



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

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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 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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<u>20120124-01</u>	09:40	Pam	Re: "Rand Paul Blocked at Airport After Refusing TSA Pat-Down" (reply to SteveG & Bill, FotM Newsletter #58)
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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 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]

20120124-04 10:54 SteveG Graphic: Tea Party World Map

[Great! One place is a little hard to read. See Russia for "Communists". -SteveB]

The World According To The Tea Party



20120124-10 12:26 SteveB Re: Graphic: Tea Party World Map (reply to SteveG, above)

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?"

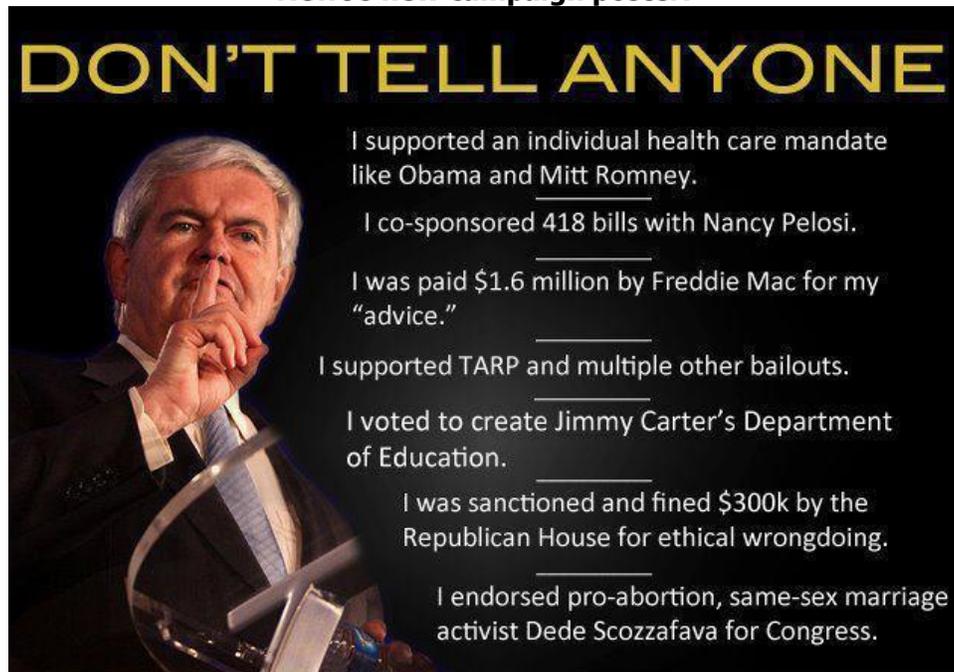
"Actually, I have two questions:

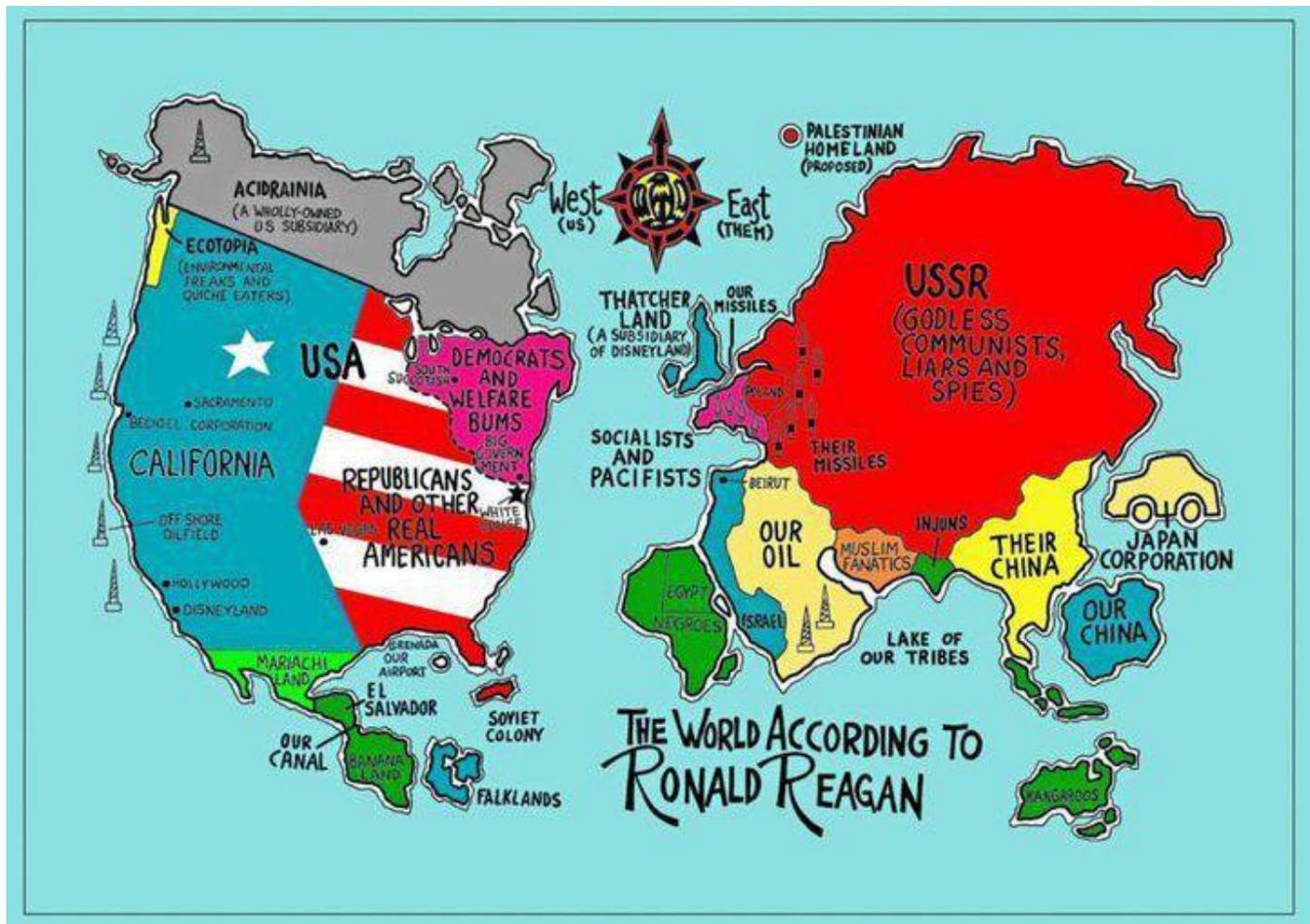
First, why did the recess bell ring 20 minutes early?

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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