



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #55 — JAN. 19, 2012

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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](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.

### **FotM NEWSLETTER #55 (Jan. 19, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

<b><u>DATE-ID</u></b>	<b><u>TIME</u></b>	<b><u>FROM</u></b>	<b><u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u></b>
<a href="#">20120119-00</a>		SteveB	<b>The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("In South Carolina, Candidates & Citizens Occupy Separate Realms")
<a href="#">20120118-01</a>	15:17	Pam	Re: The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20120118-02</a>	17:15	SteveG	Fw: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back <i>Citizens United!</i>
<a href="#">20120118-03</a>	17:35	Pam	Re: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back <i>Citizens United!</i> (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20120118-04</a>	19:30	Dennis	"Blackout Wednesday: The Time Has Come"

<a href="#">20120118-01</a>	15:17	Pam	Re: The Republican Candidates in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)
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..."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?

<a href="#">20120118-02</a> 17:15 SteveG Fw: Common Cause Petition: Roll Back <i>Citizens United!</i>
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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](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/17/citizens-united-common-cause_n_1210987.html?ref=fb&src=sp&comm_ref=false)

<a href="#">20120118-03</a>	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.

<a href="#">20120118-04</a>	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*.)

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

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