workers who can't find housing, strain the infrastructure, and create a crime wave. Steve G., didn't you say there was a lot of crime out where you live?

I tend to agree with the fellow who predicts significant change. I guess in order to be happy in these parlous times, you have to assume that things will get better in the long run and think short-term when it comes to your own life. I have a young friend who has a year-old baby. She is working on a dissertation for her PhD, is married to a much older man who doesn't really have much of a job (former ballet dancer, a neat guy), and just got a gig teaching one class a week. That's a ton of stuff on the shoulders of one young woman, but I keep telling her not to worry. Things will be OK. I remember being her age and feeling overwhelmed. I also remember that as an incredibly happy time in my life. I don't know why I'm saying all this to you all. I think I'm really talking to myself.

[20120117-07](#) 16:36 Bill Re: Business Taxes (reply to Pam, above)

Thanks for your humanity and your empathy for the young woman with the baby. They contrast so admirably with the IRS Code. Glad everything is now perfectly clear about corporate earnings.

It so often seems to me that, of the many forces, both good and ill, that affect and afflict us, the information age and growing density of electronically proliferated fact and fiction all around us cause as much angst and dislocation as anything. I think I began feeling this way several years ago while sitting in interminable meetings with most attendees constantly reading Blackberry screens and punching in messages. Time for contemplation has largely evaporated. I'm willing, however, to concede it's just the weight of, oh my, age.

[20120117-03](#) 15:44 SteveB "The Romney Tax Loophole" & "Free Enterprise on Trial"

from Robert Reich's Blog (<http://robertreich.org/>):

"The Romney Tax Loophole" (Jan. 17, 2012)

After refusing for weeks to release his taxes, Mitt Romney now says he'll do so — by tax day, April 15. But the real news is what Romney has now admitted about his taxes.

It's not how much Romney earns. Everyone knows he's comfortably in the top one-tenth of one percent.

It's how much he pays of it in taxes. Romney says he pays a tax rate of "about 15 percent."

That's lower than the tax rate most of America's middle class face and far lower than the 35 percent top rate after the Bush tax cut. (To put this in perspective, recall that the top income tax rate under Dwight Eisenhower was 91 percent.)

Newt Gingrich immediately pounced on Mitt's admission as evidence that Newt's proposed flat 15 percent tax is ideal, and wants to call it the "Romney tax." Newt's flat tax is a fraud. It would dramatically lower the taxes of most of the top 1 percenters and increase the taxes of most of the rest of us.

The real smoking gun is how Romney manages to pay only 15 percent on what's been his money-gusher of compensation from Bain Capital. Romney hasn't released his tax returns yet, but the most obvious answer is he treats his Bain income as capital gains — subject to the current capital gains rate of only 15 percent.

A loophole in the tax laws allows private-equity managers like Romney to treat their compensation as capital gains. It's legal but it's a scandal. Income from employment is employment income, period.

Private-equity managers cling to the technicality that the money they take out of their companies comes from the appreciation of assets they own and sell. That may be true, but it's still income they get from their jobs. Common sense would dictate it be treated as ordinary income.

Congress has vowed for years to close this loophole. But somehow it persists. Even when Democrats have been in charge, they haven't been able to close it.

Guess why. The managers and executives of private-equity funds are big donors to Republicans and Democrats alike.

Don't call it the Romney tax, as Newt wants to do. Call it the Romney tax loophole. And let him explain why he thinks it's justified.

"Free Enterprise on Trial" (Jan. 16, 2012)

Mitt Romney is casting the 2012 campaign as "free enterprise on trial" – defining free enterprise as achieving success through "hard work and risk-taking." Tea-Party favorite Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina says he's supporting Romney because "we really need someone who understands how risk, taking risk ... is the way we create jobs, create choices, expand freedom." Chamber of Commerce President Tom Donahue, defending Romney, explains "this economy is about risk. If you don't take risk, you can't have success."

Wait a minute. Who do they think are bearing the risks? Their blather about free enterprise risk-taking has it upside down. The higher you go in the economy, the easier it is to make money without taking any personal financial risk at all. The lower you go, the bigger the risks.

Wall Street has become the center of riskless free enterprise. Bankers risk other peoples' money. If deals turn bad, they collect their fees in any event. The entire hedge-fund industry is designed to hedge bets so big investors can make money whether the price of assets they bet on rises or falls. And if the worst happens, the biggest bankers and investors now know they'll be bailed out by taxpayers because they're too big to fail.

But the worst examples of riskless free enterprise are the CEOs who rake in millions after they screw up royally.

Near the end of 2007, Charles Prince resigned as CEO of Citigroup after announcing the bank would need an additional \$8 billion to \$11 billion in write-downs related to sub-prime mortgages gone bad. Prince left with a princely \$30 million in pension, stock awards, and stock options, along with an office, car, and a driver for five years.

Stanley O'Neal's five-year tenure as CEO of Merrill Lynch ended about the same time, when it became clear Merrill would have to take tens of billions in write-downs on bad sub-prime mortgages and be bought up at a fire-sale price by Bank of America. O'Neal got a payout worth \$162 million.

Philip Purcell, who left Morgan Stanley in 2005 after a shareholder revolt against him, took away \$43.9 million plus \$250,000 a year for life.

Pay-for-failure extends far beyond Wall Street. In a study released last week, GMI, a well-regarded research firm that monitors executive pay, analyzed the largest severance packages received by ex-CEOs since 2000.

On the list: Thomas E. Freston, who lasted just nine months as CEO of Viacom before being terminated, and left with a walk-away package of \$101 million.

Also William D. McGuire, who in 2006 was forced to resign as CEO of UnitedHealth over a stock-options scandal, and for his troubles got pay package worth \$286 million.

And Hank A. McKinnell, Jr.'s, whose five-year tenure as CEO of Pfizer was marked by a \$140 billion drop in Pfizer's stock market value. Notwithstanding, McKinnell walked away with a payout of nearly \$200 million, free lifetime medical coverage, and an annual pension of \$6.5 million. (At Pfizer's 2006 annual meeting a plane flew overhead towing a banner reading "Give it back, Hank!")

Not to forget Douglas Ivester of Coca Cola, who stepped down as CEO in 2000 after a period of stagnant growth and declining earnings, with an exit package worth \$120 million.

If anything, pay for failure is on the rise. Last September, Leo Apotheker was shown the door at Hewlett-Packard, with an exit package worth \$13 million. Stephen Hilbert left Consecro with an estimated \$72 million even though value of Consecro's stock during his tenure sank from \$57 to \$5 a share on its way to bankruptcy.

But as economic risk-taking has declined at the top, it's been increasing at the middle and below. More than 20 percent of the American workforce is now "contingent" – temporary workers, contractors, independent consultants – with no security at all.

Even full-time workers who have put in decades with a company can now find themselves without a job overnight – with no parachute, no help finding another job, and no health insurance.

Meanwhile the proportion of large and medium-sized companies (200 or more workers) offering full health care coverage continues to drop – from 74 percent in 1980 to under 10 percent today. Twenty-five years ago, two-thirds of large and medium-sized employers also provided health insurance to their retirees. Now, fewer than 15 percent do.

The risk of getting old with no pension is also rising. In 1980, more than 80 percent of large and medium-sized firms gave their workers "defined-benefit" pensions that guaranteed a fixed amount of money every month after they retired. Now it's down to under 10 percent. Instead, they offer "defined contribution" plans where the risk is on the workers. When the stock market tanks, as it did in 2008, the 401(k) plan tanks along with it. Today, a third of all workers with defined-benefit plans contribute nothing, which means their employers don't either.

And the risk of losing earnings continues to grow. Even before the crash of 2008, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics at University of Michigan found that over any given two-year stretch about half of all families experienced some decline in income. And the downturns were becoming progressively larger. In the 1970s, the typical drop was about 25 percent. By late 1990s, it was 40 percent. By the mid-2000s, family incomes rose and fell twice as much as they did in the mid-1970s, on average.

What Romney and the cheerleaders of risk-taking free enterprise don't want you to know is the risks of the economy have been shifting steadily away from CEOs and Wall Street – and on to average working people. It's not just income and wealth that are surging to the top. Economic security is moving there as well, leaving the rest of us stranded.

To the extent free enterprise is on trial, the real question is whether the system is rigged in favor of those at the top who get rewarded no matter how badly they screw up, while the rest of us get screwed no matter how hard we work.

The jury will report back Election Day. In the meantime, Obama and the Democrats shouldn't allow Romney and the Republicans to act as defenders of risk-taking free enterprise. Americans need to know the truth. The only way the economy can thrive is if we have more risk-taking at the top, and more economic security below.

[20120117-05](#)

15:49

Pam

Re: "A Voters' Rights Amendment as a Focus for Dissent" (reply to Dennis, FotM Newsletter # 53)

These are both interesting, as are the discussions that follow. Are we really on the verge of corporate fascism? What do you think?

[I think we're way farther than "on the verge". –SteveB]

[20120117-06](#)

16:12

SteveG

Jails, Jobs & the Cost of Living

Sometimes I think we manufacture crimes by pushing for new laws through lobbying so that for profit companies can get into the jail business. Yakima has a huge jail (population 71,000 for the city & 220,000 or so for the metropolitan area), but the jail lost a contract and had to lay off 70 employees. That is a "city" jail, supposedly

non-profit. The police chief makes over \$110,000 a year, not certain what the sheriff makes. At least here there is big money in government - smaller town Selah – the police chief and another position put forth local legislation that if they got fired they would get a \$500,000 (each) severance package – it didn't pass.

You do have to be mobile to be employed this day and age, but the laws are so different from state to state in regards to medical coverage, legalization of gay marriages, car seats for children, taxes, etc. It is difficult to understand the ramifications of moving until you do. Originally we left Indiana for Florida. It cost \$96 for license plates in Indiana and it was going to cost over \$400 for plates in Florida. They cost \$80 in Washington. Car insurance was a lot higher in Florida than in Indiana. Washington is the lowest of the 3. Cost of living is cheapest in Indiana. So to find a job in North Dakota may not be better than a lower paying job in another state.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #55 — JAN. 19, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 19, 2012)



The candidates say: WE MUST RID AMERICA OF THE EVIL TWINS: SOCIALISM AND FINANCIAL REGULATION!!!!!!

That's the answer to our problems! The 1800's!

Here are your Republican Presidential candidates, folks, busy proposing the solutions that caused our problems in the first place. This is from the article (below), re: Saturday's South Carolina Primary.

As has been the case from Iowa to New Hampshire and now here, the candidates jockeyed to proclaim themselves more pro-free enterprise than the next, with each implicitly portraying

the nation's enduring hard economic times as an outgrowth of the Obama administration's supposed embrace of socialism, through means such as attempting to regulate the financial system.

"Dodd-Frank does need to be gone," declared Rick Perry, the Texas governor, referring to the new law aimed at preventing a replay of the 2008 financial crisis. "I would get rid of a large number of those financial regulations." Romney and Gingrich have said much the same.

See? I told you. [The whole ball of wax in a nutshell!](#) (Now, how in the world did that get in there?)

"In South Carolina, Candidates and Citizens Occupy Separate Realms" by Peter S. Goodman, Huffington Post

Jan. 18, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/18/south-carolina-candidates-citizens_n_1214275.html?ref=elections-2012)

(COLUMBIA, SC) Inside a cavernous ballroom at a downtown hotel, Newt Gingrich stands beneath crystal chandeliers, addressing a crowd of several hundred local businesspeople -- most of them men in dark suits and ties, and many looking not unlike Newt Gingrich.

The former House speaker long ago mastered the art of tapping into revulsion for what he and fellow conservatives portray as the American welfare state. At this candidate forum sponsored by the South Carolina Chamber of Commerce on Tuesday afternoon, he goes right to the well, assailing people who have been collecting unemployment benefits for many months. In a Gingrich administration, he promises, they would be forced to enroll in job training or forfeit their checks.

"We never again pay anybody for 99 weeks of doing nothing," Gingrich says, provoking cheers. "It is profoundly wrong to pay people for doing nothing."

Six blocks away, in the hulking rectangle that is the city's central unemployment office, another gathering is under way. Hundreds of jobless people are jammed into a waiting room to arrange the continuation of their weekly benefits check. Downstairs, dozens wait for a free computer to peruse job listings.

From inside this stultifying space, the campaign in this electorally crucial Southern state might just as well be happening on some other planet. Many of the people massed here dismiss the candidates as something like characters on an irritating reality television show seen only while flipping channels. They are occupied with the daily struggle to pay bills minus a paycheck. But ask people about Gingrich's rhetoric and that of other candidates who voice similar positions, and many vent disgust at intimations that their joblessness amounts to a chosen lifestyle financed by the taxpayer. As if they have chosen to be without work for months and years at a time.

"Are we here just 'cause we like coming here?" says Stephen Ballard, who lost his job installing air conditioners in December, surrendering a roughly \$500-a-week paycheck for a \$179-a-week unemployment check. "If you think there's jobs down here, come down and show us."

In the run-up to Saturday's state Republican presidential primary, a vast disconnect separates the narrative of the stump from the struggles consuming millions of households. Two conversations seem to occupy two discrete spaces, a divide that is emblematic of many cleavages in American life, from the income inequality capturing headlines to the gap between black and white unemployment.

Ballard, who is white, sees this disconnect as reflective of the basic difference in life perspective separating would-be leaders from ordinary people. He has spent his adult years engaged in physical labor -- driving forklifts, loading boxes, tending lawns and installing air-conditioning ducts. The people vying to be president have spent theirs inside the corridors of power and elite corporate offices, occupying the sorts of comfortable homes and hotel suites that power and wealth convey.

"When's the last time you heard of a poor broke politician getting into office?" he asks, as he leans against the doorway of an unemployment office that is emblazoned with a sticker declaring, SC WORKS COLUMBIA: BRINGING EMPLOYERS AND JOB SEEKERS TOGETHER. Only half of that promise has been delivered.

"The rich stay with the rich," he says. "They don't socialize with people outside their circle."

The candidates cannot hear such critiques. They are perpetually elsewhere -- at yacht clubs on the coast and at town halls down the freeway, on the steps of the state Capitol less than a mile away, and in ballrooms like the one inside the downtown Marriott, where Gingrich describes the long-term unemployed as people who have lost the will to work.

A LIFETIME OF WORK

On this day, Ballard is dressed as if prepared for the work to which he is accustomed -- in leather lace-up boots scuffed at the toes, faded blue jeans, a gray sweatshirt and a blue baseball cap pulled over his balding head. But after four decades of steady work, he has seen his days yield to an all-consuming struggle to locate the next job.

He first tasted joblessness in late 2008, when South Carolina's unemployment rate spiked above 9 percent, on the way to reaching nearly 12 percent the following year. For more than two years, he looked for another job, before his old employer hired him back last February -- albeit with a \$2-an-hour slash in pay. When the business took another bad turn late last year, he again was cut loose.

He is still physically strong, he says, and still eager to earn a living. His last job paid \$13 an hour, yet he has not hesitated to put his name in for janitorial and warehouse jobs that pay less than \$8 an hour. Rejection has landed atop rejection, each cementing the realization that he is a 58-year-old man in a time when that fact alone seems to blot out all others.

"A lot of companies," he says, "if you're more than 40 years old, they ain't going to touch you."

He lives in a modest, rural home with his wife, who has a disability, and his 19-year-old daughter, who is taking cosmetology classes. His rent is \$400 a month, a sum he once afforded easily. Back when the economy was expanding and construction was buzzing, he remembers, he was bringing home as much as \$1,400 every two weeks.

"Every Friday, I'd take my wife and my father-in-law out to a steak place," he says. "I had money up the yin yang. I'd give my wife \$100, my daughter \$100, and tell them to do whatever they liked with it."

But since unemployment entered his life, he has six times seen his check cut off, he says, while Congress fought with the White House over the terms of extending emergency benefits. More than once, he has had to ask for his landlord's good graces after falling into arrears. In the spring of 2010, he got so deep into delinquency on his electric bill that the power was shut off. ("We grilled outside," he says. "Same as after Hurricane Hugo.")

The telephone company cut off his service for lack of payment, and he cannot afford Internet access at home, which constrains his job search. He puts gas in his truck and drives to a local library to scan job listings. He goes to a branch of Staples -- the office supply chain propelled by Mitt Romney's private equity firm, Bain Capital -- where he makes mass copies of his resume and then walks from shop to shop dropping them off.

"I've got \$40 in my pocket, and I've got to give twenty to my daughter for gas," he says. "I don't know how I'm going to pay next month's rent. It kind of kills your self-worth, to be honest with you. You're just sitting around wondering, 'Damn, can I pay the bills?'"

He turns on the news and catches glimpses of the presidential candidates hopscotching around South Carolina. They seem to be talking from the same script -- promising that cutting taxes and stripping away government regulations will spur private industry to expand and that this will produce large numbers of jobs.

"They can get up there and promise everything in the world," he says. "Make the economy better? I don't know how. Do they know how? I don't know what's going to turn this country around."

'CAN'T THINK ABOUT THE FUTURE'

A night earlier, the candidates commanded a stage at a convention center in Myrtle Beach -- five white guys wearing suits, pressed white shirts and generic ties. They sparred over the issues that have become familiar to anyone following the campaign. Will the front-runner, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, release his tax returns? Has he been using a political action committee to smear Gingrich? Is Bain, his private equity firm, a job-killing machine? Is Romney sufficiently conservative, particularly on social issues such as abortion?

As has been the case from Iowa to New Hampshire and now here, the candidates jockeyed to proclaim themselves more pro-free enterprise than the next, with each implicitly portraying the nation's enduring hard economic times as an outgrowth of the Obama administration's supposed embrace of socialism, through means such as attempting to regulate the financial system.

"Dodd-Frank does need to be gone," declared Rick Perry, the Texas governor, referring to the new law aimed at preventing a replay of the 2008 financial crisis. "I would get rid of a large number of those financial regulations." Romney and Gingrich have said much the same.

Among the sorts of voters likely to turn out on Saturday, this sort of talk is red meat.

"This is a market fundamentalist state," says Doug Woodward, an economist at the University of South Carolina's Moore School Business. "They have a deep-seated fear of government intervention in the economy."

Diane Paynter has been following the campaign as if taking in events in another country, the candidates speaking in a language she only partially understands. Her own reality is consumed by issues largely absent from the political conversation: the problems of young people in a community beset by intergenerational poverty.

Paynter works for a nonprofit that runs programs for at-risk middle school students in one of the poorest ZIP codes in the state. She pours her heart into her work, she says, yet she is cognizant that she is straining against forces larger than any one program can ever address -- a long-term crisis of unemployment and its attendant problems, from substance abuse to violence. It is a difficult place for young people to grapple with adolescence.

"They are headed down the gangway and not doing well in school," she says. "It's a place where, if you do well in school, it's perceived as a weakness."

Paynter is white, while some 90 percent of the students at her school are African-American. More than 90 percent receive free or reduced-price school lunches, an indication of the poverty that grips their households, many of them headed by single parents who work two jobs to pay the bills.

At the debate on Monday night and again in appearances throughout Columbia on Tuesday, Gingrich captured headlines by noting that Obama has presided over the greatest expansion of food stamps in history, a statistical truth that presented by itself implies something that is at best debatable -- that the current generation of aid recipients proves a failure of the administration's economic policies. The expansion of food stamps began during George W. Bush's administration, the result of the Great Recession that unfolded on his watch.

Gingrich has seized on this expansion as evidence that Obama's vision is supposedly one of national dependence on the dole in place of work, telling the Chamber of Commerce crowd that he will "run a campaign of paychecks versus food stamps."

Paynter's eyes roll as she reflects on this kind of talk.

"Even with food stamps, there's hunger out there," she says. "You can't feed a kid healthy food based on what these people can spend on groceries. You can't afford food and vegetables. It's very expensive to eat well. And lots of people who are working still need food stamps because they don't earn enough."

From Paynter's perspective, the candidates are pandering to interest groups that revel in depicting poverty as moral failure. But they are also reflecting their remove from the sorts of people she encounters daily.

"I don't know that there's any incentive for the candidates to connect with the real world," she says. "I doubt they even know anybody who has been unemployed or the scariness of knowing your check's going to run out and not knowing what you're going to do."

Paynter and her husband, Greg, have spent the last decade constantly vulnerable to that fear. A computer programmer, Greg lost his \$75,000-a-year job in 2001 when his company landed in bankruptcy. In the years since, he has bounced from one contract position to the next, most lasting no more than six months, while she has worked for nonprofits earning from \$30,000 to \$40,000 a year.

Joblessness has been more frequent than employment in the Paynter household. Diane and Greg have run through their savings, once about \$70,000. They have slipped into delinquency on the mortgage on their four-bedroom suburban house.

In the spring of 2010, they resigned themselves to finally losing their home, as Greg's unemployment benefits were about to expire. But at the last minute, he secured a contract job that ran the rest of the year, though it was a four hours' drive away in Georgia.

She is aware, as she tells this story, that she amounts to a relatively fortunate person in these times, and in Columbia, a city of 129,000 people, where more than 1 in 5 are officially poor, according to the U.S. Census.

But how many more potential disasters will arrive, and how much more staving off can they manage? These are the questions that gnaw at her as she tries not to ponder the decades ahead. These are the questions she wishes the politicians would address.

"I can't think about the future," she says. "People ask me what my retirement plan is, and I say, 'I'm just going to have to die young.'"

UP MAIN STREET

Rick Santorum, the former senator from Pennsylvania, is the last to speak inside the Marriott. He, too, casts himself as a champion of American-style capitalism, even as he argues for policies that encourage a return of manufacturing jobs -- a talking point that distinguishes him from the field.

"There will be income inequality, and there should be," he says. "That's what America is about." He casts inequality as the inevitable outgrowth of a system in which people are free to strive for success. Some will find it, while others fail.

The crowd filters out into the mild South Carolina evening, landing on Main Street, a brick-paved corridor dotted by palmetto trees and flower baskets, and lined with al fresco dining establishments along with boutiques and cappuccino bars.

Less than a mile to the north, the stretch of Main Street that flows into North Main is a desolate strip through a high-crime, low-income community, one dominated by businesses relinquished to failure. What was once Cashion Electricians lies abandoned.

The former Kirby Croft Blooming Plants sits empty, its sign and tattered awning the only evidence of its former existence. The fading letters painted on the side of a vacant building, spelling out "Wilson's Upholstery, Since 1956" are like a half-written tombstone, leaving no clue as to when the business disappeared.

But tucked into the back of one of the few remaining businesses, an Allstate insurance office, a new enterprise has recently set up: Sweet Temptations Bakery.

For 15 years, the bakery's owner, Vessell Wilson, 52, ran the business out of his Columbia home with his wife Rosa and daughter, reaping revenues from their luscious sour cream butter cream cake, among other confections. For years, they sought to expand, but they could not persuade a bank to lend them the money needed to establish a commercial kitchen, Wilson says.

"We had to turn down a lot of orders because of limited space," Wilson says. "The banks, they don't want to help you. If you don't have money, they don't want to give you money."

Eight months ago, they availed themselves of an offer from the landlord to set up here, enabling a modest expansion that created two new jobs.

Warm and easygoing, Wilson is happy to be here, a conspicuous island of success in a sea of lost causes. He is grateful to so far be weathering an historic economic downturn. Yet he still thinks of what might have been.

"If we could have gotten the loan, we could have done more," Wilson says. "We would have hired 10 people."

The Republican candidates have not visited this far up Main Street, he says, and this is hardly surprising: Wilson's business sits in a predominantly African-American neighborhood that votes overwhelmingly Democratic. Still, Wilson, who is black, is struck by the exclusion of his issues from a campaign that is supposed to be about the economy.

He is a successful entrepreneur in a city in which nearly 1 of every 5 businesses is black-owned, according to the U.S. Census. No one seems to be talking about credit availability, the lifeblood of free enterprise.

"I guess small business ain't quite as important as people talking about abortion and what not," Wilson says. "But small business is what makes this country what it is."

You step onto Main Street from the bakery and you look south, and there is the Bank of America building -- a triangular-topped tower that anchors downtown. There is the Capitol dome, the backdrop for many campaign events and the center of the thriving part of Main Street.

It all seems so far away.

[20120118-01](#) 15:17 Pam Re: The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)

..."more risk-taking at the top, and more economic security below." —Robert Reich

This nails it. I really hate the way the candidates talk about "class warfare" and "envy", as if there was something wrong with pointing out the gross unfairness of our wealth distribution. Reich is right to ask just who is risking what. I hope the American voter has enough sense to see that it's Congress, not the President, who is mostly responsible for many of our troubles. Why has Bush faded so quickly? Isn't it interesting that Republicans constantly hark back to Reagan and never mention Bush? I wish the Democrats would do more to point out just what the Bush administration did to get us where we are. Maybe once Obama begins actively campaigning there will be more of that.

Did you see the news about the young Iranian woman who was shot in Houston? I find this very ominous. It makes me nervous to listen to Romney talk about building up the military and I fear another war with Iran. I assume there is a lot going on behind the scenes to contain the Iranian threat. It's too bad the Arab spring can't burgeon there. If we find WMD in Iran, will we attack them?

[20120118-02](#) 17:15 SteveG Fw: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back *Citizens United!*

from Common Cause:

Robert Reich, the chairman of our board and former Secretary of Labor, is fond of saying that the Citizens United decision created a perfect storm of money, politics and secrecy that threatens our very democracy.

He's right about the problem -- and in a new video out just today, he makes the case for how "we, the people" should respond: by demanding a constitutional amendment.

Watch now and take action at Amend2012.org!

<http://www.amend2012.org/site/c.8qKOJXMvFaLUG/b.7939705/k.7B55/Amend2012org.htm?sid=211272770&aid=10155956>

This week marks the second anniversary of the reckless Citizens United decision that overturned decades of law and granted corporations the same rights as people when it comes to political spending.

[But even real people should not be able to donate large sums of money to campaigns. Period. –SteveB]

Today it's clear that the wealthy corporations and billionaires that destroyed our economy and caused millions of us to lose our jobs and homes have now set their sights on a hostile takeover of our elections and our government. They are spending millions of dollars to elect and defeat candidates, and all that secret money could drown out the voices of voters like you and me.

We can't allow that to happen.

That's why Common Cause is launching the Amend2012 campaign. We're embarking on a 50-state drive to give voters a voice to push back on corporate political spending, and build toward national referenda calling on Congress to pass a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United.

Please take a moment to watch the new video, and then join Robert Reich in signing the petition at Amend2012.org.

Thanks for all you do, Bob Edgar and the rest of the team at Common Cause

P.S. This is a people-powered campaign, and we need your help to spread the word. Please forward this message to 3 or more people (real people, not incorporated or limited liability "people") and ask them to sign the Amend2012 petition.

And if you want to read more about our campaign, check out this piece on Huffington Post: "Hate Citizens United? Common Cause Has A Way To Say So In 2012":

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/17/citizens-united-common-cause_n_1210987.html?ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false

20120118-03	17:35	Pam	Re: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back <i>Citizens United!</i> (reply to SteveG, above)
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This is great. Thanks, Steve. I'll do what I can to get the word out. This is something important and REAL that we can all get behind.

20120118-04	19:30	Dennis	"Blackout Wednesday: The Time Has Come"
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"Blackout Wednesday: The Time Has Come" by Jeffrey Tucker, The Daily Reckoning

Jan. 18, 2012, (<http://dailyreckoning.com/blackout-wednesday-the-time-has-come/>)

Wikipedia, that ever-evolving monument to human collaboration in the cause of global enlightenment, goes completely black today, Wednesday, Jan. 18. The blackout is a choice, and a brilliant one, made by founder Jimmy Wales in consultation with the whole Wikipedia community. It is a protest, a statement, a symbolic warning to the world of what can happen if governments attack the free flow of information.

The online protest is directed, in particular, against two bills roiling around Congress right now, called SOPA in the House and PIPA in the Senate. Early versions have been tabled. The Obama administration has said that it opposes the current versions, but the opposition was weak and suspiciously nuanced.

People who are digitally aware and politically savvy know that this is only round one. The attempt by governments to block information flows on the Web will continue in new and different bills and regulations. No new laws are even necessary; government possesses the power now to crush the information age on a bureaucratic whim.

In fact, this goes on every day. That's because governments everywhere, in all times and places, want to control information and will use all their power to do it. It is also because the legal framework that rules how information is produced and distributed is fundamentally corrupted by the fraudulent notion of "intellectual property," which, if consistently enforced, would put an end to the Internet as we know it..

1. Just this past week, a judge ruled that a 23-year-old British college student can be extradited to the US for a 10-year prison sentence, all for linking to other servers that illicitly host copyrighted content.
2. Late last year, US officials shut down 150 domains without hearings or trials on grounds that they were suspected of selling goods that violate trademark law. It was done on "Cyber Monday" for a reason: It was an announcement to the digital world that government is in charge.
3. In the spring of last year, the FBI arbitrarily shut down every online poker domain they could find and seized the bank accounts of some of the largest and smartest people who play online poker — and all of this happened before the recent announcement that online poker is being re-legalized.
4. Earlier in the year, the Department of Homeland Security seized 84,000 domains and put up an announcement that each was trafficking in child porn. Problem: It was all a mistake. Not one was actually guilty. To date, there has been no explanation of how this could have happened.
5. In 2010, the feds seized some 73,000 domains for the crime of linking to content that was said to be distributed illegally in violation of copyright.

Already, the damage of this sort of thing is enormous. Ten years ago, the Internet represented liberation, a new frontier of innovation, commerce, opinion sharing and spontaneous organizing. Today, more and more people are consumed by fear. Bloggers are unclear about what existing law does or does not allow. No one knows for sure how to define "fair use." The deepest pockets are winning case after case. Faced with this uncertainty, many are choosing less over more content — which is exactly what the government and private monopolists want.

The Wikipedia protest is a way of saying: If this kind of thing continues and ends up institutionalized in new legislation, there will be no more Wikipedia, which is the No. 1 content-rich site on the Web and the main way people learn today (how far we've come from the debunking that was common only five years ago).

And this is just one example. Individual blogs would only contain government-approved content. Search engines would only produce only government-approved sites. Digital entrepreneurship would be suffocated by fears of threats, confiscations and jails. It is hard to see how even Facebook and Twitter could survive.

It is just marvelous that Wikipedia has taken this bold direction, and it is only possible because of the unique nature of the media in question. Many large businesses during the 1930s tried their best to protest New Deal price controls. But they could hardly shut down their giant stores. The revenue loss would have been devastating, and the victims would have been the employees. So in the end, the private sector was forced to submit to the controls. It was the same in the 1970s with wage and price controls. How could the merchants resist?

But digital enterprises are in a different position entirely. They can vanish with a few clicks, giving the world a conjectural look at what happens when the state attacks the lifeblood of innovation and progress. Small changes in the law can have a gigantic effect. Just as one click can shut down this site, one law can do the same.

It is not only Wikipedia. Others are doing the same. WordPress, the open-source platform that powers nearly a quarter of new websites and has the most-popular content management system on the Web, has also stepped out in front with a call for action: "Normally, we stay away from... politics here at the official WordPress project... Today, I'm breaking our no-politics rule... How would you feel if the Web stopped being so free and independent? I'm concerned — freaked right the heck out about the bills that threaten to do this, and as a participant in one of the biggest changes in modern history, you should be, too."

There are many such examples. And even if successful, it is not enough. With or without SOPA, digital freedom is under attack. For example, ICANN, the gateway for all domain registration, is now requiring a verified official identity, supplied by government, for domain ownership. This change sets the stage for continuing shutdowns and strangulation.

The struggle is intensifying, and the sides are very clear: It is the government and old-line media companies that depend on the state's laws versus everyone else. Everyone else consists of the independently active, privately owned global society that lives and thrives in the digital age. The astonishing innovations of this age have taught an entire generation about the miraculous power of information generation and delivery, about the capabilities embedded in the spontaneous actions of individuals, about the capacity of people around the world to generate order and progress through cooperation and exchange.

The notable thing is that the Web as we know it has been built by private hands working together, not by bureaucrats and politicians. This is the great lesson that our Jetsons world has taught us, and it points to a truth that all governments want to suppress: namely, that order is the daughter of liberty. How dare the bureaucrats and politicians presume to be the lords of what they had nothing to do with creating!

If government gets its way with this legislation and these overall trends, the costs will be immense and tragically unseen. Digital media and information freedom is directly and indirectly responsible for most of the economic growth we've experienced over the last 20 years. Without it, government controls, taxes, regulations and wars would have instituted a new dark age by now.

For government to attack Internet freedom today would be akin to burning the seventh-century manuscripts of St. Isidore of Seville, who produced, in the hardest times, the book that summarized all the knowledge of the ancient world (a Wikipedia of his time) and remains a primary source today.

It would be like murdering Venerable Bede in the eighth century, so that he could not have written his history of England that passed on knowledge and wisdom in the darkest of times.

It would be like smashing the 15th-century Gutenberg presses so that printing could have never gotten off the ground.

Historians constantly remind us that all great leaps in human history are inspired by the sharing and spreading of information. This is the precondition. When the first crusaders returned with new manuscripts from the ancient world, we began to see the first signs of the birth of modernity in the West. When populations moved to cities where they could leave behind their isolation and collaborate with others, economic growth followed. And when the Internet blasted down the barriers around the world and allowed anyone to discover new ideas, we saw a new dawn of technology and efficiency.

Information is the most-valuable commodity, and one that so happens to be infinitely reproducible. But today, governments have rallied around this notion of "intellectual property" and used it as an excuse to set up monopolies and censor ideas. We'll never be safe from this kind of legislation and arbitrary dictate until this fallacy is pulled up from its very roots and we are better able to distinguish between real and fake property rights.

The two dominant trends of our time are, on the one hand, the darkening of the physical world ruled by governments and, on the other hand, the re-enlightening of the world thanks to the spontaneous order of digital media controlled by everyone else. Governments are seeking to drag it down and shut off the lights. The protests against these proposed controls constitute a mighty statement that we will not let the raiders, the barbarians, the vandals, have their way.

(Joel's Note: Everyone's favorite, bow-tied freedom advocate, Jeffrey Tucker is publisher and executive editor of Laissez-Faire Books and also author of *Bourbon for Breakfast: Living Outside the Statist Quo* and *It's a Jetsons World*.)

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #56 — JAN. 20, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Shakespearean Drama

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 20, 2012)



Selecting an American President is played upon such a huge stage. I wonder if it must be quite so titanic? We make it this way, largely, so it must be what we want. We want it all to be heroic. Maybe that's why we're so disappointed when one of our favorites—be it Perry or Obama—proves to be more human than hero.

The Republican debate in South Carolina last night was indeed high drama.

After all, we are talking about a little bit of power here, even in these times of decline. I find it kind of fun to think of the whole thing in the grandest Shakespearean terms possible. I could start with some of those out of the race.

Herman Cain seems to match up with Othello pretty well. There's the stupid thing that Othello is the only black character I can remember out of Shakespeare. But more than that, the tragic falls of both had something to do with women and mysterious, devious outside forces. Poor Herman was brought down pretty low, almost as if to show how easily it can be done, in the case of some men, anyway.

Michele Bachmann is Lady Macbeth. Maybe more like Lady Macbeth combined with the three witches. Maybe that's what the magic spell was!

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and caldron bubble.
[Make me President on the double!]

Rick Perry is a Clown. No elevation to "Fool" (see below).

Rick Santorum reminds me of Hamlet. He turned-in a masterful performance in this debate, yet somehow seems torn. He doesn't really know which way to turn. He hates gays so violently and passionately that you have to wonder if there's some tinge of sexuality there. Maybe he's secretly, deathly afraid that he's gay? Maybe he always wears women's underwear to remind him that he's not? Maybe he loves the definition of "santorum"? Who knows. Don't ask me how any of that works. Ask Santorum. But as with so many "holier than thou" types, I sense the basic building blocks of some major hypocrisy in Rick Santorum. I wonder if he spends much time in Buenos Aires?

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shylock is intent of extracting his "pound of flesh" for gold, which Antonio owes him. Portia, the bride of Antonio's friend, attempts to save him:

Portia: Then must the Jew be merciful.

Shylock: On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.

Portia: The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.

This Christian appeal gets nowhere with Shylock, just as similar appeals from America's poor fall on the deaf ears Republican conservatives and Libertarian Ron Paul.

Mitt Romney is the classic Fool. Make-up. Superficial. Facile. Fake. A fool. Listen to him giggle. When I learned that his wife is known in the family as the "Mitt Stabilizer", I knew there was a fool problem.

To me, Newt Gingrich is the most complex character of all. I see elements of Henry VIII, Iago, and Sir John Falstaff. He certainly seems to have problems with women and divorce. Now, I can't say I'm totally against open marriage, even if Rick Santorum and Mitt Romney can turn it down, I'm not so quick to condemn. And I'm all for virility in a President. It's just that, with Newt, you don't know it's virility or just the Viagra talking. The Iago is the devious, lurking, coiling, springing to the attack side of Newt, like we saw in this debate's opening salvo. And Falstaff not because "the better part of valor is discretion" (haha), but because of how high Newt can get when he's UP, like last night when he talked to the press after the debate:

The world's mine oyster
Which I with sword will open.

(I wonder if this quote would, then, refer to America or to Callista or to both?)

"The GOP Debate: 6 Takeaways" by Maggie Haberman, Politico

Jan. 20, 2012, (<http://dyn.politico.com/printstory.cfm?uuid=00747E80-BE70-4AF4-8E97-1AE9A23164A5>)

In less than 48 hours, Newt Gingrich will know if his good night was good enough.

The former House speaker was the standout — and early — star of Thursday's CNN-hosted Republican debate in South Carolina, the last before voting begins in the first-in-the-South primary.

Below are POLITICO's six takeaways on the crackling debate:

1. Newt Gingrich saw the pitch coming.

Gingrich was looking for a fastball and proceeded to knock it out of the park. Yes, it's a sports cliché, but it's a fitting one here. Gingrich knew full well that CNN moderator John King would ask him about his ex-wife's claims that the former House Speaker had sought an "open marriage" over a decade ago. And CNN made a clear choice to open with it, knowing that would make the network a part of the news story.

Gingrich came prepared.

The former Georgia congressman, who stoked debate hall crowds at several of these forums, had the audience on its feet applauding him as he bashed King, his network and ABC News for the "despicable" move to make his messy marital past part of the discussion.

The crowd ate up the red meat about the "elite media," and the tone of the debate was immediately set. Nothing that happened after those first five minutes were anywhere near as memorable. Gingrich had the type of moment that GOP strategist Alex Castellanos has described as a critical "moment of strength."

This is, of course, Gingrich's specialty - whipping up the GOP base's distrust of the mainstream media. He himself has said on the trail that it's perfectly appropriate for voters to ask him about his personal history, a statement at odds with his indignation Thursday evening.

Still, the crowd's strong response inoculated him over the ex-wives issue and made it all but impossible for other candidates to attack him. Rick Santorum came the closest to touching it, but veered away just before he crossed the line into booing territory.

It was, simply put, Gingrich's best single moment in any 2012 debate, and he's had many good ones. His overall performance in Monday's debate was better, but coming so close to the primary election, last night was exactly what he needed.

2. Mitt Romney whiffed at the plate.

The issue of Romney's tax returns — and his muddled response about whether he'd release them at all - has dominated the headlines and the cable news networks for the last few days, along with the somewhat unfair reports about money in Cayman Islands accounts. Even his ally Chris Christie has said he needs to get on with it, conform to tradition, and eliminate doubts creeping into voters' minds.

So it was surprising that Romney had such a marble-mouthed response when King asked him about releasing his tax forms. King noted that Romney's father George, when he was running for president decades ago, set the precedent for releasing multiple years of tax returns.

Will Romney do the same? "Maybe," he said, to boos. How the framing of that question could have caught him off guard is unclear.

Tax returns are not, as Romney advisers correctly assert privately, generally an issue voters really care about. But the combination of Romney's personal wealth and a narrative about him being distant and opaque is making it a sustained media issue.

The discussion of abortion and Romneycare — which Romney, in an apparent first, referred to as "Romneycare" — didn't really favor him, since Santorum and Gingrich landed some shots on him.

Romney also declared during that back-and-forth that he rarely hears attacks on his character and integrity, which might come as a surprise to the Democrats who have been hammering him as lacking a "core."

But Romney didn't have a bad night overall, and had some strong spots, including his statement that he wished the candidates had all spent more time focused on Barack Obama.

He was blessed by Rick Santorum's practice of drilling down with gusto on Gingrich, a fight that kept some of the attention away from him. Romney had, ironically, one of his best moments, also during the issue of taxes, when he said that he would not apologize for being successful, and underscored he'd earned his own wealth.

For someone who has seemed uncomfortable dealing with questions about his money — earlier he awkwardly stated he'd lived on the "real streets of America" — this was a strong note.

But it was somewhat lost amid the "maybe" response, and the evening did nothing to change the sense that Gingrich is the momentum candidate in South Carolina.

3. Rick Santorum will not be ignored.

On points, Rick Santorum was actually the winner of the debate. Alas, debates are not won on points, but key moments.

Still, Santorum had his best debate of the season, and made clear he is not going to lie down for Gingrich, who is hoping upon hope that he will.

Santorum's attacks were measured but sharp. He did what Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann could never quite figure out how to do - hit Gingrich and Romney hard, where they live, and sustain the pressure.

He cleverly yoked the two together repeatedly, especially on Romneycare. He went straight at Gingrich over the congressional check-kiting scandal of the early 1990s.

Santorum also leveled the charge that many Romney backers also have made about Gingrich — he's unreliable, and there is the prospect of waking up to terrible headlines every morning if Gingrich is the GOP nominee.

He twice declared he'd won the Iowa caucuses, a fact that's in some dispute, but which nonetheless served him well. As for Gingrich's push to get him out of the GOP race despite the fact that the former Pennsylvania senator outperformed him in the only two contests, Santorum summed it up this way: "These are not cogent thoughts."

Santorum is every bit as good a debater as Gingrich — and in some ways, he's better. He tends to make his points more cleanly and not get lost in the moment. That has not come through very often, but it did tonight.

4. Bad, grandiose **Newt** is still lurking.

Gingrich tossed out a few discordant lines Thursday that will endure.

At the top of that list was this: "I have grandiose thoughts."

Gingrich probably meant "grand" instead of "grandiose." But it's a case, unfortunately, of truer words never spoken, and of inadvertent self-parody. The comment underscored Santorum's comment about Gingrich's penchant for self-inflicted wounds.

While he had a few sharp lines about jobs and the economy, overall it was not his tightest performance. And, in a too-cute move, Gingrich put out his tax returns, after deriding Mitt Romney for days on the issue, in the middle of the debate when no one was paying attention — a bit of a low mark in a discussion of transparency.

5. Ron Paul faded from view.

Literally. To the point where he was frantically waving his arms at moderator King when the debate hall crowd reminded him that the congressman had gotten no time to answer a specific question.

The debates this cycle, unlike the 2008 race, have not been Paul's calling card. He has a tendency to disappear, or to try to suppress some of his famously fringy instincts, none of which has made him much of a factor on stage.

Last night was no exception. He had no real standout lines, and repeatedly reminded King that he had experience as a doctor that's relevant to discussions about health care and abortion.

Candidates need to seize the moments they can to get attention, and that's not Paul's specialty.

Still, the fact that the audience repeatedly called out to King to call on Paul is a reminder that he speaks to a real constituency in the GOP — and that he may still be the candidate that Romney haters/conservatives turn to in a two-man race.

6. Smaller debates make better theater.

Not necessarily better substance, mind you. There was not a single question about foreign policy, Iran, Israel, China or North Korea during the 120-minute event.

But without the cluster of eight candidates on one stage, the four who remain got a whole lot more attention, and interacted on a much more intense level.

Some of it is due to the fact that the remaining candidates know they're running out of time to make a dent in Romney's frontrunner status. But there's also an intimacy to the four-candidate set up that made it more intense and more focused than earlier debates.

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20120119-01 08:32 SteveB "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'"
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This gives me a lot of confidence in the voting process. If Iowa can't accurately count 122,000 votes, what happens when there are millions? Gulp!

How can they not have an actual vote tally?

And if Romney by 8 was a "Win", why is DoucheBag by 34 called a "split decision"?

"Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result Split Decision" by Reuters

Jan. 19, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/iowa-republicans-call-caucus-result-split-decision-114838850.html>)

(WASHINGTON) The Iowa Republican Party will certify this month's presidential caucuses as a split decision between former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum, citing missing data from eight precincts, the Des Moines Register reported on Thursday.

The party had previously awarded the contest to Romney, with an eight vote margin. The official certified caucus results are due out Thursday at 8:15 a.m. local time (1415 GMT).

The Register said the new count put Santorum ahead by 34 votes. However, results from any one of the eight precincts with "missing data" could hold an advantage for Romney, the Register reported.

"It's a split decision," the newspaper said, citing a party official in the state. There are too many holes in the certified total from the caucuses to know for certain who won, it said.

GOP officials discovered inaccuracies in 131 precincts, although not all the changes affected Romney or Santorum, the newspaper reported.

"The results from Iowa caucus night revealed a virtual tie," Romney said in a statement early Thursday from Boston.

"I would like to thank the Iowa Republican Party for their careful attention to the caucus process, and we once again recognize Rick Santorum for his strong performance in the state.

"The Iowa caucuses, with record turnout, were a great start to defeating President Obama in Iowa and elsewhere in the general election."

20120119-02	11:09	Pam	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to SteveB, above)
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"And if R0mney by 8 was a "Win", why is DoucheBag by 34 called a "split decision"?"--indeed!

20120119-03	11:32	Art	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to Pam & SteveB, above)
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My thought: What possesses these people?

[I keep thinking there must be a reason why they do exorcisms! :-)-SteveB]

20120119-05	12:27	SteveG	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to all, above)
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If there is not a national process for a federal election that uses the same equipment and the same process across all voting precincts, then the elections are left to 50 different rules/regulations and hundreds if not 1000's of processes and equipment utilization. I have not heard 1 person on the national level talk of this except to say it is up to each state.

20120119-10	13:49	Dennis	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to SteveB, above)
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A voter in South Carolina interviewed on NPR said she wouldn't vote for Santorum because he is from the North and doesn't understand Southerners. When asked who she intended to vote for, she replied "Romney."

20120119-12	14:25	Pam	Re: "Iowa Republicans to Call Caucus Result 'Split Decision'" (reply to Dennis, above)
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It's people like this who will elect our next president. Everyone who trusts the American public, raise your hand.

20120119-06

12:29

SteveG

Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama: It's Time to Lead on Climate!

from CREDO Action:

Tell President Obama: It's time to lead on climate. Make the case in your State of the Union Address. Click here to sign the petition:

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/sotu_climate/index2.html.

This is why activism matters: Six months ago, the Obama Administration was set to approve one of the single most environmentally disastrous fossil fuel projects imaginable. Today, it's dead.

The Keystone XL pipeline — designed to bring filthy tar sands oil from Canada to refineries on the Gulf Coast of Texas so that oil companies can profit by selling the oil overseas — was dealt a severe setback yesterday when President Obama said no to an election year blackmail threat by the American Petroleum Institute and its lackeys in Congress.

But President Obama didn't reject Keystone XL because he wanted to. Or because he thought it was the right thing to do. Or because he thought it would help his reelection campaign. He rejected it because you made him do it.

It's a victory for activists. But because the President rejected the pipeline on a narrow technicality, in no way has he set down a clear marker against the pipeline or the carbon bomb that burning Canadian tar sands oil in China represents.

We want to thank the many groups and thousands of activists, who, following the inspiring call of Bill McKibben, joined us in putting massive public pressure on the President. In fact, CREDO waged the single largest activism campaign in our history.

It was this pressure that forced President Obama to initially delay the decision in November. And it was this pressure, combined with the Republicans' overzealous and irresponsible demand of a 60-day deadline that forced him yesterday to reject the pipeline permit.

Our pressure overcame the lies and propaganda of Republicans and oil giants, and their threats of "huge political consequences" if he didn't approve it.

Rejecting this pipeline was the right thing to do. But by rejecting it purely on a technicality, there are many things President Obama did not do:

- He did not close the door to this pipeline once and for all. In fact, he specifically opened the door to the southern portion of Keystone XL, which would allow this oil to be exported overseas — the real reason TransCanada wanted Keystone XL in the first place.
- He did not explain the imperative of stopping not just this project, but others that will expedite disastrous warming. Just the opposite — he touted the need to expand oil and gas drilling and made no mention of clean energy.
- He did not refute the lies of Republicans and polluters, whose biggest "jobs plan" is a foreign oil pipeline whose chief purpose is to export oil overseas.

The time to lead us away from dirty fuels and prevent escalating global catastrophes from climate change is here. And President Obama still can.

Until President Obama makes a clear and compelling case to the American people for sweeping action to reduce our dependence on any and all fossil fuels, the pace of our transition will remain slower than what is required to stem the onrushing danger of climate pollution.

Until he refutes the false choice presented by Big Oil and Republicans — that we must choose between a clean energy future and a stable economy — he empowers and remains vulnerable to their attacks.

Until he shows his commitment to clean energy over dirty fossil fuels, the energy of progressive activists will be spent fighting individual bad decisions, instead of pushing to support needed progressive policies.

And ultimately, until President Obama takes the opportunity for a true moment of leadership that publicly raises the stakes on the fight to stabilize our climate, the State of our Union will remain deeply clouded.

For now, it is clear that we must fight for every victory. It's also clearer than ever that when we fight, we can win.

Let's use this momentum to push for even broader victories to bring about the type of future that you and I know is still possible.

Thank you for being part of this historic victory.

Becky Bond, Political Director

[20120119-04](#) 12:21 Art Re: "The Romney Tax Loophole" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #54)

Too good not to share.

Among others, Mitt, Newt, and his friends have expressed concerns about getting pink slips themselves and being without a job. These guys and their friends are really hurting and we all need to sacrifice to give them additional tax breaks, as this will undoubtedly help our country.

Think we might have a clue as to one of the things wrong with American business?

[20120119-07](#) 12:31 SteveG "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands"

"Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" by Joe Conason, *The National Memo*

Jan. 19, 2012,

(<http://cl.exct.net/?qs=880302aae0b3929083fe0528b61a90a7def8962556f0da5ab307461dd7521643>)

Mitt Romney's reluctance to release his tax returns suddenly makes perfect sense: According to a report filed by the ABC News investigative team late Wednesday, the Romneys have invested millions of dollars in offshore tax havens -- specifically, in several accounts domiciled in the "notorious" Cayman Islands.

Headlined "Romney Parks Millions In Cayman Islands," an article on the network website notes that "he has used a variety of techniques to help minimize the taxes on his estimated \$250 million fortune." Earlier this week, he admitted paying as little as 15 percent of his multi-million-dollar annual income in federal taxes. But the ABC report said that "in addition to paying the lower tax rate on his investment income, Romney has as much as \$8 million invested in at least 12 funds listed on a Cayman Islands registry." A Romney campaign spokesman told ABC that the Cayman accounts had no effect on the tax liability of the candidate and his wife Ann.

[Continue...](#)

[20120119-08](#) 12:35 Art Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to SteveG, above)

Going to be fun to see his tax returns. Of course the danger is then we may have Newt or Ricky to live with. Hard to say what is worse. Maybe Bachman or Cain will dive back in???

[20120119-09](#) 12:42 SteveG Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Art, above)

None of the above could win easily. Seemingly the Republicans are making it too easy for Obama. There is time yet, but I am not confident of major changes.

[20120119-11](#) 14:10 Dennis Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to all, above)

Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands



© Dennis Cox / WorldViews

It just so happens that I photographed Mitt Romney's yacht (foreground) in Grand Cayman a few years ago.

[20120119-13](#) 14:26 Pam Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)

Ha! What's the skull and crossbones in aid of?

[20120119-14](#) 14:59 Bill Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)

He pirated away his millions to the Caymans. Trusting that this really is the Romney yacht, I would think the Obama campaign might like to have your photo. Good work.

[20120119-15](#) 15:24 Dennis Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Bill, above)

Okay, just kidding. It's a pirate cruise for tourists. Does seem appropriate that it's in Grand Cayman.

[20120119-16](#) 15:37 Pam Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)

Oh heck. I thought you were serious.

[20120119-17](#) 15:38 Bill Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to all, above)

Well, anyway, where is Dick Nixon, now that we need him?

[20120119-18](#) 15:42 Pam Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Bill, above)

Back in the day, I thought Watergate was about the worst crisis our nation could face (not counting Viet Nam). It seems like a picnic at the beach compared to what we're dealing with today.

[20120119-19](#) 16:13 SteveG Re: "Mitt Romney's Taxes Took a Vacation in the Cayman Islands" (reply to Dennis, above)

J You are good!

[20120119-20](#) 19:00 SteveG "The Day the Internet Roared"

"The Day the Internet Roared" by Amy Goodman, NationofChange

Jan. 19, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/day-internet-roared-1326982915>)

Wednesday, Jan. 18, marked the largest online protest in the history of the Internet. Websites from large to small "went dark" in protest of proposed legislation before the U.S. House and Senate that could profoundly change the Internet. The two bills, SOPA in the House and PIPA in the Senate, ostensibly aim to stop the piracy of copyrighted material over the Internet on websites based outside the U.S. Critics, among them the founders of Google, Wikipedia, the Internet Archive, Tumblr and Twitter, counter that the laws will stifle innovation and investment, hallmarks of the free, open Internet. The Obama administration has offered muted criticism of the legislation, but, as many of his supporters have painfully learned, what President Barack Obama questions one day he signs into law the next.

First, the basics. SOPA stands for the Stop Online Piracy Act, while PIPA is the Protect IP Act. The two bills are very similar. SOPA would allow copyright holders to complain to the U.S. attorney general about a foreign website they allege is "committing or facilitating the commission of criminal violations" of copyright law. This relates mostly to pirated movies and music. SOPA would allow the movie industry, through the courts and the U.S. attorney general, to send a slew of demands that Internet service providers (ISPs) and search-engine companies shut down access to those alleged violators, and even to prevent linking to those sites, thus making them "unfindable." It would also bar Internet advertising providers from making payments to websites accused of copyright violations.

SOPA could, then, shut down a community-based site like YouTube if just one of its millions of users was accused of violating one U.S. copyright. As David Drummond, Google's chief legal officer and an opponent of the legislation,

blogged, "Last year alone we acted on copyright takedown notices for more than 5 million web pages." He wrote, "PIPA & SOPA will censor the web, will risk our industry's track record of innovation and job creation, and will not stop piracy."

Corynne McSherry, intellectual property director at the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF.org), told me: "These bills propose new powers for the government and for private actors to create, effectively, blacklists of sites ... then force service providers to block access to those sites. That's why we call these the censorship bills."

The bills, she says, are the creation of the entertainment, or "content," industries: "SOPA, in particular, was negotiated without any consultation with the technology sector. They were specifically excluded." The exclusion of the tech sector has alarmed not only Silicon Valley executives, but also conservatives like Utah Republican Congressman Jason Chaffetz, a tea party favorite. He said in a December House Judiciary Committee hearing, "We're basically going to reconfigure the Internet and how it's going to work, without bringing in the nerds."

PIPA sponsor Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., said in a press release, "Much of what has been claimed about [PIPA] is flatly wrong and seems intended more to stoke fear and concern than to shed light or foster workable solutions."

Sadly, Leahy's ire sounds remarkably similar to that of his former Senate colleague Christopher Dodd, who, after retiring, took the job of chairman and CEO of the powerful lobbying group Motion Picture Association of America (at a reported salary of \$1.2 million annually), one of the chief backers of SOPA/PIPA. Said Dodd of the broad-based, grass-roots Internet protest, "It's a dangerous and troubling development when the platforms that serve as gateways to information intentionally skew the facts to incite their users in order to further their corporate interests."

EFF's McSherry said, "No one asked the Internet—well, the Internet is speaking now. People are really rising up and saying: 'Don't interfere with basic Internet infrastructure. We won't stand for it.' "

As the Internet blackout protest progressed Jan. 18, and despite Dodd's lobbying, legislators began retreating from support for the bills. The Internet roared, and the politicians listened, reminiscent of the popular uprising against media consolidation in 2003 proposed by then-Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell, the son of Gen. Colin Powell. Information is the currency of democracy, and people will not sit still as moneyed interests try to deny them access.

When Internet users visited the sixth-most popular website on the planet during the protest blackout, the English-language section of Wikipedia.org, they found this message:

Imagine a World Without Free Knowledge.

For over a decade, we have spent millions of hours building the largest encyclopedia in human history. Right now, the U.S. Congress is considering legislation that could fatally damage the free and open Internet.

In a world with fresh, Internet-fueled revolutions, it seems that U.S. politicians are getting the message.

(Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column.)

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20120119-21	20:29	SteveG	Fw: DCCC Petition: Tell Mitt Romney to Release His Full Tax Forms!
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from DCCC:

Wonder why Presidential candidate Mitt Romney won't follow decades of historical precedent and release his full tax returns now? So do we.

It might be because Romney likely pays a lower tax rate than middle class families. Despite having an estimated fortune of up to \$250 million, Mitt says he probably pays an effective tax rate of only 15%. That's less than what school teachers pay.

Help up hit 100,000 signatures on our petition telling Mitt Romney to release his full tax returns right now:

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

Just this week, we learned that Mitt has millions invested in the Cayman Islands and other offshore accounts.

President Obama has released his tax returns going back to the year 2000. In fact, Mitt's own father, George Romney, started the tradition of Presidential candidates releasing their tax returns in 1968, releasing 12 years of returns.

Romney's response? He says if he does release his taxes, he won't do it until April, and he'll only release this year's records.

Something doesn't add up. Add your name and tell Mitt Romney to come clean to the American people.

20120119-22 23:59 SteveB Photo: Montana: 'The Last Best Place' (for Jim & BrentR)

We miss our Montana a lot. To be able to spend almost any weekend at Glacier or Yellowstone or a million places with no one but us. Truly as they say, "THE LAST BEST PLACE."

Glacier National Park, Montana (<http://www.montanaoutdoorstoreblog.com/>)



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

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Welcome to all our new members who may be here for the first time. We want to hear from YOU! To submit your comment, you can use the form on our website or blog, or reply to this email with your two cents worth. Be sure to sign with your desired user name.

Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #57 — JAN. 23, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

What Hell and South Carolina Hath Wrought

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 23, 2012)

Chick-fil-A® — Very conservative, always closed on the Day of Our Lord,
but a delicious chicken salad sandwich. Ooops! I just lost my appetite!





Pinpointing the problem: I don't think this article puts the case of a classically antisocial politician too strongly.

"Newt's Delusions of Grandeur" by Lee Siegel, The Daily Beast

Jan 20, 2012 (<http://news.yahoo.com/newt-delusions-grandeur-033030805.html>)

(Hypocrisy is one thing. Mental illness is another.)

Watching Newt Gingrich excoriate the media for making his personal life an issue in Thursday's presidential debate, you realized that he wasn't merely guilty of not practicing what he preaches. The real issue isn't that Gingrich has done things that he castigates others for doing. The real, disturbing issue is what seems to be his deeply embedded pattern of finding his own sordid nature in other people, and then mercilessly persecuting them.

"Projection" is a psychological commonplace. The person suffering from depression will find depression everywhere. The person in the grip of lust will see randiness in everyone he meets. And on and on. We all see, in one degree or another, the world in terms of our own condition. Our sanity depends upon the degree.

Borderline personality, clinical narcissist, megalomaniac, sociopath—however you want to characterize Newt Gingrich, he clearly has difficulty distinguishing his own reality from that of other people. The man who cheated on his first wife as she lay in a hospital bed with cancer proclaimed in 1992, just as the Democratic National Convention was taking place, "Woody Allen having non-incest with a non-daughter to whom he was a non-father because they were a non-family fits the Democratic platform perfectly." The man who then went on to cheat on his second wife compared Democrats, two years later, to Susan Smith: "I think that the mother killing the two children in South Carolina vividly reminds every American how sick the society is getting and how much we need to change things. The only way you get change is to vote Republican."

The man who brought down Democratic House Speaker Jim Wright on ethics charges in 1988 for an improper book deal himself used political funds to promote the sale of his own book. As House Speaker, Gingrich had 84 ethics charges filed against him. And this compulsive philanderer and morally challenged legislator routinely accuses American teenagers of immorality and poor blacks of lax moral natures.

If all this were only hypocrisy, Gingrich might legitimately expect voters to shrug off his lapses of decency and humanity. As he thundered to the debate audience sitting inside the Charleston arena Thursday night (a pathetic tin parody of Joe Welch's "Have you no sense of decency?"), "Every person in here knows personal pain." Because of the law of projection, we often stumble privately and then try to restore our sense of moral dignity by harping on precisely the same deficiencies in other people. As petty and sometimes mean-spirited as that may be, it is a run-of-the-mill hypocrisy. It is simply a psychological convenience for getting through life.

But hypocrisy becomes mental illness when we seek to punish people for our own tendency to hurt other people. When Gingrich treats his wives worse than chattel and then turns around and attempts to demonize others for what he declares are their hurtful moral missteps; when his projections have the potential to cause harmful concrete consequences—that is a diseased relationship with the world that puts him on a par with every tyrant who ever wreaked his damaged personality on the society he governed.

Perhaps Gingrich's sickness—what Santorum nicely called that "worrisome moment" in Gingrich—is what led him to commit political suicide in 1996. That was when he blamed his obduracy during the government shutdown over the budget on being snubbed by Clinton on a flight to Israel. People who cannot separate themselves from the reality around them go berserk when that reality turns and bites.

But, then, lacking a solid core, projectors like Gingrich secretly lust after the identities of the people they persecute. Gingrich lashed out at Clinton for the latter's moral trespasses during the Lewinsky scandal, but he had long fancied himself Clinton's legislative soulmate, as the two worked on making Social Security and Medicare solvent. His fury at Clinton seemed to be fueled by a desperate desire to inhabit Clinton's charm, his intellect, his "vision thing," his grandness. The echo of Clinton's "I feel your pain" was unmistakable in Gingrich's "Every person in here knows pain."

Clinton was, however, at his worst, a wily rogue. Gingrich is the projector/persecutor so proud of his "grandiosity" who has replaced human relations with abstract ideas, and whose sagging posture and enervated demeanor seem propped up by spitefulness and revenge. This Gingrich is no slick rogue. He is, to bluntly state the ugly fact of the matter, a very sick man.

20120120-01	14:08	SteveB	"Tax Fairness"
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This way of thinking about taxes seems to be becoming the norm in conservative Republican circles, except, perhaps, among the elite...

"Tax Fairness" by M.S., The Economist

July 28, 2011, (<http://www.economist.com/blogs/democracyinamerica/2011/07/tax-fairness>)

(Little income, little to tax.)

One argument often deployed against tax hikes for the rich is that the burden of taxation is already unfairly skewed, since roughly half of Americans pay no federal income tax at all. Sometimes, the line is incorrectly adumbrated to a claim that half of Americans pay no taxes, which isn't true; all Americans pay some mix of payroll taxes, state taxes, capital-gains taxes, sales taxes and so forth. The overall burden of taxation is pretty even across income groups: the total effective tax rate ranges from 16% for the bottom quintile to 31% for the top quintile, and in fact it stays at 31% right up through the top 1% of earners. But the point that about half of American tax units pay no *federal income tax* is correct. Why not? Aaron Carroll and Donald Marron point us to a new report by the Tax Policy Center

(a joint project of the Urban Institute and the Brookings Institution), which explains that there are two basic reasons why people don't pay federal income tax: either they're very poor, or they're covered by tax expenditures, mainly the ones that benefit the elderly and children. Mr. Marron:

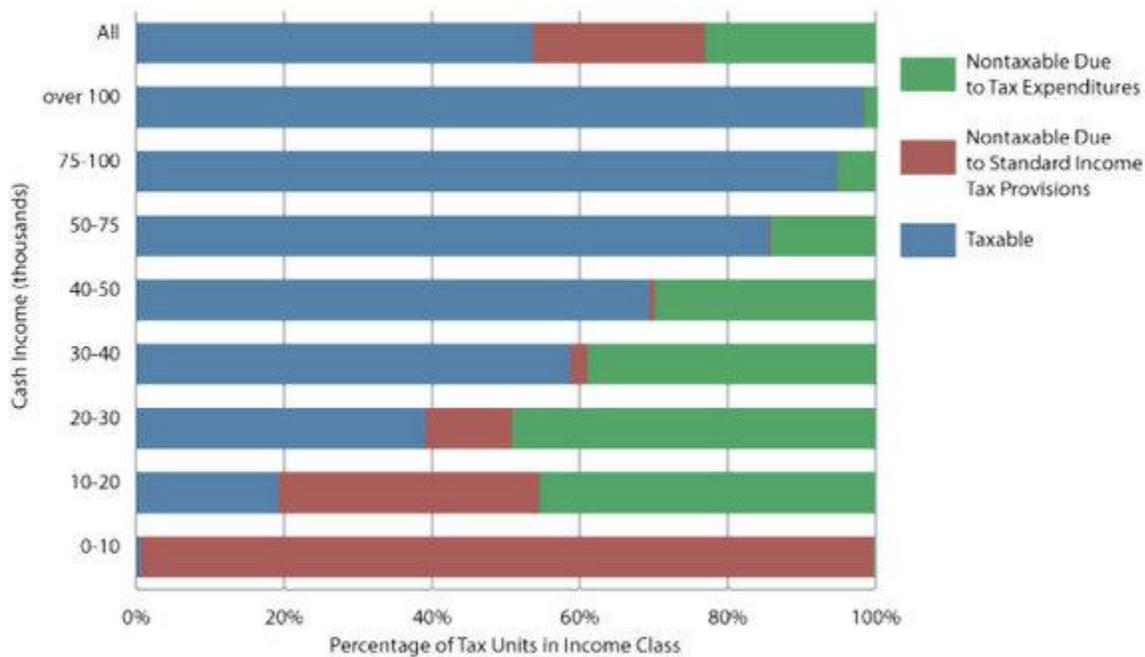
Low incomes (or, if you prefer, the standard deduction and personal exemptions) account for fully half of the people who pay no federal income tax.

The second reason is that for many senior citizens, Social Security benefits are exempt from federal income taxes. That accounts for about 22% of the people who pay no federal income tax.

The third reason is that America uses the tax code to provide benefits to low-income families, particularly those with children. Taken together, the earned income tax credit, the child credit, and the childcare credit account for about 15% of the people who pay no federal income tax.

Okay, "low incomes". But how low exactly? How poor would you be if you were too poor to pay federal income tax, strictly on the basis of your income and the standard deductions? Basically, you'd be making less than \$20,000 a year, though you've still got a small chance of qualifying if you make under \$40,000 and have some kids.

Chart 1: Taxable and Nontaxable Tax Units by Income, 2011



Source: Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center Microsimulation Model (version 0411-2).

The brown bars are the "tax units" who are nontaxable because they're straight-up too poor, even using the standard deduction alone. And too poor means pretty darn poor. \$20,000 a year is not a lot of money to support a hungry tax unit, especially if it includes some little tax units running around in their pajamas with the floppy feet. Of course, up to \$75,000 a year, you've still got a substantial number of people in the green bars: those who owe no federal income tax because they're benefiting from tax expenditures. But which tax expenditures? Mostly, it's the tax expenditures you get because you're over 65, or because you've got the pajamas with the floppy feet: the child tax credit, the child and dependent care tax credit, and the earned-income tax credit. Less frequently, people qualify on the basis of "costs of earning income", meaning they may be freelancers or small business owners. And so forth.

American society is becoming more unequal. Incomes at the bottom level are stagnant or declining, while incomes at the top are rising. This is why a large number of people at the bottom levels of the income tier don't make enough money to pay any federal income tax. At the same time, we're not collecting enough overall revenue to pay for our government spending. We could try to raise the money we need by repealing tax breaks for poor children and the elderly, if we were sort of mean and determined to hurt people who don't have the political strength to

resist, but I think it makes more sense to raise the taxes we need by increasing rates on relatively well-off people whose incomes have risen dramatically over the past couple of decades and can thus afford to pay them.

20120120-02 15:06 Pam Re: "Tax Fairness" (reply to SteveB, above)

This seems pretty straightforward to me. A progressive income tax is necessary for adequate revenue and it's fair, because it puts the burden on those who can best afford it. I am opposed to a flat tax, whether it's 17% or 9-9-9. A flat tax would be fair if everyone earned the same amount of money, but obviously that's not the case. 31% of a rich man's income hurts him less than any amount of tax on a poor man. I know the conservative line: land of opportunity, work hard and get ahead, don't punish the successful. But this assumes things that many people don't have, such as good health, good luck, good connections, all of which are necessary to really get ahead. Stephen Hawking excepted. Under feudalism, the peasants were taxed to death, while the nobility got off Scott free. That was patently unfair, and history tells us what happened as a result. We've also seen the harm a forced equalization can do in the USSR and eastern Europe. Since its beginnings, I believe America has tried to be fair to all its citizens, except when it hasn't. The Founding Fathers, peace be upon them, had as a primary aim the limitation of natural human behavior. They wanted to create better institutions because they knew they could not fundamentally change human nature. Conservatives have dressed up "greed" in the language of "success, risk-taking, job-creating, and hard work," language that obfuscates the true motivation of ambitious men. If they didn't care so much about money, why would they go to such extremes to hold onto it, even when they have more than enough? They try to present getting rich as public service. The photo of Mitt Romney with his Bain cronies speaks volumes. Rich young men with money literally coming out of their ears. The idea that Romney ever worried about losing a job is ludicrous. Man is not the measure of all things; money is. I'm not opposed to people having money and living comfortably, far from it. But the idea that a rich man and a poor man deserve to be taxed equally is just plain wrong.

20120121-05 17:32 SteveB Fw: MoveOn Petition: Investigate Wall St. Bank Fraud

from MoveOn:

Breaking: There are reports that in the next 48 hours President Obama could make a decision on whether to hold Wall Street accountable by opening a full investigation into the banks' role in the housing crisis, or give them a sweetheart deal that lets them off the hook¹ This is it!

On Thursday, at events across the country, MoveOn members delivered more than 360,000 signatures to the president asking him to investigate² But the big banks are lobbying non-stop for a deal giving them broad immunity—so we need to collect as many signatures on our petition this weekend as possible.

We need the president to hear, loud and clear, that we're counting on him to stand up to Wall Street as negotiators get close to a final deal. We'll deliver the additional petitions directly to the White House throughout the weekend. Will you step up right now and sign?

Click here to sign the petition and join in the call for Wall Street accountability:

<http://pol.moveon.org/bankfraud/?id=34957-9148195-%3D0IIOJx&t=2>.

If the banks get broad immunity now, without a full investigation, we'll never know the extent of the fraud that cost so many people their homes, savings, and jobs. That's why this decision by President Obama to investigate is so incredibly important.

The White House is paying close attention to what progressives across the country think on this issue. A massive group of new petition signatures this weekend will let them know that we're watching them closely—and that we need a full federal investigation, not a sweetheart settlement.

Sign the petition for a real investigation before President Obama makes his final decision. Thanks for all you do.

–Elena, Joan, Sarah, Carrie, and the rest of the team

Sources:

¹"Shaking Their Windows and Rattling Their Walls," Huffington Post, January 20, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=269677&id=34957-9148195-%3D0IIOJx&t=5>.

²"MoveOn, Color Of Change Demand Obama To Investigate Wall Street Banks, Housing Crisis," Huffington Post, January 19, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=269678&id=34957-9148195-%3D0IIOJx&t=6>.

20120120-06	21:06	Larry	Friends of the Middle
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Your Newsletter is really getting "classy" and everybody seems to be having a good time. I know I am, especially with your Shakespearian comparisons.

Have a nice winter. ;-)

20120120-03	15:58	SteveB	Video: "Amend 2012" & "Kucinich Announces Constitutional Amendment to Publicly Finance Federal Elections"
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SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE!

Robert Reich Video—"Amend 2012": <http://www.nationofchange.org/amend-2012-1327080249>.

"Kucinich Announces Constitutional Amendment to Publicly Finance Federal Elections" [NationofChange](#)

Jan. 20, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/kucinich-announces-game-changing-constitutional-amendment-publicly-finance-federal-elections-1327069>)

On the eve of the second anniversary of the Supreme Court ruling known as *Citizens United*, which opened the floodgate of unlimited, shadowy corporate spending in public elections, Congressman Dennis Kucinich (D-OH) has introduced H. J. Res. 100, a constitutional amendment to rescue American democracy from corporate money's corrupting influence. Kucinich:

Because of the decision by the Supreme Court majority in the *Citizens United* case, more money was spent on campaigns in the 2010 election than has ever been spent in a mid-term election. Because of the *Citizens United* case, more money will be spent in the 2012 elections than has ever been spent in an election in the history of our country, and American democracy has been put up on the auction block.

We must rescue American democracy from unlimited corporate money. This is the most fundamental issue facing the future of our nation. With corporate, private financing we have officials working for the interest of corporations. With public financing we have officials working for the public. And public financing will actually save taxpayers' money, by eliminating any incentive of public officials to reward campaign contributors with taxpayer subsidies.

We must eliminate the influence of money on our elections and on our policy-making. We must eliminate the influence of special interests on our elections and on our legislation. We must eliminate the influence of multi-national corporations and foreign corporations on the government of our country. We cannot wait. We must fight for government of the people, by the people, for the people.

H.J. Res.100 would require that all federal campaigns –all campaigns for President, Vice-President, Senator and Representative – be financed exclusively with public funds and prohibit any expenditures from any other source, including the candidate. H. J. Res. 100 would also prohibit any expenditures in support of, or in opposition to, any federal candidate, so that interest groups will not be able to influence elections. It will maintain the First Amendment "freedom of the press" and preserve the traditional role that the media have played in our electoral process.

[20120120-04](#) 18:17 Pam Re: Video: "Amend 2012" & "Kucinich Announces Constitutional Amendment..." & Republican Primaries (reply to SteveB, above)

These are great initiatives, and I have sent in my support of them. I used to think Kucinich was a strange little monkey (no disrespect intended), but he does tend to be on the right side of things. Why is it that activists on the left are always portrayed as disaffected hotheads, while those on the right are all puffed up with self-righteousness? Robert Reich is a pointy-headed intellectual, but Newt is a redeemed Christian? I didn't see the debate, but I gather that Newt came out swinging when asked about his infidelities. What a complete and total hypocrite! It is appalling that he thinks that by bluster and outrage and attacking his questioners he will come off as the injured party. He is so two-faced it's amazing he knows where to shave in the morning. If character matters, then Obama is the one without a stain. I suppose Santorum is squeaky clean, but who gives a s---? His claim to have only ever sat on a couch with his wife is evidence of a prehistoric mindset. I'm sorry that his baby died, but the way he flaunts his religion and purity makes me sick. I imagine we all think it's likely that Romney will be the chosen one. He's the least insane, unless you count his Mormonism, which to me is pretty crazy. Mormons believe in making money, and he sure has. There's something kind of screwy about his pretense to be part of the regular middle class. Ted Kennedy never tried to pass himself off as anything other than a very privileged man, with a sense of responsibility. I was brought up on lots of quotations, some of which I ignored to be sure. "Propinquity is the great matchmaker." "You don't fly in the face of convention." "Noblesse oblige." Romney would be more honest just to come out and admit he's made a fortune, has been lucky, and wants to give something back. That would be lots better than Newt's claiming to have committed adultery and worked too hard (poor baby) because he loves the country so much. BS. And to say the country is worth the pain the campaign is costing him and Calista is like making a martyr out of Daddy Warbucks. I'll say one thing: the Republicans have been putting on a good show.

[20120120-05](#) 19:04 SteveG Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Pam, above, 18:17)

When there was talk of Dennis [Kucinich] losing his seat in the house due to gerrymandering there was a movement by several states wanting him to move to their newly gerrymandered districts – Washington was one of those. Dennis is unique and I would love to have him representing me in Congress.

As much as I do not like Mitt and the way he made his money, it is 100% better than the manner in which Newt and Santorum made their lobbying millions.

[20120121-01](#) 11:31 Pam Re: Republican Primaries (reply to SteveG, above)

I agree that Romney is the least of all evils. I still can't get over Newt's re-re-reincarnation. I'm disgusted by the crowd that booed John King (I believe it was he) when he asked Newt about his "open marriage" proposal. Have they forgotten how Newt went after Clinton for his dalliance with Monica? People believe what they want to believe, and if the facts show them something different, they believe it anyway. Mitt may be ruthless, but so far he seems to be honest, which is more than can be said for the rest.

[20120121-02](#) 15:07 Dennis Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Pam, above)

That crowd also booed the Golden Rule. No wonder they still fly the Confederate Flag. Lincoln should have let them secede!

Has anything good ever come out of South Carolina (well, except Stephen Colbert and Mary-Louise Parker)? Here's some background:

"Why South Carolina's Values Are Not America's Values" by David Atkins, Hullabaloo/AlterNet

Jan. 21, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/module/printversion/newsandviews/765350>)

Since CNN has assured us that the South is "where values matter" in advance of today's South Carolina primary, it's worth considering just what South Carolina values are, courtesy Thomas Schaller in *Whistling Past Dixie* (pp.274-275):

Consider South Carolina, which has opposed or defied almost every beneficent social and political change in American history. To appease South Carolinian slaveholders, Thomas Jefferson removed language condemning slavery from the Declaration of Independence. Four years later, backcountry loyalists in South Carolina helped the British Army recapture the state in 1780 from the patriots. By 1828, Palmetto State native and vice president John C. Calhoun was agitating for state "nullification" of federal powers, generating secessionist calls a full generation before the outbreak of the Civil War.

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina became the first state to secede; four months later Confederate forces in Charleston fired the opening shots of the Civil War on the Union garrison at Fort Sumter, and South Carolina even threatened to secede *from* the Confederacy because the other southern states would not agree to reopening the slave trade. Soon after the state's chapter of the Ku Klux Klan formed, "red shirt" Democratic rifle clubs used physical intimidation and ballot manipulation to alter results of the 1876 election. In the 1890s, Governor Ben "Pitchfork" Tillman--who earned his nickname by threatening to stab President Grover Cleveland in the ribs with said implement--served two terms as governor before embarking on a twenty-three-year Senate career during which he defended segregation as vigilantly as his fellow Edgefield County native, Strom Thurmond, later did for most of his career.

Well into the twentieth century, South Carolina's black citizens observed the Fourth of July mostly alone because the vast majority of whites refused to, preferring instead to celebrate Confederate Memorial Day, May 10. State politicians repeatedly averted their eyes as textile industry executives employed children and quashed attempts by mill workers to organize for fair wages. In 1920, the South Carolina legislature rejected the proposed women's suffrage amendment and took almost a half century finally to ratify it, in 1969. In 1948, the same year the South Carolina legislature declared President Harry Truman's new civil rights commission "un-American," Thurmond's full-throated advocacy of racial segregation as the States' Rights Democratic Party presidential nominee helped him carry four Deep South states. Six years later, the Clarendon County school district--where per-pupil spending on whites was quadruple that for blacks--was pooled with three other districts in a failed defense of the "separate but equal" standard in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case. And when Congress passed the 1965 Voting Rights Act, the law that finally banned the creative and vicious methods used to disfranchise blacks, South Carolina became the first state to challenge its constitutionality. By 1968 Harry Dent, the most legendary of Thurmond's political protégés and a key architect of the "southern strategy," was helping Richard Nixon translate racial antagonisms into crucial Republican votes, a victory in South Carolina, and a ticket to the White House.

If all of this seems like so much ancient history, consider that South Carolinians are still debating the merits of public displays of the Confederate battle flag. Indeed, more than a few pundits believe Republican David Beasley won the 1994 governor's race in part because of his pledge to support displaying the Confederate flag over the state capitol--then promptly lost his 1998 reelection bid later after a "religious epiphany" caused him to reverse position. After two decades of adverse judicial rulings, in 2000 Bob Jones University, the state's largest private liberal arts college, founded by its anti-Catholic namesake, finally ended its policy of prohibiting interracial dating. Last year, South Carolina was sued for issuing "choose life" vanity plates while refusing the same option to pro-choice citizens, justifying its decision by claiming that the anti-abortion message constitutes protected government speech. Today, more than eight decades after women first won the right to vote, the South Carolina state legislature is the only one in America where women do not hold at least 10 percent of all seats.

Other Deep South states may stake their own claims, but South Carolina is America's most conservative state. From a strictly constitutional-historical standpoint, its legacy of firsts and lasts reads like a rap sheet: first to overturn a provincial government during the revolutionary period; last to abandon the Atlantic slave trade; first to call for nullifying the Constitution's federal authority; first to secede from the Union; last to abolish the white primary; first to litigate against the integration of public schools and challenge the Voting Rights Act. **Whenever America finds itself at some social or political crossroad and in need of direction, perhaps the best things to do is ask, "What would South Carolina do?" And then do the opposite.**

I'm sure there are many wonderful people in South Carolina fighting the good fight, trying to turn their home state around and move away from the shameful legacy of South Carolina values. But in democracy, majority rules. And the majority of South Carolinians have made it clear exactly what those values are.

They are not American values, and CNN should be ashamed to imply that they are.

[20120121-03](#) 17:04 SteveG Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Dennis, above)

Why do we not let them secede and go on about our business?

[20120121-04](#) 17:16 Art Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Pam & Dennis, above)

My personal belief is that most of the tea baggers, evangelists, etc are really at the bottom just racists and haters. Therefore they want someone to represent them who can hate and make it stick. One supposed retired Marine in a recent Town Hall in SC asked Newt " how can we give Obama a bloody nose" ? Why should this guy want to "give Obama a bloody nose"? No words about a policy he objected to, nor a reason, just hate. Never once do any of the haters I see who comment in the AOL response column to news items, ever state a policy or reason they oppose the President. Just that "Obama" is out to destroy America and must be stopped. Plus it is revealing that most of the Republican candidates refuse to refer to him as President Obama. They do that to try to demean the President and it sticks with many of their racist followers. It is why Newt did so well with his bombastic attack on John King. The hypocrites in the audience who claim such pious devotion to family principles and god really just want to support someone who can focus and channel their hate. Newt is very good at that.

Adolf Hitler would have loved this crowd and, if he were running even today knowing what we know, I suspect would easily win the Republican nomination.

[20120121-13](#) 20:39 Pam Re: Republican Primaries (reply to Art, above)

You are so right. Hitler would whip up that South Carolina crowd like nobody's business. Frightening. I love democracy, but it does have one downside: idiots get quoted as if they mattered.

[20120121-06](#) 17:54 SteveB "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"

How can somebody zoom like this? Romney and Obama are truly hated!

Though I'm much more confident Obama could beat Gingrich than I am about Romney. For now.

"New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" by Mark Blumenthal, Huffington Post

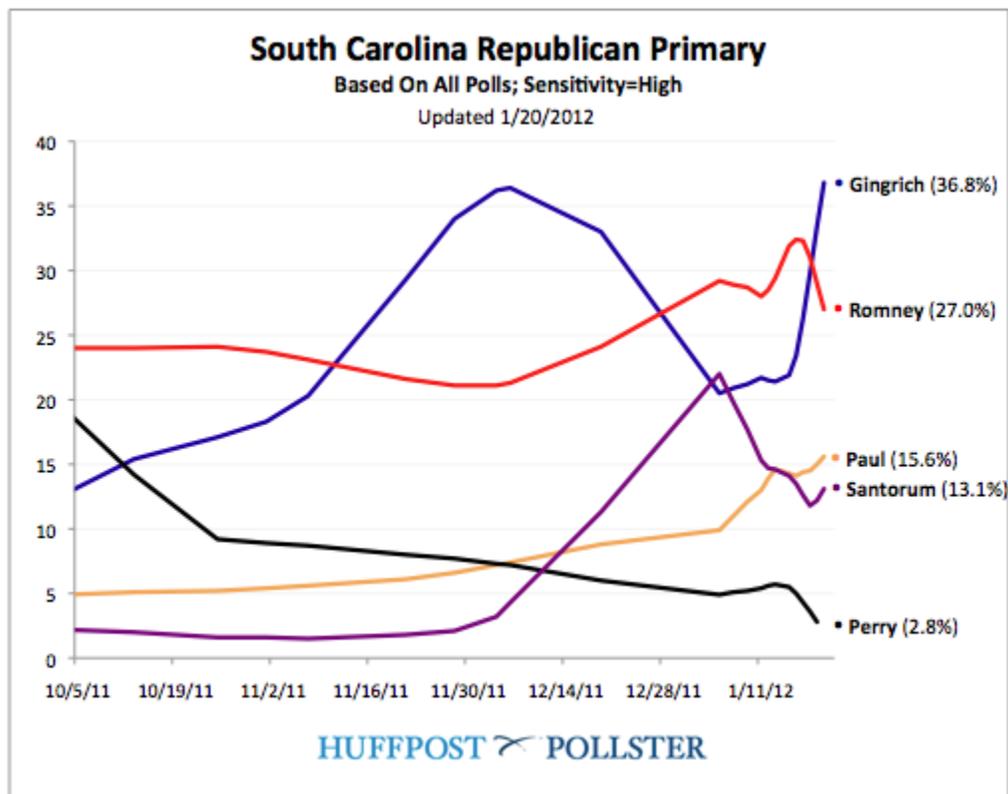
Jan. 21, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/21/south-carolina-polls-newt-gingrich-lead_n_1220731.html)

WASHINGTON -- Two new telephone polls concluded on the eve of the South Carolina primary not only confirm continuing momentum toward Newt Gingrich; they suggest that the former House speaker may be headed for a surprisingly comfortable, double-digit win.

A live-interviewer survey conducted by the American Research Group on Thursday and Friday nights finds Gingrich now leading Mitt Romney 40 to 26 percent, followed by Ron Paul (18 percent) and Rick Santorum (13 percent). An ARG poll fielded earlier in the week had Gingrich and Romney in a virtual tie (with 32 and 31 percent, respectively).

That finding complements final results from the automated survey conducted over three nights by the Democratic Party firm Public Policy Polling, which shows Gingrich leading Romney 37 to 28 percent, followed by Santorum (16 percent) and Paul (14 percent). PPP noted that in the interviews it conducted on Friday evening, Gingrich led by a 40 to 26 percent margin -- exactly the same margin found by the ARG poll.

The HuffPost Pollster chart -- based on all available public polls of South Carolina voters, including the latest from ARG and PPP -- now shows Gingrich leading Romney by a 10-point margin (36.8 to 27.0 percent), followed by Paul and Santorum running far back in third and fourth place (with 15.6 and 13.1 percent, respectively). Support for Gingrich now stands at roughly the same level that polls found when his numbers first surged in late November 2011.



[20120121-07](#) 18:06 Art Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)

It's all about hate.

You know, there is something to be learned here, but I am not quite sure what. This is absolutely amazing.

[20120121-08](#) 18:26 SteveG Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)

Newt is the true bully and plays it well to the crowd.

20120121-14	20:43	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
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He IS a bully. And his wife has helmet hair.

20120122-01	17:20	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Pam, above)
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She reminds me so much of McCain's wife. Both speed-freak bug-eyed blondes. Hey, at least she's for free love and open marriage.

[Nope! I just looked at some pictures of Cindy, who makes Callista look like a Stepford Wife. –SteveB]

20120121-09	18:27	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Art & SteveG, above)
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I don't remember ever seeing anything like this year's Republican battle in my life! Bizarre!

How could John King so play into his hands? How could he not have know what Newt's response would be? It was so predictable. It's an important issue especially in light of the hypocrisy of Newt when you consider he led the fight to impeach Clinton for crap he was actually doing at the time and before and maybe for time immemorial. A*s-hole!

You stand strong with a question like that. You fight for an answer like a pit bull or you'd better not ask the question to begin with. Another reason to have multiple moderators who can pile on when somebody gets as unruly as Newt and the crowd.

20120121-15	20:47	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Good point. And you know that crowd was partisan to begin with. He was preaching to the choir. No defense like a good offense, eh? John King did look like a deer in the headlights. I wish he'd had a bit more moxey. Bill Maher (sp?) would have handled it better.

20120122-04	06:05	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to Pam, above)
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The crowd was another CNN "mistake". They let a bunch of Teabaggers in on purpose. Maybe impossible to keep them out?

This man is dangerous:

"The American people feel that they have elites who have been trying for a half century to force us to quit being American," Gingrich said.

"The elites in Washington and New York have no understanding, no care, no concern, no reliability, and in fact, do not represent them [the American people] at all," he said.

But I get the idea the "elites" he means are not the 1%, they're anyone who might actually be educated!!! The actual elite wielding the power, the 1%, remains nameless with Newt. ^_^

20120122-12	13:17	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
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A half century?! If this isn't incitement to class warfare, I don't know what is. Here's how I see the right-wing strategy: declare over and over that the thing you want to protect is the very thing you actually want to limit, i.e., freedom. If we go all the way back to Puritan New England, we can trace a strain of fascist social control that wants to dictate morals and behavior. It's always been there, maybe it's always been part of human nature. Puritanism is anti-Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is European (French and English mainly), and the reason Romney et. al. keep bashing Europe is because they know Europe has a much better record of working to unfetter the people and ensure social justice than we do. The French may be snobs, but they have great health care. The English may be reserved, but they gave us Magna Carta, habeas corpus, and trial by jury. The Germans may be rigid, but they know how to run an economy. Gross generalizations, I realize, but generalizations are recognizable because they contain at least a grain of truth. We are so insecure in our Americanness that we refuse to learn from anyone else. Let the world learn from us, we crow. Other countries, like Japan and China, have not been so reluctant to learn from others (often us, granted), and look at the success they've made of that knowledge. Sorry, guys, but we're like a man who won't ask for directions because he's convinced of his own directional invincibility.

20120122-13	13:26	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Move over, you may be getting some new neighbors.

20120122-06	08:58	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Hey, in Bolivia we've got a guy in charge who thinks he's a communist, but is really just another fascist coca-chewer. There's even a new Constitution.

But, you know what? There's essentially no change. Too much inertia here. All politicians finally decide it's not worth it to bash their heads against the wall of ennui and indifference and figure out it's better to just cash in. This leaves the people pretty much on their own, but taxes are low and people enjoy more freedom than in the U.S. Bolivians can legally be gayly married, masturbate, and drink in the streets, but not all at once.

But don't even think about the fat lady, she ain't gonna sing yet.

20120122-05	08:06	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Do we all move to Bolivia or do we just move Newt there?

20120122-07	11:41	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Seriously, Newt is going to self-destruct again, right?

20120122-08	12:53	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
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If history is an indicator he will. But, if history is an indicator the American people self-destruct also. Either way it is going to be a ride, get your tickets now.

20120121-10	18:30	SteveG	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to all, above)
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What is to be learned:

1. A portion of the country is racist.
2. A portion of the country likes bullies and to be a bully.
3. We do not respect education or civility.
4. A portion of the country is selfish.
5. A portion of the country cannot think for themselves.

Go back and watch Rachel Maddow's Friday show on msnbc.com about John King's questioning:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26315908/ns/msnbc_tv-rachel_maddow_show/.

20120122-14	13:54	Pam	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Can't argue with this.

I must say, this [Rachel Maddow], makes me feel better. Do you think our country will ever grow up?

20120121-11	18:37	SteveB	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveG, above)
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I think your list of five points sums up a lot of what I'm seeing this week. It's why I didn't like living in Tennessee many years ago. Better there now I think...yet if you drive down certain gravel roads...well...better be armed and dangerous if you ain't from thar.

Maybe we should have let them (SC, at least) secede, like somebody said. Then they could have been a magnet for all the racists and haters of various types.

Would that have led to war or a better peace?

20120121-12	19:06	Dennis	Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary" (reply to SteveB, above)
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from SteveB:

I think that sums up a lot of what I'm seeing this week. It's why I didn't like living in Tennessee many years ago.

...or Indiana?

Maybe we should have let them (SC, at least) secede, like somebody said. Then they could have been a magnet for all the racists and haters of various types.

Sort of an American Serbia?

[20120122-02](#) 05:33 SteveB Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
(reply to Dennis, above)

I always thought Graw Bone, Indiana was a lot like Tennessee...

[20120121-16](#) 21:01 Art Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
(reply to all, above)

One thing too I would like to point out is these people hopefully don't represent all of South Carolina. The people of South Carolina did elect Nicki Harley as governor, who by all accounts is not a right wing wacko. I went to school there for four years and remember at least one or two locals that were seemingly OK. Of course I was young and naive then. What we have however, is the fact that the extreme political elements of a party have seized control for the moment and are having their day. Let's hope that turns off the general populace, as much as it does us.

Frankly, I think I may agree with Sarah Palin for once and hope Gingrich does win in South Carolina. It will prolong the Republican agony for several more weeks at least, encourage more hateful attacks by both groups, cause them to spend even more millions, and hopefully so expose both these bozos for the charlatans they are making the real election a landslide.

Just a thought.

[20120122-09](#) 12:55 Pam Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
(reply to Art, above)

I hope you're right. It will all be worth it in the end if Obama is re-elected. I can't get over the Republican mantra, "Take our country back." Like it was ever taken away--except by the 1%. I think you're right, too, about hate as a fuel. Romney is so smooth and pressed down, like a grown up preppy, that he's easy to dismiss and hard to work up a sweat about. But Newt is a firebrand who knows how to manipulate a crowd. He's a demagogue, the worst kind of politician a democracy in trouble can throw up. I hope Obama nails the State of the Union Address. I loved it when he broke into song the other night. Very cool. Way cooler than when old John Ascroft used to sing about soaring eagles. That was NOT cool. Herman Cain may have thought he had the right stuff, but he didn't. And Tom deLay made a fool of himself on the dance floor. Why do they do it? They should listen to Robbie Burns: "Oh, wad some pow'r the giftie gie us/ To see ourselves as others see us." . (Imperfectly quoted, alas.)

If I sound a bit deranged this morning, it's because I can't stand the thought of Newt getting anywhere close to the center of power. It would be a joy to rant some more, but come the revolution I don't want to be fingered for calling Newt an arrogant s.o.b. with a pi*sy, smug, little grin that I find infuriating.

[I have noted your words. -Art]

[20120122-03](#) 17:38 SteveB Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
(reply to Art, above)

This is my hope, but we're in such unknown territory. Though I know it's a drastic comparison, I wonder if anybody said the same thing about Hitler? "Hey' let's just give this guy enough rope and he'll hang himself. What?" Knock! Knock! "Hey, Fräulein, would you get the door? What do you mean it's the SS?" Bang! Bang!

[20120122-10](#) 12:59 Pam Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
(reply to SteveB, above)

I'm sure they did. I don't think Newt is as insane as Hitler was, but his "grandiose ideas" are frightening, as are the people who follow him.

[20120122-11](#) 13:02 Art Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
(reply to all, above)

Romney really got skewered on the tax thing and I don't think he's going to get out of it. The whole unfairness, class warfare thing is catching hold and Romney is on the wrong side of the fence. Either way he loses now. If he discloses, people will see how unfair that is and, if he doesn't, he hiding something.

Newt on the other hand has so much baggage that he will get blistered by Romney, as he is going down and that will create all kinds of fun. I think we'll continue to be entertained but let's hope people will wake up when it counts.

I am reminded that the German elite disdained Hitler but as he the NAZIs grew in power, they decided they could control him. Big mistake.

SteveB, the lead article on Newt's mental illness is a keeper!

[20120122-15](#) 14:01 SteveG Re: "New South Carolina Polls: Newt Gingrich Has Big Lead In Primary"
& Old Times (reply to Pam, above)

We were grownups in the 40's & 50's – I think we have been regressing since then. It seems as a country our values started changing – the Kennedy-Nixon debates, the Nixon paranoia, the Reagan rhetoric, etc. I am not convinced we are going to become mature – remember George the W saying "You are either with us or against us". That still seems to be the bully mentality of the right.

[20120122-16](#) 14:08 Pam Re: Old Times (reply to SteveG, above)

I think you're right. Adults even looked more grown up in the 40s & 50s. Compare William Powell or Cary Grant to Brad Pitt, or Barbara Stanwyck and Lady GaGa. I blame the baby boomers. Hey, that's us!

[20120122-17](#) 15:26 SteveG Re: Old Times (reply to Pam, above)

Hats and suits were the norm for guys, dresses and suits for the women. No casual Friday, no casual dress when you went out, not even to a ballgame or the show. You cleaned up to go to the doctor or to fly. It was the thing to do, expected. In high school – no jeans, skirts or dresses for the ladies.

[20120122-18](#) 15:57 Pam Re: Old Times (reply to SteveG, above)

At DePauw we weren't allowed to wear pants to the library or class, only skirts or dresses. I remember how excited I was when I was teaching at South Putnam and we were given the go-ahead to wear pants to school. I must confess, though, I like the more casual dress of today. I loved being a university teacher because I could wear whatever I wanted. Some people dressed up, some, like me, didn't. I didn't wear jeans (well, once or twice), but I could if I wanted to. I suppose if I'd been in upper administration I'd have had to dress the part, but I always said I never wanted a job where I'd have to wear a suit. I don't even own a pair of heels anymore. I hope this doesn't give the impression that I am a slob. I love clothes. I just like to be comfortable. TMI? No doubt.

<http://epicatravel.com/discover-five-best-romantic-getaways/>



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

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Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #58 — JAN. 24, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 24, 2012)

The quotation in the headline (bent slightly) is, of course, from *The Lord of the Rings*, referring to the dark lands of Mordor and to the Dark Lord, Sauron, represented in 2012 by Newt Gingrich. (See article in the Members Section, below, "Newt Gingrich: The Republican Dark Lord".)

Before Rick Perry dropped out of the race in South Carolina, when he was just beginning to campaign there, a voter approached him, shook his hand, and said, "It's a pleasure to meet a hypocrite and racist as big as you!" Perry was understandably rather taken aback and couldn't think of anything to say. He moved on to the next hand with a puzzled expression on his face. (I saw the video, but couldn't find it again just now to add the link here.) At the time, I thought the voter's question was criticism. Now I'm not so sure it wasn't genuine praise.

The events that transpired in the last week of the South Carolina Primary show the level of anger that resides in the American Right. This is an anger that makes the puny anger of the Occupy Wall Street protesters look like something from a Southern Baptist Sunday School picnic. It almost matches what we saw in Egypt and Libya, but with more vehemence.

It's funny, I don't see much anger from the Left. Am I missing something? I don't even remember much anger when Bush was President. Now, as then, I see a lot of fear. The Left is afraid. The Left is shaking in its boots, and rightfully so. Dark forces are loose in the land.

Here is my very serious question. I think several of us on the Left have been trying to verbalize this question. Certainly, John King didn't get very far. But South Carolina pushed me over the edge, so here it is, in its rawest, most elemental form:

Why the anger? Why is the Right so mad? What drives that anger? What drives it if not hatred?

Obama has turned out to be a very moderate President, as much of a Republican as a Democrat, who probably steered us past disaster. I could understand being opposed to his particular strategies, etc., but why the anger? In many cases, like we saw in South Carolina, why the hatred underlying the anger?

If people are simply out of work...but these don't seem to be the unemployed who are angry, though certainly this group of Teabaggers or whatever is worse off than they were in 2000. If it's the economy, there is no easy connection to blame Obama and not the Bush wars. Certainly, there's not enough of a concrete connection for anger and hatred, is there?

None of the case against Obama is very certain. No more certain than that he's a Muslim not born in America, it turns out.

Why the anger?

We've seen this anger here in this forum. The Right-wingers in this forum always end-up taking their marbles and going home mad. Why is that? All we do here is present facts in a polite manner, trying to get at the truth. Funny how so many of the "truths" from the Right turn-out to be lies (we've documented many of them in this group). The Right seems to hate that, even when they totally fail to prove their own case. Yet it should be valuable to both sides when lies and errors are uncovered. Why ignore the real truth? What happened to polite discourse?

Where does that anger of the Right come from? What drives it? Hatred? Hatred of what? Mild-mannered Obama? You have to be kidding me! Please tell me there's no racism involved, though I have to admit that the anger and hatred seem even more broad-based than loathing for dark skin.

HEY, ANGRY REPUBLICANS, COULD YOU PLEASE TRY TO VERBALIZE YOUR EXACT PROBLEM? Be as honest as you can possibly be. That's what we try to do here.

Why the anger? Why the hatred and name-calling and attempted bullying? In case you don't know, it's scary to the rest of us!

20120123-01 10:16 SteveG President Obama's Good Laugh

The Washington Post
SUNDAY, JANUARY 22, 2012

Gingrich Wins S.C. Primary

INTRAPARTY FIGHTS KEY LATE SURGE BY FORMER SPEAKER

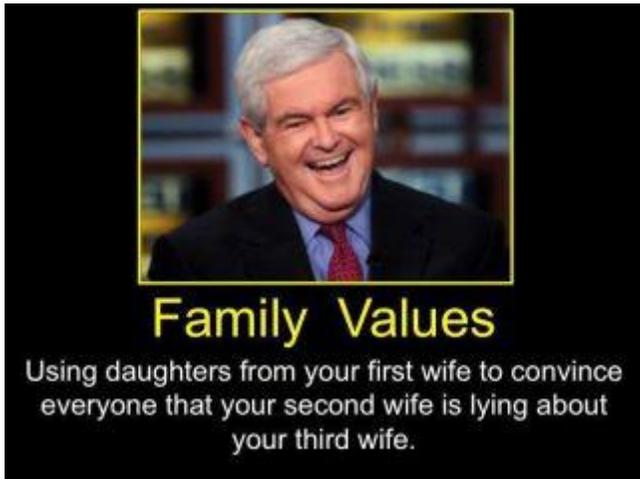
By Peter Lee, Staff Writer
The Republican Party's victory in the South Carolina primary on Sunday was a late surge for Mitt Romney, who had been trailing Barack Obama in the polls. Romney's win in South Carolina, which was the first state to hold a primary, was a key victory for the Republican Party. Romney's win in South Carolina was a key victory for the Republican Party. Romney's win in South Carolina was a key victory for the Republican Party.

TREASURY INVOKES PATRIOTISM
Treasury Invokes Patriotism In Pitch to Bank Executives

By Matthew Rosenberg
The federal government is invoking its national emergency powers to get access to banks and to get money to people.

Obama Adds \$60 Billion to Economic Plan

CAMPAIGN 2012



SO LETS GET THIS STRAIGHT...

CHARLIE SHEEN CAN MAKE A "PORN FAMILY"	BRITNEY SPEARS HAD A 55 HOUR MARRIAGE
KELSEY GRAMMER ENDED HIS 15 YEAR MARRIAGE OVER THE PHONE	JESSE JAMES & TIGER WOODS WHILE MARRIED WERE HAVING SEX WITH EVERYONE
LARRY KING HAS HAD 8 DIVORCES	43-50% OF TRADITIONAL MARRIAGES END
KIM KARDASHIAN'S MARRIAGE COST 10 MILLION DOLLARS & IT LASTED 72 DAYS	BUT SOMEHOW IT IS SAME-SEX MARRIAGE THAT IS GOING TO "DESTROY THE INSTITUTION OF MARRIAGE"
NEWT GINGRICH HAD AFFAIRS WHILE HIS 1ST & 2ND WIVES WERE VERY ILL	REALLY? PLEASE REPOST THIS IF YOU ARE PROUD TO SUPPORT EQUAL RIGHTS

[20120123-06](#) 13:14 Pam Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to SteveG, above)

Perhaps not the photo I would have chosen to run alongside that headline.

[20120123-08](#) 15:17 Ben Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to SteveG, above)

It IS ludicrous, isn't it? Or it would be, if it wasn't possible that one of those idiots might actually win. I don't think any of them would be an improvement, even on Bush.

[20120123-11](#) 16:03 SteveB Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to Ben, above)

I read that Rick Perry returned to Texas much reduced in stature. I would certainly hope so. They did a poll that showed Obama beating him in Texas, had he been the nominee.

Surely Gingrich will self-destruct at some point. I guess he's 10 points ahead in Florida with no organization there. He might be an easier opponent than Mitt, but both seem pretty easy to beat. The other day Mitt was trying to use McCain's lack of experience argument against Obama. No business experience. No experience destroying jobs. No experience as a greedy capitalist. If it didn't work then, how's it going to fly now that he'll have four years as POTUS and got bin Laden and Gaddafi?

At the same time they're trying to paint a picture of an extremely dangerous, extremely effective socialist pulling the strings of government.

You can't have it both ways. And if the slow recovery continues, which I think it will, the GOP may be in deep sh*t. The lies seem to be losing traction even with the conservative electorate. Note that Newt is using some other, very creative stuff to latch on to the teabaggers who are really natural Democrats, except they've been brainwashed by right-wing radio. You don't hear that free enterprise stuff from Newt.

20120123-12 16:06 Ben Re: President Obama's Good Laugh (reply to SteveB, above)

from SteveB:

You can't have it both ways.

Sure they can. Most of the Republican electorate is so screwed up and tied to dogma, that it will make perfect sense to them.

20120123-03 12:56 Art Much Ado About Charleston

Great newsletter again Steve. Loved the last part about getaways and Charleston, South Carolina. That is also the location of The Citadel, which is a pretty unique college by any standards. The Citadel has one academic claim to fame in Pat Conroy. I knew him as a cadet, he was behind me by a few years, and remember reading his very first book, 'The Boo' about a odd ball Commandant of Cadets who served at the school throughout the 60's and beyond. I recall thinking, this is really well written but who will ever read it besides we few who went to school during that period.

Well Conroy went on to do pretty well and one of his books, 'The Lords of Discipline' was based around the Citadel Cadet Corps and Charleston society. It was of course a novel but it did do a pretty good job of capturing a somewhat incestuous very closed inner group that constitutes Charleston inner society. They are still there and probably love Newt, in fact I know they do. Many Republicans use the school to launch their latest grandiose campaign speech on how they will save America.

Just as an aside, the Cadet Corps is oddly mixed. Many are from out of State, like me for one, and are there because of the military reputation of the school. There is always a bit of an ongoing conflict between them and the South Carolinians.

20120123-04 13:07 SteveB Re: Much Ado About Charleston (reply to Art, above)

[I thought South Carolina should have its good side shown too! -SteveB]

Thank you, Art. Charleston has got to be one of my favorite cities in the world, and, I think, of everyone I know who's ever been there. Easy to love, for some reason, well, for many reasons. And the Citadel, justifiably proud. Those closed Southern aristocracies are interesting, aren't they? Faulkner wrote about them in Mississippi and I've seen them up close in Tennessee and Arkansas (and we have something very similar here in Bolivia). I think the "tradition" is much the same across the South. It's an elitist, often racist thing, maybe in decline, maybe not anymore, and something we might miss if it were completely gone...

I think I'm going to turn the Newsletter into a comedy rag, Newt is providing so much material. And every time I see any of that stuff, I can't help visualizing Newt with smoke pouring out his ears, like a cartoon figure about to explode. I get a big kick out of that. :-) Can't wait to see it happen. Hopefully before he's the POTUS.

Townies!

[20120123-02](#) 12:53 SteveG Fw: MoveOn Petition: Investigate the Big Banks!

from MoveOn:

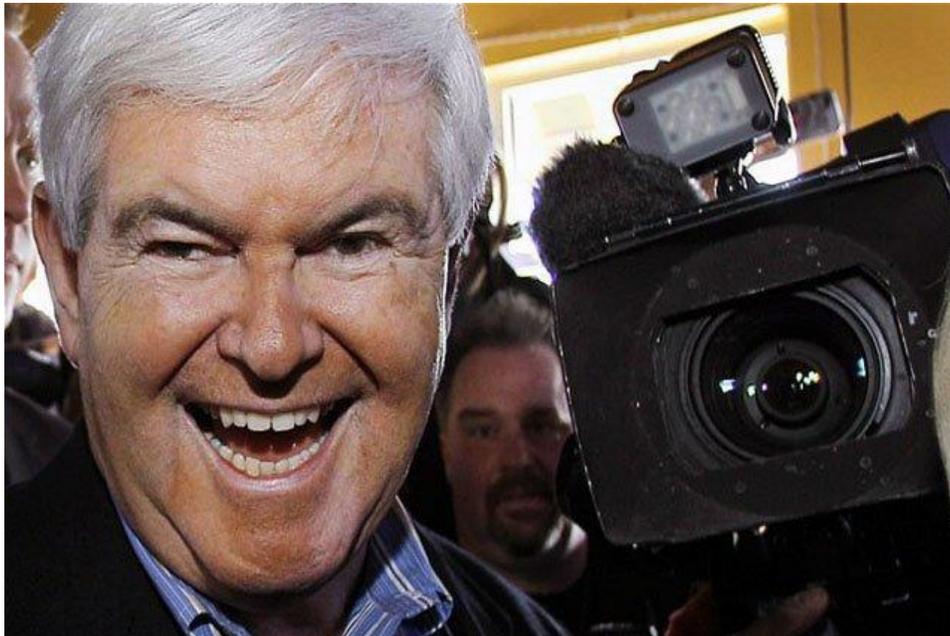
<http://front.moveon.org/shocking-how-one-bank-gets-big-time-profits-from-food-stamps/?rc=daily.share&id=35004-18997482-%3DmmwYx>

[20120123-07](#) 13:15 Pam Re: MoveOn Petition: Investigate the Big Banks! (reply to SteveG, above)

I certainly do hope Obama goes ahead with the investigation of the banks.

[20120123-05](#) 13:10 Ben "Newt Gingrich: The Republican Dark Lord"

I LOVE this headline!



"Newt Gingrich: The Republican Dark Lord" by Peter Bella, *Washington Times*

Jan. 23, 2012, (<http://communities.washingtontimes.com/neighborhood/middle-class-guy/2012/jan/23/newt-gingrich-republican-dark-lord/>)

CHICAGO, January 23, 2012— Newt Gingrich is the Dark Lord of politics. He is purposely campaigning in a provocative, irreverent, spiteful, and offensive manner.

He is pushing the envelope of decency in his "evil" campaign against his GOP competitors and President Obama.

Listening to him speak one has to wonder if he is insane, entertaining, or performing political stand-up comedy. One thing is for sure. Newt Gingrich is dangerous. Newt Gingrich's life's purpose is the quest for absolute power. In the present tense, he seeks the restoration of the power he lost.

Whenever he waddles on stage anger envelopes him like a black aura. Newt Gingrich has the singular ability to replace optimism with the ugly shadow of cold cruel hatred and pessimism.

He is the personification of the Dark Lord, Sauron.

One Newt to rule them all, One Newt to find them,
One Newt to bring them all and in the darkness bind them
In the Land of Hatred where the Shadows lie.

Only the simple minded could cheer for such an odious character.

Newt Gingrich has a grandiose delusion that he will be the next President of the United States. Which is why the Democratic Party is treating him like a lightweight. The real threat to President Obama is Mitt Romney.

DNC Chairman Debbie Wasserman Schultz is working night and day to derail Mitt Romney. She would sell her soul to help Newt Gingrich get the GOP nomination.

There is one thing Democrats do really well, better than Republicans. They can count votes, all votes, not just their own. This time out, the president does not only have to win, he needs a landslide. That is the only way he, and his party, can claim an ironclad mandate for their policies.

If the GOP loses and the margin is slim, President Obama loses too.

The president needs to win, at the very least, in the high 50% range. No landslide and he is a lame sitting duck. The White House will be relegated to pomp and ceremony. The Democrats will be seeking their next presidential candidate. The two party war of attrition will continue in the legislature.

Gridlock will be business as usual. The people, as the only losers, will suffer.

Newt Gingrich thinks he is the smartest guy in the room. He is so smart he let his own party oust him from his Speaker's position and force his retirement, even though he was warned about it ahead of time.

Newt Gingrich has been toiling in the reek and filth of the miasmatic backwater political swamp for years, waiting for his chance at revival and redemption. He grew in ego, wealth, and narcissism.

There had to be a lot of exploding heads in high GOP circles when Newt Gingrich threw his over sized hat in the ring.

Gingrich keeps invoking Ronald Reagan as his personal mantra. Ronald Reagan, the happy warrior, would be appalled at the detestable creature Gingrich has evolved into. Reagan would disavow him.

Over the past few years, political rhetoric has become terroristic in nature. Newt Gingrich kicked it up a notch. He turned political rhetoric into a grotesque art form.

One of the cardinal rules of politics is never turn the opposition into a martyr. It guarantees you will lose. Newt's ugly references to Mitt Romney and the president will backfire miserably. Newt is appealing to the lowest common denominator.

Anyone with a scintilla of intelligence and common sense can see he is just an angry guy who is in search of absolute power. Newt would not govern. He would rule.

There are plenty of legitimate reasons for Democrats and Republicans to be angry at, disappointed in, or disaffected with President Obama. Making him a martyr will backfire. Making the insults personal, even in an oblique manner, is indecent, vicious, and despicable.

There is no reason to show such disdain and hostility. President Obama has not engendered national hatred, except from some well-funded marginal fringe groups. He is not Jimmy Carter, whose own party turned against him.

Newt Gingrich has to convince Republican voters, nationally, in a compelling manner, that he can win against President Obama. He cannot make that case. All the insults and hubris in the world will not make that happen.

Barack Obama convinced Republicans, and even Evangelical Christians, in a compelling manner, that he was better than John McCain. Which is why so many voted for him.

Newt is out of touch with reality. The reality is political arithmetic. Newt Gingrich will drive many Republican voters to the Obama camp again or they will just stay home.

He cannot convert conservative or moderate Democrats to vote for him. Even most of the independents and swing voters are not that stupid.

Elections are about addition. Newt only knows how to subtract.

There is one last thing to consider, Newt Gingrich's blatant hypocrisy. Newt Gingrich spent decades as a legislator and lobbyist. His considerable wealth is a direct result of his membership in the Washington elite.

Newt Gingrich is part and parcel of the Washington elitism he rails against. He is railing against himself. Newt Gingrich is the ultimate beltway insider.

Newt Gingrich is running the mother of schlock and awful campaigns. Newt will be shocked and awed when he loses the GOP race.

The Republican Party will breath a sigh of relief.

20120123-09	15:19	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Run for Mayor of Your Town or City!
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from MoveOn:

If you were mayor of _____, what would be the first thing you'd do? Make sure city employees don't lose their pensions? Support green business startups? Or maybe fight back against cuts to crucial local services?

This isn't just a hypothetical scenario—it's exactly what more than 4,000 MoveOn members just like you have been thinking about since taking the first step to run for elective office. And they're not just running for mayor. They're exploring running for offices including school board, town council, and state legislature in cities and towns across the country.

If you've ever thought, "I've got some ideas for doing things differently in _____," or seen a local politician and thought, "If that were me, things would be different," then it's time to join thousands of other progressives across the country and run for office.

And if you decide to run, you won't be alone. You'll be part of a nationwide progressive strategy to take back local offices in 2012 and beyond. To help give you the resources you need to run a competitive campaign, we've partnered with the New Organizing Institute to provide you with online training and strategic advice. Trust me—running for office is easier than you think. So what do you say?

Yes, I'd consider running for office: <http://candidateproject.org/recruitment/campaigns/moveon/?pledge=true>

Back in 2010, tea party candidates, backed by national tea party groups, were elected to hundreds of local offices. That's exactly what we're going to do in 2012—but with a wave of candidates who will stand up for the 99% in communities across the country.

If you decide to run, you'll gain access to the New Organizing Institute's great online training programs. And to help progressive candidates in 2012, they've created a comprehensive set of candidate guides. Here are some examples of what you'll have access to:

- Expert online courses on how to run your own campaign and how to get started.
- Help finding the elected position that's right for you.
- An online community so that you can ask questions and share advice with other progressive candidates around the nation.
- A database of time-tested strategic campaign tips, and more.

So if you've ever wanted to change things in _____, or imagined yourself running for office in _____, now's the time. What do you think? Are you in?

Thanks for all you do. –Kat, Elena, Tate, Garlin, and the rest of the team

20120123-10

15:23

Mary

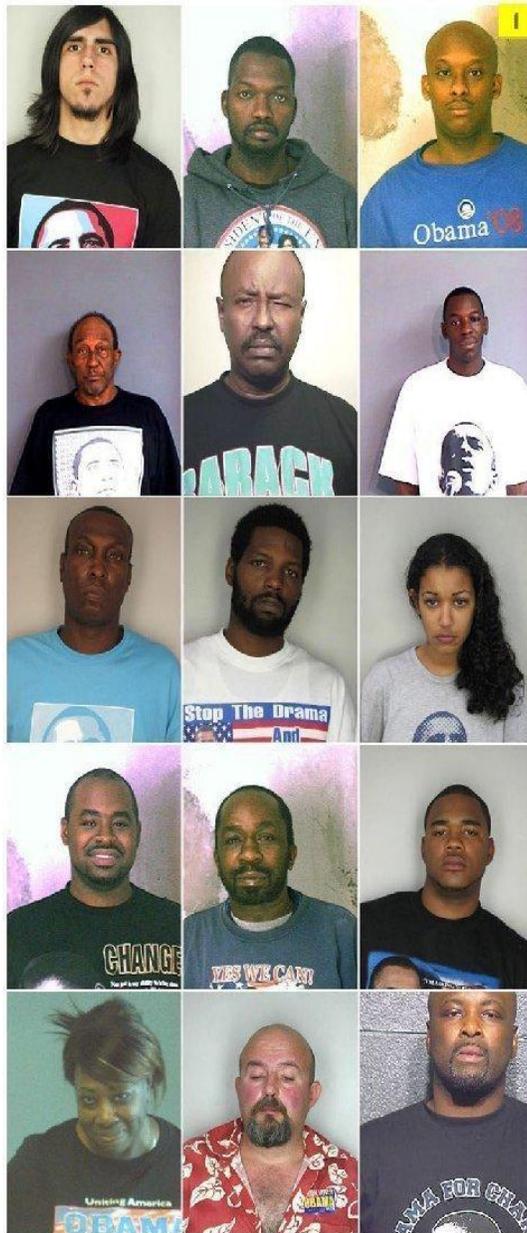
Re: SteveB's fwd. of Art's "Thanks, Mr. President" Presentation (reply to SteveB) & Fw: New Fashion Rage in Police Mug Shots

Awwww, how sweet. But I missed the violins. Ever heard the expression "figures lie, and liars figure?" Job creation? Really? So, if so and so wasn't laid off, that goes in the "job creation" category? I noticed no mention of the debt this new Messiah has incurred for our country. Oh, I forgot, that's Bush's fault.

I'm going to forward you an anti-Obama email I got which is equally as stupid, unfair, and unfounded as the one you just sent. Altho I loathe Mr O for so many reasons, I put no more stock in that than I do in your "Thanks" one. Could you try being fair yourself?

This is the anti-Obama email I rec'd, which, like the one you just sent out, is out of context, unfair, and unfounded...and you know I loathe the man, but I believe in being fair. Wish you did.

"Let's see here. I need to shower, shave, eat some oatmeal, put on my new Obama T-shirt, grab my 9 mm, and hold up a convenience store..." These are actual Police Photos:



[20120123-13](#) 16:17 SteveB Re: SteveB's fwd. of Art's "Thanks, Mr. President" Presentation (reply to Mary, above)

This is very funny. Thank you. But, jeez, Mary. Where are the WHITE guys? Ah, there's one...but he looks Serbian or something...I like a little humor! Though the Obama one brought tears to my eyes. He's just such a great guy!

What's to hate? The country seems to be moving in a positive direction. Even SteveBA seems to be betting on it. Despite Europe. This is very bad news for Newt Slimeball or Mitt Plastico.

Keep sending me stuff and ideas. You know I try to be fair. I wish we had much more criticism from the Right in the group. They just never seem to have the courage of their convictions to stick around. I'm editing the Archives now (1500 packed pages going back to 2007), and they're full of these people. And always, the Left treats them more courteously than the Left is treated in return. If the Right is correct about things and can prove it, where are they? Where is SteveM? Bob? Robert? GaryC? Dale? Richard? Mike? Pat? They couldn't take the heat of the truth, in my humble opinion.

I hope you guys are having a great year of the dragon. Thanks again for your contributions and, especially, opinions.

[20120123-14](#) 16:40 SteveBA Fw: "Rally Not Built on Complacency"

from Monday Morning Outlook:

"Rally Not Built on Complacency" by Brian S. Wesbury and Robert Stein, First Trust

Jan. 23, 2012, (<http://www.ftportfolios.com/Commentary/EconomicResearch/2012/1/23/rally-not-built-on-complacency>)

There are three types of people involved in the prognostication business these days. The "end of the world" types, the "it's a slower, post-apocalypse world" types, and the "everything is going to be OK" types.

For a long time now, we have been saying that the "end of the world" types are over-doing it. This is actually a dangerous stance for us to take because the "end of the world" types can be very nasty to people who disagree with them. The "it's a slower world" types are more cerebral and less nasty, but equally adamant. We, obviously, fall in the third camp.

No matter how we make our argument, and no matter how consistently the economy grows, the doubt and fear and disbelief just won't go away. We noticed this recently, when conventional wisdom started to say that investors were being "complacent" these days.

In other words, when the equity markets go down, investors are "living in reality" and "accepting" that the economy and financial markets just aren't in great shape. But when the equity markets go up, they are being schizophrenic, overly optimistic, and now some are saying "complacent."

We couldn't disagree more. Private sector payrolls have grown 160,000 per month in the past year. The unemployment rate is down almost a full percentage point from a year ago, while the size of the labor force is up (just like it was up in 2010, too). Over the past four weeks, unemployment claims have averaged 10% lower than the same period a year ago.

Retail sales are up 6.5% from a year ago; orders for long-lasting durable goods are up 12.1%, and auto sales are up 8.4%.

Perhaps most importantly, the long-awaited recovery in the housing sector has finally started. Housing starts in the fourth quarter hit the highest level since late 2008 and were up at a 32% annual rate compared to Q2. This was not all apartment buildings; single-family housing was up at a 13% annual rate in the second half of 2011.

Meanwhile, even after a recent rally, US equities remain incredibly cheap. Based on trailing after-tax earnings, the price-to-earnings ratio on stocks in the S&P 500 is roughly 13.5. On future earnings it's even cheaper.

Flipping this over, so earnings are on top and price is on bottom, the "earnings yield" on stocks is 7.4%, compared to a 10-year Treasury yield of only 2%. This suggests that stocks are cheap relative to bonds.

In other words, rather than being the result of complacency, craziness or stupidity, the recent rally has a much more straightforward explanation. The economy is growing, it's very likely to continue to grow, and if that is the case then stocks are grossly undervalued relative to bonds.

And the good news continues. With about 15% of the S&P 500 companies having reported earnings for the fourth quarter of 2011, 60+% have beaten street estimates.

Notice how none of this has anything to do with a third round of quantitative easing by the Federal Reserve. The last round of quantitative easing was essentially useless, with banks boosting their excess reserves from \$1 trillion to \$1.6 trillion.

Nonetheless, bank lending is picking up and accelerated after QE2 ended. This has helped boost the M2 measure of money (Milton Friedman's favorite gauge), which has also been growing faster since the end of QE2 than during it.

So far in 2012, the S&P 500 has had eleven up days versus only two down days. That ratio probably won't continue for the full year, but the idea that it is unwarranted, crazy or complacent is a point of view that is supported by a decidedly bearish set of assumptions.

Rather, it appears that the stock market is finally (or once again) beginning to realize that the world is not ending and that the recovery is not so fragile that it cannot last. We remain optimistic. We continue to believe that things are getting better and we don't feel complacent at all.

[Thanks, SteveBA. I agree with this completely. Now if Europe will just half-way fix itself...we could be in good shape for a while...I love it! -SteveB]

20120123-15	18:20	SteveG	"Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down"
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"Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" by Laura Rosen, The Ticket

Jan. 23, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/senator-rand-paul-detained-refusing-tsa-pat-down-161010280.html>)

20120123-16	21:43	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG, above)
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What do you all think? I'm sort of on the side of Rand Paul on this one. I believe in good airport security, but I know I don't want to be patted down or have a body scan. The thought of having to go through that makes me not want to fly. I have this feeling that we're putting too much energy in the wrong place when it comes to security. Why do we assume airplanes are always going to be the target? I suppose it's very hard to get it right; either we go overboard or we don't do enough.

I read in the New Yorker today that the NYC police has contacted the FBI or the CIA or someone about using drones to patrol the streets. It may not be in the works yet, but somebody somewhere is thinking about it.

Creepy. Or will it deter crime? I also read somewhere that having police do foot patrols is a good crime deterrent, especially when the cops get to know the people in the neighborhoods they patrol. Now, that makes sense to me.

There's also an interesting article on Callista Gingrich in the New Yorker. What interested me was not so much her as what the article said about Newt. He seems to me to be a very flawed individual, emotionally erratic and narcissistic. Definitely not Presidential material. He makes Obama look like the Rock of Gibraltar. Both had problematic childhoods in some ways, but Obama seems to have become a grown up, while Newt "has issues." At least that's how it looks to me.

20120123-17	21:55	SteveG	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)
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As long as there are rules about scans and pat downs all of us have to comply. I have to go through a body scan if I fly or a pat down if I go to the court house - metal knee & pacemaker. A change in the rules would be great, but neither Rand or his Dad are above the rules.

There are cameras on most corners, outside/inside stores, Google maps & videos of property - drones can't be that far behind. My understanding is that European countries have more cameras and more security at airports.

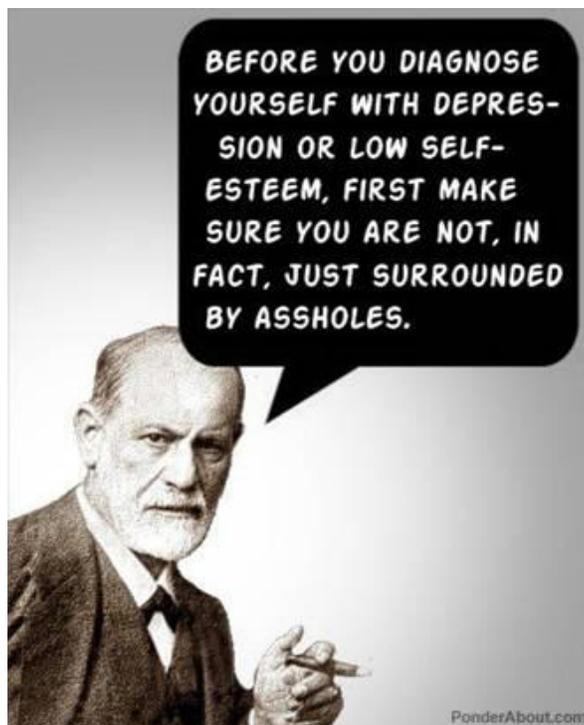
Newt and the residents of hooting/hollering/whistling residents of South Carolina are scary.

It is kind of interesting that we do not get the debates out here on network television - the three hour delay from East to West coasts.

20120123-18	22:20	Bill	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG, above)
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For fifteen years I had to travel by air quite frequently, and that period began before the security curtain fell hard on those who fly, bringing both inconvenience (you had to go to the airport very early), invasion of one's privacy, and additional cost. I hated the new security regimen and still do, although passing through the security apparatus is now a quicker process. I haven't—one reason being dislike of the security process—flown since August and am happy about it. However, air travel is crucial to the economy and necessary for other reasons, so my thought is that undergoing the small insults of the security process is a reasonable trade-off that allows a crucial service to continue in the face of hostile forces. I have some heartburn in saying that, but I don't know any superior remedy.

I doubt that Rand Paul had a shoe or underwear bomb, but he needs to subordinate himself to what is a reasonable inconvenience. It occurs to me also that the security process also deters-and catches-those who would bring guns, knives, and various other weapons on flights. Rand Paul could also avail himself of the FAA's process-for those who apply and pass-that allows expedited passage through security.



<http://www.latinflyerblog.com/2011/08/expertflyer-eric-bobeks-seven-weeks-in.html>

Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, Santa Cruz, Bolivia



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

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Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #59 — JAN. 25, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

We ARE Making a Difference!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 25, 2012)

Yesterday, we called President Obama and asked him to investigate our nation's "Great Mortgage and Banking Debacle". If you listened to the State of the Union speech, last night, you know all the hard work paid off. FINALLY, some b*stards are going to be held accountable! Whether the guilty are bank presidents or politicians, prison hopefully awaits.

This morning, I received the following from MoveOn:

Dear Friends of the Middle:

BREAKING NEWS: President Obama Launches Wall Street Investigation!

Did you watch the State of the Union address last night? President Obama did exactly what hundreds of thousands of us have been calling on him to do--he announced a federal investigation into Wall Street. Here's what he said:

I am asking my Attorney General to create a special unit of federal prosecutors and leading state attorneys general to expand our investigations into the abusive lending and packaging of risky mortgages that led to the housing crisis. This new unit will hold accountable those who broke the law, speed assistance to homeowners, and help turn the page on an era of recklessness that hurt so many Americans.

The best part is, progressive champion New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman is co-chairing the investigation and will make sure it stays on track.

Just weeks ago, this investigation wasn't even on the table, and the big banks were pushing for a broad settlement that would have made it impossible. Your work changed all that.

This is truly a huge victory for the 99% movement. Hundreds of thousands of us signed petitions, made calls, and held signs outside in the cold to make this issue something that President Obama couldn't ignore. Here's some of what MoveOn members and our allies did to bring about this victory:

1. Over 360,000 of us signed a petition calling on President Obama to fully investigate the banks.

2. We delivered that petition at over 150 events last Thursday around the country at Obama for America campaign offices.
3. Our pressure on state attorneys general stopped the rush to a sweetheart deal that would have precluded this investigation.
4. And we've called, Facebooked, and tweeted at the White House repeatedly to ask the president to launch this investigation.

Without an investigation, real accountability for the banks wouldn't be possible. But while this is a big win, it isn't enough all by itself. We still need to keep a close eye on the investigation, make sure top bankers don't escape prosecution, and keep fighting for real solutions for the 11 million underwater homeowners who are still struggling to keep their homes.

And, we need to keep pushing for more wins for the 99%, including our campaigns to get big money out of politics and tax the rich fairly. That all takes resources, and for obvious reasons, MoveOn doesn't get big checks from bank CEOs! So please click here to donate to keep the momentum going:

<https://pol.moveon.org/donate/investigation.html?id=35068-20195165-omgdQUx&t=6>.

Progressive victories don't come that often, and there's so much more to do. But this is a very big one. Thank you for all you did to make it happen!

--Elena, Emily, Lenore, Robin, and the rest of the team

P.S. I just called Regina, an affected homeowner and MoveOn member, to tell her the news. She was at our rally outside President Obama's campaign event in Harlem last Thursday, calling on the president to investigate the banks on behalf of homeowners like her. Regina shared her story in this video. She said, "The president heard the pain of the American people. Thank you, Mr. President!"

Want to support our work? We're entirely funded by our 5 million members--no corporate contributions, no big checks from CEOs. And our tiny staff ensures that small contributions go a long way.

Visible links:

<http://www.facebook.com/WhiteHouse?sk=wall>

<https://pol.moveon.org/donate/investigation.html?id=35068-20195165-omgdQUx&t=5>

<https://pol.moveon.org/donate/investigation.html?id=35068-20195165-omgdQUx&t=6>

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=269668&id=35068-20195165-omgdQUx&t=7>

https://pol.moveon.org/donate/donate.html?cpn_id=44&id=35068-20195165-omgdQUx&t=8

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20120124-01 09:40 Pam

Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG & Bill, FotM Newsletter #58)

You're both quite right, of course. I guess my biggest beef is that we need this kind of surveillance apparatus at all. I've gotten sort of inured to it on British TV; they're always looking at CCTV as part of a day's work. It's just when you step back and think about it, it is sort of Orwellian. Better than the alternative, I suppose. I remember when I

first learned that Hollywood stars had security systems. I thought, What is this world coming to? Now we have one. Go figure.

[20120124-11](#) 12:56 Art Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)

Agree with SteveG on this one. I don't like it much either but is Rand above the law the rest of us have to live with? We probably do need to rethink how we do security but at what cost. Is one airliner blown up a year worth it to stop the pat downs?

Bigger issue to me is guns, and just for the record, I have several. All older but they all work. Daily we read about people blown away at a party or while shopping or at work by some half wit with a grudge and a Glock. When are we going to face up to reality, people with guns kill people, a lot. Every time we have the latest massacre, which is practically daily in this country, I read letter from some NRA gun wacko saying millions are saved every year by guns but the liberal press won't report it. Oh, BS! Must be the same people who voted for Newt in South Carolina.

[20120124-12](#) 13:19 Pam Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Art, above)

Oh, I'm all for airport security too. Years ago I was getting ready to fly back from France, and there was a middle-eastern looking woman in the waiting area. She had a suspicious look to me. There was just something about her. I kept my eye on her and was worried she was a terrorist. And this was before terrorism was the big deal it is today. I guess I was guilty of racial profiling; I hate to admit it. But I know I'd have felt more at ease if we'd all been through some tight security. Needless to say, she did not blow up the plane. Actually it wasn't her ethnicity that worried me; I thought she looked insane.

So, Art. You own guns, but you want to get rid of guns? Again, I'm probably stereotyping, but the wackos who go on rampages are, mercifully, few and far between. The shootouts at Saturday night parties usually involve teenagers and lots of alcohol. Wouldn't it be better if it was much harder to get and own a gun than to arm the general populace? My son-in-law wants a gun, and my son, I just found out, has one. My daughter won't have one in the house (thank god). The third group of shooters you hear most about is little kids who find a gun and shoot another little kid. Mark Twain said a funny thing once about how amazing it is how many grandmothers have been killed by guns that "weren't loaded." It was funny when he said it.

[20120124-13](#) 13:41 Bill Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)

It's possible that the rigors of the air security regimen might some day be diminished. I may be a soft headed optimist, but technology and reduced international tensions might allow some relaxation. It won't go away altogether, we would probably all agree, because crazy people fly.

[20120124-18](#) 15:28 Art Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Pam, above)

As always, well stated. For years I traveled in the Middle East and always carried two passports. My official one and my self bought tourist one. It was my only defense, if we were hijacked. I was an Apple Computer Salesman. Even made myself up a card.

As to guns, I think I would support reasonableness, or at least my definition of it. I would pretty much ban handguns. Truth is nobody hunts with them and never has. They are good for robbing 7-11s and that's about it. If you want to defend your house get a shotgun. With a pistol you'll bang away, take out the potted plant, your spouse and maybe the cat but probably not the bad guy. With a shotgun you'll get them all of them with one blast.

We don't need 30 rd. magazines for anything. Last I knew, a charging quail or even deer can be brought down with one or two at the most 30mm slugs. I could go on but you get the picture. Truth is the NRA is nothing but a paid tool of gun manufactures, period. The NRA has hit upon the 2nd Amendment as some kind of holy grail and it appeals to the, shall we say, less thoughtful parts of this country. That probably offends someone but there is simply is no logic when someone writes " I would be in fear of traveling to other parts of the country unless I was armed to protect my wife and family". Does this really makes sense. I think this gun love may have something to do with being under endowed.

We could easily have reasonable gun laws that would protect those who wish to hunt and still keep the 17 year old from buying a Saturday Night Special to rob the local 7-11. We kill more people in a week with guns in this area than most European nations do in a year. It is just a matter of will.

20120124-19	17:50	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to Art, above)
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Wow. You've had a *Mission Impossible* sort of life, Art. Fascinating. I'm with you re. guns. I wouldn't ban them outright. I don't want one, but I know there are folks who want and, more importantly, need one. Like cowboys out west who need to shoot the odd rattlesnake. I don't like deer hunting much, but I acknowledge that venison can be tasty and deer can be a nuisance to gardeners and rose aficionados, so I wouldn't even try to ban hunting. Just don't ask me--or my grandsons--to participate. I used to live in the Catskill Mountains where deer hunting was a passion. I used to see deer carcasses draped over the hoods of pickup trucks all the time in hunting season. That would make me cringe. I much preferred watching deer outside my window as they tiptoed through the snow.

Another thing I liked about living in Canada was the Canadian attitude toward guns. I believe they're legal, but they're not the plague they are here. I can trace back the historical reasons why Americans have such a love affair with guns, but it doesn't make much sense today. Europeans hunt, have had wars, and are otherwise experienced with firearms. Why don't they have the kind of mayhem we do? I was just listening to an interview on NPR about the popularity of the Glock. It's been a great commercial success because it's been marketed so well, and some of that marketing has involved attempts to ban it, which just makes the prices go up and increases its cachet. I wish there were a way to get Americans generally to be a bit more reflective and self critical. The public is flattered by politicians at every turn, when we should be admonished to do better. The NRA is a bully, as is much of the Right. They bully the people who think differently than they do, and when any criticism comes their way, they scream bloody murder. Newt thinks he's calling people out? Well, someone needs to call him out. So there!

I'll be so happy when Newt fades back into obscurity, where he belongs. Maybe then my sanity will return

20120124-02	10:24	SteveB	"Buffett Slams Congress for Romney's 15% Rate"
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It looks like higher taxes are not totally all wet! More Republicans are starting to listen to Buffett.

Voters should be angry! Yes! Angry at the way they get swindled by the 1%, who rig Congress in their own favor!

Gee! Mitt and Newt are completely part of that elitist system of government. Republicans could be in trouble if the truth gets out.

"Buffett Slams Congress for Romney's 15% Rate" by Andrew Frye and Andrea Ludtke, Bloomberg

Jan. 23, 2012, (<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/buffett-blames-congress-romneys-15-155000898.html>)

Warren Buffett, the billionaire calling for more taxes on the rich, said Mitt Romney's U.S. tax rate of about 15 percent reflects poor laws rather than failings by the candidate for the Republican presidential nomination.

"It's the wrong policy to have," Buffett told Bloomberg Television's Betty Liu in an interview today. "He's not going to pay more than the law requires, and I don't fault him for that in the least. But I do fault a law that allows him and me earning enormous sums to pay overall federal taxes at a rate that's about half what the average person in my office pays."

Buffett, chairman and chief executive officer of Berkshire Hathaway Inc. (BRK/A), supports Democratic President Barack Obama and said Congress needs to raise taxes on the wealthiest Americans to close the budget deficit. Romney has agreed to release his 2010 tax return tomorrow, under pressure from Republican opponents, after saying he pays about 15 percent. Romney co-founded Boston-based private-equity firm Bain Capital LLC.

"He makes his money the same way I make my money," Buffett said. "He makes money by moving around big bucks, not by straining his back or going to work and cleaning toilets or whatever it may be. He makes it shoving around money."

(To contact the reporter on this story: Andrew Frye in New York at afrye@bloomberg.net. To contact the editor responsible for this story: Dan Kraut at dkraut2@bloomberg.net.)

20120124-03	10:33	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Call President Obama to Investigate Wall St.!
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from MoveOn:

Today could be the day when President Obama decides if he'll stand with homeowners or with the big Wall Street banks behind the housing crisis.

We need to keep the pressure on the president to launch a full federal investigation now, and not to give into the banks' demand for a sweetheart settlement deal.

Can you make a phone call to the president right now demanding an investigation?

White House comment line: 202-456-1111.

Then, please report your call by clicking here:

http://pol.moveon.org/call?cp_id=1707&tg=704&id=35007-9148195-sYmDHfx&t=3.

Over the weekend, more than 70,000 people added their names to the petition asking President Obama to open a federal investigation into the Wall Street banks behind the housing crash. That makes more than 430,000 Americans demanding that the president stand for homeowners, not Big Banks.

If someone robbed your house, you wouldn't just let them hand you \$10 and walk away. You'd want to know how much they stole, get it back, and make sure they answered for their crime. The big Wall Street banks are asking us to just forgive and forget—in exchange for a fine that amounts to a slap on the wrist—by trying to settle before there's a full investigation of their wrongdoing during the housing crisis.¹

A federal investigation is the only way we'll know the real scope of the problem. And for that, we need the president to take action. **So show the president where you stand: for a full investigation of Wall Street banks.**

Thanks for all you do, Elena, Stephen, Ryan, Sarah, and the rest of the team

P.S. Check out this great video: (<http://front.moveon.org/robert-reich-to-obama-you-wouldnt-let-someone-rob-your-home-then-hand-you-10-to-walk-away?id=35007-9148195-sYmDHfx>), where Robert Reich explains the need for an investigation in two minutes.

Source: ¹"HUD secretary: Mortgage settlement deal 'very close,'" *USA Today*, January 18, 2012
<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=269652&id=35007-9148195-sYmDHfx&t=7>.

20120124-22

20:12

SteveBA

Re: MoveOn Action: Call President Obama to Investigate Wall St.! (reply to SteveB, above)

So the Wall Street guys made you buy a house you could not afford and when the bubble burst and you were holding the upside mortgage it's the other guys fault. One of these days you bleeding heart liberals will accept the concept of personal responsibility. Let's let the taxpayers bail out the idiots who were trying to make a fast buck in the real estate market. I sure don't remember any stories about people at gunpoint being forced to buy houses.

[Turns out, the whole thing was rigged, the deck was stacked against the homeowners! We know that, now.
-SteveB]

[Great! One place is a little hard to read. See Russia for "Communists". -SteveB]

The World According To The Tea Party



With this map and the one Dennis sent before, we now have a complete 21st Century Atlas to guide #1's foreign policy.

I love it that Africa is just totally missing! LOL I guess even Teabaggers don't want to be politically incorrect. haha

"In a time when fear is traded like a commodity, and the word **SOCIALISM** is being used to create the same fear as the old word **COMMUNISM**, let's **REMEMBER** that our country was **NOT** founded on fear. **NO, OUR NATION** was founded out of **HOPE** for a better world where all people were **EQUAL**."

"Let's not let fear change our nation's great tradition and direction again!"

Did you know?

The original **Constitution** of the United States that was ratified in **1789** had only **one reference to religion**: [Article 6] **No religious Test shall ever be required** as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.

The *de facto* **motto** of the United States, adopted as part of the Great Seal of the U.S. by an Act of Congress in 1782, was **E. Pluribus Unum (Out of Many, One)**. Congress **changed it 174 years later (1956)** to "In God We Trust."

The **original 'Pledge of Allegiance'** was written in **1892** by Baptist Minister Francis Bellamy who **DID NOT INCLUDE** the words "**Under God.**" Those were added by Congress 62 years later (1954).

The **U.S. didn't issue Paper Currency until 1861**, and '**In God We Trust**' didn't appear on it for **96 years (1957)**.

Just after the **Red Scare in the 1950's**, **CONGRESS CHANGED** the **Pledge of Allegiance** and our **Nation's Motto** over the **FEAR** of **COMMUNISM**.

In a time **when fear is traded like a commodity**, and the word **SOCIALISM** is being used to **create the same fear as** the old word **COMMUNISM**, let's **REMEMBER** that our country was **NOT** founded on fear. **NO, OUR NATION** was founded out of **HOPE** for a better world where **all people were EQUAL** – that we were **ONE from MANY**.

Let's not let fear change our nation's great tradition & direction again.



This needs to go up on billboards across the country.

I like your piece on anger and hatred. It is a puzzlement why Gingrich, for instance, whines and moans about the negativity of the media, when he's the one who's yelling at everyone. I get my Fox News from Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert, so I can't claim to be super conversant in right-wing media, but does Fox find the same kinds of clips from the regular news to show their viewers? If so, they're taken out of context, as I have seen with my own eyes. It's not that the left is painting a skewed picture of the right. The right is showing its true colors all by itself. Every time Newt opens his mouth, he provides more fodder for liberal pundits. His hypocrisy is mind-boggling. If this were a movie, Newt would be the character the audience loves to hate, and when you walked out of the theater, there'd be a sense of catharsis because the bad guy always loses, right? Actually, this political season would make great drama. Let's see, John Goodman as Newt, Pierce Brosnan as Mitt, Tracey Morgan as Herman, Dana Carvey as Ron Paul, Burt Reynolds as Rick Perry, and Meryl Streep, who else?, as Michelle Bachman. And Paul Giamatti as Sanctimonious Santorum. We've got to have Giamatti on board somewhere.

20120124-09 12:22 SteveB Re: In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie (reply to Pam, above)

You are too kind.

I want Angelina Jolie for Michele. They're both so motherly. ^_^

I love your news image. What fun if someone got ALL of their news from Fox News filtered through Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert!

I think that's the guy who drew SteveG's map (above).

20120124-16 14:11 Mary Re: In the Land of Hatred Where the Shadows Lie (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #58)

[Personal content removed. -SteveB]

Perhaps if there IS anger on the right, as you see it, think of the actor (name?) in *Network*, in the scene when he yelled out the window about, "Mad as hell and not taking it anymore!" Maybe that's what's going on? I can't speak for everyone.

Since you said you like humor, I'm going to send you another email I got from a "friend in the middle". (:)

[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

"Walter"

President Obama goes to a primary school to talk to the kids. After his talk he offers question time.

One little boy puts up his hand, and Obama asks him his name.

"Walter," responds the little boy.

"And what is your question, Walter?"

"I have four questions:

First, why did the USA bomb Libya without the support of the Congress?

Second, why do you keep saying you fixed the economy when it's actually gotten worse?

Third, why did you say that Jeremiah Wright was your mentor, then said that you knew nothing about his preaching and beliefs?

Fourth, why are we lending money to Brazil to drill for oil, but America is not allowed to drill for oil?"

Just then, the bell rings for recess. Obama informs the kiddies that they will continue after recess.

When they resume, Obama says, "OK, where were we? Oh, that's right: question time. Who has a question?"

Another little boy puts up his hand. Obama points him out and asks him his name.

"Steve," he responds.

"And what is your question, Steve?"

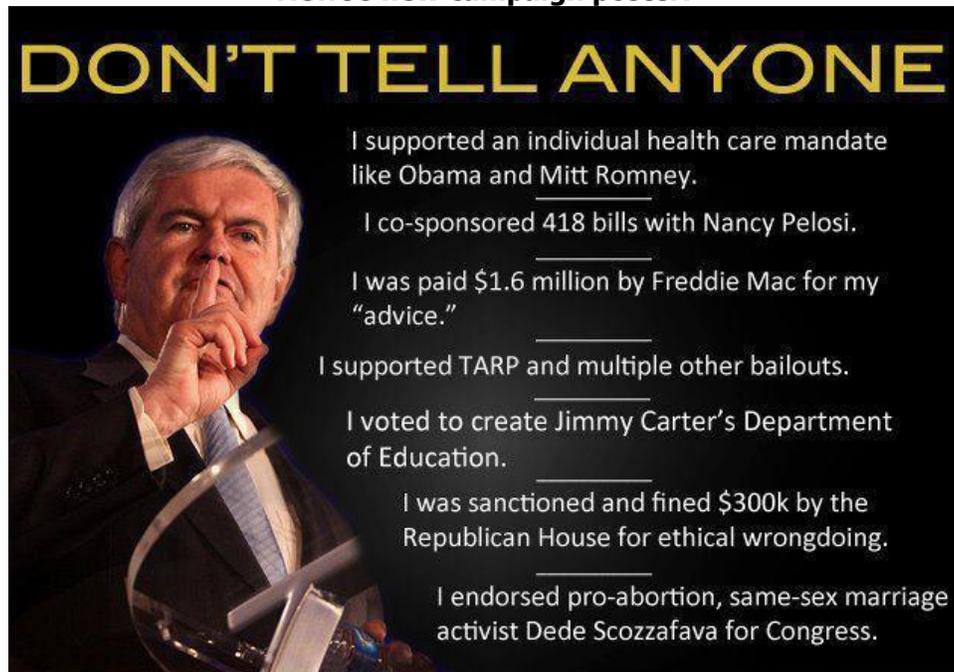
"Actually, I have two questions:

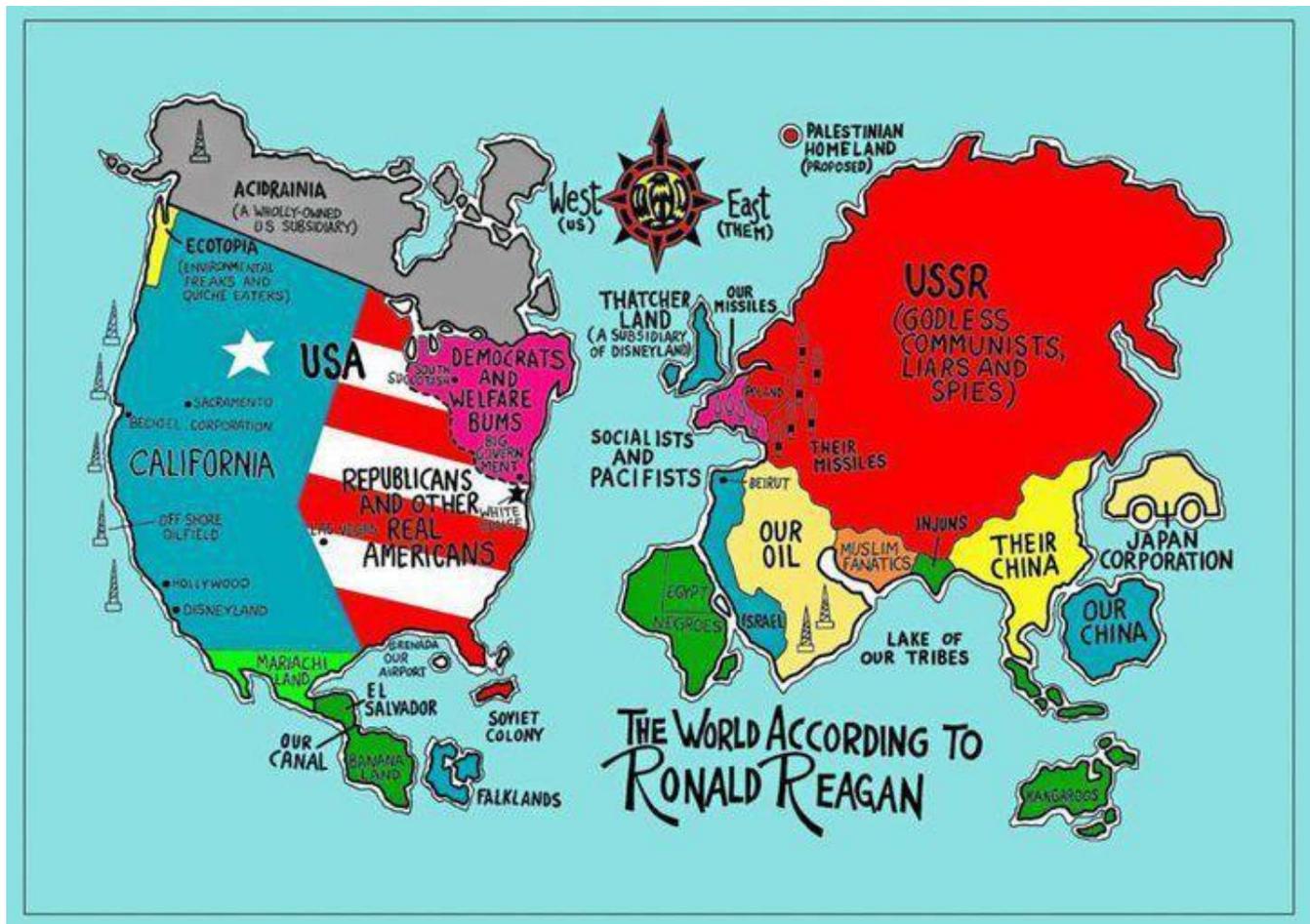
First, why did the recess bell ring 20 minutes early?

Second, what the hell happened to Walter?"

20120124-14 13:48 Dennis Graphic: Newt Gingrich Anti-Campaign Poster

Newt's new campaign poster:





"Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" by James Carville and Paul Begala, CNN

Jan. 24, 2012, (http://edition.cnn.com/2012/01/24/opinion/carville-begala-gingrich/index.html?hpt=hp_t2)

(Editor's note: James Carville is a Democratic strategist who serves as a political contributor for CNN, appearing frequently on CNN's "The Situation Room" as well as other programs on all CNN networks. Carville remains active in Democratic politics and is a party fundraiser. Paul Begala, a Democratic strategist and CNN political contributor, is senior adviser to Priorities USA Action, a PAC. He was a political consultant for Bill Clinton's presidential campaign in 1992 and was counselor to Clinton in the White House.)

Our esteemed CNN colleague Ari Fleischer says we don't understand Republicans.

Guilty.

We raise our children by the golden rule, and don't understand Republicans who boo it.

We salute gay soldiers and don't understand Republicans who boo them.

We hear about someone who's sick and lacks health insurance, and we pray, "Let him live," and don't understand Republicans who yell, "Let him die!"

We are proud to have helped President Clinton, whose policies balanced the budget, created 23 million jobs and lifted millions out of poverty, and we don't understand Republicans who inherited those blessings and gave us three wars, three tax cuts for the rich and a massive deficit. Indeed, we owe Mr. Fleischer's Republican Party and the Republican president he served a debt we can never repay.

So Ari is right, we just don't understand Republicans, and while it is not our standard posture, we approach the GOP primary race with a bit of humility -- ever mindful of the Democrats in the '70s who, as Ari himself noted in his op-ed, said they were hoping to run against Ronald Reagan.

Still, we do not back off an inch from our analysis that Republican elites are panic-stricken by the prospect of Newt Gingrich being their nominee. And we draw this conclusion from listening to people who understand the GOP far better than we:

Former Rep. Susan Molinari, who served with Gingrich in the House, has made an ad for Mitt Romney in which she rips her former colleague for "leadership by chaos." Molinari knows Newt well, as she was the keynote speaker at the 1996 Republican convention. Surely, she must know something about the Republican Party. When asked whether she would support Gingrich if he defeated her candidate for the nomination, she demurred, saying, "It would be very difficult for me to support Newt Gingrich for president."

Romney, Gingrich ratchet up attacks New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie presumably understands the GOP. A strong Romney supporter, Christie has excoriated Gingrich. "He was run out of the speakership by his own party," said Christie. "This is a guy who has had a very difficult political career at times and has been an embarrassment to the party."

Jim Talent, former senator from Missouri and another former Gingrich colleague, also supports Romney, and attacks Newt lustily. "He is not a reliable and trustworthy conservative," Talent says, "because he is not a reliable and trustworthy leader." Ouch.

Former New Hampshire Gov. John Sununu, who worked closely with Gingrich when Newt was a top GOP leader in the House, has also thrown in his lot with Romney -- and has also volunteered to swing the hatchet. Sununu basically called Newt nuts, telling CNN, "You can't have somebody that's really as irrational and perceives himself as Winston Churchill or the equivalent of Margaret Thatcher or Charles de Gaulle."

Ari's White House colleague during the Bush years and current CNN colleague, David Frum, wrote Monday, "Over a political career of nearly 40 years, Gingrich has convinced almost everybody who has ever worked closely with him that he cannot and should not be trusted with executive power."

And if we may engage in speculation, then we would say that the closer you are to Gingrich, the more likely you are to be a Republican and the less likely you are to vote for him. Just recently, columnist George Will wrote in The Washington Post, "Gingrich, however, embodies the vanity and rapacity that make modern Washington repulsive."

The aforementioned statements, plus the inevitable onslaught of other facts that will continue to come out, make the possibility of Gingrich being nominated literally nonexistent. His character flaws, in our opinion, are the reasons he is unelectable as president of the United States.

And when some of the most prominent, powerful and popular Republicans in America are saying Gingrich is unstable, unelectable and unreliable, that's panic. That's not just saying you disagree with him on, say, immigration or taxes. This is full-on, run-for-your-life terror. And we couldn't be happier to be commenting on it. That's something we are sure Ari does understand.

[20120124-20](#)

18:03

Pam

Re: "Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" (reply to SteveG, above)

This is wonderful, fantastic, and it gives me cause for optimism. A politician is always dangerous when he appeals to a mob, as Gingrich does.

[20120124-21](#) 18:34 Dale Re: "Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" (reply to Pam, above) & Video: President Obama's Election Night Speech, Nov. 4, 2008

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dYSvchqxMM0&feature=fwrel>

[President Obama's Election Night Speech, Nov. 4, 2008. –SteveB]

[20120124-23](#) 21:54 Pam Re: "Yes, There's a Lot We Don't Understand About the GOP" (reply to Dale, above)

A crowd is not a mob.

[20120124-24](#) 23:59 SteveB Photo: Bali (by FotM's Dennis!)

<http://www.denniscox.com/portfolio.htm>

Sunset at Bali's Jimbaran Beach (©Dennis Cox)



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #60 — JAN. 26, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

Romneymania!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 26, 2012)

As amazing as this article sounds, I guess I have to believe it, because it's in *The Onion*. What can I say? I'm hooked too! **Mittmania!!! Catch it!**

"Romneymania Sweeps America" *The Onion*

Jan. 25, 2012, (<http://www.theonion.com/articles/romneymania-sweeps-america,27155/>)

(TAMPA FI) From coast to coast, town to town, and in nearly every public meeting place and private residence across America, millions have been captivated, inspired, and in some cases moved to tears by presidential candidate Mitt Romney, the former Massachusetts governor who now finds himself campaigning before a nation in the throes of full-scale Romneymania.

"The raw energy and enthusiasm Mitt Romney stirs inside people is like nothing I've ever seen," Youngstown, OH auto mechanic Chris Ritenour said Wednesday. "Everything he says resonates with Americans. His moving story of growing up privileged, his inspiring rise from moderate wealth to overwhelming riches, his thrilling work in the highest echelons of corporate finance—he really speaks to the heart and mind of the common man."

"I don't think there's been a presidential candidate this exciting and magnetic in generations, if ever." Ritenour continued. "I am a Romneymaniac."

Young or old, rich or poor, Americans have been united by Romneymania.

As Romneymania has grown, the Republican candidate has crossed over from political figure to cultural phenomenon. Countless reverent portraits of Romney have appeared in storefront windows and on building facades throughout the country, often accompanied by one of the candidate's signature inspirational phrases, like "Let Detroit go bankrupt" or "Corporations are people, my friend."

Internet sources confirmed "Mitt" has become the top search term of 2012, while the blogosphere and social media sites have been dominated by discussions of the star candidate's endearing personality quirks, gossip about the relationship statuses of his five sons, and continual chatter over which designers his wife, Ann, wears.

In addition, commemorative plates and various other trinkets featuring Romney's likeness have reportedly been sold out for weeks.

"Mitt's firm belief in unlimited corporate campaign donations is what first got me really excited," said 48-year-old pipe fitter David Flores, adding that another reason he joined "Romney Nation" was because he found it "pretty cool" that Romney pays a lower income tax rate than he does. "Money is speech—that's what the First Amendment is all about. Finally, there's a candidate who speaks directly to me."

As primary season continues, Americans from all walks of life tune in loyally to Romney's stump speeches, with those in attendance so overwhelmed by the candidate's rousing oratory skills that many pass out from the excitement.

While surveys show Romneymania has swept across almost every demographic, Romney's appeal among the nation's youth, in particular, is nearly unanimous. Many young Americans acknowledged they had felt disillusioned by politics until hearing Romney's explanation of how his coordination of corporate funding for the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics renders him uniquely qualified to be president, an assertion they said immediately revived their faith in American democracy.

"Simply put, when Mitt Romney speaks, he inspires people to be better," said political scientist Deborah Klein of Brown University, adding that given his effusive charisma, people are likely to follow the Republican candidate anywhere. "Anytime he meets factory workers on the campaign trail or stands at the podium in a debate, his reputation as a highly relatable man of the people is indisputable."

"It's easy to see why Americans can't get enough Mitt," Klein added.

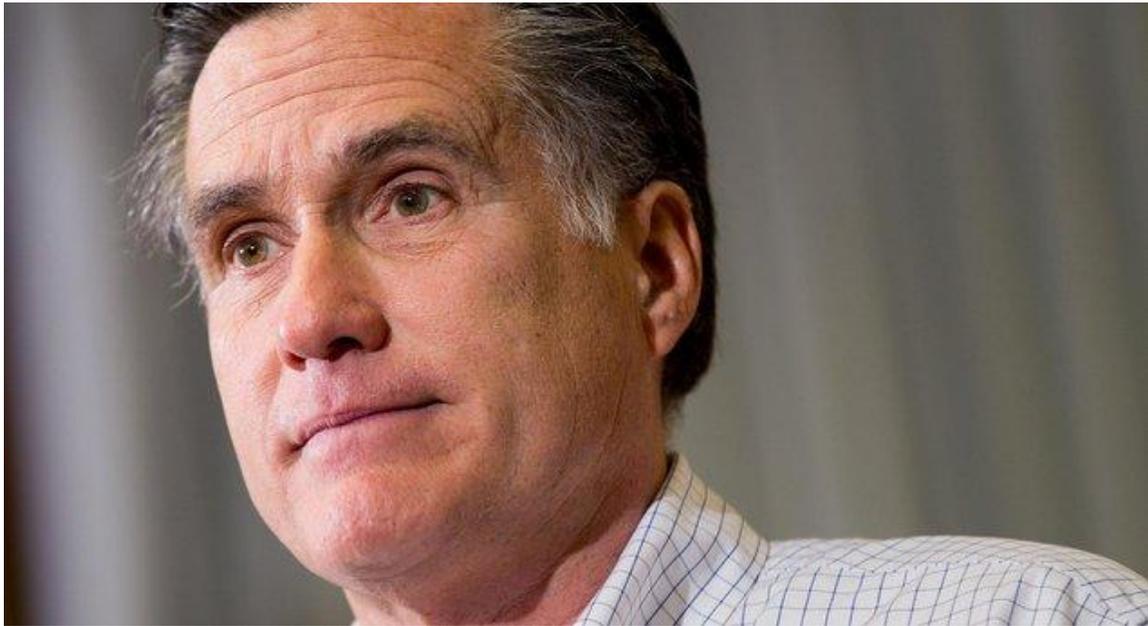
During a stop in Tampa, FL earlier this week, Romney was seen whipping a crowd of thousands into a delirious frenzy with his beloved, decade-old talking points about how he is not a career politician. The candidate reportedly inspired optimism and confidence by explaining he "never actually supported an individual mandate for health insurance at the federal level," a battle cry that prompted the audience to chant his name for five straight minutes.

In a moment his supporters called "genuine" and "down-to-earth," Romney then told the crowd that he, too, is currently unemployed and truly understands the fear of being laid off.

"It's amazing to hear your deepest convictions articulated so poignantly by a politician," said out-of-work Denver resident Austin Matthews, 36, admitting he had never before encountered a candidate—or any human being, for that matter—who had connected with him on such a basic emotional level. "He comes right out and says that any acknowledgment of income inequality in the United States is driven solely by bitterness and envy from the lower classes and shouldn't even be discussed publicly. It's like he's tapped directly into the soul of everyday Americans."

"Mitt Romney is the voice of our generation," Matthews added.

At press time, Romney's latest Twitter post, reading, "Had a surprise guest at today's event—my grandson Miles," had been retweeted more than 150 million times.



The most electrifying candidate in the history of American politics.

[20120125-01](#) 08:48 SteveB FotM Newsletter

I'm attaching a PDF copy of today's Newsletter. You might find it nicer to read than the email version. It is also a smaller file.

PDF versions of all the Newsletters are available for reading or download on the website:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org>.

The Blog is off to a slow start, but traffic is picking-up on the website. We're starting to show-up on Google and getting new subscribers almost every day.

Anyway, enjoy. And thank you one and all for your help, your writing, and most importantly, your reading!

[20120125-02](#) 10:51 Marci Re: FotM Newsletter (reply to SteveB, above)

Yes. I like the PDF form better. You have really improved your Newsletter! Congratulations.

[20120125-03](#) 12:27 SteveG "Mitch Daniels: Bombast from the Past"

"Mitch Daniels: Bombast From The Past" by Joe Conason, The National Memo

Jan. 25, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/mitch-daniels-bombast-past>)

Why the Republicans chose Mitch Daniels -- the former Indiana governor who once thrilled right-wing pundits as a 2012 hopeful -- to deliver a rebuttal to President Obama's State of the Union address is puzzling. His uninspiring remarks surely killed the Daniels fad, revived lately as Republicans fret over the unappetizing choices available in their primary.

By shining the spotlight on Daniels, the Republicans risked losing much more than a political rescue fantasy. He isn't merely a politician who looks like an accountant; he actually was an accountant -- or at least he played one during

the Bush years, when he served as director of the Office of Management and Budget. Listening to him drone on about fiscal rectitude just might have reminded voters of the true source of our national problems.

"Mitch Daniels...Isn't he the former Bush budget director who said the Iraq war would cost \$50 billion when it ended up costing \$3 trillion? The bureaucrat who promoted the Bush tax cuts when we were fighting two wars? The one whose budget projections were so fraudulent that he predicted federal surpluses in 2004 and 2005? Why the hell should we listen to him criticize Obama?"

That last is a highly pertinent question, although whether most viewers could watch Daniels long enough to ask it may be doubtful. Honest economic analysis shows that the great bulk of the deficits going forward stem from spending and taxation decisions made during the Bush era, which Obama is now doing his best to remedy, by bringing troops home from Iraq and ending the Bush tax cuts.

Daniels came close to admitting that embarrassing truth when he said that the president faced problems not of his making. And during the ex-governor's speech there were other brief moments when he sounded as if he might want to return to the hustings as his party's voice of reason. (That won't happen, not only because nobody in his party wants to remember George W. Bush, but because his personal life is too peculiar to withstand media exposure.) He made a few bipartisan noises, separating himself from the most extreme anti-Obama rhetoric heard in his party.

On the whole, however, Daniels chose to assault Obama using the familiar language of the Republicans in Congress -- and with equal dishonesty. There is no need to dwell at length on what he said when a few examples will suffice.

When he said that the president "cannot claim that the last three years have made matters anything but worse" -- and attacked the administration for spending "borrowed money" to counter the recession -- he must have known that every reputable economist believes the Obama stimulus saved the country from depression. Having written Indiana's budget when the stimulus money arrived in his state capital, he certainly knows that without the Recovery Act, unemployment, deficits, and suffering on the state and national levels would have been far worse. He took nearly \$2 billion that Obama sent to Indiana -- the money he said the president "borrowed and blew" -- because it saved his state's budgets and jobs, and made him look good. And he also knows that the Bush administration's squandering of the Clinton surplus left Obama with little choice except to borrow when the recession struck.

Daniels promised that Republicans would "level" with us about the hard fiscal facts -- but he lacked the courage to admit that raising taxes will eventually be part of any realistic solution. It was certainly part of his own solution to difficulties in Indiana, where he balanced state budgets not only by using federal stimulus money, but by raising the sales tax.

He is far from the worst in his party, but he is no political savior. With nothing to lose, he could have served a real purpose by challenging his own party to confront basic facts about spending and taxes that he could not avoid as governor. He is fortunate that this political moment -- and his choice of pander over candor -- will be instantly forgotten.

[20120125-05](#) 12:33 Art Re: "Mitch Daniels: Bombast from the Past" (reply to SteveG, above)

Do ya think some of these guys may have a little trouble sleeping at night? I mean they all can't be completely stupid and I have yet to see any discussion that stands any shred of logic to support their positions. They must know this. How would you feel standing up in front of millions of Americans knowing you were telling lies?

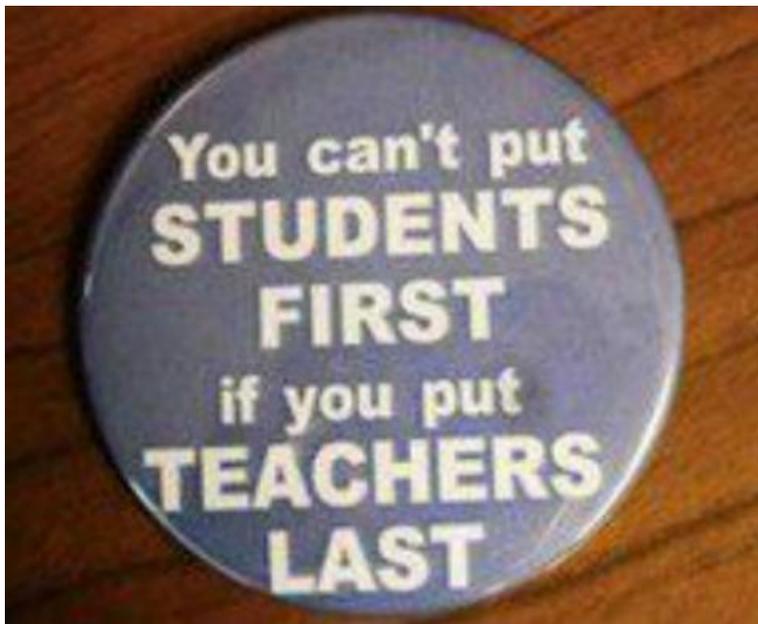
[20120125-06](#) 12:42 SteveG Re: "Mitch Daniels: Bombast from the Past" (reply to Art, above)

Complete history re-write. George, Cheney, Rumsfeld went down that road in their books. Daniels is a real piece of work and has really done Indiana in. He will leave the state with a surplus somewhere in the \$1.12 billion area -- found an account they didn't know about with \$320 million. Has really cut services for people with disabilities, Medicaid, education. But, he has money left and that is the measure the Republicans seem to cherish.

20120125-04 12:29 SteveG Button: Education

from MoveOn's Daily Share (Jan. 25, 2012):

A Message For All Those Education-Budget Cutters — <http://front.moveon.org/a-message-for-all-those-education-budget-cutters/?rc=daily.share&id=35088-18997482-xnH3Tcx>.



20120125-07 13:55 SteveG Fw: Care2/Sierra Club Petition: Tell Southern Country Coal to Stop the Hypocrisy!

<http://www.thepetitionsite.com/takeaction/857/974/825/?z00m=20185035>

20120125-08 14:41 SteveG "Drink Alcohol, Live Longer? Works for Worms"

from "Drink Alcohol, Live Longer? Works for Worms" by Lee Dye, "Good Morning America"

Jan. 25, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/drink-alcohol-live-longer-193615870--abc-news.html>)

Scientists have surprisingly discovered that a mere trace of alcohol doubles the lifespan of a tiny worm...

20120125-09 17:48 Dennis "Demand That John Boehner Be Expelled or Resign for Keystone XL Scandal"

Disclosure: I own stock in a Canadian tar sands oil company....and I oppose the boondoggle Keystone XL Pipeline. No wonder I'm not rich enough to be in Congress.

"Demand That John Boehner Be Expelled or Resign for Keystone XL Scandal" by Rmuse, PoliticusUSA

Jan. 15, 2012, (<http://www.politicususa.com/en/john-boehner-keystone-scandal>)

A good job with benefits and a pension are hard to find and if any American is fortunate enough to have a job, it is unlikely they would resign unless circumstances made remaining on the job intolerable. There are, however, occasions when a compassionate employer finds it necessary to force an employee to resign for bad behavior instead of terminating their employment. Members of Congress are unlikely to ever resign unless there is an impending ethics investigation or morality issues that are egregious enough to spark an investigation and subsequent trial to expel the offender from the House or Senate. Newt Gingrich was forced to resign his position as Speaker of the House in 1999 after being fined and reprimanded for ethics violations, but it was pressure from Republicans that forced his eventual resignation.

The current House Speaker, John Boehner, has demonstrated that he, like Gingrich, is averse to ethical behavior and it is time for him to resign his position or face an ethics investigation and eventual expulsion from Congress. There is precedent in calling for Boehner's resignation or expulsion, and ironically, it involved another representative from Ohio. James A. Traficant Jr. of Ohio was expelled in July 2002 after he was convicted of receiving favors, gifts and money in return for performing official acts on behalf of the donors. John Boehner's case is similar to Traficant's in that he is performing official acts on behalf of the oil industry and seven Canadian tar sands companies that stand to benefit if the Keystone XL pipeline is built between Canada and the Gulf Coast. Boehner's official acts on behalf of Canada's tar sands industry are scandalous because he owns stock in the aforementioned seven companies, and he is using his financial gain as impetus to hold 160 million Americans' tax cuts hostage in return for immediate approval of the Keystone pipeline.

On Sunday, Boehner told "Fox News Sunday" that Republicans may tie approval of the Keystone XL pipeline to the next payroll tax cut extension to force President Obama to give his backing to the project. Boehner said, "*We're going to do everything we can to make sure this Keystone pipeline project is approved,*" and as Republicans have shown with the debt ceiling, holding the payroll tax cut hostage is not out of the realm of possibilities. The only beneficiaries of the Keystone pipeline are Canada's tar sands companies, the oil industry, and John Boehner.

Boehner's 2010 financial disclosure form reveals his investment of \$15,001 to \$50,000 in Canadian Natural Resources Ltd, and they are in the business of tar sands oil and are just one of seven companies Boehner bought stocks in. His 2009 disclosure shows no stocks in Canadian Natural Resources Ltd leading any semi-intelligent American to believe Boehner bought stock in Canada's tar sands just in time to reap financial benefits if and when the pipeline was completed and carrying Canadian oil to Texas for refinement and sale on the foreign market. Boehner's push, as Speaker of the House, to build the pipeline is beyond simple conflict of interest; he is performing official acts for favors (campaign contributions) and money in the form of dividends from his oil sands stocks. Boehner's gifts in exchange for performing official acts for the oil industry are \$144,150 in the form of campaign contributions in 2010 alone. Boehner must resign or face an ethics investigation that may result in his expulsion from the House.

Boehner makes his unethical activity worse by lying to the American people about the number of jobs the pipeline will create and his assertions have been disproven time and time again. The fact that Boehner lies to the American people for pure personal financial gain and future oil industry campaign contributions is a matter for a House Ethics panel investigation. If Boehner wants to avoid a campaign to remove him from office, he must resign voluntarily to save himself and his family the embarrassment of a protracted ethics investigation.

As Speaker of the House, Boehner could have bought stock in Canada's tar sands oil companies and let the State Department and Environmental Protection Agency conduct studies to grant a permit for the Keystone pipeline without pushing the project by lying and now, potentially holding 160 million Americans' payroll tax cut extension hostage. However, the lure of personal financial gain was too enticing to Boehner and he took the only path available to an unethical congressman who stands to profit from performing official acts for money and gifts. Boehner must resign.

Boehner has obstructed, lied, and cheated the American people long enough. He is a hypocrite for calling for Anthony Weiner's resignation for sending sexually charged pictures over his phone at the same time Boehner bought stocks in Canadian tar sands companies. Pushing the pipeline that only benefits the Canadian companies Boehner invested in, foreign oil markets, and the oil industry while jeopardizing prime agricultural land and critical aquifer is unethical at least and inherently despicable. John Boehner can resign and go to work as a lobbyist for Canada's tar sands industry, but he cannot be their lobbyist and Speaker of the House at the same time. When

Boehner was caught handing out payments for the tobacco industry, he promised he would desist from any act that appeared unethical, but his arrogance and love of oil money proved too tempting and drove him to perform official acts for gifts and money, and if it was enough to expel another Ohio congressman, then it is good enough for Speaker Boehner. Mr. Speaker, it is time for you to go.

[20120125-10](#)

18:05

Pam

Re: "Demand That John Boehner Be Expelled or Resign for Keystone XL Scandal" (reply to Dennis, above)

Good grief! I've got a personal issue of my own that I'm working on or I'd mount a campaign against this doofus. What can ordinary folks do to address things like this? I write letters and sign petitions all the time. That doesn't seem enough.--Pam

p.s. Retirement has found me with new energy for tackling social injustices. I always thought I was just too apathetic or lazy to get involved in causes. Now I realize I was just too busy. Grey power unite!

[20120125-11](#)

18:29

Dennis

"Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon"

I'm already against the next war—Iran!

"Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon" by George Washington, Zero Hedge

Jan. 25, 2012, (<http://www.zerohedge.com/contributed/contrary-widespread-claims-there-no-evidence-iran-building-nuclear-weapon>)

(Even Israel admits that Iran has not decided to build a nuclear bomb.)

Earlier this month, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta said:

Are they [the Iranians] trying to develop a nuclear weapon? No. But we know that they're trying to develop a nuclear capability. And that's what concerns us.

Director of National Intelligence James Clapper confirmed in a Senate hearing – following the release of the classified National Intelligence Estimate in 2011 – that he has a "high level of confidence" that Iran "has not made a decision as of this point to restart its nuclear weapons program."

Mohamed El Baradei – who spent more than a decade as the director of the IAEA – said that he had not "seen a shred of evidence" that Iran was pursuing the bomb.

Six former ambassadors to Iran within the last decade say that there is no evidence that Iran is building nuclear weapons, and that Iran is complying with international law.

The International Atomic Energy Agency states:

All nuclear material in the facility remains under the Agency's containment and surveillance.

In other words, all nuclear fuel is accounted for and is being controlled and monitored by the international agency tasked with nuclear non-proliferation.

What about Iran's enriching uranium to 20%? The IAEA considers 20 percent enriched uranium to be low-enriched uranium and "a fully adequate isotopic barrier" to weaponization. In other words, 20% is well within the legal guidelines for developing a program of nuclear energy.

Indeed, under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran is acting in a wholly legal fashion. As the six former ambassadors cited above note:

In terms of international law, the position of Europe and the United States may be less assured than is generally believed.

Most experts, even in Israel, view Iran as striving to become a “threshold country”, technically able to produce a nuclear weapon but abstaining from doing so for now. Again, nothing in international law forbids this ambition. Several other countries are close to, or have already reached, such a threshold, with a commitment not to acquire nuclear weapons. Nobody seems to bother them.

Nuclear physicist Yousaf Butt – former fellow in the Committee on International Security and Arms Control at the National Academy of Sciences, scientific consultant for the Federation of American Scientists, and frequent contributor to the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists – points out:

Iran is not doing anything that violates its legal right to develop nuclear technology. Under the NPT, it is not illegal for a member state to have a nuclear weapons *capability*— or a “nuclear option.” If a nation has a fully developed civilian nuclear sector — which the NPT actually encourages — it, by default, already has a fairly solid nuclear weapons capability. For example, like Iran, Argentina, Brazil, and Japan also maintain a “nuclear option” — they, too, could break out of the NPT and make a nuclear device in a few months, if not less. And like Iran, Argentina and Brazil also do not permit full “Additional Protocol” IAEA inspections.

The real legal red line, specified in the IAEA’s “Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements,” is the diversion of nuclear materials to a weapons program. However, multiple experts and official reports have affirmed over the years that they have no evidence that any such program exists.

But didn’t the latest IAEA report say that Iran was trying to build a bomb?

Not really. The latest IAEA report states that Iran’s research program into nuclear weapons:

Was stopped rather abruptly pursuant to a ‘halt order’ instruction issued in late 2003.

While there are some allegations about documents found on a laptop, those documents apparently came from a terrorist group with zero credibility.

In any event, the current accusations against Iran by hawks pushing for an attack cannot be taken in a vacuum:

- The people pushing for war against Iran are the same neocons who pushed for war against Iraq based on false statements that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction.
- The U.S. has been claiming for more than 30 years that Iran was on the verge of nuclear capability (and the U.S. apparently helped fund the Iranian nuclear program).
- War against Iran was planned at least 20 years ago.
- Other recent claims against Iran have largely been debunked.
- The CIA admits that it hired Iranians in the 1950’s to pose as Communists and stage bombings in Iran in order to turn the country against its democratically-elected prime minister.
- Pulitzer-prize winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh says that the Bush administration (and especially Dick Cheney) helped to fund terrorist groups within Iran.
- *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and others are reporting, former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, former Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge, former national security adviser Fran Townsend

and former Attorney General Michael Mukasey – who all said that the terrorists were going to get us if we didn't jettison the liberties granted under the Bill of Rights – are now supporting terrorists in Iran.

- The war against Iran has already begun.

BUT DIDN'T IRAN THREATEN TO WIPE ISRAEL OFF THE MAP?

It has been widely report that Iran's president threatened to "wipe Israel off the map". However, numerous experts in Iranian language and culture say that this was a mistranslation.

I speak no Farsi, know nothing about Iranian culture or idioms, and don't like Iran's president or hard-line Mullahs. So I can't weigh in one way or the other.

However, Iran has not attacked another country in hundreds of years. (In the Iran-Iraq war, Iraq was the initial aggressor.) As such, it is unlikely to start one now.

THERE'S A SIMPLE SOLUTION TO THE ESCALATING TENSIONS

There is a simple solution to the escalating rumors of war. Specifically, a fuel swap would end the tensions. As Butt writes:

[A commentator] proposes a fuel swap to resolve the nuclear standoff: Iran would curtail its enrichment in exchange for foreign-supplied 20 percent enriched uranium fuel plates for its research reactor. In fact, in 2010, just such a deal was brokered by Turkey and Brazil but the United States could not take "yes" for an answer. Though Iran has just accepted an offer of new talks brokered by Turkey, new sanctions passed by Congress and signed into law by President Barack Obama have made it even more unlikely that the two sides can reach an agreement.

EVEN IF IRAN WERE TRYING TO BUILD A BOMB, AN ATTACK WOULD ONLY ACCELERATE THE PROCESS

Even if Iran were trying to build a bomb, American military and intelligence chiefs say that attacking Iran would only speed up its development of nuclear weapons, empower its hardliners, and undermine the chance for democratic reform.

20120125-12	20:57	Bill	Re: "Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon" (reply to Dennis, above)
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But Rick Santorum is ready to declare war on Iran just as soon as he takes office—fortunately an improbable event. I suppose he says this because AIPAC or an allied PAC had contributed to his campaign or because supporting Israel is required of evangelicals--or whatever he is.

If the idiot G. W. Bush had just stayed out of Iraq and let Iran and Iraq focus their hostility on each other, there would be little reason for all the saber rattling. Bush wanted, of course, to save us from the weapons of mass destruction sprinkled all over Iraq.

My knowledge, however, is that Iran continues to operate and to add to the number of its centrifuges that are intended to produce fissile material, whether weapons grade or for reactor fuel. One problem with this is that Iraq, the hereditary enemy, despite now being controlled by Shiites, construes this as Preparation imbalance. (The Israelis bombed the Osirak reactor into shards in, I think, 1984,)

20120125-13	22:13	SteveB	Re: "Contrary to Widespread Claims, There Is NO EVIDENCE That Iran Is Building a Nuclear Weapon" (reply to Dennis, above)
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Come on, Dennis, give it a chance! We haven't even gotten to see the "shock and awe" part yet.

Boy, Iraq and Afghanistan sure must be in a state of "shock and awe." I always wondered what that meant.

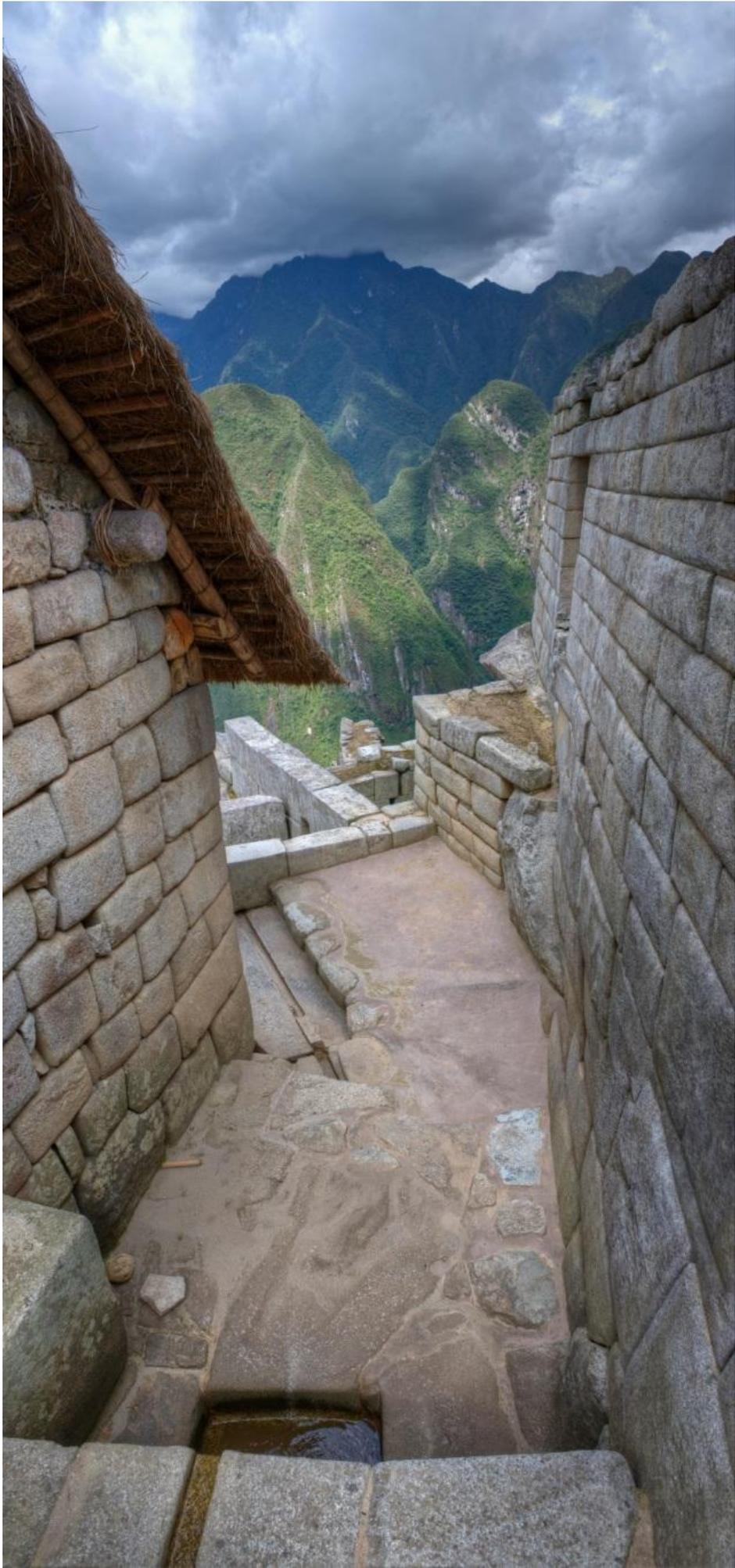
Now I know that if you're in "shock and awe" it means you're incredibly pi*sed and full of hatred for your American enemy!

There's an attitude we need to see spread further around the world! Very helpful to our national interest.

[20120125-14](#) 23:59 SteveB Photo: Machu Picchu, Peru

<http://ridingaround.wordpress.com/2011/11/26/a-day-at-machu-picchu/>

Inca stonework looking out onto even more impressive stonework...



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #61 — JAN. 27, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Fossil Fuel Subsidies Must End

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 27, 2012)

Here's an area where Republican philosophy is on-target, but Republican policy is wrong, because it's dominated by big money from energy companies. The U.S. government gives the money directly to the oil and coal companies. Many of the world's governments give their people cheap gasoline. The last time I looked, gasoline was 12 cents per gallon in Venezuela and bankrupting the country. All types of government subsidies for fossil fuels need to end (and fuel taxes raised in developed nations). If these same subsidies were applied, instead, to alternative energy solutions, we might have a fighting chance.

What makes sanity almost impossible to implement is that middle class and poor people all over the world would be hurt. People who have gotten rich off of existing policies would have to step-in to help. The amazing truth? None of these souls or companies seem interested.

Some things only government can do, because private enterprise doesn't give a damn! And why would it? Capitalism is a mindless, heartless beast with one thought—money! For the benefit of all, mankind has tamed other beasts and then, under control, turned them to do our bidding. Why not this one too?

"Dirty Money" by Matthew Yglesia, *Slate*

Jan. 26, 2012,

(http://www.slate.com/articles/business/moneybox/2012/01/fossil_fuel_subsidies_and_global_warming_we_could_cut_the_climate_change_problem_in_half_simply_by_abolishing_inefficient_fossil_fuel_subsidies.html)

(Saudi King Abdullah ordered petrol prices in the oil-rich kingdom slashed by more than 30 percent yesterday. The astonishing new data showing that simply eliminating inefficient fossil fuel subsidies could achieve half the world's carbon reduction goals.)

What if I told you that we could obtain half the reduction in carbon emissions needed to stave off climate disaster not with new government interventions in the economy but simply by removing existing interventions?

Fatih Birol, chief economist of the International Energy Agency is telling you exactly that. In data released this month as part of the IEA's latest World Energy Outlook report, he shows that in 2010 the world spent \$409 billion on subsidizing the production and consumption of fossil fuels, dwarfing the world's \$66 billion or so of subsidies for renewable energy. Phasing fossil fuel subsidies out would be sufficient to accomplish about half the reduction in

greenhouse gas emissions needed to meet the goal of preventing average world temperatures from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius.

You don't hear as much about this as you should largely because the biggest offenders are far from our shores. Still, the scale and scope of the issue is worth dwelling on if only because these subsidies are so wrongheaded.

Far and away the biggest problem seems to be that misguided sense that countries that are large producers of certain kinds of fuels ought to subsidize domestic consumption of the fuel in question. Thus Saudi Arabia spends more than \$30 billion a year on gas consumption subsidies while Russia spends \$17 billion on natural gas subsidies. Iran, which produces both, subsidizes both, spending \$66 billion in total plus an additional \$14.4 billion on electricity consumption subsidies. Large-population developing countries such as China, India, and Indonesia are also important players in the subsidy game. In no case do these subsidies make sense.

For starters, the mere fact that your country contains a lot of oil offers no special reason to subsidize gasoline consumption. For one thing, gasoline isn't oil. Like other usable fuels, it needs to be refined from crude. Iran is actually a net importer of refined petroleum products, and the United States has recently become a net exporter of them, even as the situation for crude oil is the reverse. More broadly, the opportunity cost of using a domestically produced barrel of oil is identical to the financial cost of buying a barrel on international markets. In other words, if the Japanese government wants to offer subsidized oil to its citizens, it needs to go buy the oil first from Saudi Arabia. By the same token, if the Saudi government wants to offer subsidized oil to its citizens, it needs to sell less to Japan. The budgetary impact is identical in either case and the merits of the policy have nothing to do with how much oil a country has.

And what are the merits? Not much. Consumption subsidies are typically justified as beneficial to the poor. But while it's certainly true that in rich countries utility bills and transportation fuel costs disproportionately burden the poor, it's not clear that this is true in the developing world. Here in the United States, only rich people go to fancy restaurants, but everyone needs to run home appliances, which is why higher energy costs hit the poor hardest. In India, however, more than a third of the population doesn't have electricity, and most people don't have cars. China's not as poor as India, but the same logic applies: The people who truly need help are the people who can't afford to take advantage of the subsidies. The IEA calculates that less than 10 percent of global fossil fuel subsidies benefit the poorest 20 percent. These subsidies would be much better spent on a mix of cash grants to the poor, lower taxes to spur growth, and investments in infrastructure and education.

But even a direct fuel subsidy for the poor is a pretty bad way to help people. America doesn't go in for lavish spending on fuel consumption subsidies, but we do have something called the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which offers targeted subsidies to help poor families in cold-weather states to keep their families warm in the winter. This is hardly the worst idea in the world, but you'd do more for the families and the environment if you just gave them cash. Some of that cash might go to pay the heating bill, but some might go to the purchase of sweaters or better insulation, ecologically friendlier solutions that will probably help households more over the long run.

That these kinds of subsidies are misguided counts as conventional wisdom in the economics world, but it's not clear that even economists have recognized the sheer scale of the impact. If roughly half of what needs to be done can be achieved simply by eliminating economic distortions—economic distortions that would be unwise even if there were no concern about pollution—then the whole framework of a trade-off between prosperity and sustainability is largely misguided. The outlook for greener, freer markets gets even brighter when you consider that consumption subsidies aren't the only dirty interventions out there. The U.S. government offers generous tax subsidies for the production of oil and natural gas (each year, President Obama proposes to scrap them, and each year Congress declines), and the European Union does the same for coal. Local governments nearly everywhere require the construction of more parking spaces and lower-density buildings than a free market would provide, encouraging excessive driving and energy-intensive large detached homes.

At the end of the day, pure laissez faire can never meet the world's environmental challenges. If you want to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, you need to cap them and then you need to reduce the cap. But a surprisingly large step toward that target can occur by simply allowing the market to do its work by removing the subsidies that encourage lavish and inefficient consumption of fossil fuels.

20120126-01 13:43 SteveG MSNBC's "Rachel Maddow Show"

Worth a watch:

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/26315908/ns/msnbc_tv-rachel_maddow_show/.

20120126-02 14:43 SteveB Tax Problem Joke & Graphic: Newt & 'His Well of Sleaze' [sounds like a great name for a rock group!]

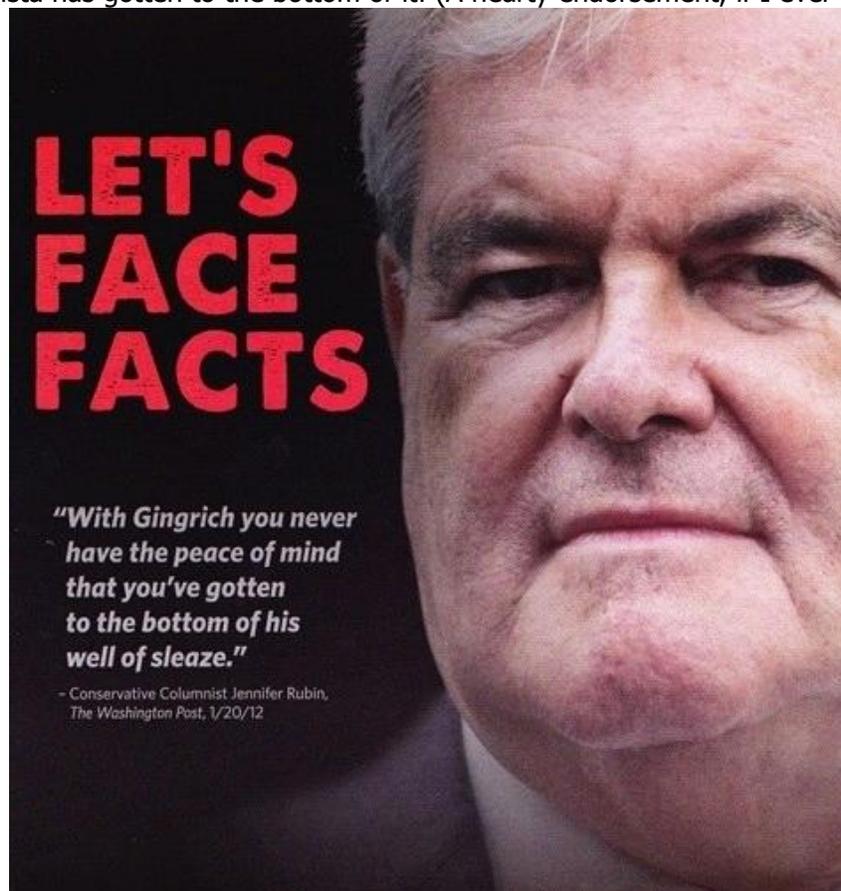
The IRS sent Joe's tax return back! AGAIN!!! In response to the question: "List all dependents..."

Joe replied:

12 million illegal immigrants; 3 million crack heads; 44 million unemployable people on food stamps; 2 million people in over 250 prisons; half of Mexico ; most third-world countries', and 535 idiots in the U.S. House and Senate.

Apparently, this was NOT an acceptable answer.

I bet Callista has gotten to the bottom of it! (A hearty endorsement, if I ever read one.)



20120126-05 15:38 Dennis Re: Tax Problem Joke (reply to SteveB, above)

[In reference to the joke, above... --SteveB]

You forgot to include Big Oil, Big Pharma, the military-industrial complex, bankers, mortgage companies, parasitic insurance companies and all the other welfare cases who make up the bulk of the dependents who suck up much more tax payer dollars than the ones you listed.

[20120126-09](#) 17:18 SteveB Re: Tax Problem Joke (reply to Dennis, above)

Oh...the tax thing was just a forward, but you're quite right.

Everybody's got their hand out. The bigger the hand, the farther the stretch. The biggest hands are stretched the farthest—around all our throats...

But it's Mexico and Canada that really pi*s me off! They have essentially stolen our stuff, because we should own them! Newt's right, we shouldn't be wasting our time on the rest of the world we'll never understand anyway. There aren't any bothersome indigenous peoples on the moon, and we could just get what we need right here in our own backyard—the lands of Latinos and Canucks—with Mexico and Canada soon to be the 51st and 52nd states, and Cuba soon following, combined with Puerto Rico as the state of "Cuba Libre" or "South Florida"—land of cheap retirement and domestic servants for all true Americans! That Newt is a brilliant thinker.

[20120126-10](#) 17:29 Pam Re: Tax Problem Joke (reply to Dennis, above)

Better to laugh than to cry, I guess.

[20120126-03](#) 15:03 Ben "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon"

I sure like this idea, as a national goal:

"Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" Reuters/ *The Globe and Mail*

Jan. 26, 2012, (<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/gingrich-vows-to-build-a-permanent-us-base-on-the-moon/article2316004/>)

(COCOA, FI) Republican presidential contender Newt Gingrich called on Wednesday for a base on the moon and an expanded federal purse for prize money to stimulate private-sector space projects. Gingrich vowed to build a permanent US base on the moon.

[20120126-04](#) 15:36 SteveB Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to Ben, above) & "Santorum: Moon Base Idea Is 'Crass Politics'"

As much as I wish it were the time to pursue such a plan, I don't think the payback is there.

Much better to spend the money on finding energy solutions and water solutions. We could build that pipeline between the mouth of the Mississippi to Texas (at least) instead of the Keystone XL Pipeline.

We could invest in public transportation. We could solve the healthcare crisis. You want technological innovation? We could improve education, make it more accessible, and provide plentiful financing to creative entrepreneurs.

We could send almost half the illegal aliens back to Mexico, coach. We could defeat the Taliban (just kidding about that one).

I don't see such vast rewards in returning to the moon. I'd be perfectly happy to let the Chinese do it while we work on the hyper-drive. Now, if there's one of those damned monoliths up there, whatever the hell they are, then, yes, we'd better try to get there first. Do you suppose Newt knows something?

It's not a super simple equation, because there is much still to be gained from such space travel, but it also seems to me a little like engineering masturbation, not even scientific masturbation like the LHC.

I guess I find myself in complete agreement with Mr. Glitter Bomb (below). You do know that, eventually, we are going to have to inflate our way out of this mess, right?

"Santorum: Moon Base Idea Is 'Crass Politics'" by Emily Schultheis, Politico

Jan. 26, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/>)

POLITICO's Robin Bravender reports from Tallahassee, Fla.:

Santorum was asked at Florida State University about whether he'd expand NASA programs after Newt Gingrich's pledge for a new moon base.

"I go back to trying to be very up front and honest with the people of Florida, the people of the country," he said.

But given a potential explosion of inflation, he said, "the idea that anybody's going out and talking about grand, new, very expensive schemes to spend more money at a time when we do not have our fiscal house in order, in my opinion, is plain, crass politics."

20120126-06	16:59	Ben	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to SteveB, above)
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I see anything to further develop our efforts in space as ultimately requiring a boost in education, focused in particular on math and science: just like Eisenhower's program -- the one that shaped you and me. So some of that, I have covered, if a realistic effort is made to do the Space thing. I also feel strongly that as more water becomes less accessible, the wilder ideas like comets as a source of water begin to look - at some point - necessary. There's so much potential, with energy just coursing throughout, that I feel not to accept that challenge is to guarantee an endpoint for humanity.

Maybe that's a good thing. But I think not.

20120126-07	17:00	SteveB	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to Ben, above)
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OK, Newt. (just kidding...I wish these were better times...but there is a limit to growth that only work on this planet will solve. At least for a while.)

Believe me, you want water from the Mississippi before you tackle some damned comet. ^_^

20120126-11	17:36	Ben	Re: "Gingrich Vows to Build a Permanent U.S. Base on the Moon" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Agreed. About the pipeline.

"Low IQ & Conservative Beliefs Linked to Prejudice" by Stephanie Pappas, LiveScience.com/Yahoo! News

Jan. 26, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/low-iq-conservative-beliefs-linked-prejudice-180403506.html>)

There's no gentle way to put it: People who give in to racism and prejudice may simply be dumb, according to a new study that is bound to stir public controversy.

The research finds that children with low intelligence are more likely to hold prejudiced attitudes as adults. These findings point to a vicious cycle, according to lead researcher Gordon Hodson, a psychologist at Brock University in Ontario. Low-intelligence adults tend to gravitate toward socially conservative ideologies, the study found. Those ideologies, in turn, stress hierarchy and resistance to change, attitudes that can contribute to prejudice, Hodson wrote in an email to LiveScience.

"Prejudice is extremely complex and multifaceted, making it critical that any factors contributing to bias are uncovered and understood," he said.

Controversy ahead

The findings combine three hot-button topics.

"They've pulled off the trifecta of controversial topics," said Brian Nosek, a social and cognitive psychologist at the University of Virginia who was not involved in the study. "When one selects intelligence, political ideology and racism and looks at any of the relationships between those three variables, it's bound to upset somebody."

Polling data and social and political science research do show that prejudice is more common in those who hold right-wing ideals than those of other political persuasions, Nosek told LiveScience.

"The unique contribution here is trying to make some progress on the most challenging aspect of this," Nosek said, referring to the new study. "It's not that a relationship like that exists, but why it exists."

Brains and bias

Earlier studies have found links between low levels of education and higher levels of prejudice, Hodson said, so studying intelligence seemed a logical next step. The researchers turned to two studies of citizens in the United Kingdom, one that has followed babies since their births in March 1958, and another that did the same for babies born in April 1970. The children in the studies had their intelligence assessed at age 10 or 11; as adults ages 30 or 33, their levels of social conservatism and racism were measured.

In the first study, verbal and nonverbal intelligence was measured using tests that asked people to find similarities and differences between words, shapes and symbols. The second study measured cognitive abilities in four ways, including number recall, shape-drawing tasks, defining words and identifying patterns and similarities among words. Average IQ is set at 100.

Social conservatives were defined as people who agreed with a laundry list of statements such as "Family life suffers if mum is working full-time," and "Schools should teach children to obey authority." Attitudes toward other races were captured by measuring agreement with statements such as "I wouldn't mind working with people from other races." (These questions measured overt prejudiced attitudes, but most people, no matter how egalitarian, do hold unconscious racial biases; Hodson's work can't speak to this "underground" racism.)

As suspected, low intelligence in childhood corresponded with racism in adulthood. But the factor that explained the relationship between these two variables was political: When researchers included social conservatism in the analysis, those ideologies accounted for much of the link between brains and bias.

People with lower cognitive abilities also had less contact with people of other races.

"This finding is consistent with recent research demonstrating that intergroup contact is mentally challenging and cognitively draining, and consistent with findings that contact reduces prejudice," said Hodson, who along with his colleagues published these results online Jan. 5 in the journal *Psychological Science*.

A study of averages

Hodson was quick to note that despite the link found between low intelligence and social conservatism, the researchers aren't implying that all liberals are brilliant and all conservatives stupid. The research is a study of averages over large groups, he said.

"There are multiple examples of very bright conservatives and not-so-bright liberals, and many examples of very principled conservatives and very intolerant liberals," Hodson said.

Nosek gave another example to illustrate the dangers of taking the findings too literally.

"We can say definitively men are taller than women on average," he said. "But you can't say if you take a random man and you take a random woman that the man is going to be taller. There's plenty of overlap."

Nonetheless, there is reason to believe that strict right-wing ideology might appeal to those who have trouble grasping the complexity of the world.

"Socially conservative ideologies tend to offer structure and order," Hodson said, explaining why these beliefs might draw those with low intelligence. "Unfortunately, many of these features can also contribute to prejudice."

In another study, this one in the United States, Hodson and Busseri compared 254 people with the same amount of education but different levels of ability in abstract reasoning. They found that what applies to racism may also apply to homophobia. People who were poorer at abstract reasoning were more likely to exhibit prejudice against gays. As in the U.K. citizens, a lack of contact with gays and more acceptance of right-wing authoritarianism explained the link.

Simple viewpoints

Hodson and Busseri's explanation of their findings is reasonable, Nosek said, but it is correlational. That means the researchers didn't conclusively prove that the low intelligence caused the later prejudice. To do that, you'd have to somehow randomly assign otherwise identical people to be smart or dumb, liberal or conservative. Those sorts of studies obviously aren't possible.

The researchers controlled for factors such as education and socioeconomic status, making their case stronger, Nosek said. But there are other possible explanations that fit the data. For example, Nosek said, a study of left-wing liberals with stereotypically naïve views like "every kid is a genius in his or her own way," might find that people who hold these attitudes are also less bright. In other words, it might not be a particular ideology that is linked to stupidity, but extremist views in general.

"My speculation is that it's not as simple as their model presents it," Nosek said. "I think that lower cognitive capacity can lead to multiple simple ways to represent the world, and one of those can be embodied in a right-wing ideology where 'People I don't know are threats' and 'The world is a dangerous place'. ... Another simple way would be to just assume everybody is wonderful."

Prejudice is of particular interest because understanding the roots of racism and bias could help eliminate them, Hodson said. For example, he said, many anti-prejudice programs encourage participants to see things from another group's point of view. That mental exercise may be too taxing for people of low IQ.

"There may be cognitive limits in the ability to take the perspective of others, particularly foreigners," Hodson said. "Much of the present research literature suggests that our prejudices are primarily emotional in origin rather than

cognitive. These two pieces of information suggest that it might be particularly fruitful for researchers to consider strategies to change feelings toward outgroups," rather than thoughts.

"The Secrets of the Republican Hair Helmet" by Brian Moylan, Gawker

Jan. 23, 2012, (<http://gawker.com/5878549/the-secrets-of-the-republican-hair-helmet>)

20120126-12	19:32	SteveG	Fw: (from Alan Grayson) Dennis Kucinich vs. Predatory Capitalism
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CONTRIBUTE TO BOTH ALAN GRAYSON AND DENNIS KUCINICH SIMULTANEOUSLY:
<https://secure.actblue.com/contribute/page/grayson4kucinich?refcode=nationaljan26>.

from Alan Grayson:

Mitt Romney did not invent predatory capitalism. It's been around for a while.

Predatory capitalism was already alive and well in 1978, in Cleveland. That was when the One Percent who controlled the banks, and pretty much everything else of value, decided that they wanted to steal the local power company from the people of Cleveland.

By way of background, Cleveland Public Power was founded by the Mayor of Cleveland, more than a century ago. It provides the people of Cleveland with electricity -- without the price gouging, poor service, pollution and monopolization for which Big Energy seems to strive.

The One Percent didn't like that idea at all. So they invested in a private company called Cleveland Electric Illuminating. They wanted to steal Cleveland Public Power from the people, and then jack up the rates, and make lots and lots of money.

They then issued this ultimatum:

1. Hand over the assets of Cleveland Public Power to us.
2. Or we will pull the plug on Cleveland.

By which they meant that they would boycott the City of Cleveland's bonds as they came due, and drive the City into bankruptcy.

Which they then did. The One Percent forced the City of Cleveland into bankruptcy.

But they didn't anticipate one thing. What the 32-year-old, first-term Mayor of Cleveland would say.

That was Dennis Kucinich. And Dennis said no.

No matter what the banks said, Dennis said no.

No matter what the City Council said, Dennis said no.

No matter what the bankruptcy court said, Dennis said no.

A newspaper on December 22, 1978 quoted Dennis as follows: "They are maneuvering to offer the city terms so bad that we will feel pressured to beg." And Dennis would not beg.

No. Just no.

And Dennis paid a price for that. The "Boy Mayor of Cleveland" went down to defeat that year. The One Percent made sure of that. But the people of Cleveland kept their power company.

Twenty years later, the Cleveland City Council honored Dennis Kucinich for having the "courage and foresight" to stand up to the banks, for the sake of the people. They calculated that Dennis had saved the people of Cleveland \$195 million in one decade alone. And Cleveland elected Dennis Kucinich to Congress.

Let me tell you something. There is not one person in a hundred -- Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, male or female, white, black, red or brown -- who would have the courage to do what Dennis Kucinich did. For the good of the people.

That's why we need Dennis Kucinich in Congress.

Thanks to Republican gerrymandering in Ohio, Dennis is facing the fight of his career. His election is on March 6. And absentee ballots in his district will be mailed out next Tuesday.

Dennis needs your help. He needs to contact thousands of absentee voters, and that costs money. If you helped him before, then help again. If you didn't help him before, then help now.

Because Dennis has guts. And that's what we need in our leaders.

Courage, Alan Grayson

This is the artist who is painting the cover of my new poetry book. I believe him to be the greatest living painter in South America. Our other national treasure is Ejti Stih, who is one of my wife's many cousins. Bolivia is such a small country, less than 10 million people, that I'm lucky to know both truly great artists. They're pretty interesting people too! The painting below absolutely blows me away. To me, it's like what Picasso wanted to do—to inhabit and exhibit the interiors of his subjects, not just the outside; what he intended to do, but couldn't quite bring off. Mamani Mamani does. Time after time. With some mysterious inner vision...with the impeccable intent of a true warrior.

<http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2011/04/21/color-earth-andes-the-work-of-bolivian-artist-roberto-mamani-mamani-29630>

La Pachamama (Earth Goddess, Mother Earth, Mother Nature), © Roberto Mamani Mamani



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #62 — JAN. 30, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

The Obameter: Tracking Obama's Campaign Promises

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 30, 2012)

We get a lot of lies and a lot of truths coming across our desks at Friends of the Middle. It's important to tell them apart. We have help.

In a previous Newsletter, I presented some of the online resources we use in fact checking. One of the best is PolitiFact.com, which rates the truthfulness of statements by politicians, almost in real time—Democrats and Republicans alike.

One of my favorite Truth-O-Meter readings lately was for a pronouncement by Indiana Governor Mitch Daniels, made while rebutting President Obama's State of the Union Address:

Nearly half of all persons under 30 did not go to work today.

A shocking indictment of President Obama's stimulus plan and jobs initiatives, don't you think? But, gee, Mitch, an awful lot of those persons under 30 might have been in school. Duh!

So, the Truth-O-Meter for this statement is: PANTS ON FIRE! (a "10" on "Dancing with the Stars", a perfect lie—100% untrue, effectively).

And here's a little bonus PolitiFact feature, which tracks President Obama's campaign promises and how he's doing on them. Instead of the talking point / mantra of "shovel ready wasn't shovel ready", you can really get into the nitty-gritty with this tool. The problem: Barry's doing pretty darned well, in my view, despite powerful opposition. I suppose Republicans might think he's done too well.

That's what the big sell is all about for the election, right? President Obama is a socialist hell-bent on "destroying" the country? But I don't think Republicans can get away with the big, bigger, biggest lie that they've been telling since about January, 2009—that President Obama is not doing anything while overtly doing everything he can to destroy the country. Rather a paradox. Especially since, despite every Republican working against the Recovery, the economy keeps growing. I'm having a very hard time seeing the destruction or the socialism. Can someone please point it out to me?

In this forum, someone from the Right has said that Obamacare destroyed the economy. What do you think PolitiFact would think of that statement?

I can't help but wonder how Bush was doing at the end, having had eight years?

Ladies and germs, I present "the Obameter" (<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/>):

The Obameter Scorecard (out of 508 promises)

Promise Kept:	187 (37%) ¹
Compromise:	62 (12%) ²
Promise Broken:	72 (14%) ³
Stalled:	60 (12%) ⁴
In the Works:	125 (25%) ⁵
Not yet rated:	2 (0%) ⁶

PolitiFact has compiled more than 500 promises that Barack Obama made during the campaign and is tracking their progress on our Obameter. We rate their status as Not Yet Rated, In the Works or Stalled. Once we find action is completed, we rate them Promise Kept, Compromise or Promise Broken. The report card provides an up-to-the-minute tally of all the promises.

¹<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/rulings/promise-kept/>

²<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/rulings/compromise/>

³<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/rulings/promise-broken/>

⁴<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/rulings/stalled/>

⁵<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/rulings/in-the-works/>

⁶<http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/promises/obameter/rulings/not-yet-rated/>

20120127-01 11:16 SteveG "How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism: Echoes"
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"How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism: Echoes" by Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, Bloomberg

Jan 24, 2012, (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-24/how-slavery-led-to-modern-capitalism-echoes.html#share>)

When the New York City banker James Brown tallied his wealth in 1842, he had to look far below Wall Street to trace its origins. His investments in the American South exceeded \$1.5 million, a quarter of which was directly bound up in the ownership of slave plantations.

Brown was among the world's most powerful dealers in raw cotton, and his family's firm, Brown Brothers & Co., served as one of the most important sources of capital and foreign exchange to the U.S. economy. Still, no small amount of his time was devoted to managing slaves from the study of his Leonard Street brownstone in Lower Manhattan.

Brown was hardly unusual among the capitalists of the North. Nicholas Biddle's United States Bank of Philadelphia funded banks in Mississippi to promote the expansion of plantation lands. Biddle recognized that slave-grown cotton was the only thing made in the U.S. that had the capacity to bring gold and silver into the vaults of the nation's banks. Likewise, the architects of New England's industrial revolution watched the price of cotton with rapt attention, for their textile mills would have been silent without the labor of slaves on distant plantations.

The story we tell about slavery is almost always regional, rather than national. We remember it as a cruel institution of the southern states that would later secede from the Union. Slavery, in this telling, appears limited in scope, an

unfortunate detour on the nation's march to modernity, and certainly not the engine of American economic prosperity.

Yet to understand slavery's centrality to the rise of American capitalism, just consider the history of an antebellum Alabama dry-goods outfit called Lehman Brothers or a Rhode Island textile manufacturer that would become the antecedent firm of Berkshire Hathaway Inc.

Reparations lawsuits (since dismissed) generated evidence of slave insurance policies by Aetna and put Brown University and other elite educational institutions on notice that the slave-trade enterprises of their early benefactors were potential legal liabilities. Recent state and municipal disclosure ordinances have forced firms such as JPMorgan Chase & Co. and Wachovia Corp. to confront unsettling ancestors on their corporate family trees.

Such revelations are hardly surprising in light of slavery's role in spurring the nation's economic development. America's "take-off" in the 19th century wasn't in spite of slavery; it was largely thanks to it. And recent research in economic history goes further: It highlights the role that commodified human beings played in the emergence of modern capitalism itself.

The U.S. won its independence from Britain just as it was becoming possible to imagine a liberal alternative to the mercantilist policies of the colonial era. Those best situated to take advantage of these new opportunities -- those who would soon be called "capitalists" -- rarely started from scratch, but instead drew on wealth generated earlier in the robust Atlantic economy of slaves, sugar and tobacco. Fathers who made their fortunes outfitting ships for distant voyages begat sons who built factories, chartered banks, incorporated canal and railroad enterprises, invested in government securities, and speculated in new financial instruments.

This recognizably modern capitalist economy was no less reliant on slavery than the mercantilist economy of the preceding century. Rather, it offered a wider range of opportunities to profit from the remote labor of slaves, especially as cotton emerged as the indispensable commodity of the age of industry.

In the North, where slavery had been abolished and cotton failed to grow, the enterprising might transform slave-grown cotton into clothing; market other manufactured goods, such as hoes and hats, to plantation owners; or invest in securities tied to next year's crop prices in places such as Liverpool and Le Havre. This network linked Mississippi planters and Massachusetts manufacturers to the era's great financial firms: the Barings, Browns and Rothschilds.

A major financial crisis in 1837 revealed the interdependence of cotton planters, manufacturers and investors, and their collective dependence on the labor of slaves. Leveraged cotton -- pledged but not yet picked -- led overseers to whip their slaves to pick more, and prodded auctioneers to liquidate slave families to cover the debts of the overextended.

The plantation didn't just produce the commodities that fueled the broader economy, it also generated innovative business practices that would come to typify modern management. As some of the most heavily capitalized enterprises in antebellum America, plantations offered early examples of time-motion studies and regimentation through clocks and bells. Seeking ever-greater efficiencies in cotton picking, slaveholders reorganized their fields, regimented the workday, and implemented a system of vertical reporting that made overseers into managers answerable to those above for the labor of those below.

The perverse reality of a capitalized labor force led to new accounting methods that incorporated (human) property depreciation in the bottom line as slaves aged, as well as new actuarial techniques to indemnify slaveholders from loss or damage to the men and women they owned. Property rights in human beings also created a lengthy set of judicial opinions that would influence the broader sanctity of private property in U.S. law.

So important was slavery to the American economy that on the eve of the Civil War, many commentators predicted that the North would kill "its golden goose." That prediction didn't come to pass, and as a result, slavery's importance to American economic development has been obscured.

But as scholars delve deeper into corporate archives and think more critically about coerced labor and capitalism -- perhaps informed by the current scale of human trafficking -- the importance of slavery to American economic history will become inescapable.

(Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, historians at Harvard University and Brown University respectively, are co-editing *Slavery's Capitalism: A New History of American Economic Development*, to be published by University of Pennsylvania Press in 2013. The opinions expressed are their own.)

20120127-02	11:48	Art	Re: "How Slavery Led to Modern Capitalism: Echoes" (reply to SteveG, above)
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I think I read somewhere that some in New York considered briefly also seceding from the Union because they had so much invested in the Slave south.

Also, although this is played around with a lot, I strongly suspect the average Union soldier if asked why he joined the Union Army and was fighting, would not have said 'to free the slaves'.

20120127-03	11:52	SteveG	"Mitt Romney's Mexican Roots; His Father Was Born In Mexico, Could Choose Dual Citizenship"
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Where are the birthers when it's a white guy? Not that it really matters, but interesting none the less.

[This information is interesting to me for one reason: Romney's father ran for President illegally, by the same "logic" the Right-Wing extremists use to exclude President Obama from being POTUS. And the stink the Right raised about that can still be smelled, despite Donald Trump's public humiliation on the matter. George Romney was born in Mexico. On Mexican soil. Not American soil. No one ever talks about that. What if he had won? --SteveB]

"Mitt Romney's Mexican Roots; His Father Was Born In Mexico, Could Choose Dual Citizenship" by Gabriel Lerner, Huffington Post

Jan. 9, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/08/mitt-romney-mexican_n_1192694.html)

Four years after electing its first black president, the U.S. could soon have its first presidential nominee whose father was born in Mexico.

It's already been published: Mitt Romney's father is Mexican. George Romney was born in 1907 in an American colony in the Mexican state of Chihuahua.

This could make his son, Mitt, today's favorite to be the GOP presidential candidate, a potential Mexican citizen, with full rights.

Check out any official Mexican guide for "paisanos" - those living in the U.S. - that now appear to have been written with Romney's father in mind: "Dear Paisano: If you are Mexican and have children born in the United States, by registering them in any Mexican consulate they will have dual nationality." (source in Spanish)

Mitt Romney needs to just -- if he hasn't already -- go to the closest consulate to his domicile (or whenever he is campaigning right now) with some documents that his aides-de-camp could easily gather: the birth certificate of baby Willard Mitt, born March 12, 1947 in Detroit, Mich., together with the name of the hospital and the doctor in charge, his father George W. Romney's birth certificate and two witnesses.

In fact, the GOP front runner has deep roots in Mexico, including his second cousin Leighton Romney, and about 40 other relatives descended from religious pioneers who first traveled to Mexico 125 years ago, according to report airing tonight on NBC's "Rock Center with Brian Williams." The Romneys of Mexico live in Colonia Juarez and

Colonia Dublan, two remaining settlements just 175 miles south of the border. They said they support the candidate and are proud of their family history. Romney has never come to visit.

"He's got a great pioneer heritage starting with people that crossed the plains going from Illinois to Utah, and then on from Utah down to Mexico," Leighton Romney told NBC's Mike Taibbi. "So there's a great heritage there of people that had to fight for what they believed in and for people that had to travel to different places and learn different things. I think there's a vast amount of experience that he could draw from there."

Of course, Romney never considered himself Mexican. He has said little about this part of his life. His family moved to that country fleeing American laws against polygamy, then considered a crucial pillar of his church.

The Romneys are Mexican since Miles Park Romney crossed the border in 1884, rejecting the Edmund Act that in 1882 declared polygamy a felony.

In 1890, the Mormon Church (LDS) disavowed plural marriage.

According to an AP story, Miles married his fifth wife seven years later. His own father had 12 wives.

In 1912, Mitt's grandfather, Gaskell Romney, returned to the U.S. fleeing the Mexican Revolution. (No mention of immigration papers here). The Romney family's genealogy page states he lost all his "home and possessions" there. But the family later sued the Mexican government and was awarded damages in 1938. This seed money "put the family on a solid financial footing." The fact that his father was then a sort of Mexican immigrant didn't prevent George from becoming CEO of American Motors and the governor of Michigan.

This is relevant, of course, because among all Republican candidates in the 2012 election cycle, as well as in 2008, Mitt Romney has been the one who consistently argued against immigration reform and for the swift deportation of all undocumented immigrants in the United States. He recently criticized the suggestion by another conservative candidate -- Newt Gingrich -- to legalize those immigrants who have lived here for decades who "go to church and pay their taxes" as "Amnesty" -- one of the worst insults in his lexicon.

Again, his Mexican past was never a secret. But not everybody knew it. Now, in the heat of the primaries and the debates between the GOP candidates, Romney's Mexican father turns out to be breaking news, an exclusive. Like a terrible family secret was suddenly disclosed.

All of a sudden, there is an interview with distant cousin Leighton Romney, who still lives in Colonia Dublan, 175 miles south of the Mexican.

"We certainly have a love for both countries," Leighton Romney told NBC. "I can sing both national anthems and tear up at both of them. I think that having two countries that you love and two countries that you can serve or be a beneficiary of their service is a great thing."

Why is this coming out now?

Could it be because those who are behind the re-re-re-publication of the alleged secret want to identify Romney as a Mexican exploiting the deep distrust of everything Mexican many of them have?

This is all reminiscent of the outrageous campaign that attempts to de-legitimize President Obama, arguing that he is not fit to rule the country because (other than his supposed identity as a socialistic, occult-believing Muslim, etc., etc...) even if he was born here, he is still the son of a man born in a foreign country. Kenya.

Where will it stop?

I suppose you could buy a lot of welfare Cadillacs with these refunds:

35% Myth: Tax Cheater Hall Of Shame

	2009 Profits: \$37.3 Billion U.S. Taxes: \$0 Refund: \$156M
	2009 Profits: \$4.4 Billion U.S. Taxes: \$0 Refund: \$1.9B Taxpayer/Fed Bailout: \$1 Trillion
 Imagination At Tax Evasion	2010 Profits: \$14 Billion U.S. Taxes: \$0 Credit: \$3 B 2001-10: Cut 20% of U.S. Jobs

**Nearly 2/3 of U.S. corps pay \$0 in U.S. income taxes
> \$100 Billion in lost tax revenue annually**

Sources: Forbes, April 2010 (www.Forbes.com) & US Uncut (www.USuncut.org) & New York Times, April 2011
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from Media Matters for America:

Affectionately called "Captain Planet" around the office, Media Matters' environmental team analyzed news coverage of the proposed Keystone XL Pipeline between August 1 and December 31, 2011, and compiled some troubling findings about the media's mishandling of this issue.

For starters, the media disproportionately slanted the debate in favor of those advocating for this pipeline, as this graph illustrates:

WHO WAS HOSTED OR QUOTED ON KEYSTONE XL?

Percentage of those hosted or quoted by the media about Keystone XL who

SUPPORT THE PIPELINE , **OPPOSE THE PIPELINE** , or **ARE NEUTRAL** .

BROADCAST



CABLE



PRINT



MEDIAMATTERS
FOR AMERICA

But this just scratches the surface. Among other things, our researchers also found that the media not only repeated the inflated (and widely discredited) industry jobs numbers, they also downplayed environmental concerns about the pipeline.

We expect our news outlets to act responsibly, tell the truth and tell the whole story. It's essential. People rely on this information to make decisions. A well-packaged piece of misinformation or inadequate reporting can have consequences for us all, especially if amplified by the media at large. That's why our efforts to identify and correct misinformation and your participation in actions or spreading the word matters.

Our latest report about the Keystone XL Pipeline coverage underscores this point all the more.

Read the full report here: <http://mediamatters.org/research/201201260005>.

Thanks, Matt Butler, President and CEO, Media Matters for America

[20120127-06](#) 19:35 Dennis Saving Sam

An awesome illustrated political narrative that says it all about the USofA: <http://www.savingsamcollection.com/>.

[20120127-07](#) 19:36 Art Fw: Honor Our Marines

Normally I don't forward these on general principle but this one is special.

[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

Charlie Sheen is 45 and his story is all over the news because he is a substance abuser, an adulterer, sexually promiscuous and obnoxious.

Lindsay Lohan is 24 and her story is all over the news because she is a celebrity drug addict and a thief.

Something as frivolous as Kim Kardashian's stupid wedding (and short-lived marriage) was shoved down our throats.

While.....

Justin Allen, 23
Brett Linley, 29
Matthew Weikert, 29
Justus Bartett, 27
Dave Santos, 21
Jesse Reed, 26
Matthew Johnson, 21
Zachary Fisher, 24
Brandon King, 23
Christopher Goeke, 23
and Sheldon Tate, 27...

Are all Marines who gave their lives last month for you. There is no media for them; not even a mention of their names.

Honor THEM by sending this on. I did, will you? [And so many, many more! Thank you, my brothers and sisters. – SteveB]

May they Rest in Peace. God Bless America.

20120128-01	00:54	SteveG	"State Trends in Premiums and Deductibles, 2003–2010: The Need for Action to Address Rising Costs"
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Health insurance deductibles [and rates] doubled in 7 years, study finds:

"State Trends in Premiums and Deductibles, 2003–2010: The Need for Action to Address Rising Costs" by Cathy Schoen, Ashley-Kay Fryer, Sara R. Collins, and David C. Radley, The Commonwealth Fund

Nov. 17, 2011, (<http://www.commonwealthfund.org/Publications/Issue-Briefs/2011/Nov/State-Trends-in-Premiums.aspx#citation>)

20120128-02	06:00	SteveB	Mitt R0mney
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Mitt R0mney is the perfect guy to run against President Obama:

1. He can't say much about Obamacare, since he invented it in Massachusetts.
2. He can't talk about President Obama not being eligible for the Presidency (the birth certificate thing), since Romney's father ran for President in the same situation President Obama is falsely accused of. George Romney was born in Mexico to members of a polygamous religious cult. Not American territory, last time I looked.
3. He's a staunch, charter member of a cult, himself, so he can hardly accuse President Obama of being a godless Muslim.

Gee, unless Newt pulls a miracle, this election might be a level above 2008. At least maybe the anti-Barry hate emails will have to improve. Please!

Citigroup's CEO unrepentant at Davos...

"Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" by Jonathan Weil, Bloomberg View

Jan. 26, 2012, (<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-01-26/pandit-does-davos-0-1-gloat-madness-reigns-commentary-by-jonathan-weil.html>)

Sometimes a single fact stands out amid all the clutter, offering a flash of insight and clarity. Here is one of them: Citigroup Inc. Chief Executive Officer Vikram Pandit is a co-chairman of the World Economic Forum's annual meeting this week in Davos, Switzerland.

At first blush, the notion might seem almost ho-hum, a non-event. Upon further consideration, this looks like it can't possibly be right. Then it turns out, much to our amazement, that the story is accurate, confirming once again that our world is stark mad. You really have to wonder why anyone outside of Citigroup would pick Pandit to lead anything.

It's one thing for Citigroup to blow itself up so spectacularly that it needs multiple taxpayer bailouts to stay afloat. What seems strange is that an organization like the World Economic Forum would honor the fellow who was Citigroup's CEO throughout most of the financial crisis, by selecting him as one of its six co-chairmen. If Sheila Bair had gotten her way when she was head of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp., Pandit would have been fired years ago.

It's stunning when you think about it: How does Pandit, who owes much of his fortune to the American public's largess, wind up being showcased as a paragon of leadership and free enterprise, little more than a year after the U.S. Treasury finally sold the last of its Citigroup common stock?

And what message are the rest of us supposed to take away from this? That his example is to be celebrated?

Maybe the distinction bestowed on Pandit should be of no surprise at all. Founded in 1971, the World Economic Forum describes itself as an international organization of large corporations that is "committed to improving the state of the world" with "no political, partisan or national interests." But it's becoming hard not to suspect that the annual gathering in Davos has become a conclave for global elites to promote crony capitalism and state-backed enterprise, ensuring that national coffers remain available to be tapped for private gain.

Pandit joined Citigroup in 2007 after selling his Old Lane Partners LP hedge fund, which the bank shut the following year. Pandit's take from his share of the sale was \$165 million, the last \$80 million of which he received in July.

In February 2008, two months into his job as CEO, Pandit certified in Citigroup's 2007 annual report that the company's internal controls were effective. Eight days before he did that, the U.S. Office of the Comptroller of the Currency had sent him a seven-page letter detailing all sorts of ways in which Citigroup's controls were inadequate.

In November 2008, in spite of the company's insistent refrain that it had "very strong capital," Citigroup took a second federal-bailout package. That boosted its proceeds from the Troubled Asset Relief Program to \$45 billion, plus \$301 billion of asset guarantees. Another rescue came in 2009, when the Treasury Department let Citigroup repay \$25 billion of its bailout money in common shares rather than cash.

Then in March 2010, appearing before a congressional oversight panel, Pandit said Citigroup was a healthy institution back in November 2008 when the government saved it from going under. Short sellers (of course!) were to blame for the bank's problems, he said.

Today Citigroup says it has returned to profitability, although investors remain skeptical. At a recent price of \$30.25 a share, down 90 percent since Pandit was named CEO, Citigroup trades for about 50 percent of its common shareholder equity. In other words, the markets believe that about half of the \$178 billion book value on Citigroup's balance sheet is imaginary. The company probably wouldn't be standing were it not for its implicit guarantee from the U.S. government.

Is this the right man for the World Economic Forum to pick as one of its co-chairmen for this year's Davos extravaganza? Pandit's bromides at a press conference this week were the sort of filler any college advertising major could have written.

"Banks have to serve clients, not serve themselves," Pandit said. (Were they not serving clients before?) Or this: "It's important for the financial system to acknowledge that there's a great deal of anger that's directed at it for the crisis, and trust has been broken," he said. "We've got to start addressing that." The unwashed protesters at Zuccotti Park had keener insights than this.

Or perhaps the problem here is me, and I'm looking at the situation the wrong way. For all we know, these little rough patches in the financial industry offered just the kind of hands-on experience the forum's organizers were looking for in a leader, in which case they found their man.

Maybe if Citigroup blows up again someday, they could put Pandit in charge of the whole conference.

(Jonathan Weil is a Bloomberg View columnist. The opinions expressed are his own.)

20120128-04	14:01	Pam	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to Art, above)
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Good Lord! It's like watching a train wreck you can't stop.

20120128-05	14:56	SteveG	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to Pam, above)
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Dennis has good suggestions for countries to move to. Maybe Art could offer some good alternatives also. Not certain Bolivia makes the list.

20120128-06	18:19	Art	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to SteveG, above)
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I had the fun of living in Europe (Germany) for almost 12 years during my days in the Army. I know it sends Republicans into a frenzy when you mention Europe but I must say I think they may have it righter than we do. Yes, they have issues and all is not perfect but on average they have better health care, very little crime, marvelous amenities and frankly probably overall better quality of life. There, I said it.

Of course I also lived in the Middle East, (Oman and Morocco - OK technically Africa) twice and of course those lovely years in Vietnam and they weren't all that bad, so maybe it's what you make of it.

20120129-01	01:25	SteveG	Re: "Pandit Does Davos, 0.1% Gloat, Madness Reigns" (reply to Art, above)
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I do believe Europe has a different perspective on the world, and thus maybe a little better for the citizens – more social service oriented. And I believe you are right – anywhere you live is what you make of it

Now this is interesting:

"How Swedes and Norwegians Broke the Power of the '1 Percent'" by George Lakey, Waging Nonviolence / AlterNet

Jan. 29, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153929>)

While many of us are working to ensure that the Occupy movement will have a lasting impact, it's worthwhile to consider other countries where masses of people succeeded in nonviolently bringing about a high degree of democracy and economic justice. Sweden and Norway, for example, both experienced a major power shift in the 1930s after prolonged nonviolent struggle. They "fired" the top 1 percent of people who set the direction for society and created the basis for something different.

Both countries had a history of horrendous poverty. When the 1 percent was in charge, hundreds of thousands of people emigrated to avoid starvation. Under the leadership of the working class, however, both countries built robust and successful economies that nearly eliminated poverty, expanded free university education, abolished slums, provided excellent health care available to all as a matter of right and created a system of full employment. Unlike the Norwegians, the Swedes didn't find oil, but that didn't stop them from building what the latest CIA *World Factbook* calls "an enviable standard of living."

Neither country is a utopia, as readers of the crime novels by Stieg Larsson, Kurt Wallender and Jo Nesbro will know. Critical left-wing authors such as these try to push Sweden and Norway to continue on the path toward more fully just societies. However, as an American activist who first encountered Norway as a student in 1959 and learned some of its language and culture, the achievements I found amazed me. I remember, for example, bicycling for hours through a small industrial city, looking in vain for substandard housing. Sometimes resisting the evidence of my eyes, I made up stories that "accounted for" the differences I saw: "small country," "homogeneous," "a value consensus." I finally gave up imposing my frameworks on these countries and learned the real reason: their own histories.

Then I began to learn that the Swedes and Norwegians paid a price for their standards of living through nonviolent struggle. There was a time when Scandinavian workers didn't expect that the electoral arena could deliver the change they believed in. They realized that, with the 1 percent in charge, electoral "democracy" was stacked against them, so nonviolent direct action was needed to exert the power for change.

In both countries, the troops were called out to defend the 1 percent; people died. Award-winning Swedish filmmaker Bo Widerberg told the Swedish story vividly in *Ådalen 31*, which depicts the strikers killed in 1931 and the sparking of a nationwide general strike. (You can read more about this case in an entry by Max Rennebohm in the Global Nonviolent Action Database.)

The Norwegians had a harder time organizing a cohesive people's movement because Norway's small population—about three million—was spread out over a territory the size of Britain. People were divided by mountains and fjords, and they spoke regional dialects in isolated valleys. In the nineteenth century, Norway was ruled by Denmark and then by Sweden; in the context of Europe Norwegians were the "country rubes," of little consequence. Not until 1905 did Norway finally become independent.

When workers formed unions in the early 1900s, they generally turned to Marxism, organizing for revolution as well as immediate gains. They were overjoyed by the overthrow of the czar in Russia, and the Norwegian Labor Party joined the Communist International organized by Lenin. Labor didn't stay long, however. One way in which most Norwegians parted ways with Leninist strategy was on the role of violence: Norwegians wanted to win their revolution through collective nonviolent struggle, along with establishing co-ops and using the electoral arena.

In the 1920s strikes increased in intensity. The town of Hammerfest formed a commune in 1921, led by workers councils; the army intervened to crush it. The workers' response verged toward a national general strike. The

employers, backed by the state, beat back that strike, but workers erupted again in the ironworkers' strike of 1923–24.

The Norwegian 1 percent decided not to rely simply on the army; in 1926 they formed a social movement called the Patriotic League, recruiting mainly from the middle class. By the 1930s, the League included as many as 100,000 people for armed protection of strike breakers—this in a country of only 3 million!

The Labor Party, in the meantime, opened its membership to anyone, whether or not in a unionized workplace. Middle-class Marxists and some reformers joined the party. Many rural farm workers joined the Labor Party, as well as some small landholders. Labor leadership understood that in a protracted struggle, constant outreach and organizing was needed to a nonviolent campaign. In the midst of the growing polarization, Norway's workers launched another wave of strikes and boycotts in 1928.

The Depression hit bottom in 1931. More people were jobless there than in any other Nordic country. Unlike in the U.S., the Norwegian union movement kept the people thrown out of work as members, even though they couldn't pay dues. This decision paid off in mass mobilizations. When the employers' federation locked employees out of the factories to try to force a reduction of wages, the workers fought back with massive demonstrations.

Many people then found that their mortgages were in jeopardy. (Sound familiar?) The Depression continued, and farmers were unable to keep up payment on their debts. As turbulence hit the rural sector, crowds gathered nonviolently to prevent the eviction of families from their farms. The Agrarian Party, which included larger farmers and had previously been allied with the Conservative Party, began to distance itself from the 1 percent; some could see that the ability of the few to rule the many was in doubt.

By 1935, Norway was on the brink. The Conservative-led government was losing legitimacy daily; the 1 percent became increasingly desperate as militancy grew among workers and farmers. A complete overthrow might be just a couple years away, radical workers thought. However, the misery of the poor became more urgent daily, and the Labor Party felt increasing pressure from its members to alleviate their suffering, which it could do only if it took charge of the government in a compromise agreement with the other side.

This it did. In a compromise that allowed owners to retain the right to own and manage their firms, Labor in 1935 took the reins of government in coalition with the Agrarian Party. They expanded the economy and started public works projects to head toward a policy of full employment that became the keystone of Norwegian economic policy. Labor's success and the continued militancy of workers enabled steady inroads against the privileges of the 1 percent, to the point that majority ownership of all large firms was taken by the public interest. (There is an entry on this case as well at the Global Nonviolent Action Database: <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/norwegians-overthrow-capitalist-rule-1931-35>.)

The 1 percent thereby lost its historic power to dominate the economy and society. Not until three decades later could the Conservatives return to a governing coalition, having by then accepted the new rules of the game, including a high degree of public ownership of the means of production, extremely progressive taxation, strong business regulation for the public good and the virtual abolition of poverty. When Conservatives eventually tried a fling with neoliberal policies, the economy generated a bubble and headed for disaster. (Sound familiar?)

Labor stepped in, seized the three largest banks, fired the top management, left the stockholders without a dime and refused to bail out any of the smaller banks. The well-purged Norwegian financial sector was *not* one of those countries that lurched into crisis in 2008; carefully regulated and much of it publicly owned, the sector was solid.

Although Norwegians may not tell you about this the first time you meet them, the fact remains that their society's high level of freedom and broadly-shared prosperity began when workers and farmers, along with middle class allies, waged a nonviolent struggle that empowered the people to govern for the common good.

(George Lakey is Visiting Professor at Swarthmore College and a Quaker. He has led 1,500 workshops on five continents and led activist projects on local, national, and international levels. Among many other books and articles, he is author of "Strategizing for a Living Revolution" in David Solnit's book *Globalize Liberation* (City Lights,

2004). His first arrest was for a civil rights sit-in and most recent was with Earth Quaker Action Team while protesting mountain top removal coal mining.)

20120129-02 05:36 SteveB Fw: From the Right: *The Roots of Obama's Rage*

This is just a heads-up about a potentially great book. Got to be a very good read. Essential to learning why this American president is so darned ANGRY!

Barack "Barry" Hussein Obama, "a man without a country...bent on living out his African father's anti-colonialist dream of making America a poorer, weaker, diminished nation."

This book must contain the answers to all the questions we've been asking in vain. Like, why the Right can't explain itself or prove its case—at all!

I guess, for the very first time in our lives, in this book, we would encounter "bursts of conservative brilliance". I don't know where they come from, but that would truly be something incredibly rare to witness.

What a mightily intelligent man this conservative author (Dinesh Hussein D'Souza) would have to be to even comprehend Barry's complex rage and plots, let alone write about them in a coherent conservative style.

from an email I received today from *Human Events*:

Besides sending you "Daily Events", we consider it our duty to alert you to **bursts of conservative brilliance** you can't afford to miss.

The Roots of Obama's Rage, by New York Times bestselling author Dinesh D'Souza, possessor of one of the most insightful minds in America, is one of the most profoundly important books we've read in years.

So important, we've arranged to send you a FREE hardcover copy... if you'll try Human Events, the national conservative weekly newspaper, with this specially discounted Charter Subscription invitation.

The Roots of Obama's Rage reveals why just about everyone is wrong in their assessment of this strange, determined and, ultimately, very dangerous man. Far from being a mere socialist, Chicago machine pol, covert Muslim, or even the "Liberal Messiah," **Barack Obama is a man bent on living out his African father's anti-colonialist dream of making America a poorer, weaker, diminished nation.**

With stunning insight, D'Souza reveals how Obama is motivated by an inherited rage —against the wealth, power and global influence of the very nation he leads. There has never been a U.S. president like him. And no one has better diagnosed who he is and what he intends to do than Dinesh D'Souza in *The Roots of Obama's Rage*. Be assured, you will never see Obama the same way again.

It's a must-read — and you can get your copy absolutely free when you try Human Events with this special invitation. And, please, read this book right away!

We promise: Next time you listen to Obama, you will know and understand him for the first time. That's how incredibly revealing and shocking this book is!

Remember, it's FREE with this offer! <http://content.eaglepub.com/?laPa4nYLVKst6ysX1stHCMdaVwqhSgRI>

Sincerely, Editors of Daily Events

P.S. You know who else loved *Human Events*? Our hero Ronald Reagan, the greatest president since George Washington. In fact, he called it his "favorite newspaper." Find out why by giving it a try, at zero risk. And you get *The Roots of Obama's Rage* FREE, too!

[20120129-05](#) 11:25 Art Re: From the Right: *The Roots of Obama's Rage* (reply to SteveB, above)

Now it all comes clear. Duh?

Not the brightest bulb in the closet.

[20120129-06](#) 13:38 Pam Re: From the Right: *The Roots of Obama's Rage* (reply to SteveB, above)

What?

[20120129-07](#) 14:06 Dennis Re: From the Right: *The Roots of Obama's Rage* (reply to SteveB, above)

This book-length screed is a couple of years old. It's free because it's propaganda that, like manure, begs to be spread.

[20120129-03](#) 06:12 SteveB "Allen West to Liberals: Get the Hell Out of the U.S."

I thought this was a cute little posting.

I was happy to learn the goals of the Democrats—"equality of achievement [never heard of it]...economic dependency [Where's the "in" in independency?...]...and enslaving the entrepreneurial will and spirit of the American people." All worthy goals, I'm sure everyone would agree.

"Allen West to Liberals: Get the Hell Out of the U.S." by Jon Ward, Huffington Post

Jan. 28, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/22/florida-primary-2012-live_n_1221650.html?ref=politics#121_allen-west-to-liberals-get-the-hell-out-of-the-us)

Speaking to a Lincoln Day Dinner in West Palm Beach for the Palm Beach County GOP, Rep. Allen West (R-Fla.) got off this humdinger of a line that within minutes drew recriminations from Democrats on Twitter.

We need to let President Obama, Harry Reid, Nancy Pelosi, (audience boos) and my dear friend the chairman of the Democrat National Committee, we need to let them know that Florida ain't on the table. Take your message of equality of achievement, take your message of economic dependency, take your message of enslaving the entrepreneurial will and spirit of the American people somewhere else. You can take it to Europe, you can take it to the bottom of the sea, you can take it to the North Pole, but **get the hell out of the United States of America.** (cheers) Yeah I said "hell."

Moments after the quote was mentioned on Twitter, former Reid spokesman Jim Manley responded via his own Twitter feed: "Me to allen west. You first a*shole."

And they say politics is getting more acrimonious.

[20120129-04](#) 11:03 Pam Re: "Allen West to Liberals: Get the Hell Out of the U.S." (reply to SteveB, above)

"Enslaving the will" This is a crazy statement!! Well-intentioned, but ridiculous.

Some interesting reading:

"Why All the Robo-Signing? Shedding Light on the Shadow Banking System" by Ellen Brown, Nation of Change

Jan. 29, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/why-all-robo-signing-shedding-light-shadow-banking-system-1327846780>)

The *Wall Street Journal* reported on January 19th that the Obama Administration was pushing heavily to get the 50 state attorneys general to agree to a settlement with five major banks in the "robo-signing" scandal. The scandal involves employees signing names not their own, under titles they did not really have, attesting to the veracity of documents they had not really reviewed. Investigation reveals that it did not just happen occasionally but was an industry-wide practice, dating back to the late 1990s; and that it may have clouded the titles of millions of homes. If the settlement is agreed to, it will let Wall Street bankers off the hook for crimes that would land the rest of us in jail – fraud, forgery, securities violations and tax evasion.

To the President's credit, however, he seems to have shifted his position on the settlement in response to protests before his State of the Union address. In his speech on January 24th, President Obama did not mention the settlement but announced instead that he would be creating a mortgage crisis unit to investigate wrongdoing related to real estate lending. "This new unit will hold accountable those who broke the law, speed assistance to homeowners, and help turn the page on an era of recklessness that hurt so many Americans," he said.

The Deeper Question Is Why

Whether massive robo-signing occurred is no longer in issue. The question that needs to be investigated is why it was being done. The alleged justification—that the bankers were so busy that they cut corners—hardly seems credible given the extent of the practice.

The robo-signing largely involved assignments of mortgage notes to mortgage servicers or trusts representing the investors who put up the loan money. Assignment was necessary to give the trusts legal title to the loans. But assignment was delayed until it was necessary to foreclose on the homes, when it had to be done through the forgery and fraud of robo-signing. Why had it been delayed? Why did the banks not assign the mortgages to the trusts when and as required by law?

Here is a working hypothesis, suggested by Martin Andelman: securitized mortgages are the "pawns" used in the pawn shop known as the "repo market." "Repos" are overnight sales and repurchases of collateral. Yale economist Gary Gorton explains that repos are the "deposit insurance" for the shadow banking system, which is now larger than the conventional banking system and is necessary for the conventional system to operate. The problem is that repos require "sales," which means the mortgage notes have to remain free to be bought and sold. The mortgages are left unendorsed so they can be used in this repo market.

The Evolution of the Shadow Banking System

Gorton observes that there is a massive and growing demand for banking by large institutional investors – pension funds, mutual funds, hedge funds, sovereign wealth funds – which have millions of dollars to park somewhere between investments. But FDIC insurance covers only up to \$250,000. FDIC insurance was resisted in the 1930s by bankers and government officials and was pushed through as a populist movement: the people demanded it. What they got was enough insurance to cover the deposits of individuals and no more. Today, the large institutional investors want similar coverage. They want an investment that is secure, that provides them with a little interest, and that is liquid like a traditional deposit account, allowing quick withdrawal.

The shadow banking system evolved in response to this need, operating largely through the repo market. "Repos" are sales and repurchases of highly liquid collateral, typically Treasury debt or mortgage-backed securities—the securitized units into which American real estate has been ground up and packaged, sausage-fashion. The collateral is bought by a "special purpose vehicle" (SPV), which acts as the shadow bank. The investors put their money in the SPV and keep the securities, which substitute for FDIC insurance in a traditional bank. (If the SPV fails to pay up, the investors can foreclose on the securities.) To satisfy the demand for liquidity, the repos are one-day or short-term deals, continually rolled over until the money is withdrawn. This money is used by the banks for other lending, investing or speculating. Gorton writes:

This banking system (the "shadow" or "parallel" banking system)—repo based on securitization—is a genuine banking system, as large as the traditional, regulated banking system. It is of critical importance to the economy because it is the funding basis for the traditional banking system. Without it, traditional banks will not lend and credit, which is essential for job creation, will not be created.

All Behind the Curtain of MERS

The housing shell game was made possible because it was all concealed behind an electronic smokescreen called MERS (an acronym for Mortgage Electronic Registration Systems, Inc.). MERS allowed houses to be shuffled around among multiple, rapidly changing owners while circumventing local recording laws. Title would be recorded in the name of MERS as a place holder for the investors, and MERS would foreclose on behalf of the investors. Payments would be received by the mortgage servicer, which was typically the bank that signed the mortgage with the homeowner. The homeowner usually thinks the servicer is the lender, but in fact it is an amorphous group of investors.

This all worked until courts started questioning whether MERS, which admitted that it was a mere conduit without title, had standing to foreclose. Courts have increasingly held that it does not.

Making matters worse for the servicing banks, Fannie Mae sent out a memo telling servicers that in order to be reimbursed under HAMP—a government loan modification program designed to help at-risk homeowners meet their mortgage payments—the servicers would have to produce the paperwork showing the loan had been assigned to the trust.

The hasty solution was a rash of assignments signed by an army of "robosigners," to be filed in the public records. But the documents are patent forgeries, making a shambles of county title records.

Complicating all this are tax issues. Since 1986, mortgage-backed securities have been issued to investors through SPVs called REMICs (Real Estate Mortgage Investment Conduits). REMICs are designed as tax shelters; but to qualify for that status, they must be "static." Mortgages can't be transferred in and out once the closing date has occurred. The REMIC Pooling and Servicing Agreement typically states that any transfer significantly after the closing date is invalid. Yet the newly robo-signed documents, which are required to begin foreclosure proceedings, are almost always executed long after the trust's closing date. The whole business is quite complicated, but the bottom line is that title has been clouded not only by MERS but because the trusts purporting to foreclose do not own the properties by the terms of their own documents.

John O'Brien, Register of Deeds for the Southern Essex District of Massachusetts, calls it a "criminal enterprise." On January 18th, he called for a full scale criminal investigation, including a grand jury to look into the evidence. He sent to Massachusetts Attorney General Martha Coakley, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder and U.S. Attorney Carmen Ortiz over 30,000 documents recorded in the Salem Registry that he says are fraudulent.

From Lending Machines to Borrowing Machines

The bankers have engaged in what amounts to a massive fraud, not necessarily because they started out with criminal intent, but because they have been required to in order to come up with the collateral (in this case real estate) to back their loans. It is the way our system is set up: the banks are not really creating credit and advancing it to us, counting on our future productivity to pay it off, the way they once did under the deceptive but

functional façade of fractional reserve lending. Instead, they are vacuuming up our money and lending it back to us at higher rates.

“Instead of lending into the economy,” says British money reformer Ann Pettifor, “bankers are borrowing from the real economy.” She wrote in the Huffington Post in October 2010:

[T]he crazy facts are these: bankers now borrow from their customers and from taxpayers. They are effectively draining funds from household bank accounts, small businesses, corporations, government Treasuries and from e.g. the Federal Reserve. They do so by charging high rates of interest and fees; by demanding early repayment of loans; by illegally foreclosing on homeowners, and by appropriating, and then speculating with trillions of dollars of taxpayer-backed resources.

Not only has the system destroyed county title records, but it is highly vulnerable to bank runs and systemic collapse. In the shadow banking system, as in the old fractional reserve banking system, the collateral is being double-counted: it is owed to the borrowers and the depositors at the same time. This allows for expansion of the money supply, but bank runs can occur when the borrowers and the depositors demand their money at the same time. And unlike the conventional banking system, the shadow banking system is largely unregulated. It doesn't have the backup of FDIC insurance to prevent bank runs.

That is what happened in September 2008 following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, a major investment bank. Gary Gorton explains that it was a run on the shadow banking system that caused the credit collapse that followed. Investors rushed to pull their money out overnight. LIBOR—the London interbank lending rate for short-term loans—shot up to around 5%. Since the cost of borrowing the money to cover loans was too high for banks to turn a profit, lending abruptly came to a halt.

Fixing the System

The question is how to eliminate this systemic risk. As noted by *The Business Insider*:

Regulate shadow banking more tightly, and you probably have to also provide government backstops. Shudder. Try to shut the thing down or restrict it and you suck credit out of the system, credit which much of the non-financial “real” economy uses and needs.

Interestingly, countries with strong public sector banking systems largely escaped the 2008 credit crisis. These include the BRIC countries—Brazil, Russia, India, and China—which contain 40% of the global population and are today's fastest growing economies. They escaped because their public sector banks do not need to rely on repos and securitizations to back their loans. The banks are owned and operated by the ultimate guarantor—the government itself. The public sector banking model deserves further study.

Whatever the solution, a system that requires the slicing and dicing of mortgages behind an electronic smokescreen so they can be bought and sold as collateral for the pawn shop of the repo market is obviously fraught with perils and is unsustainable. Please contact your state attorney general and urge him or her not to go through with the robo-signing settlement, which will be granting immunity for crimes that are not yet fully known. Phone numbers are here. The surface of this great shadowy second banking system has barely been scratched. It needs a very thorough investigation.

20120129-09	22:20	SteveG	“Thousands of Federal Workers Owe Back Taxes”
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From SteveG (Jan. 29, 2012, 22:20)—Back Taxes Owed by Federal Workers

“Thousands of Federal Workers Owe Back Taxes” by Ken Thomas, AP

Jan 27, 2012, (<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/thousands-federal-workers-owe-back-taxes-231332510.html>)

http://www.sodahead.com/living/what-is-your-state-the-worst-at/question-1896077/?page=2&postId=60724953#post_60724953&link=ibaf&q=beautiful+indiana&imgurl=http://www.wallpaperweb.org/wallpaper/nature/1600x1200/Country_Road_in_Autumn_Nashville_Indiana.jpg&link=ibaf&q=beautiful+indiana&imgurl=http://www.wallpaperweb.org/wallpaper/nature/1600x1200/Country_Road_in_Autumn_Nashville_Indiana.jpg

Country Road near Nashville, Indiana (by Kari of Thailand)



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #63 — JAN. 31, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

The Mortgage Game—You Lose!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Jan. 31, 2012)

Interest rates at record lows? You don't get no stinkin' financing!

This is how our government serves the people...by allowing (hell, expediting!) their homes to be taken by corrupt, predatory lenders:

"Freddie Mac Bets Against American Homeowners" by Jesse Eisinger, ProPublica, and Chris Arnold, NPR News
Jan. 30, 2012, (<http://www.propublica.org/article/freddy-mac-mortgage-eisinger-arnold>)

Freddie Mac, the taxpayer-owned mortgage giant, has placed multibillion-dollar bets that pay off if homeowners stay trapped in expensive mortgages with interest rates well above current rates.

Freddie began increasing these bets dramatically in late 2010, the same time that the company was making it harder for homeowners to get out of such high-interest mortgages.

No evidence has emerged that these decisions were coordinated. The company is a key gatekeeper for home loans but says its traders are "walled off" from the officials who have restricted homeowners from taking advantage of historically low interest rates by imposing higher fees and new rules.

Freddie's charter calls for the company to make home loans more accessible. Its chief executive, Charles Haldeman Jr., recently told Congress that his company is "helping financially strapped families reduce their mortgage costs through refinancing their mortgages."

But the trades, uncovered for the first time in an investigation by ProPublica and NPR, give Freddie a powerful incentive to do the opposite, highlighting a conflict of interest at the heart of the company. In addition to being an instrument of government policy dedicated to making home loans more accessible, Freddie also has giant investment portfolios and could lose substantial amounts of money if too many borrowers refinance.

"We were actually shocked they did this," says Scott Simon, who as the head of the giant bond fund PIMCO's mortgage-backed securities team is one of the world's biggest mortgage bond traders. "It seemed so out of line with their mission."

The trades "put them squarely against the homeowner," he says.

Those homeowners have a lot at stake, too. Many of them could cut their interest payments by thousands of dollars a year.

Freddie Mac, along with its cousin Fannie Mae, was bailed out in 2008 and is now owned by taxpayers. The companies play a pivotal role in the mortgage business because they insure most home loans in the United States, making banks likelier to lend. The companies' rules determine whether homeowners can get loans and on what terms.

The Federal Housing Finance Agency effectively serves as Freddie's board of directors and is ultimately responsible for Freddie's decisions. It is run by acting director Edward DeMarco, who cannot be fired by the president except in extraordinary circumstances.

Freddie and the FHFA repeatedly declined to comment on the specific transactions.

Freddie's moves to limit refinancing affect not only individual homeowners but the entire economy. An expansive refinancing program could help millions of homeowners, some economists say. Such an effort would "help the economy and put tens of billions of dollars back in consumers' pockets, the equivalent of a very long-term tax cut," says real-estate economist Christopher Mayer of the Columbia Business School. "It also is likely to reduce foreclosures and benefit the U.S. government" because Freddie and Fannie, which guarantee most mortgages in the country, would have lower losses over the long run.

Freddie Mac's trades, while perfectly legal, came during a period when the company was supposed to be reducing its investment portfolio, according to the terms of its government takeover agreement. But these trades escalate the risk of its portfolio, because the securities Freddie has purchased are volatile and hard to sell, mortgage securities experts say.

The financial crisis in 2008 was made worse when Wall Street traders made bets against their customers and the American public. Now, some see similar behavior, only this time by traders at a government-owned company who are using leverage, which increases the potential profits but also the risk of big losses, and other Wall Street stratagems. "More than three years into the government takeover, we have Freddie Mac pursuing highly levered, complicated transactions seemingly with the purpose of trading against homeowners," says Mayer. "These are the kinds of things that got us into trouble in the first place."

'We're in financial jail'

Freddie Mac is betting against, among others, Jay and Bonnie Silverstein. The Silversteins live in an unfinished development of cul-de-sacs and yellow stucco houses about 20 miles north of Philadelphia, in a house decorated with Bonnie's orchids and their Rose Bowl parade pin collection. The developer went bankrupt, leaving orange plastic construction fencing around some empty lots. The community clubhouse isn't complete.

The Silversteins have a 30-year fixed mortgage with an interest rate of 6.875 percent, much higher than the going rate of less than 4 percent. They have borrowed from family members and are living paycheck to paycheck. If they could refinance, they would save about \$500 a month. He says the extra money would help them pay back some of their family members and visit their grandchildren more often.

But brokers have told the Silversteins that they cannot refinance, thanks to a Freddie Mac rule.

The Silversteins used to live in a larger house 15 minutes from their current place, in a more upscale development. They had always planned to downsize as they approached retirement. In 2005, they made the mistake of buying their new house before selling the larger one. As the housing market plummeted, they couldn't sell their old house, so they carried two mortgages for 2½ years, wiping out their savings and 401(k). "It just drained us," Jay Silverstein says.

Finally, they were advised to try a short sale, in which the house is sold for less than the value of the underlying mortgage. They stopped making payments on the big house for it to go through. The sale was finally completed in 2009.

Such debacles hurt a borrower's credit rating. But Bonnie has a solid job at a doctor's office, and Jay has a pension from working for more than two decades for Johnson & Johnson. They say they haven't missed a payment on their current mortgage.

But the Silversteins haven't been able to get their refi. Freddie Mac won't insure a new loan for people who had a short sale in the last two to four years, depending on their financial condition. While the company's previous rules prohibited some short sales, in October 2010 the company changed its criteria to include all short sales. It is unclear whether the Silverstein mortgage would have been barred from a short sale under the previous Freddie rules.

Short-term, Freddie's trades benefit from the high-interest mortgage in which the Silversteins are trapped. But in the long run, Freddie could benefit if the Silversteins refinanced to a more affordable loan. Freddie guarantees the Silversteins' mortgage, so if the couple defaults, Freddie — and the taxpayers who own the company — are on the hook. Getting the Silversteins into a more affordable mortgage would make a default less likely.

If millions of homeowners like the Silversteins default, the economy would be harmed. But if they switch to loans with lower interest rates, they would have more money to spend, which could boost the economy.

"We're in financial jail," says Jay, "and we've never been there before."

How Freddie's investments work

Here's how Freddie Mac's trades profit from the Silversteins staying in "financial jail." The couple's mortgage is sitting in a big pile of other mortgages, most of which are also guaranteed by Freddie and have high interest rates. Those mortgages underpin securities that get divided into two basic categories.

One portion is backed mainly by principal, pays a low return, and was sold to investors who wanted a safe place to park their money. The other part, the inverse floater, is backed mainly by the interest payments on the mortgages, such as the high rate that the Silversteins pay. So this portion of the security can pay a much higher return, and this is what Freddie retained.

In 2010 and '11, Freddie purchased \$3.4 billion worth of inverse floater portions — their value based mostly on interest payments on \$19.5 billion in mortgage-backed securities, according to prospectuses for the deals. They covered tens of thousands of homeowners. Most of the mortgages backing these transactions have high rates of about 6.5 percent to 7 percent, according to the deal documents.

Between late 2010 and early 2011, Freddie Mac's purchases of inverse floater securities rose dramatically. Freddie purchased inverse floater portions of 29 deals in 2010 and 2011, with 26 bought between October 2010 and April 2011. That compares with seven for all of 2009 and five in 2008.

In these transactions, Freddie has sold off most of the principal, but it hasn't reduced its risk.

First, if borrowers default, Freddie pays the entire value of the mortgages underpinning the securities, because it insures the loans.

It's also a big problem if people like the Silversteins refinance their mortgages. That's because a refi is a new loan; the borrower pays off the first loan early, stopping the interest payments. Since the security Freddie owns is backed mainly by those interest payments, Freddie loses.

And these inverse floaters burden Freddie with entirely new risks. With these deals, Freddie has taken mortgage-backed securities that are easy to sell and traded them for ones that are harder and possibly more expensive to offload, according to mortgage market experts.

The inverse floaters carry another risk. Freddie gets paid the difference between the high mortgage rates, such as the Silversteins are paying, and a key global interest rate that right now is very low. If that rate rises, Freddie's profits will fall.

It is unclear what kinds of hedging, if any, Freddie has done to offset its risks.

At the end of 2011, Freddie's portfolio of mortgages was just over \$663 billion, down more than 6 percent from the previous year. But that \$43 billion drop in the portfolio overstates the risk reduction, because the company retained risk through the inverse floaters. The company is well below the cap of \$729 billion required by its government takeover agreement.

How Freddie tightened credit

Restricting credit for people who have done short sales isn't the only way that Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae have tightened their lending criteria in the wake of the financial crisis, making it harder for borrowers to get housing loans.

Some tightening is justified because, in the years leading up to the financial crisis, Freddie and Fannie were too willing to insure mortgages taken out by people who couldn't afford them.

In a statement, Freddie contends it is "actively supporting efforts for borrowers to realize the benefits of refinancing their mortgages to lower rates."

The company said in a statement: "During the first three quarters of 2011, we refinanced more than \$170 billion in mortgages, helping nearly 835,000 borrowers save an average of \$2,500 in interest payments during the next year." As part of that effort, the company is participating in an Obama administration plan, called the Home Affordable Refinance Program, or HARP. But critics say HARP could be reaching millions more people if Fannie and Freddie implemented the program more effectively.

Indeed, just as it was escalating its inverse floater deals, it was also introducing new fees on borrowers, including those wanting to refinance. During Thanksgiving week in 2010, Freddie quietly announced that it was raising charges, called post-settlement delivery fees.

In a recent white paper on remedies for the stalled housing market, the Federal Reserve criticized Fannie and Freddie for the fees they have charged for refinancing. Such fees are "another possible reason for low rates of refinancing" and are "difficult to justify," the Fed wrote.

A former Freddie employee, who spoke on condition he not be named, was even blunter: "Generally, it makes no sense whatsoever" for Freddie "to restrict refinancing" from expensive loans to ones borrowers can more easily pay, since the company remains on the hook if homeowners default.

In November, the FHFA announced that Fannie and Freddie were eliminating or reducing some fees. The Fed, however, said that "more might be done."

The regulator as owner

The trades raise questions about the FHFA's oversight of Fannie and Freddie. But the FHFA is not just a regulator. With the two companies in government conservatorship, the FHFA now plays the role of their board of directors and shareholders, responsible for the companies' major decisions.

Under acting director DeMarco, the FHFA has emphasized that its main goal is to limit taxpayer losses by managing the two companies' giant investment portfolios to make profits. To cover their previous losses and ongoing operations, Fannie and Freddie already had received \$169 billion from taxpayers through the third quarter of last year.

The FHFA has frustrated the administration because the agency has made preserving the value of the companies' investment portfolios a priority over helping homeowners in expensive mortgages. In 2010, President Barack Obama nominated a permanent replacement for acting director DeMarco, but Republicans in Congress blocked him. Obama has not nominated anyone else to replace DeMarco.

Even though Freddie is a ward of the state, top executives are highly compensated. Peter Federico, who's in charge of the company's investment portfolio, made \$2.5 million in 2010, and he had target compensation of \$2.6 million for last year, when most of these leveraged investments were made.

One of Federico's responsibilities — tied to his bonuses — is to "support and provide liquidity and stability in the mortgage market," according to Freddie's annual filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission. Mortgage experts contend that the inverse floater trades don't further that goal.

ProPublica and NPR made numerous attempts to reach Federico. A woman who answered his home phone said he declined to comment.

The FHFA knew about the trades before ProPublica and NPR approached the regulatory agency about them, according to an FHFA official. The FHFA has the power to approve and disapprove trades, though it doesn't involve itself in day-to-day decisions. The official declined to comment on whether the FHFA knew about them as Freddie was conducting them or whether the FHFA had explicitly approved them.

(Liz Day of ProPublica contributed to this story.)

20120130-02	13:50	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Stop Florida Governor's Privatization Scheme!
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from MoveOn:

Some Florida legislators are rushing full steam ahead to enact legislation, specifically SB 2036 and SB 2038, that would privatize governmental services and agencies without public input. **They are trying to pass these bills as early as this week.**

This scheme starts with immediate plans to privatize 29 prisons in 18 counties in south and central Florida with no exit strategy should things go wrong. No other state in our nation has given contracts to private prisons at even close to this level.

The bills would squander taxpayer money to reward political donors and drive up unemployment. **And as a corrections officer I can say with first-hand knowledge that privatization will undermine public safety.**

Did you know that private prisons do not chase escaped inmates past the perimeter like the public prisons do, which means more escaped prisoners in our communities? And private prison corporations have often failed to live up to legal requirements in the past. This bill will just make the problem worse.

That's why I created a petition to the Florida State House and Senate and Governor Rick Scott on SignOn.org, which says:

I oppose SB 2036 and SB 2038, bills being pushed by corporate lobbyists to privatize governmental services and agencies without public input. These bills will compromise public safety, cause unemployment, and hurt communities and small businesses across Florida.

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

<http://www.moveon.org/r?r=269884&id=35232-20195165-j%3DILhix&t=2>.

Thanks! —Christina Bullins

The battle rages at the state level...

"ALEC's Latest Actions" by Ben Adler, *The Nation* / Nation of Change

Jan. 30, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/alec-s-latest-actions-1327933925>)

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a conservative organization that has been leading recent coordinated attempts to move state laws rightward, has some busy minions in the New Hampshire state legislature. In the past week they introduced seven pieces of ALEC's model legislation.

These include bills that are plainly counter-productive, such as the "Eliminating Support Services for Newborn Children" Act. According to Granite Progress "This legislation would eliminate support services for newborn children whose parents are utilizing TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families)." How that will break the cycle of the poverty or give the disadvantaged children of poor people a more fair shot at becoming productive citizens is unclear.

Some of the other proposals are just doctrinaire right wing ideology, such as instituting a tax credit to divert money from public education to private school vouchers.

The farthest-reaching proposal would impede the people of New Hampshire from tossing out the Republican legislative majority that is trying to impose this agenda. That's a bill to require voters to present photo identification at the polling place. Such laws are designed to combat a non-existent problem of in-person voter impersonation. But they are very effective at disenfranchising poor people, young people and people of color. In other words, it's a partisan scheme to stop Democrats from voting.

It's similar to the South Carolina law that the Department of Justice denied pre-clearance under the Voting Rights Act. New Hampshire is not subject to pre-clearance under the VRA. But New Hampshire is a key swing state. In 2000 Al Gore would have won if he had carried it.

Meanwhile ALEC is pumping out reports to justify its agenda, and ignoring the contradictions between the facts and their preconceived notions. On Tuesday ALEC released a "Report Card on American Education." In ranking the 50 states and Washington, D.C. some interesting trends emerge. Blue states tend to outperform red states. Based on standardized test scores these are five states: Massachusetts, Vermont, New Jersey, Colorado, and Pennsylvania. Numbers 47-51: Missouri, Mississippi, Louisiana, South Carolina, and West Virginia.

The other funny thing about ALEC's education report card is that they grade each state on whether they've adopted ALEC's education reform agenda but are unconcerned with how their reforms affect outcomes. Some of the states with the highest marks for reform with rank in the bottom half on their performance, such as Missouri, California and Arizona.

I emailed ALEC and asked whether this demonstrates that their reform agenda is not necessarily the right solution for every state, but they did not respond.

from "Mondays with Tony Lee" by Tony Lee, Daily Events / *Human Events*

Jan. 30, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/>)

In a Facebook post this weekend, former Alaska Gov. **Sarah Palin defined the GOP primary as not a battle between Newt Gingrich and Mitt Romney, but one between "the GOP establishment vs. the Tea Party grassroots and independent Americans who are sick of the politics of personal destruction used now by both parties' operatives with a complicit media egging it on."**

She acknowledged that Gingrich was far from a perfect vessel for the Tea Party movement, but called the tactics the establishment used against him the last week as nothing short of Stalin and Alinsky-esque.

She made the point that the GOP establishment was fiercer in their attacks against Gingrich than they were against President Barack Obama and rightfully asked who the GOP establishment is running against.

Sadly, since 1976, it seems as if the GOP establishment, by their actions and words, find the most glee in running against bold (not pale pastel) conservatives.

If Gingrich has any chance of remaining viable after Florida, he will frame the race as a struggle between the establishment and the Republican base. Because Gingrich, as Palin noted, is far from a perfect anti-establishment vessel, he will not fare as well as someone who could be a better vessel.

This primary cycle, if for no other reason, is important because it gives a preview of what is on the horizon. The GOP establishment may get the win this cycle, but the win will not be clean. And it will embolden grassroots conservatives, many of whom have not yet to begun to fight, going forward.

20120130-04	18:08	Dennis	Boomers Failed
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Found the following posted by Kate Danley on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/?ref=home#!/photo.php?fbid=288504314511847&set=a.147188291976784.22926.146979968664283&type=1&theater>.

What They did not want you to ever find out is that your generation, the generation born between 1980-1995, actually outnumbers the Baby Boomers. They knew that if you ever turned your eye towards political reform, you could change the world.

They tried to keep you sated on vapid television shows and vapid music. They cut off your education and fed you brain candy. They took away your music and gave you Top Ten pop stations. They cut off your art and replaced it with endless reality shows for you to plug into, hoping you would sit quietly by as They ran the world. I think They thought you were too dumb to notice.

Indeed, I thought They had won.

But I watched you occupy the capital of Wisconsin. I see you today as you occupy Wall Street. And I see a spark, a glimmer of the glorious new age that is yours. A changing of the guard, a guard that has stood for entirely too long and needs your young legs to take his place.

I watch you turn away from what is easy and stand up for what is right. I see you understand we as a society are only as strong as our weakest link. I see you wise beyond your years. And I am proud. Give 'em hell, kids. You are beautiful.

20120130-05	21:24	SteveG	Fw: Obama-Biden Petition: Ban Congressional Insider Trading!
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from the Obama-Biden Campaign:

If you believe it should be illegal for congress to use insider trading information please sign and forward. If you think it is OK for them to use insider trader information for their own personal investment, please delete.

Right now, members of Congress can make personal investment decisions based on confidential information they get in the course of regulating industries and doing their work.

It's kind of unbelievable that this isn't already illegal. President Obama wants to make it illegal once and for all -- no one should profit from inside information about the very businesses they're supposed to be regulating.

Today, the Democratic leadership in the Senate voted to move forward on a bill to extend to Congress the same strict rules that apply to anyone else whose job gives them access to sensitive information about businesses. This legislation is expected to pass the Senate with bipartisan support later this week.

But Republicans in the House have yet to move on it.

There aren't a lot of good reasons to disagree with this bill. So the question here isn't how many people we have to persuade, but simply how loudly we can speak up to prevent the House Republicans from dodging this issue.

Say you support the President on banning insider trading in Congress:

<http://my.barackobama.com/Ban-Insider-Trading-in-Congress>

Thanks, and stay tuned, James Kvaal, National Policy Director, Obama for America

20120130-06 23:59 SteveB Photo: High, High Bolivia

<http://www.ianskipworth.com/wanderlust/ses.html>

Laguna Verde, Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia



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

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