



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

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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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?

FotM NEWSLETTER #44 (Jan. 4, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120104-00		SteveB	R0mney* (Yawn!) Wins Iowa by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
20120103-13	20:42	Cândida	Video: Bunker Roy: "Learning from a Barefoot Movement"
20120103-01	08:21	GaryC	Fw: Groundhog Day
20120103-02	08:44	SteveB	Re: Groundhog Day (reply to GaryC, above)
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)
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)
20120103-07	14:00	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Permit Medicinal Use of Cannabis in Florida!
20120103-08	14:19	Dennis	Re: Supersized Debt (reply to SteveBA)
20120103-09	16:28	SteveB	"Super PACs Spend \$13 Million on Early Primaries, Romney Top Beneficiary"
20120103-12	17:30	Ben	"Big Shift for Gas-Guzzling Nation: Fuels Are Top U.S. Export; Oil Imports Still World's Highest"

20120103-13	20:42	Cândida	Video: Bunker Roy: "Learning from a Barefoot Movement"
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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: Cândida, 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)
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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!
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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)
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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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