



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

FEBRUARY, 2012 NEWSLETTERS

Edited by Steven W. Baker for FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

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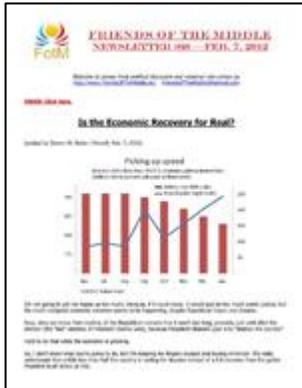
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SECRET: Why the Republican Party Is in Trouble

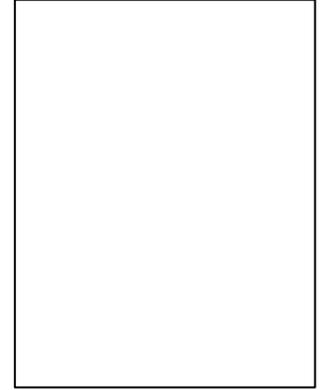
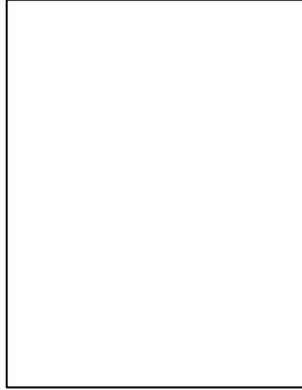
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<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
(01-12) 2012 PRIMARIES			
20120201-02	06:17	SteveB	'Goodbye, Moon'
20120201-11	13:26	Art	Re: 'Goodbye, Moon' (reply to SteveB, above)
20120206-00		SteveB	The Grand Old Party of Incompetence by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Nevada GOP Rolls Snake Eyes")
20120204-02	14:31	Dennis	'Gilligan's Island' Remake (see this FotM Newsletter cover)
20120208-00		SteveB	GOP Race Now in 'No Man's Land' by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Santorum: GOP Race Now in 'No Man's Land'")
20120208-07	14:07	Beth	Re: GOP Race Now in 'No Man's Land' (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #69)
20120210-12	18:05	Dennis	Photo: Rick Santorum Crowd Reaction
20120210-13	18:09	Pam	Re: Rick Santorum Crowd Reaction (reply to Dennis, above)
20120210-14	18:59	Dennis	Palin-Beck 2012
20120214-00		SteveB	Even Newt Knows by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Newt Goes Positive, Encounters Orly Taitz")
20120219-05	21:43	Jim	Video: Adele Trashes Newt Gingrich at the Grammys!
20120220-02	17:35	SteveB	"Inside Rick Santorum's Head"
20120221-03	09:06	SteveB	From the Right: "I Will Defend the 2nd Amendment"
20120221-13	22:07	SteveB	"Rush Limbaugh on Santorum & Satan"
20120221-14	22:08	SteveB	"Rick Santorum Aide: Obama's 'Radical Islamic Policies'"
20120222-01	07:15	SteveB	Rick Santorum as Depicted by Ron Paul (Who Must Be Satan in Disguise!)
20120222-06	14:17	Dennis	Re: "Rush Limbaugh on Santorum & Satan" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #79)
20120222-07	14:36	Pam	Re: "Rush Limbaugh on Santorum & Satan" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #79)
20120222-08	15:47	SteveB	"Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?"
20120222-09	16:28	Dennis	Re: "Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120223-03	11:08	Beth	Re: "Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #80)
20120223-09	13:57	SteveB	Fw: Secret Gingrich Letter Revealed
20120223-24	18:21	SteveG	Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Pam, above)
20120223-27	18:30	SteveB	Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Pam, above)
20120223-30	18:41	Pam	Re: Rick Santorum (reply to all, above)
20120223-31	19:22	Dennis	Re: Rick Santorum (reply to all, above)
20120223-32	20:02	Art	Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Pam, above)
20120223-33	20:31	Pam	Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Art, above)
20120223-15	16:53	GaryF	Wacky Newt's Brilliant Robot Bartender
20120227-00		SteveB	Is Today the Eve of Destruction or Resolution? by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Lost Party")
20120224-01	12:44	Pam	"Senator Santorum's Planet"
20120224-15	20:00	SteveG	Sign: God for Obama
20120225-05	09:15	SteveB	Video: Rick Santorum and His Party
20120225-07	09:42	Pam	Re: Video: Rick Santorum and His Party (reply to SteveB, above)
20120225-06	09:18	SteveB	2012 Republican Primaries & Platforms (to GaryC)
20120225-13	16:49	Pam	"Rick Santorum's Hypocrisy on Higher Education?"
20120227-03	18:32	SteveB	"Santorum: Separation of Church and State 'Makes Me Want to Throw Up'"
20120229-00		FotM	A Christian Dictatorship? by Friends of the Middle ("Obama Responds to Santorum's 'Snob' Jab?")

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20120228-02	09:05	SteveB	Republican Presidential Candidates in Michigan Primary
20120228-05	10:37	SteveG	Religion in Politics in Michigan
20120228-07	11:05	SteveB	Re: Religion in Politics in Michigan (reply to SteveG, above)
20120228-10	13:57	SteveB	Republican Primary in Michigan (to Dennis)
20120228-11	14:41	Dennis	Re: Republican Primary in Michigan (reply to SteveB, above)
20120228-12	16:57	Pam	Re: Republican Primary in Michigan (reply to Dennis, above)
(02-12) 2012 ELECTIONS			
20120210-00		SteveB	'Fair & Balanced': Mitt Romney vs. Barack Obama by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Mitt Romney Is Dazed & Confused" & "The Political Transformation of Barack Obama")
20120223-01	07:27	SteveB	The November Whuppin'
BARACK OBAMA			
20120202-13	16:35	Dennis	"Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot"
20120202-14	16:46	SteveG	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120202-16	17:25	Art	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120202-17	17:38	Pam	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120202-15	16:50	Larry	Fw: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds
20120202-18	17:44	SteveB	Re: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds (reply to Larry, above)
20120207-05	11:08	SteveG	"Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops"
20120207-06	11:18	Art	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120207-07	11:43	Pam	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120207-09	11:53	SteveB	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120207-10	11:59	SteveG	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to all, above)
20120207-11	12:27	Art	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120208-02	11:47	Art	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to all, FotM Newsletter #69)
20120208-03	12:21	Pam	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to Art, above)
20120213-02	11:27	Mary	Fw: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!
20120213-05	16:26	SteveB	Re: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist! (reply to Mary, above)
20120214-05	12:47	Art	Re: "Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)
20120214-04	11:35	Pam	Re: "Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)
20120220-00		SteveB	What the GOP Doesn't Want You to Know by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Why Obama's the Least Socialistic President in Modern History (& That's a Shame)")
20120222-04	09:30	SteveB	From the Right: Is President Obama a Christian?
20120223-35	23:03	SteveG	"Florida Congressman Upset at Obama for \$70 Fill-Up of His Hummer"

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MITT ROMNEY			
20120206-08	15:56	Art	Cartoon: Mitt Washes Off the 'Ordinary Americans' Grime
20120206-09	15:59	Art	Re: Cartoon: Mitt Washes Off the 'Ordinary Americans' Grime (reply to SteveG, above)
20120206-10	16:16	Pam	Re: Cartoon: Mitt Washes Off the 'Ordinary Americans' Grime (reply to Art & SteveG, above)
20120215-20	23:40	SteveG	Cartoon: Valentines to Mitt
20120223-13	16:30	SteveG	"Revealed: Romney's Top Funders Made Billions on Auto Bail-Out"
20120224-06	14:06	Dennis	"Revealed: Romney's Top Funders Made Billions on Auto Bail-Out"
20120226-03	08:00	SteveB	Mitt Romney: "Let Detroit Go Bankrupt"
20120225-04	08:58	SteveB	"R0mney Speech Falls Flat in Detroit"
20120225-12	13:22	SteveG	"No Bailouts for Romney's Intellectual Bankruptcy"
20120227-04	18:55	SteveB	"Mitt Romney's Budget in About 150 Words" & "Mitt Romney's Budget in Less Than 15 Words" (ROMNEY WILL BALANCE THE BUDGET ON THE BACKS OF POOR PEOPLE, THE END.)
20120228-04	10:31	SteveG	"Romney Looks to Squeak By in Native Michigan"
(03) CONSERVATIVE MIND, THE			
20120209-00		SteveB	More Than Politics by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Conservatives vs. Liberals: More Than Politics")
20120209-03	09:41	Pam	Re: More Than Politics (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #70)
20120209-04	11:30	Beth	Re: More Than Politics (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #70)
20120210-05	10:55	SteveG	"White Nationalists Share Spotlight with GOP at CPAC"
20120212-03	14:47	Art	"Republicans Undiscover Fire"
20120216-01	11:29	Art	"Objections of Conscience? Or of Politics?"
20120222-02	08:02	MarthaH	"Lawmaker: 'Radical' Girl Scouts Out to Destroy 'American Family Values'"
20120222-10	17:42	Art	From the Right: Extremism Illustrated
20120222-18	20:09	SteveG	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art, above)
20120222-11	17:59	SteveB	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art, above)
20120222-12	18:17	Ben	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art & SteveB, above)
20120222-13	18:31	Dennis	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art & SteveB, above)
20120222-14	18:53	Art	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above)
20120222-23	23:28	SteveG	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above)
20120222-16	19:26	SteveB	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above) & Replay: Bob the Bigot
20120222-20	20:44	Pam	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to SteveB, above)
20120223-04	11:12	Art	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #80)
20120223-10	15:31	Dennis	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #80)
20120222-21	22:42	SteveG	Racism, Church & State
20120222-22	23:05	SteveB	Re: Racism, Church & State (reply to SteveG, above)
20120223-11	16:15	SteveG	"The Republican Brain: Why Even Educated Conservatives Deny Science — & Reality"
20120223-12	16:22	Dennis	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveG, above)
20120223-14	16:46	SteveB	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveG, above)
20120223-16	16:56	Art	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveB, above)
20120223-17	17:51	Phil	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to all, above)
20120223-18	17:55	SteveG	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to Phil, above)
20120223-19	17:56	Dennis	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to Phil, above) & Cartoon: Santorum in Bed with the Pope

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20120223-21	18:13	Pam	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to all, above)
20120224-14	19:21	Art	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #81)
20120225-02	07:13	SteveB	Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to Art, above)
20120223-22	18:16	SteveG	Quote: Bill Maher on Republicans
20120223-23	18:17	SteveB	Re: Quote: Bill Maher on Republicans (reply to SteveG, above)
20120223-25	18:27	SteveG	Re: Quote: Bill Maher on Republicans (reply to SteveB, above)
20120223-28	18:32	Dennis	"Arizona Debate: Conservative Chickens Come Home to Roost"
20120224-02	12:51	SteveG	Quote: V.P. Henry Wallace on American Fascists
20120224-16	20:02	SteveG	Quote: Lawrence O.Donnell, Jr., on Liberals & Conservatives
20120226-06	13:26	Pam	Quote: Lawrence O.Donnell, Jr., on Liberals & Conservatives (reply to MarthaH, above)
(04) DEMOCRATS			
20120202-04	11:59	GaryC	Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High
20120202-09	15:40	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
20120202-10	15:45	GaryC	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to SteveB, above)
20120202-11	16:15	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
(05) LIBERAL MIND, THE			
20120217-03	21:18	SteveG	Fw: Dennis Kucinich: A Prayer for America
(06) MISC. POLITICS / CORRESPONDENCE w/ POLITICIANS			
20120215-01	11:35	SteveB	Examples of Political Stubbornness
20120215-03	11:47	Pam	Re: Examples of Political Stubbornness (reply to SteveB, above)
20120215-08	15:21	Dennis	Re: Examples of Political Stubbornness (reply to SteveB, above)
20120215-10	16:23	SteveB	Re: Examples of Political Stubbornness (reply to Dennis, above)
20120222-15	19:44	Art	A Huge, Incredibly Wonderful Listing of Debunked Lies!
20120226-04	08:13	SteveB	Throw the Bums Out — Un-Elect Congress! & Quote: Hitler on the Big Lie
20120228-00		SteveB	SECRET: Why the Republican Party Is in Trouble by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("2012 or Never" & "Mr. Bumble vs. Mr. Scary")
(07) REPUBLICANS			
20120201-01	05:56	SteveB	"Sarah Palin Skewered in <i>Game Change</i> "
20120208-19	22:43	SteveG	Cartoon: Carl Rove vs. Clint Eastwood
20120228-03	09:46	MarthaH	Republican Politics
20120228-06	10:41	SteveB	Re: Republican Politics (reply to MarthaH, above)
20120228-09	11:38	MarthaH	Re: Republican Politics (reply to SteveB, above)
20120228-17	21:35	SteveB	Re: Republican Politics (reply to MarthaH, above)
(08) STATE / LOCAL POLITICS			
(09) THIRD PARTIES			
(10) CONSTITUTION			

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120131-05	19:15	SteveB	Fw: Constitutional Amendment Undoing <i>Citizens United</i> (from MT Sen. Jon Tester)
20120203-00		SteveB	Now, Even Our Constitution Ain't Up to Par by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Talks Constitution, Women & Liberty on Egyptian TV")
20120203-02	11:05	Art	Re: Now, Even Our Constitution Ain't Up to Par (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #66)
20120222-19	20:36	SteveG	Which of These Two people Is a Liar?
<u>(11) CORRUPTION</u>			
20120201-12	14:05	Tom	Cartoon: Career Choice
<u>(12) EDUCATION</u>			
20120205-03	16:34	Pam	"Memo from Austerity Land to Teachers: Caring No Longer Counts"
20120213-09	20:26	SteveB	"The War for Privatization"
20120216-05	12:24	SteveB	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #75)
20120216-09	12:36	SteveG	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120216-12	15:13	Dennis	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120216-13	20:00	Art	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to all, above)
20120226-05	12:39	Pam	"What If We Treated Doctors the Way We Treat Teachers?"
20120226-07	17:44	SteveB	Re: "What If We Treated Doctors the Way We Treat Teachers?" (reply to Pam, above)
<u>(13) ELECTION REFORM</u>			
20120206-03	11:36	Art	"How to Discourage Virginia Voters"
20120214-08	15:59	SteveG	"Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors"
20120214-09	17:05	SteveB	Re: "Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120223-02	08:54	SteveG	"'Super PAC' Leaders Profit from Lack of Oversight"
20120224-09	17:01	SteveG	"Super PACs & Montana vs. the Supreme Court"
<u>(14) EXECUTIVE BRANCH</u>			
<u>(15) GUNS / INSURRECTION / CRIME</u>			
20120207-18	20:54	Pam	Guns in an Insane Asylum
20120207-19	21:19	Art	Re: Guns in an Insane Asylum (reply to Pam, above)
20120207-20	21:27	Dennis	Re: Guns in an Insane Asylum (reply to Pam, above)
20120228-16	21:21	SteveG	"Why Does America Lead the World in School Shootings?"
<u>(16) IMMIGRATION</u>			
<u>(17) JUDICIAL BRANCH</u>			
<u>(18) LEGISLATIVE BRANCH</u>			

DATE-ID	TIME	FROM	SUBJECT/TITLE
<u>(19) MISC. GOVERNMENT / CORRESPONDENCE w/ OFFICIALS</u>			
20120131-04	18:56	Jim	"Social Justice Quiz 2012: Thirteen Questions"
20120201-14	16:06	SteveG	Civic Literacy Exam
20120201-15	18:37	Art	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, above)
20120202-19	18:00	Pam	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)
20120202-21	18:32	SteveG	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to Pam, above)
20120202-31	11:01	Bill	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)
20120203-01	09:57	Pam	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to all, FotM Newsletters #65 & #66)
<u>(20) REPRODUCTION / WOMEN / LGBT</u>			
20120205-06	17:44	Mary	Federal Birth Control Mandate
20120205-07	19:35	SteveB	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary, above) & "Birth-Control Fight Unlikely to Hurt Obama, His Strategists Say"
20120206-02	11:09	Pam	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary & Art, FotM Newsletter #67)
20120206-06	14:17	Dennis	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary, FotM Newsletter #67)
20120208-18	09:01	mgobble01	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary, FotM Newsletter #67)
20120209-15	23:49	Carol	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to mgobble01, FotM Newsletter #70)
20120210-03	10:00	Pam	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, FotM Newsletter #71)
20120210-08	14:25	Dennis	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, FotM Newsletter #71)
20120211-01	00:23	Carol	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Dennis, above)
20120211-02	14:55	Dennis	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, above)
20120211-03	15:02	Carol	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Dennis, above)
20120211-04	15:05	Dennis	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, above)
20120207-13	17:59	SteveG	"Komen's Ambiguous Apology"
20120207-15	18:07	Pam	Re: "Komen's Ambiguous Apology" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120207-17	19:56	Art	Re: "Komen's Ambiguous Apology" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120208-09	15:14	SteveB	Fw: From the Right: Birth Control Perspective
20120209-05	11:49	Pam	Freedom of Information & So Much More (to SteveB)
20120209-07	13:56	SteveB	Re: Freedom of Information & So Much More (reply to Pam, above)
20120210-07	11:53	Beth	Re: Freedom of Information and So Much More (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #71)
20120210-10	16:48	Pam	Re: Freedom of Information and So Much More (reply to Beth, above)
20120209-14	22:55	SteveG	"Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaigns"
20120210-02	08:48	Pam	Re: "Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #71)
20120210-04	10:50	Art	Re: "Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #71 & Pam, above)
20120215-02	11:36	SteveG	"The Long History Of The War Against Contraception" & More
20120215-18	23:01	SteveG	"Before Current Birth-Control Fight, Republicans Backed Mandates"
20120218-01	14:50	SteveG	"Republicans Are Unprotected on Contraception"
20120221-04	11:57	SteveB	"Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns"
20120221-05	12:23	SteveG	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120221-08	13:20	SteveB	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120221-07	12:28	Pam	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120221-15	22:52	SteveG	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120221-11	20:07	Art	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to all, above)
20120221-10	17:31	SteveG	"Woman Keeps Hapless Robber as Sex Slave"
20120223-00		SteveB	The Sanctity & Sacredness of Sperm by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Georgia Democrats Propose Limitations on Vasectomies for Men")
20120224-10	17:04	SteveG	"Mississippians Are Ready for Comprehensive Sex Education"
20120225-10	12:30	FotM	The Federal Birth Control 'Mandate' (FotM group discussion)
20120226-02	06:28	SteveB	"Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell's Wisdom"
(21) SOCIAL SECURITY / RETIREMENT			
(22) STATE / LOCAL GOVERNMENT			
20120201-03	07:54	SteveG	"Creationism: Indiana Senate Passes Bill to Teach Approach in Schools"
20120201-08	11:44	Art	Re: "Creationism: Indiana Senate Passes Bill to Teach Approach in Schools" (reply to SteveG. above)
20120206-07	15:30	Dennis	"Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud"
20120206-11	16:43	Phil	Re: "Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120206-13	16:57	Bill	Re: "Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud" (reply to Phil, above)
20120207-22	23:05	SteveG	Yakima, WA City Council Meeting
20120208-01	09:44	Pam	Re: Yakima, WA City Council Meeting (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #69)
(23) TAXES			
20120207-04	11:02	SteveB	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (to Bill)
20120207-12	16:11	Bill	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)
20120207-21	22:30	SteveB	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (reply to Bill, above)
20120208-10	17:01	Bill	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #69)
20120219-01	18:55	Dennis	"Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?"
20120219-02	19:44	Art	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120219-03	21:24	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120219-04	21:40	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Art, above)
20120219-06	21:46	Jim	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to all, above)
20120219-07	21:57	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Jim, above)
20120222-03	09:11	SteveB	"Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate"
20120222-05	13:07	SteveBA	Re: "Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120222-17	19:57	SteveB	Re: "Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate" (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120227-07	22:09	SteveB	"Corporate Tax: Next Battle for the White House"
(24) TRADE / INT'L RELATIONS			
20120201-00		SteveB	Restoring America's Manufacturing Base by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("A Competitive Dollar: The Missing Link in President Obama's Manufacturing Agenda")
(25) WAR / SECURITY			

DATE-ID	TIME	FROM	SUBJECT/TITLE
20120201-16	18:56	Dennis	"Lost in Translation: An Important Note for International Reckoners"
20120205-01	15:44	SteveG	"U.S. Citizen Prevented from Returning Home"
20120205-04	16:35	Pam	Re: "U.S. Citizen Prevented from Returning Home" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120207-01	07:06	Tom	No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran
20120207-02	07:38	SteveB	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Tom, above)
20120207-03	10:59	Art	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Tom, above)
20120208-05	13:30	SteveBA	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Tom, FotM Newsletter #69)
20120208-06	13:43	Dennis	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120208-11	17:47	SteveBA	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Dennis, above)
20120208-13	18:25	Dennis	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120208-14	19:10	Art	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to SteveBA, above)
20120208-15	19:19	Dennis	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Art, above)
20120208-16	19:38	SteveG	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to all, above) & "America's Empire of Bases"
20120208-17	20:59	SteveBA	Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to all, above)
20120207-14	18:00	SteveG	"Anniversaries from Unhistory"
20120215-19	23:34	SteveG	"How Did We Forget About Mutually Assured Destruction?"
20120216-02	11:30	Art	"Iran's Sabre Rattling Shows Energy Crisis Is Still with Us"
20120221-02	08:08	Jim	Graphic: Global American Military Presence
20120223-05	11:35	Pam	Is This Too Radical? War in Iran/Syria?
20120223-06	12:06	Art	Re: Is This Too Radical? War in Iran/Syria? (reply to Pam, above)
20120223-07	12:40	SteveB	Re: Is This Too Radical? War in Iran/Syria? (reply to Pam, above)
20120224-04	13:29	Phil	Video: IED (Improvised Explosive Device) in Iraq
20120225-18	21:56	Jim	"Bradley Manning, Solitary Confinement & Occupy 4 Prisoners"
(26) ART / LITERATURE / WRITING / MOVIES / MUSIC			
20120224-00		SteveB	The Worst Pop Singer of All Time? by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Worst Pop Singer Ever")
20120224-03	13:24	Beth	Re: The Worst Pop Singer of All Time? (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #81)
20120224-13	17:46	SteveB	Re: The Worst Pop Singer of All Time? (reply to Beth, above)
20120224-08	16:20	Pam	Video: 99 Problems / W.H. Auden's " <i>Musee Des Beaux Arts</i> "
20120228-08	11:25	Mark	Video: Blues at the White House!
20120228-18	21:56	SteveB	Re: Video: Blues at the White House! (reply to Mark, above)
(27) BUSINESS / MONEY / ECONOMICS			
20120131-02	14:43	SteveB	"The Biggest Risk to the Economy in 2012 & What's the Economy For Anyway?"
20120131-06	23:44	SteveG	"Current Laws Would Slash Federal Deficit, Analysts Say"
20120201-17	19:49	SteveG	"MF Global Missing Money Mostly Found"
20120202-03	11:15	Art	"A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'"
20120202-05	12:24	Pam	Re: "A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'" (reply to Art, above)
20120202-22	19:02	SteveB	"Biggest Holders of US Government Debt"
20120202-30	22:56	SteveG	"Bank of America Is Shrinking"
20120204-01	13:20	Mary	Video: "Debt Limit: A Guide to American Federal Debt Made Easy"
20120204-03	19:14	SteveBA	Re: Video: "Debt Limit..." (reply to Mary, above)
20120204-04	19:40	Dennis	Re: Video: "Debt Limit..." (reply to Mary, above)

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20120207-00		SteveB	Is the Economic Recovery for Real? by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Recovery Is Gathering Speed, Jobs Data Confirm")
20120206-04	11:43	Dale	Video: "Keynes vs. Hayek Smackdown: Battle Still Rages Between Long-Dead Economists"
20120208-12	17:56	Dale	"War of Borrowers Against Savers: News Analysis"
20120208-20	23:58	SteveB	Quote: SteveB on Keynesian vs. Republican Economics
20120210-01	08:33	Dick	"The Economics of Abbott and Costello"
20120217-00		SteveB	Past Due: The Mortgage Mess by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("How to Fix the Mortgage Mess")
20120227-01	13:40	Art	"How the GOP Would Expand the Deficit"
(28) CLASS WAR / POVERTY / RICH & POOR			
20120202-00		SteveB	A Former Slave Writes to His Master by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("To My Old Master")
20120202-12	16:26	Beth	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #65)
20120202-20	18:05	SteveB	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to Beth, above)
20120202-07	13:26	Art	"R0mney's 1% Nation Under God"
20120208-08	14:37	SteveB	"Obama's Wrong Note on Foreclosures"
20120210-11	17:04	Pam	"Money and Morals"
20120212-02	13:25	Pam	"We're More Unequal Than You Think"
20120223-34	22:30	SteveG	Quote: Helen Keller on Rich and Poor
(29) DAILY PHOTOS / PHOTOGRAPHY			
20120131-07	23:59	SteveB	Photo: 'Goodbye, Moon!'
20120201-19	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Handmade Bolivian Indian Blankets — Works of Art
20120202-34	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Paradise & Lucky Dube
20120205-08	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Mt. Katahdin, Maine
20120206-16	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Beaver Island, Michigan
20120207-23	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Marci's Yellowstone
20120208-21	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Sedona, Arizona
20120209-16	23:59	SteveB	Photo: St. Vincent
20120212-06	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Queen of the Andes—Blooms Once a Century
20120213-10	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Magog Lake Sunrise (near Banff National Park, Canada)
20120214-12	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Hoosier Trillium
20120215-21	23:59	SteveB	Photo: The World's Tiniest Chameleon
20120216-14	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Salteña (outside)
20120219-10	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Salteña (inside)
20120220-08	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Carnival 2012
20120221-16	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Sonoma Valley, California
20120222-24	23:59	SteveB	Photo: How More Fundamentalists Get Begotten
20120223-37	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Black Cat
20120225-03	07:41	SteveB	Re: Hoosier Post Office (reply to SteveG, below)
20120225-08	09:41	Pam	Re: Hoosier Post Office (reply to SteveB, above & SteveG, below)
20120224-17	20:18	SteveG	Photo: Hoosier Post Office
20120227-09	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Convento da Arrábida, Setuba, Portugal
20120228-19	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Belize Caribbean
(30) ENERGY / TRANSPORTATION / WATER			
20120202-01	10:38	Phil	Fw: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline

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20120202-08	13:55	Pam	Re: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline (reply to Phil, above)
20120202-27	20:18	SteveB	Re: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline (reply to Phil, above)
20120206-12	16:50	SteveG	"Warren Buffett Exposed: The Oracle of Omaha & the Tar Sands"
20120211-05	15:57	Dick	Antique Cars
20120212-01	08:01	SteveG	Cartoon: Animals Not Allowed on Yakima Zip Lines?
20120215-04	12:27	Art	Climate Change
20120215-05	14:06	SteveB	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to SteveG, above) & "\$2.50-a-Gallon-Gas & Energy Independence"
20120215-06	14:46	Pam	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Art & SteveB, above)
20120215-07	14:58	Ben	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above)
20120215-09	15:40	Dennis	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Newt Gingrich, above)
20120215-11	17:18	SteveG	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Dennis, above)
20120215-12	17:58	Dennis	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to SteveG, above)
20120215-13	18:00	Pam	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above)
20120215-15	18:37	Dennis	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Pam, above)
20120215-14	18:04	Art	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above)
20120215-17	20:08	MathaH	Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above) & "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in \$chools"
20120215-16	19:48	MarthaH	Keystone XL Pipeline from Indiana Perspective (to Sen. Richard Lugar) & "Lugar Defends Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying for Keystone XL Pipeline"
20120216-03	11:37	Art	Fw: Overpopulation
20120216-06	12:27	SteveB	Re: Overpopulation (reply to Art, above)
20120216-04	11:59	Pam	Re: Overpopulation (reply to Art, above)
20120216-07	12:28	SteveG	Re: Overpopulation (reply to Pam, above)
20120216-08	12:35	Pam	Re: Overpopulation & Stock Act (reply to SteveG, above)
20120216-10	12:41	SteveG	Re: Overpopulation & Stock Act (reply to Pam, above)
20120221-01	07:21	SteveG	Cartoon: Here We Go Again!
20120224-07	14:41	SteveB	From the Right: "Fridays with Erick Erickson, 02.24.12"
20120225-01	01:21	Ben	EarthRoamer RV
20120225-14	19:29	SteveG	"Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" & "What Happens If the Keystone XL Pipeline Isn't Built?"
20120225-15	20:18	Jim	Re: "Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120225-16	20:29	Dennis	Re: "Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" (reply to Jim & SteveG, above)
20120225-17	21:55	SteveG	Re: "Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" (reply to Jim, above)
20120227-06	20:37	Jim	"The Great Carbon Bubble: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry Fights So Hard"
20120227-02	16:09	SteveB	"Hoyer Not Sold on Tapping Oil Reserve"
(31) FOOD / DRINK			
20120212-04	16:33	SteveG	"300,000 Organic Farmers Sue Monsanto in Federal Court..."
20120217-04	22:47	SteveG	"The 5 Grossest Things You're Eating"
(32) FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE			
20120201-07	11:24	Pam	Police in the Neighborhood
20120201-09	12:07	Art	Re: Police in the Neighborhood (reply to Pam, above)
20120201-10	13:24	SteveB	Re: Police in the Neighborhood (reply to Pam, above)
20120203-03	16:49	Pam	I'm Still Here
20120203-07	21:30	Bill	Re: I'm Still Here (reply to Pam, above)
20120203-04	16:59	SteveG	Re: I'm Still Here (reply to Pam, above)

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20120203-05	17:34	SteveB	Re: I'm Still Here (reply to SteveG, above)
20120203-06	17:57	SteveG	Re: I'm Still Here (reply to SteveB, above)
20120207-08	11:47	SteveB	How FotM Newsletter Corrections Are Handled
20120213-01	10:12	NormF	The State of the Nation
20120214-03	10:24	NormF	Re: The State of the Nation (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)
(33) FUN / DIVERSION			
(34) HEALTH CARE / HEALTH / MEDICINE			
20120201-18	23:29	SteveG	"House Votes to Repeal Part of Healthcare Law"
20120202-02	10:39	Pam	Re: "House Votes to Repeal Part of Healthcare Law" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)
20120202-06	12:25	SteveG	"Healthcare Reform Was the Tea Party's First Defeat"
20120209-08	14:57	SteveG	"\$25B Settlement Reached Over Foreclosure Abuses" & "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising"
20120209-10	15:49	Pam	Re: "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120209-11	16:41	SteveB	Re: "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising" (reply to all, above)
20120209-12	17:43	SteveG	Re: "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising" (reply to all, above)
20120213-03	15:29	GaryF	Life Expectancy Calculator
20120222-00		Pam	Toward More Egalitarian Health Care by Pam McRae
20120221-12	21:21	SteveG	Re: Toward More Egalitarian Health Care (reply to Pam, above)
20120223-20	18:12	SteveG	"California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" & Photo: Carnival
20120223-26	18:28	Pam	Re: "California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120223-29	18:37	SteveB	Re: "California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" (reply to Pam, above)
(35) HISTORY			
20120215-00		SteveB	Important Stuff: How We Got to Where We Are, Part 1 by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Losing' the World: American Decline in Perspective, Part 1")
20120216-00		SteveB	Important Stuff: How We Got to Where We Are, Part 2 by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Imperial Way: American Decline in Perspective, Part 2")
(36) JOBS / LABOR			
20120201-13	15:38	SteveG	"6 Shocking Ways Capitalism Is Failing Working America"
20120213-00		SteveB	They Want Slaves Not Consumers! by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("House Transportation Bill 'Technical Correction' Would Strip Workers of Pay Protections")
20120226-01	01:28	SteveG	"Virginia Safety Joseph Williams Is on a Hunger Strike for University Workers"
(37) LIFE / PHILOSOPHY / SPIRITUALITY			
20120213-06	16:28	SteveB	The "Church"—Chpt. 23

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20120213-07	16:39	Dennis	Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120213-08	18:43	Pam	Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120214-02	10:17	Phil	Re: The "Church", Chapter 23 (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #73)
20120214-06	13:08	Art	Re: The "Church", Chapter 23 (reply to SteveB & Pam, FotM Newsletter #73)
20120214-07	13:23	Pam	Re: The "Church", Chapter 23 (reply to Art, above)
20120221-00		SteveB	Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra 2012 by Steven W. Baker / SteveB
20120220-03	19:39	Art	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
20120220-04	20:24	Cândida	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
20120220-05	21:46	Bill	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
20120220-06	22:30	Ben	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
20120220-07	23:08	Larry	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
20120220-01	14:02	BrentR	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)
20120221-06	12:25	Pam	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #78)
20120221-09	13:26	SteveB	Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to Pam, above)
20120225-20	22:44	SteveG	Quote: Teddy Roosevelt on Doing What You Can
20120227-05	19:07	SteveG	"My Take: Stop Sugarcoating the Bible"
20120227-08	23:43	Phil	Fw: Wisdom from an Old Jewish Man
(38) MEDIA / NEWS MEDIA			
20120209-13	18:27	SteveG	Media's Political Spin Cycle
20120217-01	10:16	Pam	"The 'Undue Weight' of Truth on Wikipedia"
20120217-02	21:06	SteveG	"Victory: MSNBC Dumps Pat Buchanan"
(39) MISC. REALITY			
(40) OCCUPY WALL ST.			
20120204-05	21:54	SteveG	Report from Occupy Yakima
20120205-02	16:14	SteveB	Re: Report from Occupy Yakima (reply to SteveG, above)
20120205-05	16:54	SteveG	Re: Report from Occupy Yakima (reply to SteveB, above)
20120214-11	23:24	SteveG	"OWS Meets with Members of Dissident Movements from All Over the World"
(41) PETITIONS / ACTIONS / CAUSES			
20120131-01	13:35	Art	Re: Obama-Biden Petition: Ban Congressional Insider Trading! (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #63)
20120206-01	07:35	SteveB	Fw: Notice from The99%Declaration.org
20120206-14	17:18	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Oppose President Obama's FDA Appointment!
20120206-15	18:28	GaryF	Fw: Status Message from 'Make Congress Work'
20120207-16	19:34	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Tell President Obama to Veto Extending Bush Tax Cuts to the 1%!
20120208-04	13:26	SteveB	Fw: DCCC Petition: Stop Eric Cantor from Watering Down the Stock Act!
20120209-01	09:04	SteveG	Fw: UUSC Petition: Have a Heart, Hershey!
20120209-02	09:21	SteveB	Re: UUSC Petition: Have a Heart, Hershey!
20120209-06	13:33	SteveG	Fw: Consumers Union Petition: Tell Washingtonians What They're Eating!
20120209-09	14:58	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Hold Banks Accountable!

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20120212-05	20:33	SteveB	Fw: Change.org Petition: Stop Chase Bank Foreclosure on Helen Bailey!
20120213-04	15:32	SteveG	Fw: DCCC Petition: Support President Obama's Budget!
20120214-01	02:09	SteveG	Fw: NationofChange Action: Donate to Help Us Speak Truth to Power!
20120214-10	17:38	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Keep the Senate & Your Employer Out of Your Bedroom!
20120216-11	13:26	SteveG	Fw: Emily's List Petition: Women Should Be Heard on Birth Control!
20120223-08	13:26	SteveG	Fw: Wolf PAC Action: Attend a Wolf-PAC Meeting in Your Area!
20120224-05	13:36	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Attend 99% Spring training!
20120224-11	17:07	SteveG	Fw: One.org Petition: Stop Bullying by Big Oil!
20120224-12	17:11	SteveG	Fw: MoxyVote Petition: Make Chevron Clean-Up the Rain Forest!
20120225-09	12:00	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama: 55 Wall St. Investigators Aren't Enough!
20120225-11	13:12	Pam	Re: Tell President Obama: 55 Wall St. Investigators Aren't Enough! (reply to SteveG, above)
20120225-19	22:00	SteveG	Fw: Change.org Petition: Save LGBT Lives in Uganda!
20120228-01	08:37	SteveB	Fw: Avaaz Hits 13 Million
(42) SCIENCE / TECHNOLOGY			
20120210-06	11:26	Art	The Theory of Hippos
20120210-09	15:30	FotM	Re: The Theory of Hippos (FotM group discussion)
20120219-08	22:00	Jim	Video: Physics Lesson with a Knitting Needle in Space
20120219-09	22:25	Tom	Source for Gadgets/Electronics
20120228-13	19:33	Art	Global Warming Mind-Changing Experiment & "The Great Carbon Bubble: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry Fights So Hard"
20120228-14	20:35	Pam	Re: Global Warming Mind-Changing Experiment (reply to Art, above)
20120228-15	21:04	SteveB	Re: Global Warming Mind-Changing Experiment (reply to Art, above)
(43) U.S.A., THE			
(44) WORLD, THE			
20120131-03	18:10	SteveG	Poster: "Admit It: You Now Want to Live in Canada"
20120201-04	09:35	Pam	Re: 'Admit It: You Now Want to Live in Canada' (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #64)
20120201-06	10:24	SteveB	Re: 'Admit It: You Now Want to Live in Canada' (reply to Pam, above)
20120201-05	10:13	SteveB	"The 10 Most Educated Countries in the World"
20120202-23	19:08	GaryC	Brutal Winter, Travel to Chile (to SteveB)
20120202-25	19:52	SteveB	Brutal Winter, Travel to Chile (reply to GaryC, above)
20120202-24	19:47	Dennis	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, below)
20120202-26	19:56	SteveB	Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Dennis, above)
20120202-28	20:19	Dennis	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, above)
20120202-29	22:50	SteveB	Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Dennis, above)
20120202-32	23:04	Jim	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, above)
20120202-33	23:15	SteveB	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Jim, above)
20120206-05	13:52	SteveBA	Cartoon: Mideast Re-Mapping?



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #64 — FEB. 1, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Restoring America's Manufacturing Base

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 1, 2012)



Well, the Florida Republican Primary was certainly boring, not that I want to see Newt succeed. I just want him to have enough rope to hang himself. For some reason, that's the entertaining part., to most of us, I think. I can't go to the cock fights around the corner not expecting to see blood. Modern American politics has become much like a cock fight. Both should be illegal!

So, please allow me to turn the page to what I believe is our most pressing problem — JOBS!

I hope we're ready to start having a serious discussion on this issue and the related issues of trade, manufacturing, and monetary policy. The need is urgent, so I hope Congress can ignore the election distractions and accomplish just a few good things between now and November.

#1 — kill the Bush tax cuts! (But I don't think this will happen before the election.)

Here's another valuable resource, Dean Baker's blog and much more: <http://www.cepr.net/index.php/beat-the-press/>.

"A Competitive Dollar: The Missing Link in President Obama's Manufacturing Agenda" by Dean Baker, NationofChange

Jan. 31, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/competitive-dollar-missing-link-president-obama-s-manufacturing-agenda-1328028595>)

In his State of the Union Address last week, President Obama announced a renewed commitment to manufacturing in the United States. While the commitment to rebuilding the country's manufacturing base is welcome – manufacturing has historically been a source of good-paying jobs for workers without college degrees – he unfortunately left the most important item on the list off the agenda.

President Obama failed to commit himself to restoring the competitiveness of the dollar as part of his agenda for bringing back manufacturing jobs. The value of the dollar really has to be front and central in any effort to restore U.S. competitiveness since it is by far the most important factor determining the relative cost of U.S. goods compared with goods produced elsewhere.

If the dollar is 20 percent above its proper value then it is equivalent to putting a 20 percent tariff on all of our exports. If the price of U.S. made goods are 20 percent higher for people living in other countries because of an over-valued dollar, we are not going to be able to export very much.

The opposite is true with imports. The over-valued dollar is equivalent to giving a 20 percent subsidy to people who import goods from other countries. This places U.S.-made products at an enormous disadvantage competing with imports. This explains the flood of imports coming into the country over the last 15 years.

President Obama's plans to improve education and training and provide support for research and long-term planning are all great, but if we don't address the fundamental problem of an over-valued dollar, then his agenda will have little impact on manufacturing in the United States. This is sort of like preparing the soil and carefully watering your garden but forgetting to plant the seeds.

The idea of the dollar falling in response to a trade deficit is actually fairly basic economics. In a system of floating exchange rates, countries with large trade deficits, like the United States, are supposed to see their currency fall, which brings trade back into balance. The lower-valued dollar has little effect on the price of most goods and services people in the United States consume. It just raises the price of imports, which is necessary if we are not going to keep borrowing money to pay for the fact that we consume more imports than we export.

The trade deficit is not leading to a fall in the dollar now because the central banks in many countries (most importantly China) are buying up large amounts of dollars precisely to keep the dollar from declining and eliminating their trade surpluses and our trade deficit. President Obama must persuade these countries to change their practice or take steps to force the dollar down. If he doesn't, then he is largely wasting our time with his "built to last" agenda.

Balanced trade would have a huge impact on U.S. labor markets. It would lead to more than 5 million new jobs in manufacturing. If we had balanced trade, as opposed to a \$580 billion trade deficit (4 percent of GDP), we could get back to full employment without needing either the stimulus from large budget deficits or the boost from the demand generated by a housing bubble.

Imagine the 4.0 percent unemployment of the late 90s coming back. This would make a real difference in the lives of tens of millions of workers.

As a matter of accounting, the gap in demand created by a trade deficit can only be filled by either negative public saving (a budget deficit) or negative private saving, as we experienced with the housing-bubble-driven consumption boom. There is literally no way around this story.

Unfortunately it is not clear that President Obama is prepared to push for a lower-valued dollar. Robert Rubin, the Treasury Secretary under President Clinton whose views still capture the thinking of most centrist Democrats, was the main promulgator of the high dollar policy that caused our trade deficit to explode in the first place.

There is a real class dimension to the high dollar since it means that Wall Street's money will go further when it invests overseas. It also helps to keep down inflation, Wall Street's nemesis. In other words the value of the dollar is another one of those 99 percent versus the 1 percent issues.

In short, if we actually want to see results in the form of more manufacturing jobs, rather than just a good speech, we will have to press President Obama to challenge the 1 percent. A more competitive dollar must be at center of a serious manufacturing policy. Everything else on President Obama's Built to Last agenda is just window dressing.

(Dean Baker is co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C. He previously worked as a senior economist at the Economic Policy Institute and an assistant professor at Bucknell University. He is the author of several books, including *Plunder & Blunder: The Rise and Fall of the Bubble Economy*, *The Conservative Nanny State: How the Wealthy Use the Government to Stay Rich and Get Richer* and *The United States Since 1980*. He was the editor of *Getting Prices Right: The Debate Over the Consumer Price Index*, which was a winner of a Choice Book Award as one of the outstanding academic books of the year. He appears frequently on TV and radio programs, including CNN, CBS News, PBS News Hour, and National Public Radio. His blog, Beat the Press, features commentary on economic reporting. He received his B.A. from Swarthmore College and his Ph.D. in economics from the University of Michigan.)

Comments:

posted by BozoAdult (Jan. 31, 2012, 3:06 pm)

Hey Dean! Want to make American manufacturing more competitive? Stop allowing multinational corporations to own "our" politicians. They are the ones that write laws that foster unfair competition.

Just imagine, we try to compete with a China that allows prison and child labor. They allow no organized labor, every heavy industry undercuts the American ones because China's are subsidized and there is no concern for worker health and safety. You think China has worker's compensation? LMAO!

So Dean, don't bring that bullsh*t in here. We know that things could be corrected with the application of tariffs. Tariffs only need to offset the unfair advantages built into trade with third world nations. Enact tariffs to protect American manufacturing and jobs! Stop with the lies. Enact tariffs or admit the truth that this is a race to the bottom.

posted by John Mugge (Jan. 31, 2012 12:25 pm)

The fed is trying to devalue by printing money like it's going out of style. Other nations' central banks are buying fewer dollars and fewer US Bonds as they diversify their reserves. We are in the middle of a currency war right now. (See James Rickards' new book.) But currency wars are no way to solve the fundamental global economic problems. We need to stop these shooting wars which waste resources; war always plays havoc with the economy. And we need some other mechanism besides currency valuations to balance trade. Our manufacturing sector is such a mess right now tariffs would be justified.

[20120131-01](#) 13:35 Art

Re: Obama-Biden Petition: Ban Congressional Insider Trading! (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #63)

Thanks. Good one!

20120131-02

14:43

SteveB

"The Biggest Risk to the Economy in 2012 & What's the Economy For Anyway?"

"The Biggest Risk to the Economy in 2012, and What's the Economy For Anyway?" by Robert Reich, Nation of Change

Jan. 31, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/biggest-risk-economy-2012-and-what-s-economy-anyway-1328022937>)

Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner, speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos a few days ago, said the "critical risks" facing the American economy this year were a worsening of Europe's chronic sovereign debt crisis and a rise in tensions with Iran that could stoke global oil prices.

What about jobs and wages here at home?

As the Commerce Department reported Friday, the U.S. economy grew 2.8 percent between October and December – the fastest pace in 18 months and the first time growth exceeded 2 percent all year. Many bigger American companies have been reporting strong profits in recent months. GE and Lockheed Martin closed the year with record order backlogs.

Yet the percent of working-age Americans in jobs isn't much different than what it was three years ago. Yes, America now produces more than it did when the recession began. But it does so with 6 million fewer workers.

Average after-tax incomes adjusted for inflation are moving up a bit. (They increased at an annual rate of .8 percent in the last three months of 2011 after falling 1.9 percent in prior three-month period. For all of 2011, incomes fell .1 percent.)

But beware averages. Shaquille O'Neal and I have an average height of six feet. Exclude Mitt Romney's \$20 million last year — along with everyone else securely in the top 1 percent — and the incomes of most Americans are continuing to slip.

Consumer spending picked up slightly in the fourth quarter mainly because consumers drew down their savings. Obviously, this can't last.

Meanwhile, government is spending less on schools, roads, bridges, parks, defense, and social services. Government spending at all levels dropped at an annual rate of 4.6 percent in the last quarter – and that's likely to continue.

Some economists worry this drop is a drag on the economy. But it also means fewer public goods available to all Americans regardless of income.

Congress still hasn't decided whether to renew the temporary payroll tax cut and extend unemployment benefits past February. If it doesn't, expect another 1 percent slice off GDP growth this year.

Tim Geithner is surely correct that the European debt crisis and Iran pose risks to the American economy in 2012. But they aren't the biggest risk. The biggest risk is right here at home – that most Americans will continue to languish.

All of which raises a basic question: Who or what is the economy for? Surely not just for a few at the top, and not just big corporations and their CEOs. Nor can the success of the economy be measured by how fast the GDP is growing, or how high the Dow Jones Industrial Average is rising, or whether average incomes are turning upward.

The crisis of American capitalism marks the triumph of consumers and investors over workers and citizens. And since most of us occupy all four roles – even though the lion's share of consuming and investing is done by the

wealthy – the real crisis centers on the increasing efficiency by which all of us as consumers and investors can get great deals, and our declining capacity to be heard as workers and citizens.

Modern technologies allow us to shop in real time, often worldwide, for the lowest prices, highest quality, and best returns. Through the Internet and advanced software we can now get relevant information instantaneously, compare deals, and move our money at the speed of electronic impulses. We can buy goods over the Internet that are delivered right to our homes. Never before in history have consumers and investors been so empowered.

Yet these great deals increasingly come at the expense of our own and our compatriots' jobs and wages, and widening inequality. The goods we want or the returns we seek can often be produced more efficiently elsewhere around the world by companies offering lower pay, fewer benefits, and inferior working conditions.

They also come at the expense of our Main Streets – the hubs of our communities – when we get the great deals through the Internet or at big-box retailers that scan the world for great deals on our behalf.

Some great deals have devastating environmental consequences. Technology allows us to efficiently buy low-priced items from poor nations with scant environmental standards, sometimes made in factories that spill toxic chemicals into water supplies or pollutants into the air. We shop for great deals in cars that spew carbon into the air and for airline tickets in jet planes that do even worse.

Other great deals offend common decency. We may get a great price or high return because a producer has cut costs by hiring children in South Asia or Africa who work twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Or by subjecting people to death-defying working conditions.

As workers or as citizens most of us would not intentionally choose these outcomes but as seekers after great deals we are indirectly responsible for them. Companies know that if they fail to offer us the best deals we will take our money elsewhere – which we can do with ever-greater speed and efficiency.

The best means of balancing the demands of consumers and investors against those of workers and citizens has been through democratic institutions that shape and constrain markets.

Laws and rules offer some protection for jobs and wages, communities, and the environment. Although such rules are likely to be costly to us as consumers and investors because they stand in the way of the very best deals, they are intended to approximate what we as members of a society are willing to sacrifice for these other values.

But technologies for getting great deals are outpacing the capacities of democratic institutions to counterbalance them. For one thing, national rules intended to protect workers, communities, and the environment typically extend only to a nation's borders. Yet technologies for getting great deals enable buyers and investors to transcend borders with increasing ease, at the same time making it harder for nations to monitor or regulate such transactions.

For another, goals other than the best deals are less easily achieved within the confines of a single nation. The most obvious example is the environment, whose fragility is worldwide. In addition, corporations now routinely threaten to move jobs and businesses away from places that impose higher costs on them – and therefore, indirectly, on their consumers and investors – to more "business friendly" jurisdictions. The Internet and software have made companies sufficiently nimble to render such threats credible.

But the biggest problem is that corporate money is undermining democratic institutions in the name of better deals for consumers and investors. Campaign contributions, fleets of well-paid corporate lobbyists, and corporate-financed PR campaigns about public issues are overwhelming the capacities of Congress, state legislatures, regulatory agencies, and the courts to reflect the values of workers and citizens.

As a result, consumers and investors are doing increasingly well but job insecurity is on the rise, inequality is widening, communities are becoming less stable, and climate change is worsening. None of this is sustainable over the long term.

Blame global finance and worldwide corporations all you want. But save some blame for the insatiable consumers and investors inhabiting almost every one of us, who are entirely complicit. And blame our inability as workers and citizens to reclaim our democracy.

This article was originally posted on Robert Reich's blog: <http://robertreich.org/>.

20120131-03 18:10 SteveG Poster: "Admit It: You Now Want to Live in Canada"



20120131-04 18:56 Jim "Social Justice Quiz 2012: Thirteen Questions"

Interesting comparisons:

"Social Justice Quiz 2012: Thirteen Questions" by Bill Quigley and Sam Schmitt, Nation of Change

Jan. 31, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/social-justice-quiz-2012-thirteen-questions-1328020073>)

(The truth about social justice.)

1. The combined pay of the 299 highest paid CEOs in the US is enough to support how many median salary jobs?

45,000? 83,000? 102,325?

2. The median net worth of black households in the US is \$2,200. What is the median net worth of white households in the US?

\$4,400? \$44,000? \$97,000?

3. The US Department of Housing and Urban Development issues a national survey every year listing fair market rents for every county in the US. HUD also suggests renters should pay no more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. In how many of the USA's 3068 counties can someone who works full-time and earns the federal minimum wage pay 30% of their income and find a one-bedroom apartment at the fair market rental amount?

19? 368? 1974?

4. How much must the typical U.S. worker earn per hour to rent a two-bedroom apartment if that worker dedicates thirty percent of his income, as HUD suggests, to rent and utilities?

\$9.39? \$14.63? \$18.46?

5. The wealthiest 1 percent of the US has a net worth which is how many times greater than the median or typical household's net worth?

50? 150? 225?

6. Which of these countries puts the highest percentage of their people in jails and prisons?

China? Iran? Iraq? Germany? Russia? USA?

7. In 2012, the US will pay out about \$620 billion for old age Social Security benefits to 45 million families. How much is budgeted for military spending by the US in 2012?

\$310 billion? \$620 billion? \$836 billion?

8. The US is number one in the world in military spending. How much more does the US spend compared to the top 15 countries in the world in military spending?

More than any 2 other countries combined? More than any 5 other countries combined? More than all the rest of the 15 top military spending countries combined?

9. How many people in the world live on less than \$1.25 a day?

150 million? 500 million? Over 1 billion?

10. How many people in the world live without electricity?

500 million? One billion? One and half billion?

11. The US government donates over \$30 billion a year in official development assistance (foreign aid) to poor countries. Where does that rank the US government in percentage of giving among the richest 23 countries?

First? Tenth? Nineteenth?

12. The US government donates over \$30 billion a year to poor countries. How much do US consumers spend on pets and pet supplies each year?

\$10 billion? \$30 billion? \$67 billion?

12. The poverty rate among children in the US is over 20 percent. How does US compare with the rest of the 30 nations surveyed by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development?

First? Tenth? Twenty-sixth?

Answers to Social Justice Quiz 2012:

1. The combined pay of the top 299 CEOs is enough to support 102,325 average jobs. Source: Corporate Paywatch.

2. The median net worth of white households in the US is \$97,900. Source: Economic Policy Institute.

3. Except for eleven counties in Illinois and another eight in Puerto Rico, there is no county in the US where a one bedroom fair market rate apartment is available to a person working full-time at the minimum wage. Source: The National Low Income Housing Coalition.

4. The typical worker must earn \$18.46 an hour to rent a two bedroom apartment. Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition.

5. In the last numbers reported, the top 1 percent had net worth 225 times greater than the median or typical household's net worth, the highest ever recorded. Source: Economic Policy Institute.

6. The rate of incarceration per 100,000 people is: USA 730, Russian 534, Iran 334, China 122, Iraq 101, and Germany 86. Source: International Centre for Prison Studies, University of Essex.

7. \$836 billion. Over \$713 billion on military programs and another \$123 for veterans affairs. Source: US Office of Management and Budget, Fiscal Year 2012.

8. The US spends \$100 billion more on our military than the next highest 15 countries combined. More than China, UK, France, Russia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Germany, India, Italy, Brazil, South Korea, Australia, Canada and Turkey combined. Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2011 Yearbook.

9. 1.4 billion people live on less than \$1.25 a day. Source: United National Development Program, Human Development Report 2010.

10. One and half billion people, more than one of every five people in the world, live without electricity. Source: United Nations Development Program, Human Development Report 2011.

11. US government ranks 19th out of 23 countries in assistance to poor nations, giving about two-tenths of one percent of US gross national income to poor countries. Source: Global Issues: Foreign Aid for Development Assistance.

12. US consumers spend \$67 billion each year on pets, pet products and services. Source: US Census Bureau 2012 Statistical Abstract.

13. The US poverty rate among children ranks the US 26th among 30 nations in the rate of poverty among children. Source: Poverty among children. OECD.

20120131-05	19:15	SteveB	Fw: Constitutional Amendment Undoing <i>Citizens United</i> (from MT Sen. Jon Tester)
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from Montana Senator Jon Tester (D):

Free and fair elections are the bedrock of our democracy. That's why I'm supporting a constitutional amendment to undo the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United decision.

This controversial decision undermines Montana values, allowing corporations to spend unlimited money on our elections with no transparency or accountability. Under this ruling, even foreign corporations can influence our elections.

Corporate interests should not have the power to buy an election. Like most Montanans, I know corporations aren't people. A century ago, in the wake of rampant political corruption wrought by the Copper Kings, the people of Montana passed a law limiting corporate influence over our elections. The Montana Supreme Court recently upheld our state's historic law, and I strongly support their decision.

It will take a constitutional amendment to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision. I believe this step is the right thing to do to uphold Montana's values and put our democracy back in the hands of people, not wealthy corporations.

Please feel free to share your thoughts. As always, I'm interested in hearing from you: senator@tester.senate.gov.

20120131-06	23:44	SteveG	"Current Laws Would Slash Federal Deficit, Analysts Say"
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If the federal government continues the gridlock, the deficit will take care of itself. Interesting!

"Current Laws Would Slash Federal Deficit, Analysts Say" by Lisa Mascaro, *LA Times*

Jan. 31, 2012, (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-cbo-deficits-20120201,0,1929376.story>)

(The annual deficit would be cut in half by next fiscal year if Congress allows laws to stand that would let Bush-era tax cuts end and impose deep budget cuts, the Congressional Budget Office reports.)

(WASHINGTON) Here's one way Congress can trim the nation's record deficits: Do nothing.

Keeping Congress gridlocked on budget issues would cut the projected annual federal deficit in half by the next fiscal year and set the trend on a downward path for years to come.

Legislation already on the books, if left alone, would do several things: Tax cuts passed under President George W. Bush's administration would expire Dec. 31, generating more revenue. And deep budget cuts passed as part of last summer's debt ceiling deal would be automatically triggered, slashing spending in 2013.

Pain would come with the progress, however. If Congress agreed to let such politically difficult choices stand, the short-term effect would curtail the nation's modest economic growth. The unemployment rate would rise back above 9% next year, a result of substantial reductions to the federal workforce and sluggish demand, according to the latest report from the Congressional Budget Office.

This is the Catch-22 facing Congress and driving the presidential campaign. Tea party members want to reduce government spending. Democrats want to raise taxes on the affluent. And economists warn that sudden budget cuts or tax increases can damage a recovering economy. How lawmakers balance the competing interests will be at the crux of the debate that has become the nation's defining domestic issue.

"On the one hand, if policymakers leave current laws unchanged, the federal debt will probably recede slowly," said Douglas W. Elmendorf, director of the CBO, in releasing the annual Budget and Economic Outlook for the next decade.

"On the other hand, changing current laws to let current policies continue would boost the economy and allow people to pay less in taxes and benefit more from government programs in the next few years — but put the nation on an unsustainable fiscal course."

One thing is certain, the CBO advised: Making decisions sooner rather than later is preferable, even if lawmakers agree to phase in the changes over time to soften the damage.

"There's no substantive advantage to waiting to decide what policy changes we will make," Elmendorf said Tuesday. "To the contrary, the longer we wait as a country to make the sort of choices that we have to make, the harder it will be to make them, because more debt will have accumulated and people will have less time to plan how they will react to the various changes."

Although the issues covered in the CBO report are driving the national debate on and off Capitol Hill, they have not spurred lawmakers to act. Substantive action isn't expected until a lame-duck session of Congress after the November election.

Party leaders wasted no time cherry-picking from the report. Republicans said the gloomy economic outlook represented the failed policies of President Obama, who took office amid the most significant economic downturn since the Depression.

"This president inherited a bad situation and he has made it worse," said Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, a member of the GOP leadership.

Democrats argued that raising taxes on wealthier Americans must be part of any deficit reduction strategy.

"We have to get our fiscal house in order by reaching a big and balanced deficit reduction plan this year," said Rep. Steny H. Hoyer of Maryland, the No. 2 Democrat in the House. "Such a plan requires both getting a handle on spending and raising revenue."

But even if Congress leaves the tough laws on the books this year — thereby halving the projected 2012 deficit of \$1.1 trillion — the gain would be short-lived, the CBO said. Raising taxes and cutting spending alone cannot solve the problems of the nation's \$15.2-trillion debt load.

By the middle of the decade, deficits would begin to curve upward again, largely as a result of an aging population and the related costs of Medicare and Social Security.

Resolving that issue is what Elmendorf called the "fundamental challenge." The GOP has proposed offering the next generation of seniors a fixed-price stipend to buy private health insurance — a proposal from Rep. Paul D. Ryan (R-Wis.) that was panned by much of the public and used as a Democratic campaign issue against Republicans who supported it.

The nation's gross domestic product is projected to grow by 2% this year — better than in the recent past — but the economy is only about halfway through the effects of the downturn, the report said.

Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a former CBO director who has advised Republicans, suggested that members of Congress brace themselves for the inevitable year-end budget battles.

"Deep breath," he said. "December could be quite ugly."

[20120131-07](#) 23:59 SteveB Photo: 'Goodbye, Moon!'

<http://gizmodo.com/5645030/watch-the-super-harvest-moon-today>

Harvest Moon Setting over Arizona (2010)



—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 #65 — FEB. 2, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

A Former Slave Writes to His Master

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 2, 2012)



I wonder how close to slavery the Right wishes to drive the workers of America? Slavery certainly fits their stated goals to a T—the lowest wages possible, low taxes, no unions, no work rules, no minimum wage, no pesky governmental regulation or inspection. I could go on. I love the man writing this letter. He wonderfully states what all us workers feel, I think, though perhaps not so charitably and humbly. His simple goals remain those of nearly all Americans, starting with a freedom and a good education for his children. These goals are worthy and necessary to a stable, thriving society. Their attainment should be aided by the government, not thwarted—again!

“To My Old Master” from Letters of Note (<http://www.lettersofnote.com>)

Jan. 30, 2012, (<http://www.lettersofnote.com/2012/01/to-my-old-master.html>)

(In August of 1865, a Colonel P.H. Anderson of Big Spring, Tennessee, wrote to his former slave, Jourdan Anderson, and requested that he come back to work on his farm. Jourdan — who, since being emancipated, had moved to Ohio, found paid work, and was now supporting his family — responded spectacularly by way of the letter

seen below (a letter which, according to newspapers at the time, he dictated). Rather than quote the numerous highlights in this letter, I'll simply leave you to enjoy it. Do make sure you read to the end.

(Source: *The Freedmen's Book*; Image: A group of escaped slaves in Virginia in 1862, courtesy of the Library of Congress.)

Dayton, Ohio, August 7, 1865

To My Old Master, Colonel P.H. Anderson, Big Spring, Tennessee

Sir:

I got your letter, and was glad to find that you had not forgotten Jourdon, and that you wanted me to come back and live with you again, promising to do better for me than anybody else can. I have often felt uneasy about you. I thought the Yankees would have hung you long before this, for harboring Rebs they found at your house. I suppose they never heard about your going to Colonel Martin's to kill the Union soldier that was left by his company in their stable. Although you shot at me twice before I left you, I did not want to hear of your being hurt, and am glad you are still living. It would do me good to go back to the dear old home again, and see Miss Mary and Miss Martha and Allen, Esther, Green, and Lee. Give my love to them all, and tell them I hope we will meet in the better world, if not in this. I would have gone back to see you all when I was working in the Nashville Hospital, but one of the neighbors told me that Henry intended to shoot me if he ever got a chance.

I want to know particularly what the good chance is you propose to give me. I am doing tolerably well here. I get twenty-five dollars a month, with victuals and clothing; have a comfortable home for Mandy,—the folks call her Mrs. Anderson,—and the children—Milly, Jane, and Grundy—go to school and are learning well. The teacher says Grundy has a head for a preacher. They go to Sunday school, and Mandy and me attend church regularly. We are kindly treated. Sometimes we overhear others saying, "Them colored people were slaves" down in Tennessee. The children feel hurt when they hear such remarks; but I tell them it was no disgrace in Tennessee to belong to Colonel Anderson. Many darkeys would have been proud, as I used to be, to call you master. Now if you will write and say what wages you will give me, I will be better able to decide whether it would be to my advantage to move back again.

As to my freedom, which you say I can have, there is nothing to be gained on that score, as I got my free papers in 1864 from the Provost-Marshal-General of the Department of Nashville. Mandy says she would be afraid to go back without some proof that you were disposed to treat us justly and kindly; and we have concluded to test your sincerity by asking you to send us our wages for the time we served you. This will make us forget and forgive old scores, and rely on your justice and friendship in the future. I served you faithfully for thirty-two years, and Mandy twenty years. At twenty-five dollars a month for me, and two dollars a week for Mandy, our earnings would amount to eleven thousand six hundred and eighty dollars. Add to this the interest for the time our wages have been kept back, and deduct what you paid for our clothing, and three doctor's visits to me, and pulling a tooth for Mandy, and the balance will show what we are in justice entitled to. Please send the money by Adams's Express, in care of V. Winters, Esq., Dayton, Ohio. If you fail to pay us for faithful labors in the past, we can have little faith in your promises in the future. We trust the good Maker has opened your eyes to the wrongs which you and your fathers have done to me and my fathers, in making us toil for you for generations without recompense. Here I draw my wages every Saturday night; but in Tennessee there was never any pay-day for the negroes any more than for the horses and cows. Surely there will be a day of reckoning for those who defraud the laborer of his hire.

In answering this letter, please state if there would be any safety for my Milly and Jane, who are now grown up, and both good-looking girls. You know how it was with poor Matilda and Catherine. I would rather stay here and starve—and die, if it come to that—than have my girls brought to shame by the violence and wickedness of their young masters. You will also please state if there has been any schools opened for the colored children in your neighborhood. The great desire of my life now is to give my children an education, and have them form virtuous habits.

Say howdy to George Carter, and thank him for taking the pistol from you when you were shooting at me.

From your old servant, Jourdon Anderson.

20120201-01 05:56 SteveB "Sarah Palin Skewered in *Game Change*"

Interesting looking movie with excellent actors...<http://www.politico.com/blogs/click/>

"Sarah Palin Skewered in *Game Change*" by Caitlin McDevitt, Politico, Jan. 31, 2012

HBO's upcoming movie *Game Change*, which zeroes in on John McCain's 2008 presidential run, paints a less-than-flattering picture of his running mate, Sarah Palin, a new trailer shows.

In the clip from the film — which is based on the bestselling book of the same name by Mark Halperin and John Heilemann — actress Julianne Moore, as Palin, joins the campaign and, subsequently, melts down under too much pressure.

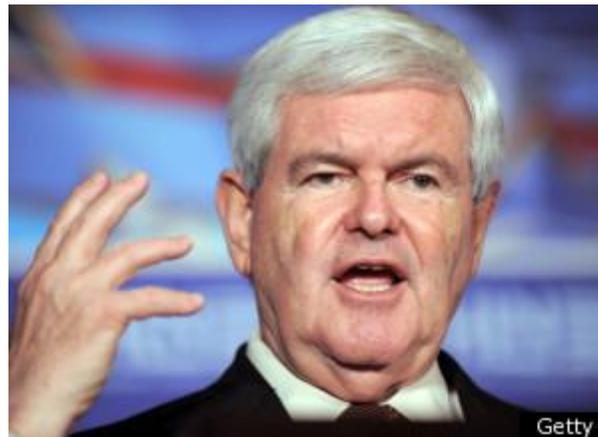
Realizing that Palin may not be ready for the role, McCain adviser Steve Schmidt, played by Woody Harrelson, says at one point, "Oh my God, what have we done?"

Click below to watch the trailer for the movie, which premieres March 10:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IPhh7mch5zo.

20120201-02 06:17 SteveB 'Goodbye, Moon'

I loved the Huffington Post headline this morning, "Goodbye, Moon".



GOODBYE, MOON!



[20120201-11](#) 13:26 Art Re: 'Goodbye, Moon' (reply to SteveB, above)

Good title!!!

[20120201-03](#) 07:54 SteveG "Creationism: Indiana Senate Passes Bill to Teach Approach in Schools"

How's this for good old Indiana?

"Creationism: Indiana Senate Passes Bill to Teach Approach in Schools" by Scott Elliott, *Indianapolis Star*

Feb. 1, 2012, (<http://www.indystar.com/article/20120201/NEWS05/202010320/Indiana-Senate-passes-bill-teaching-creationism>)

(If measure becomes law, opponents wonder if suit versus state will follow.)

The Indiana Senate passed a bill Tuesday that would allow creationism to be taught in the classroom -- an idea that, if it becomes law, could likely end up in a courtroom.

Senate Bill 89, authored by Sen. Dennis Kruse, R-Auburn, would allow schools to teach religion-based views on the origin of creation -- be they Muslim, Jewish, Scientology or Christian -- alongside the theory of evolution in public school science classes.

Schools, however, would not be required to do so, and an Indiana Department of Education spokesman said the state would not develop any such curriculum or guidelines for teaching creationism.

The Senate passed the bill 28-22. It would still need to be passed by the House and signed by Gov. Mitch Daniels before it became law.

"I believe in creation," Kruse said, "and I believe it deserves to be taught in our public schools."

Sen. Karen Tallian, D-Portage, had a decidedly different take: "I can't believe we are even considering this."

The question now -- if it becomes law -- is whether schools will consider it. And if they do, will that violate the Constitution?

Creation science was specifically ruled unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in a 1987 case in which the court voided a Louisiana law that required creation science to be taught alongside evolution in science class. The court found the law violated the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution because it was designed to advance religion.

Kruse said he is aware of the precedent but isn't sure it would survive today.

"This is a different Supreme Court," he said. "This Supreme Court could rule differently."

Sen. Tim Skinner, D-Terre Haute, asked whether Indiana is ready for the lengthy legal battle that could follow.

"If we get sued," he asked, "who is going to pay for the lawsuit?"

The answer to Skinner's question might help explain why Kruse felt the need to put creationism into state law.

Technically, a school district could teach creationism now -- and some do.

"As far as I know," said Mount Vernon Community School Corporation Superintendent William Riggs, "we've always been allowed to do that."

Riggs said Mount Vernon High School's biology class already teaches creationism alongside evolution. "We've been doing this for years."

Riggs said the school teaches them as "two theories of the origins of life" and said that in literature classes students often learn about the Bible and the Quran. "The idea is to get kids to think."

But districts such as Mount Vernon potentially open themselves up to costly lawsuits. Kruse's bill gives those districts and any other that choose to teach creationism some legal cover -- and likely would draw the state into their defense.

In 2008, Louisiana passed a law that protects the "academic freedom" of teachers and students to discuss the merits of scientific theories.

According to the Fordham Foundation, a conservative-leaning institute in Washington, D.C.: "In practice, the (Louisiana) measure pushes a pro-creationist agenda -- and gives cover to those looking to teach intelligent design creationism."

In 2011, six states considered similar laws, but all were defeated, according to the Fordham Foundation. Besides Indiana, Fordham notes that New Hampshire also is advancing a creation bill in 2012.

Over the past decade, the evolution debate has re-emerged as proponents of "intelligent design" sought to persuade school districts and state legislatures to include it in science discussions.

Intelligent design holds that the complexity of the laws of the universe and factors that led to the emergence of life suggest they could not have happened by accident but must be the work of a "designer." Many proponents believe the designer is God, but they argue that there are other possibilities and that intelligent design is not specifically a religious theory.

Intelligent design received its legal test in 2005 when a federal judge took up the case of a requirement in Dover, Pa., that schoolchildren be read a statement in biology class that called evolution a "flawed" theory and suggested intelligent design as another option.

Judge John E. Jones III issued a 139-page decision that traced the history of the intelligent design theory to its roots in the already outlawed idea of creation science, concluding it was entirely a theological argument and "not science."

Edward Frazier, executive director of the Hoosier Association of Science Teachers, said he thinks some people get hung up on the term "theory" when discussing evolution. The scientific definition, he explained, is different from the lay definition.

"With a scientific theory, you start with a hypothesis and then collect evidence," he said. "(With evolution) there is a tremendous amount of facts to support it."

Frazier, a retired biology and science teacher who taught at Speedway High School for 40 years, said creationism is based on belief, not scientific evidence.

In the wake of the Dover decision, most battles over the issue lately have focused on more subtle efforts to insert creation into evolution discussions, such as laws requiring students be taught specific "weaknesses" in the theory.

Skinner argues that SB 89 has a specific weakness: It does not call for the creation of state standards for teachers to follow.

Skinner said teachers shouldn't be forced to figure it out on their own.

But Indiana Department of Education spokesman Alex Damron said a state curriculum would not be needed.

"We believe this is a local issue," he said, "best left to school communities to decide."

Coincidentally, Tuesday's vote came on the same day that the Fordham Foundation released a report that named Indiana as one of just seven states that earned an "A" for its science standards.

That might change.

"If this law passes, for the classrooms of Indiana, it would be a serious undermining of the teaching of evolution," said Kathleen Porter-Magee, senior director of the High Quality Standards Project at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

The think tank, based in Washington, D.C., advocates for high academic standards and school choice.

In its report, Fordham said the challenges to evolution are among the biggest problems facing science standards today.

Adding creation science to state standards, Porter Magee said, would be a step in the wrong direction.

Francis Eberle, the executive director of the National Science Teachers Association, agrees.

"I understand that religious belief and faith is important," he said. "We don't dispute that in any fashion. Our position is that in the science classroom we should be teaching science."

Kruse called evolution a "Johnny come lately" idea that emerged well after many religious views about the origins of life were formed.

"Many people still believe in creation," he said. "Our schools are teaching what many people believe is false."

Kruse thinks his bill is fair to everyone because it was amended to allow the creation theories of several religions, not just Christianity. But the inclusion of other religions was the reason Sen. Brent Steele, R-Bedford, said he voted against the measure.

Nine other Republicans voted against the bill, and one Democrat, Lindel Hume of Princeton, voted for it.

(*Star* reporters Alex Campbell and Tim Evans contributed to this story.)

20120201-08	11:44	Art	Re: "Creationism: Indiana Senate Passes Bill to Teach Approach in Schools" (reply to SteveG. above)
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So this authorizes Sharia??? Hmm. That may take a nasty turn for the evangelicals. Stupidity reigns.

20120201-04	09:35	Pam	Re: 'Admit It: You Now Want to Live in Canada' (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #64)
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Canada is a GREAT country. It's everything we wish America could be.

20120201-06	10:24	SteveB	Re: 'Admit It: You Now Want to Live in Canada' (reply to Pam, above)
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Welcome Back, Pam! (at least a little)

GOD BLESS AMERICA! LAND THAT WE LOVE! (though we're getting more jealous all the time!).

Well, we're still the world's greatest fighting machine! I wonder how big that puny Canadian military is? Mmmmm...

When our leaders say they intend to focus more on the Western hemisphere, I wonder if they're really thinking that it's much cheaper to fight wars closer to home.

I mean...that's what we do anymore, right? We go to war (undeclared). That's what we're best at, in a difficult field of endeavor. I mean, we don't sell much. We buy a lot, but it had better be damned cheap and under our control, and what better place than right under our noses.

Oil? Why...look, Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, the U.S. and Brazil have more oil than all the Arabs put together. Ahhh....

20120201-05	10:13	SteveB	"The 10 Most Educated Countries in the World"
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CANADA AGAIN! THOSE DAMNED, GODLESS SOCIALISTS UP NORTH ARE BEATING THE U.S. AGAIN!!!!

I wonder why other countries achieve so much more per dollar spent on education? I still think our schools are among the best in the world (maybe #4, huh?). Top students get a good education in many countries. It's a matter of how far the resources get extended to students with, let us say, less "individual" talent and "individual" motivation.

Republicans say these kids are on their own and might as well practice working as school janitors. Democrats say, as always, we need to do a little more.

Where are those FAMILY VALUES if not here in the schools with our children, with America's future???

"The 10 Most Educated Countries in the World" by Charles B. Stockdale and Michael B. Sauter, 24/7 Wall St.

Jan. 31, 2012, (<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/the-10-most-educated-countries-in-the-world.html>)

In the past 50 years, college graduation rates in developed countries have increased nearly 200%, according to Education at a Glance 2011, a recently published report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The report shows that while education has improved across the board, it has not improved evenly, with some countries enjoying much greater rates of educational attainment than others. Based on the report, 24/7 Wall St. identified the 10 developed countries with the most educated populations.

The countries with the most highly educated citizens are also some of the wealthiest in the world. The United States, Japan and Canada are on our list and also have among the largest GDPs. Norway and Australia, also featured, have the second and sixth-highest GDPs per capita, respectively. All these countries aggressively invest in education.

The countries that invest the most in education have the most-educated people. All of the best-educated countries, except for the UK, fall within the top 15 OECD countries for greatest spending on tertiary — that is, college or college-equivalent — spending as a percentage of GDP. The U.S. spends the second most and Canada spends the fourth most.

Interestingly, public expenditure on educational institutions relative to private spending by these countries is small compared with other countries in the OECD. While the majority of education is still funded with public money, eight of the countries on our list rely the least on public funding as a percentage of total education spending.

The countries included here have had educated populations for a long time. While they have steadily increased the percentages of their populations with postsecondary educations, the increases are modest compared to developing countries. The U.S., Canada and Japan have had tertiary educational attainment above 30% since at least 1997. Poland, a recently developed country that is not on our list, had a tertiary educational rate of 10% in 1997. As of 2009, that rate had grown to 21%.

These are the 10 most educated countries in the world.

10. Finland

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 37%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 1.8% (3rd lowest)
GDP per capita: \$36,585 (14th highest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 3.15% (10th lowest)

Finland is a small country relative to the other OECD members. The share of its adult population with some sort of postsecondary education, however, is rather large. This select group is reaching the end of its expansion. From 1999 to 2009, the number of college-educated adults increased only 1.8% annually — the third-smallest amount among all OECD countries. Finland is also one of only two countries, the other being Korea, in which the fields of social sciences, business and law are not the most popular among students. In Finland, new entrants are most likely to study engineering, manufacturing and construction.

9. Australia

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 37%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 3.3% (11th lowest)
GDP per capita: \$40,719 (6th highest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 14.63% (3rd highest)

Australia's population grew 14.63% between 2000 and 2009. This is the third-largest increase among OECD countries. Its tertiary-educated adult population is increasing at the much less impressive annual rate of 3.3%. Australia also spends the sixth-least amount in public funds on education as a percentage of all expenditures. The country also draws large numbers of international students.

8. United Kingdom

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 37%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 4.0% (9th highest)
GDP per capita: \$35,504 (16th highest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 3.47% (13th lowest)

Unlike most of the countries with the highest percentage of educated adults, the UK's educated group increased measurably — more than 4% between 1999 and 2009. Its entire population only grew 3.5% between 2000 and 2009. One aspect that the UK does share with a number of other countries on this list is relatively low public expenditure on education institutions as a percentage of all educational spending. As of 2008, 69.5% of spending came from public sources — the fourth-smallest amount among OECD countries.

7. Norway

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 37%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): N/A
GDP per capita: \$56,617 (2nd highest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 7.52% (14th highest)

Norway has the third-greatest expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, at 7.3%. Roughly 23% of that is spent on tertiary education. In Norway, more than 60% of all tertiary graduates were in a bachelor's program, well more than the U.S., which is close to the OECD average of 45%. The country is one of the wealthiest in the world. GDP per capita is \$56,617, second only to Luxembourg in the OECD.

6. South Korea

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 39%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 5.3% (5th highest)
GDP per capita: \$29,101 (13th lowest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 3.70% (14th lowest)

Korea is another standout country for its recent increase in the percentage of its population that has a tertiary education. Graduates increased 5.3% between 1999 and 2009, the fifth-highest among OECD countries. Like the UK, this rate is greater than the country's recent population growth. Korea is also one of only two countries — the other being Finland — in which the most popular fields of study are not social sciences, business and law. In Korea, new students choose to study education, humanities and arts at the greatest rates. Only 59.6% of expenditures on educational institutions come from public funds — the second-lowest rate.

5. New Zealand

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 40%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 3.5% (14th lowest)
GDP per capita: \$29,871 (14th lowest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 11.88% (8th largest)

New Zealand is not a particularly wealthy country. GDP per capita is less than \$30,000, and is the 14th lowest in the OECD. However, 40% of the population engages in tertiary education, the fifth-highest rate in the world. The country actually has a rapidly growing population, increasing 11.88% between 2000 and 2009. This was the eighth-largest increase in the OECD. Part of the reason for the high rate of tertiary graduates is the high output from secondary schools. More than 90% of residents graduate from secondary school.

4. United States

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 41%

Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 1.4% (the lowest)
GDP per capita: \$46,588 (4th highest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 8.68% (12th highest)

The U.S. experienced a fairly large growth in population from 2000 to 2009. During the period, the population increased 8.68% — the 12th highest among OECD countries. Meanwhile, the rate at which the share of the population with a tertiary education is growing has slowed to an annual rate of 1.4% — the lowest among the 34 OECD countries. Just 71% of funding for educational institutions in the country comes from public funds, placing the U.S. sixth-lowest in this measure. Among OECD countries, the largest share of adults with a tertiary education live in the United States — 25.8%.

3. Japan

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 44%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 3.2% (10th lowest)
GDP per capita: \$33,751 (17th lowest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 0.46% (6th lowest)

In Japan, 44% of the adult population has some form of tertiary education. The U.S. by comparison has a rate of 41%. Japan's population increased just 0.46% between 2000 and 2009, the sixth-slowest growth rate in the OECD, and the slowest among our list of 10. Japan is tied with Finland for the third-highest upper-secondary graduation rate in the world, at 95%. It has the third-highest tertiary graduation rate in the world, but only spends the equivalent of 1.5% of GDP on tertiary education — the 17th lowest rate in the OECD.

2. Israel

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 45%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): N/A
GDP per capita: \$28,596 (12th lowest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 19.02% (the highest)

Although there is no data on the percentage of Israeli citizens with postsecondary education dating back to 1999, the numbers going back to 2002 show that growth is slowing dramatically compared to other countries. In fact, in 2006, 46% of adults ages 25 to 64 had a tertiary education. In 2007 this number fell to 44%. Only 78% of funds spent on educational institutions in Israel are public funds. The country is also only one of three — the other two being Ireland and Sweden — where expenditure on educational institutions as a proportion of GDP decreased from 2000 to 2008. Israel also had the largest increase in overall population, approximately 19% from 2000 to 2009.

1. Canada

Pct. population with postsecondary education: 50%
Avg. annual growth rate (1999 – 2009): 2.3% (5th lowest)
GDP per capita: \$39,070 (10th highest)
Pop. change (2000 – 2009): 9.89% (10th highest)

In Canada, 50% of the adult population has completed tertiary education, easily the highest rate in the OECD. Each year, public and private expenditure on education amount to 2.5% of GDP, the fourth-highest rate in the world. Tertiary education spending accounts for 41% of total education spending in the country. In the U.S., the proportion is closer to 37%. In Israel, the rate is 22%. In Canada, nearly 25% of students have an immigrant background.

Thanks, SteveB. I appreciate that. Things in my life are totally crazy at the moment, and if I don't post as much, that's why. I miss all of you too. There is one thing I do want to share with you now, though, and that's to tell you about the last 24 hours.

At 5:15 yesterday morning we were awakened by shots, lots of them. They sounded very close, and it was very scary. Within a minute or two police cars were swarming all over our neighborhood; we were right in the middle of this. Looking out the windows, we could see police loading up with combat gear and getting their guns out. All this went on in the pitch dark, with only the blue lights flashing, so it was hard to tell who was a cop and who might be some crazy lunatic running amok. At 5:30 a cop pounded on our door and told us we had to get out immediately. I didn't know if there was a sniper next door or what. Mark tried to ask a question, and the cop just said to go on and get the hell out. I was in my nightgown and didn't even grab my purse. It was absolutely terrifying.

We didn't know where to go, so we just drove around for about 45 minutes. It was still quite dark, and the whole, silent city felt menacing. My daughter's family lives in our neighborhood, but they were outside the evacuation zone (about 20 houses were evacuated, some of the people in armored vans), so we went there and sat outside in the car until it got light. I didn't want to scare the boys, but it turned out that Saskia had been up the whole time. Ben was out riding his bike, and she couldn't get hold of him because he didn't have his cell phone with him. Ben got back around 6:30, and we all went inside at that point. I was shaking like a leaf. Ben made us hot tea and some breakfast, and I began to feel a bit better, but was still totally freaked out. Jonas's school is just across the street from where they live, and we saw police patrolling the grounds. They decided it was safe for the kids to go to school, so they didn't close it, but a pre-school nearby was on a 2-hr. delay. Atty went the long way around to his pre-school, and Saskia stayed home most of the day with me. (She took a couple of hours to go on a field trip with Jonas's class).

We waited and watched the news and waited. Saskia was on the phone and texting with all her friends in the neighborhood, including our next door neighbor. Jenna's family was not evacuated, so she could report directly from the field, as it were. Mark went back to our house when the police said he could come back and get some clothes, but he couldn't stay there. One cop came in the house and asked to look out our sunroom windows to see if he could get a better view of the house where the gunman was holed up. Mark left a key with him in case the police needed to get in. My heart is pounding as I'm writing this. The siege went on all day. The police tried tear gas, didn't work. They sent in a robot to try to achieve some communication with the guy, but apparently that didn't work either. Turns out this is a man in his 30s who has seemed normal enough. He's a chiropractor, and when we looked him up online, he looked like a normal, successful man who was part of a practice. Our neighbor Jenna told us that she had run into him in front of her house a few days ago and found him very creepy. He was rambling and semi-coherent and talking about conspiracies. She went inside and was a bit unnerved, but didn't think she needed to do anything. I learned from Saskia this morning that he is a paranoid schizophrenic. The police are at his house as I write this, clearing out a huge cache of weapons. The shots we heard night before last came from an automatic rifle--not semi-automatic, automatic! He had a whole arsenal in there.

Mark and I were able to come home last night just after dark, maybe 8:00. Police were still all over the place, but they had managed to take the guy into custody without any more shots being fired. The guy had shot at a police officer who first came on the scene, but he wasn't hurt. It was good to be home, but I was still pretty unnerved. Around ten we heard sirens again, and when I looked out there was a big armored van at the corner of our street. I thought, here we go again, but it was just the police bringing the people who had been at a Red Cross center all day back to their homes. I had a horrible night with dreams straight out of a Robert Ludlum novel. The whole experience was like something you'd see on Law & Order or CSI. Watching it on TV and living through it are two totally different things!

So, that's what I've been doing. Now I'm going to tell you what I'm thinking so far. Art, this is especially aimed at you. I don't think I've ever been so scared, and my reaction was physical as well as emotional. I know what I experienced was only a brush with the tip of a feather compared with being in a war, but I now have an inkling of how that must feel. To be a soldier, living with the constant threat of someone shooting you, day after day, month after month is -- I don't even know how to describe it. How anyone survives such stress is beyond me. I'm watching "Downton Abbey" on PBS, and there's a lot to do with WW I and "shell shock." I don't see how anyone could see combat and not have PTSD. I also don't see how the police find the courage to do what they do, never knowing what the day will bring. I usually feel so safe, and I hadn't realized the level of fear that many others live

with on a daily basis. I mean, I realized it intellectually, but emotionally I really couldn't imagine it. My experience was not the trauma of the year. No one was hurt, and everything is back to normal today. But I feel altered by this event. I learned something yesterday. You all know I am agnostic at best, but this seemed to me like a sign from the universe. I see everything in a new light, mostly because of finding my son, but also from going through all of this when I was already cracked open like a walnut.

I hope this didn't get too personal. It's not exactly political analysis. But thank you for letting me share it.

[20120201-09](#) 12:07 Art Re: Police in the Neighborhood (reply to Pam, above)

Wow!!! What a story. Glad you are all OK and, yes, it does sound like something out of a TV show, better written by you of course.

Couple of things I will pass on. When I first went to Vietnam in 1967, what sort rattled me a bit was grasping the idea that there were people out there actively trying to kill you. Not accidental but actively focusing on doing you in. Later, I went through a few really vicious battles, (if you have seen the movie Platoon, it is generally a lousy movie but they did capture toward the end what a real slugfest was like in Vietnam) and you come to realize that you are simply not going to survive more than one or two of those and that's just the way it is. Once you do, life is easier. Someone, James Joyce I think, wrote that about an infantryman in WW II. It is still true.

Lastly, the real problem here is guns. This guy could have gone on his mentally deranged way and not posed a real threat to anyone except for guns. Period.

Again, glad you are all OK. Makes life a little more spicy, if you handle it right. :-)

[20120201-10](#) 13:24 SteveB Re: Police in the Neighborhood (reply to Pam, above)

Mother Fate has shown her pearly...

I'm so happy no one was hurt! Not even the guy with the guns! That's good police work and hard to do—to try to protect the perp and his life too. The guy was just crazy and needed help, though, of course, it was all his fault (more about this in a minute).

I really sympathize with how you must have felt. Most of us rarely feel that life/death thing and it can really be unnerving in the midst of a relatively calm life. It is something you can get used to in a way, but maybe by then you have changed already into someone else. I've written before about how I narrowly missed Viet Nam with the 86th Med. Evac. Unit. They had a very poor rate of return (to the U.S. in one piece). But I spent a lot of time around an Army hospital half full of shot-up Viet Nam Vets and I will tell you this. It gave me a huge respect for courage, even of the most seemingly mundane, and a huge dose of fear for what the path of fate can make some people, even heroes, become. War. What is it good for. Absolutely nothin'. I'll say it again. War.

I'm sorry you got to taste a bit of it.

I wonder what kind of personal war your perp was waging? Sometimes just craziness is enough.

And, though I hope we get outside the political arena a lot here, I was trying to see someone like this guy through the eyes of the conservative philosophy. Individualism. Personal responsibility. Limited societal responsibility.

Mitt Romney owes his millions entirely to his own vast intellect and (I hope) good luck. To hell with his father and mother. OK. It ended up well. Maybe he was "given" an easy environment to manage.

Your perp? I guess it's all his fault and what can one do except to throw ones hand in the air and lock the prison with the other 2,000,000 Americans already there, up or shoot him.

Yet given how much they like peace and law and order (like the rest of us), maybe even the Right might take pause to imagine what it's like to be in someone else's shoes. I can't help but wonder what dark hell this man inhabited that ultimately "caused" this. Or do they not believe in causation? They sure believe in creationism. Causation should be a bit easier.

But if the right help had arrived before it got so far, might that not have saved society a very high cost in lives that was narrowly, perhaps, averted? By the time you are in the hands of the police, you are in serious trouble indeed. And expensive for all, especially for society.

I have a story too. Stay away from the police if at all possible. Yesterday we heard from a friend in Montana and read the newspaper story that happened in our little town there. A fifteen-year-old girl had gone out with some friends. One thing led to another. There was drinking and then some pot smoking. The other teenagers left the girl off, for some reason, at the theater. Her mother picked her up, noticed that she was a little drunk, and took her straight to the police. She was forced to confess all, including the marijuana and the boy who had sold it to another boy. By this time the SWAT teams were going about town, crashing doors, and rounding up teenagers. Teenagers were texting like crazy. Before the police could get to the 17-year-old boy who had sold the others the pot, he killed himself.

The schools could have taught the value and sanctity of life and liberty instead of instilling massive fear in the community about drugs and alcohol. Things used to be better. We used to be more tolerant. It's so ironic in Montana because they have one of the nation's loosest legal medical marijuana programs (all you need is a little pain), yet some of the harshest prison sentences.

Stay away from the police. If you don't want PTSD or your life ruined. I don't know why that girl's mother was so ignorant.

We could do a little better. That's the Democratic philosophy.

20120201-12 14:05 Tom Cartoon: Career Choice

Possibly the best cartoon of this century



I personally would suggest government. They never go to jail.

20120201-13 15:38 SteveG "6 Shocking Ways Capitalism Is Failing Working America"

"6 Shocking Ways Capitalism Is Failing Working America" by Les Leopold, AlterNet

Jan. 31, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/153901/>)

Capitalism is coming apart at the seams and the middle-class is paying the price. This week's news alone bombards us with examples of how, absent a dramatic rethink, our "free-enterprise" system may never again provide enough decent jobs for those who need and want them.

1. iSlavery

Apple is arguably the world's most successful company. Yet most of the 700,000 jobs needed to produce its cherished products are located abroad, especially in China. Why doesn't Apple manufacture in the United States? Charles Duhigg and Keith Bradsher writing for the *New York Times* reveal that Apple is looking for a cheap, "flexible" workforce that can be put to work whenever and wherever it is needed on the company's terms.

One chilling example concerns the manufacture of glass screens for the iPhone to replace plastic screens which are easily scratched. With only weeks to go before the phone's release in 2007, the late Steve Jobs demanded a switch to glass. But to get that done on time required deploying the pliable workforce of the giant Chinese manufacturing firm, Foxconn:

"They could hire 3,000 people overnight," said Jennifer Rigoni, who was Apple's worldwide supply demand manager until 2010, but declined to discuss specifics of her work. "What U.S. plant can find 3,000 people overnight and convince them to live in dorms?"

In mid-2007, after a month of experimentation, Apple's engineers finally perfected a method for cutting strengthened glass so it could be used in the iPhone's screen. The first truckloads of cut glass arrived at Foxconn City in the dead of night, according to the former Apple executive. That's when managers woke thousands of workers, who crawled into their uniforms — white and black shirts for men, red for women — and quickly lined up to assemble, by hand, the phones. Within three months, Apple had sold one million iPhones. Since then, Foxconn has assembled over 200 million more.

Little wonder that Apple just announced that it doubled its already enormous profits over the Christmas holidays. Like the Pharaohs of old, it's always paid to build great things on the backs of slave labor.

2. The Bain of Our Middle-Class Existence

A day doesn't go by without suffering through another Mitt Romney defense of his career at Bain Capital, his highly profitable leveraged buy-out firm. Mitt repeatedly tells us that Bain created tens of thousands of jobs at Staples, Domino's Pizza, Sealy, Brookstone, Sports Authority, Burger King, Burlington Coat Factory, Dunkin' Donuts, and Toys 'R' Us.

For a moment let's put aside the fact that Bain also drove a large number of companies into bankruptcy while loading them up with debt and extracting enormous profits along the way. Instead, let's focus on the type of jobs that Staples, Domino's et al. produce for the American middle-class. While these jobs are not as slavish as those sought after by Apple in China, most Bain companies pay so little and have so few benefits that it is impossible to support a middle-class existence from the jobs they create.

Since Romney likes to brag about Staples, we took a closer look at its average hourly pay (as reported on Glassdoor.com). Out of 61 job classifications listed, only three provide starting salaries of \$20 or more per hour. The vast majority of those 61 jobs categories have pay scales that begin at \$7 and \$8 per hour and scale up over time to \$13 or \$14 an hour. I'd like to see Mitt raise his dog on that.

But wait! There really is some fairness in our economy when it comes to taxes. If you work at Staples and somehow climb your way up to a middle-class salary, you might be paying the same tax rate as Mitt who

earns \$20 million a year. Then again, since Mitt paid only 13.9% on his 2010 taxes, you might even pay a little more counting all your state and local taxes. (More on how he does it below.)

3. Surprise! Federal Auditors Find Big Pay for Bailed-Out Bankers

While the middle-class suffers, top executives are raking it in yet again, even at the companies bailed out by our tax dollars. You may recall that the Obama administration demanded that executives at the top seven bailed-out firms receive no more than \$500,000 a year. Congress complied by passing a law to set up a "special master" to administer the salary cap. Well, this week we discovered that the special master got mastered, according to federal auditors.

Apparently, the bailed-out companies teamed up with Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner and company to pressure the special master to allow salaries 10 times as high for these failed executives. "Forty-nine people received packages worth \$5 million or more from 2009-2011," according to the auditor's report. (What the auditor failed to mention is that the law only applies to direct bailout money. It does not cover the big Wall Street firms that took trillions in hidden loans from the Federal Reserve to avoid collapse. Those top bankers earn much more than those at the seven bailed-out firms.)

So what was the excuse for busting the pay cap? Without fatter paychecks, these poor executives would...quit.

Here's the argument one bailed-out company used to claim a "hardship" exemption so the employee could receive at least \$1 million in cash: "This individual is in their early 40s, with two kids in private school, who is now considered cash-poor." Such people "would not meet their monthly expenses" if the \$500,000 a year cap were applied to him. Ouch!

Why not let this executive walk? After all, his or her firm was a failure. It was only saved from destruction because of the generosity of the taxpayer. Where's that executive going to go anyway, and couldn't a suitable replacement be found at \$500,000 a year?

Just count all the alleged "laws of capitalism" that are broken in this example: 1) the original bailout instead of bankruptcy; 2) the irreplaceable executive in an economy with massive layoffs even in the financial sector; and 3) a financial wage scale having no connection to real value produced (especially since the firm produced negative value and needed to be bailed out).

So while the Apple workers in China get up in the middle of the night from their company dorms to assemble phones, and while Staples workers try to live on \$8 an hour, we the taxpayers are supporting financial executives who can't make ends meet on \$500,000 a year?

4. Economically Addicted to War

The news is hot this week with military strife. Iraq is drifting back to civil war. Afghanistan is already there. Iran is threatening to close the Straits of Hormuz, and the New York City police got nabbed using an anti-American Muslim training film on 1,400 of its officers. What does this all add up to? Spending trillions on the military and then asking the middle-class to tighten its belt to make up for deficits.

Since W.W.II pulled the U.S. out of the Great Depression, massive military expenditures have been used repeatedly to keep the economy near full-employment. During the Cold War, these expenditures contributed mightily to a new form of state capitalism where public funds were used to subsidize private corporations which supplied the military. Along the way, this process also helped prop up the middle-class in defense industry jobs.

But over the last decade this military Keynesianism got a new wrinkle. The U.S. went to war without paying for it, thereby racking up nearly a trillion dollars in new debt. At the same time an enormous tax cut was handed over to the super-rich which proceeded to spend a good deal of it in the Wall Street casino which then crashed. In total, the unfunded wars, the tax cuts and the economic crash account for the entire deficit

problem. Let me repeat, there would be no deficit at all were it not for the Bush tax cuts, the two unfunded wars and the Wall Street crash.

Nevertheless the middle-class must pay. We are told that the real problem is "entitlements," including public support for healthcare, education, unemployment benefits and Social Security. Therefore we must cut, cut, cut, to pay for military adventurism and the lifestyles of our financial oligarchs.

5. Mitt Slithers Through the "Carried Interest" Loophole

Of course, one of the big news items of the week was Mitt's tax returns, which revealed that he paid only 13.9 percent in federal taxes instead of the 30-plus percent high-income earners are supposed to pay. Like Warren Buffett, Mr. Romney probably pays a lower tax rate than his secretary at Bain Capital. How does he get away with that?

It's not just that he has a legion of tax sharpies who know how to hide his money in secret Swiss accounts and in the Grand Cayman Islands. The real culprit is a gigantic tax loophole called "carried interest" that allows private equity moguls and hedge fund honchos to essentially lie about what they do for a living.

You will hear Mitt wax euphoric about how hard he worked at Bain to obtain his riches. What he doesn't tell you is that he used the carried interest loophole to hide all that hard work from federal taxes. Instead of paying himself an income for the real work he performed (which would be taxed at 35 percent), he hid his income within a slice of the profits so that he could claim it as capital gains (which is taxed at 15 percent). If he worked at a big bank doing exactly the same kind of work and got big stock options as his bonus, he would have to pay 35 percent. But thanks to the largess of Congress, he and billionaires in the private equity and hedge fund rackets pay only 15 percent. And of course, every effort to remove this loophole has been stalled by both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

This loophole is the poster child example of how the super-rich enhance their wealth at the expense of the rest of us. And the rest of us do indeed make up the difference either through increased taxes or decreased services.

6. How the Gringrich/Freddie Tryst Distorts History

This week also treated us with the release of Newt's \$600,000 a year consulting contract with Freddie Mac. Did he get paid for influence-peddling or for his prescient historical insights? Who cares? As sordid as his deal may have been, the real damage comes from the analysis of the financial crash that accompanies the story. We hear again and again by all, including the media, that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, the two troubled government housing agencies, caused the financial meltdown.

Not true!

Let's start with some basic facts about these corporations. They are not government agencies. They are private corporations that have the implicit backing of the government to help provide a massive mortgage market for middle-class Americans (or they were before the crash). The big mistake was allowing these agencies to become for-profit organizations in the first place. But that's another story.

The widely repeated erroneous analysis claims that Fannie and Freddie caused the crash by underwriting risky housing mortgages. Ron Paul, in particular, blames the Community Reinvestment Act for pushing Fannie and Freddie to buy up "risky" loans that enable underserved minorities in particular to obtain mortgages.

But Paul, who should know better, has it dead wrong. CRA mortgages were standard mortgages and not risky ones. Their default rates are just like other standard mortgages given to Anglo home buyers. CRA, in short, had absolutely nothing to do with Wall Street's reckless gambling as big banks and hedge funds bought up risky mortgages and sold them in even riskier mortgage-related securities.

Fannie and Freddie also wanted in on that enormously profitable Wall Street derivative game. But they got there very, very late just as the crisis was starting to unfold. These flawed private/government backed agencies didn't cause what already was fully developed. Instead they were left holding the bag. You can't blame them for the mess that Wall Street already created.

Who suffers? The middle-class homeowner who is already underwater due to the housing crash, and those who will purchase homes in the future. The drumbeat of attacks on Freddie and Fanny will surely lead to the privatization of those functions, which in turn will drive up the costs of mortgages for the rest of us.

How do we put America back to work?

These recent examples demonstrate yet again that "free-enterprise" on its own can not create enough middle-class jobs. Neither Apple, nor Bain-Staples, nor Wall Street, nor deficit reduction will get us there. By the way, neither will small business.

We need to recognize that modern financialized capitalism is deeply flawed. Without enormous government support, it cannot function. Without enormous government support, there will be no sizable middle-class.

The solution is both simple and difficult for us to accept. We need to use public money to create jobs and decent wages doing the things that need doing!

- We need more education? Then make higher education virtually free as we did at the end of W.W.II.
- We need alternative energy? Then use government funds to perfect the technology as we did with the Manhattan Project to build the A-bomb, and as we did with NASA's moon shot.
- We need to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure? Then hire a million workers to do it as we did during the Great Depression.

How do we pay for it? By now that should be conceptually easy: Wall Street should pay for the damage it has done. (A financial transaction tax would be a good first step.) And while we're at it, get rid of the carried interest loophole so that Romney and the rest of his gang pay the same rates as the rest of us.

(Les Leopold is the executive director of the Labor Institute and Public Health Institute in New York, and author of *The Looting of America: How Wall Street's Game of Fantasy Finance Destroyed Our Jobs, Pensions, and Prosperity—and What We Can Do About It* (Chelsea Green, 2009).)

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20120201-14	16:06	SteveG	Civic Literacy Exam
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We all need to take this test. Any embarrassment we might suffer will be greatly lessened when you look at the chart showing how we ordinary citizens did compared to politicians!!!

This test is not supposed to be an easy one. The website reports that average score was 49% and college professors averaged about 55%.

33 questions:

<http://www.isi.org/quiz.aspx?q=FE5C3B47-9675-41E0-9CF3-072BB31E2692&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

[Thanks, SteveG, couldn't resist, got 32 of 33. –SteveB]

Good one. I got 29 right.

The police state is not rocket science...

"Lost in Translation: An Important Note for International Reckoners" by Joel Bowman, The Daily Reckoning

Feb. 1, 2012, (<http://dailyreckoning.com/lost-in-translation-an-important-note-for-international-reckoners/>)

Read more: "Lost in Translation: An Important Note for International Reckoners": <http://dailyreckoning.com/lost-in-translation-an-important-note-for-international-reckoners/#ixzz1lDnd9Lga>

(BUENOS AIRES) First up, a quick public service announcement for our International Reckoners:

If you're planning a vacation to the United States of America in the foreseeable future, you would do well to refrain from employing any confusing colloquialisms in your social media updates prior to departure.

For Australians, that means no "cracking onto" members of the opposite sex...no getting "off one's face"...no "tearing it up"...no "little rippers" and, we would think, no "barracking" for anyone.

Our Irish friends will likewise wish to steer clear of referring to anything as "the gas," from declaring intentions to "eat one's head off" and from "throwing shapes," "sucking diesel" or otherwise "effin' and blindin'."

We can only imagine to what extent our English Reckoners shall have to curb their delightfully colorful lingo to ensure a stateside journey (even relatively) free of let or hindrance at the gate, though we imagine no measure of self-censorship will be sufficient to guarantee a transit experience free of at least a touch of "Ye ol' Liberty Grope."

What's all this caper then, eh? What's the apple, the score, the bleedin' apple core?

Apologies for the loose linguistics, weary reader. But a point begs its making; a point two British (would-be) tourists, Leigh Van Bryan and Emily Bunting, discovered the hard way just last week.

Apparently rather chuffed at the upcoming prospect of a wee jaunt over the pond, Van Bryan and Bunting engaged in a bit of online banter before their big trip to the US. Mistake number one. The two were perhaps unaware that the Department of Homeland Security routinely trolls the global social media digital waves, setting up accounts to listen in on prospective threats to...um...the "Homeland."

We can only imagine the hysterical frenzy that whipped around the DHS H.Q. when they discovered what Van Bryan, 26, had posted.

"Free this week for a quick gossip/prep before I go and destroy America x"

Not that it should matter, but "destroy" is popular English slang for "party"...an easily Googable fact, one would think, for the highly skilled heroes manning the control tower at the Twitter and Facebook Counter Terrorism and Special Operations Unit for Liberty and Freedom of the Homeland... Patriot... Liberty... uh, never mind.

After making their way through passport control at Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) last week, the pair were promptly detained by armed guards/heroes/patriots. But the real trouble was still to come.

The two were then informed that the DHS was on to their scheme to "destroy" (read: party in) America and (Could it be? No! Sweet Mother of Mercy!) their sick and twisted plot to dig up the grave of Marilyn Monroe!

[Tweet:] "3 weeks today, we're totally in LA p***** people off on Hollywood Blvd and diggin' Marilyn Monroe up!"

Read more: Lost in Translation: An Important Note for International Reckoners <http://dailyreckoning.com/lost-in-translation-an-important-note-for-international-reckoners/#ixzz1lDpBFceb>

The pair explained that the tweet, which the DHS had considered a grave matter of national security was, actually, a reference from *Family Guy*, a popular television show *produced in the Homeland itself...behind patriot lines!*

"They asked why we wanted to destroy America and we tried to explain it meant to get trashed and party," explained Bunting. "I almost burst out laughing when they asked me if I was going to be Leigh's lookout while he dug up Marilyn Monroe. I couldn't believe it because it was a quote from the comedy *Family Guy* which is an American show."

Department of Homeland Security staff, brave unwavering professionals as they are, were not deterred from their mission.

"It got even more ridiculous because the officials searched our suitcases and said they were looking for spades and shovels. They did a full body search on me too" explained Bunting.

Perhaps because grave-robbing spades and shovels have little to do with (most people's idea of) partying, the DHS were unable to find any in the pair's luggage or, strangely enough, on their person. Nevertheless, this was no time to take chances:

"I kept saying to them they had got the wrong meaning from my tweet but they just told me 'you've really f***** up with that tweet boy'."

Van Bryan, apparently thought to be the leader of the non-existent operation, was then cuffed, thrown in a cage inside a van and whisked away to a location where he could not be of harm to Homeland citizens.

Recounted the suspect:

When we arrived at the prison [ed.: prison!] I was shoved in a cell on my own but after an hour two huge Mexican men covered in tattoos came in and started asking me who I was... They told me they'd been arrested for taking cocaine over the border... When the food arrived on the tray they took it all and just left me with a carton of apple juice.

After 12 hours in custody, the pair were returned to the airport where they were sent directly home...charge sheets in hand.

Emily "The Lookout" Bunting's charge sheet stated: "It is believed that you are travelling with Leigh-Van Bryan who possibly has the intentions of coming to the United States to commit crimes."

"Possibly has the *intentions*"? We can almost hear Special Twitter Task Force Agent Johnston saying, "That's as good as a thought crime to me!"

Added to the charge sheet of one Leigh "Happy Birthday Mr. President" Van Bryan:

He had posted on his Tweeter website account that he was coming to the United States to dig up the grave of Marilyn Monroe. Also on his tweeter account Mr. Bryan posted that he was coming to destroy America.

We're not quite sure what a "Tweeter account" is, but you can be sure the vigilant servicemen and women at the DHS are on the case. Thank goodness the pair didn't use the "we were only taking the Mickey" defense. Could you imagine the costs and hassle involved in having to put Disneyland on high security lockdown? We shudder to think.

So, to our International Reckoners, remember to travel safely both to and from the Homeland. And please, feel free to pass our public service announcement on.

20120201-17 19:49 SteveG "MF Global Missing Money Mostly Found"

"MF Global Missing Money Mostly Found" by Daniel Wagner, Huffington Post

Feb. 1, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/01/mf-global-missing-money_n_1247439.html?utm_campaign=020112&utm_medium=email&utm_source=Alert-business&utm_content=FullStory)

(WASHINGTON) Most of the \$1.2 billion reported missing from the failed brokerage MF Global has been traced to customer accounts and banks, people briefed on the matter told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Brokerages are supposed to keep customer money separate from company money. That way, customers are protected if the brokerage fails.

But three people briefed on the investigations into MF Global's collapse said MF Global misused client money to repay other customers, business partners and banks who demanded cash as the firm teetered.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the investigations publicly.

They said details about where the money went are being kept under wraps because the publicity could hinder future prosecutions and efforts to return money to MF Global customers.

MF Global's demise, the eighth-biggest U.S. corporate bankruptcy, is the subject of investigations by the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, the firm's main regulator, and trustees trying to return money to MF Global customers and lenders, among others.

The status of the missing money was first reported late Tuesday by *The New York Times*.

MF Global's collapse grabbed headlines in part because it was headed by Jon Corzine, a former Democratic governor of New Jersey, U.S. senator and CEO of Goldman Sachs.

Corzine had taken charge of the sleepy brokerage in early 2010. He wanted to transform it into a full-scale investment bank, similar to Goldman. In congressional hearings in December, he denied knowing how the money disappeared.

"I simply do not know where the money is," he said more than a month after the company filed for bankruptcy protection Oct. 31.

The promise of separate accounts is considered a fundamental protection for people who trade futures and options, the investments that MF Global specialized in. It's the equivalent of federal deposit insurance for bank deposits.

Using client money to meet the company's other financial needs could violate civil securities laws and lead to criminal charges for those who authorized the transactions. Federal criminal-justice authorities have said that they are looking into the case.

MF Global failed after a massive bet on European sovereign debt spooked investors, rating agencies and its shareholders. Corzine bet about \$6.3 billion on bonds issued by debt-saddled such as Italy and Spain.

As the bonds lost value, MF Global was forced to set aside additional cash as collateral. The money was meant to protect the lender in case the bonds crashed or MF Global went bust.

Meanwhile, credit rating agencies downgraded MF Global because it was preparing to announce a large quarterly loss.

The downgrades and news reports on the European bets caused investors to question MF Global's financial strength. Customers started pulling their money, and business partners demanded that it put up more cash collateral. Its stock price plunged.

MF Global executives tried to find a buyer willing to rescue the firm. But it was unable to explain why its books didn't add up, so the potential saviors abandoned the deal.

Upon learning of the missing cash, regulators forced MF Global to file for bankruptcy protection.

Current and former risk officers from MF Global are scheduled to testify Thursday before a subcommittee of the House Financial Services committee.

(AP Business Writer Marcy Gordon contributed to this report.)

20120201-18	23:29	SteveG	"House Votes to Repeal Part of Healthcare Law"
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Our government looking out for the well being of its citizens.

Medicaid has paid for in home services for people with developmental disabilities and for the elderly. There are also some insurance programs that are available to cover the service also. Just think it is amazing that when the focus has been on job creation that the House votes to do away with a program that not only provides a needed service across the country and would create thousands of jobs. There are numerous franchises on the market providing the service and of course families that can afford it have no problem – but the middle class and low income families would benefit. As Art would say: hhhmmmmmm.

"House Votes to Repeal Part of Healthcare Law" by Donna Smith, Reuters

Feb. 1, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/house-votes-repeal-part-healthcare-law-004040150.html>)

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The House of Representatives voted on Wednesday to repeal a provision of President Barack Obama's healthcare overhaul setting up a home-care program for the elderly and disabled that regulators said was unworkable.

The Republican-led House voted 267-159 for the bill that would terminate the Community Living Assistance Services(CLASS) Act that was supposed to create a voluntary insurance program to help the elderly and disabled pay for home care.

Republicans called it a step toward achieving their goal of dismantling the healthcare overhaul Obama signed into law nearly two years ago.

The legislation is not expected to pass the Democratic-controlled Senate even though Republicans are expected to push for a vote on it.

"There is no doubt that the president's healthcare plan is killing jobs," said Republican Representative Jeb Hensarling. "House Republicans have repealed it in its totality. It has been blocked by the president, by Democrats and so if we can't do it in its totality we'll do it piecemeal. We need to start out by repealing the CLASS Act."

Democrats opposed to scrapping the program acknowledged that it had a flawed design, but they argued it should be fixed rather than repealed so millions of elderly and disabled people could receive help at home rather than be placed in usually more expensive institutional care.

"You stand there with no alternative whatsoever," Democratic Representative Bill Pascrell shouted at Republicans on the House floor. "Millions of people out there are suffering. Where is your heart ... you have no heart."

The Health and Human Services Department last October pulled the plug on the program after officials determined they could not come up with a model that would keep it voluntary and solvent without adding to long-term U.S. budget burdens.

The law calls for workers to begin voluntarily enrolling in the program later this year. Participants would have paid monthly fees for at least five years before qualifying for benefits.

The Congressional Budget Office saw the program raising money in the short run, but adding to long-term budget imbalances in a few decades as the program began paying out more in benefits than it collected in premiums.

<http://shoptwine.com/product/311/frasadas/545/2175>

Handmade Bolivian Frasadas (available in U.S.)



—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 #66 — FEB. 3, 2012**

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

INDEX: Click here.

Now, Even Our Constitution Ain't Up to Par

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

Feb. 3, 2012, by Steven W. Baker (SteveB)

We Americans are lucky to have a very good Constitution that has lasted quite a long time. But maybe it's not as "sacred" as the Right would have us believe. Maybe it's time for some changes? Even SCOTUS judges seem to think we're behind the times—maybe even obsolete. We're topped in human rights guarantees, I guess, by, of all places, South Africa.

"Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Talks Constitution, Women and Liberty on Egyptian TV" (incl. Video)
by Mike Sacks, Huffington Post

Feb. 1, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/01/justice-ruth-bader-ginsburg-egypt_n_1248527.html?ref=politics)

Appearing on Egyptian television before concluding a four-day trip in Egypt, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg extolled the virtues of the U.S. Constitution but urged Egyptians to look to other countries' newer constitutions for guidance as they craft their own in the coming months.

The U.S. Embassy in Cairo's website noted in a Feb. 2 release that Ginsburg concluded her trip to Egypt "following four days of discussions and programs in both Cairo and Alexandria with judges and legal experts as well as law faculty and students." She had intended to "'listen and learn' with her Egyptian counterparts as they begin Egypt's constitutional transition to democracy," according to the embassy.

Yet while Ginsburg's interview, posted on YouTube on Wednesday, lauded the Founding Fathers' "grand general ideas that become more effective over the course of ... more than two sometimes-turbulent centuries," she also said she "would not look to the United States Constitution if I were drafting a constitution in the year 2012," given its original exclusion of women, slaves and Native Americans.

Since World War II several other models have emerged that offer more specific and contemporary guarantees of rights and liberties, she said, pointing to South Africa's constitution, which she called a "really great piece of work" for its embrace of basic human rights and guarantee of an independent judiciary. She also noted Canada's charter of rights and freedoms and the European Convention of Human Rights.

"Why not take advantage of what there is elsewhere in the world? I'm a very strong believer in listening and learning from others," she said.

Among those currently sitting on the U.S. Supreme Court no other justice has publicly advised another country on the creation of a constitution. In 1960, eight years before he became a justice, Thurgood Marshall traveled to Kenya to draft its bill of rights, which he modeled after the European Convention on Human Rights. Unlike the U.S. Constitution, the Kenyan document guarantees rights to education, health, welfare and a right to work.

Nevertheless, Ginsburg spent most of the 18-minute interview spelling out all the ways the Egyptians could take inspiration from the United States' Constitution, from the First Amendment's guarantee of free speech and a free press to the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause that she, as a lawyer in the 1970s, convinced the court to expand to protect women's rights.

"We were just tremendously fortunate in the United States that the men who met in Philadelphia were very wise," Ginsburg said. "Now it is true that they were lacking one thing," she continued with a chuckle. "And that is that there were no women as part of the Constitutional Convention."

"It's a very inspiring time -- that you have overthrown a dictator and that you are striving to achieve a genuine democracy," Ginsburg told Al Hayat TV. "I think people in the United States are hoping that this transition will work and that it will genuinely be a government of, by and for the people."

Jan. 25 marked the one-year anniversary since the start of the Tahrir Square protests that toppled President Hosni Mubarak's nearly three-decade regime.

When asked by her interviewer how best to draft a constitution and protect it from contemporary political pressures (perhaps alluding to Islamic parties' dominance in the new parliament's lower house), Justice Ginsburg answered, "A constitution, as important as it is, will mean nothing unless the people are yearning for liberty and freedom."

"If the people don't care, then the best constitution in the world won't make any difference," she said.

"The spirit of liberty," she continued, "has to be in the population."

20120202-01 10:38 Phil Fw: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline

One of my customers who leans heavily to the right sent this. I'm wondering, Pam, if you know anything about this guy Levant? I'd be surprised if this was actually telecast to Canadians.

forwarded email:

It is pitiful that our members of congress, and still a significant number of American citizens, do not understand Obama as well as this Canadian talk show host Ezra Levant. This is a well documented, true analysis of Obama's lies and stupidity in his denial of the Keystone pipeline project. It is worth your close attention:

<http://conservatives4palin.com:80/2012/01/video-canadian-talk-show-host-d>.

20120202-08 13:55 Pam Re: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline (reply to Phil, above)

I do find this compelling. He gets a little carried away here and there, but the substance of his argument is very persuasive. I love Canada, having lived there for over four years. America does shortchange our nearest neighbor more even than Mexico, but then Canadians aren't the voting bloc that Hispanics are. I like getting strong arguments from the "other side." I can sort out the hyperbole; the content in this is very convincing. I'd like to hear more reactions.

20120202-27 20:18 SteveB Re: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline (reply to Phil, above)

This is bogus on several points, I think. Obama didn't "choose" Saudi Arabian or Venezuelan oil over Canadian oil. That's just not how the whole deal was supposed to work. Anybody can look it up. The oil isn't even for the U.S. though maybe we could steal it from the Chinese in the future.

Also, in many ways, I don't think we care where the oil we use comes from. If it mattered, the market wouldn't be working as well as when it doesn't matter. We want the markets to work well, hence, we don't care.

With one big exception: I don't like the Keystone XL Pipeline because the big oil money corrupting Congress tried to jam it down our throats. I don't want to be their lackey.

Also, if this gunk leaked or were sabotaged, it would be hell. NO!

Also, we need to save as much American, Canadian, and Western oil as possible for those future times when things get dire. I want to be conservative and preserve. Let's buy oil from the suckers while it's still plentiful and cheap. Ya, you heard me right.

This video is just plain wrong, and only money makes that jack-a*s tell those blatant lies that he knows are lies.

Isn't it funny how dominant this issue became in the media when it's really such a small fish? So much for "liberal media bias".

It's only big oil and their greasy dollars who wants this debacle.

20120202-02 10:39 Pam Re: "House Votes to Repeal Part of Healthcare Law" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)

Un-f-----believable!

20120202-03 11:15 Art "A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'"

Now Pam, our esteemed Republican Congressmen have important things to offer. This should have been the headlines!

"A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'" by Dana Milbank, *The Washington Post*

Feb. 2, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/a-grandstanding-plan-to-cut-the-debt/2012/02/01/gIQAJW6ziQ_story.html)

(Freshman Republican lawmakers have a not-so-grand plan to reduce the national debt.)

House freshmen have been on the job for almost exactly a year, and until now they've done little more than talk about cutting the national debt.

But on Wednesday morning, eight lawmakers finally decided to take action. They scheduled a "major announcement," invited the media and declared that they had a plan to reduce the deficit by — are you sitting down? — \$1.5 million.

That amounts to a whopping 0.00001 percent of what the nation owes. Among budget analysts, the technical phrase for this is "chump change."

The eight lawmakers announced that they were returning unused portions of their office budgets in the hope that the money could help pay down the debt. And they were feeling mighty pleased with themselves.

"Now, I can hear the pundits saying, 'Oh, these freshmen — they're just grandstanding,' " said Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-S.C.). Now, why might a pundit say that? Well, maybe because Duncan delivered these words while posing before TV cameras and holding an 11-by-17 mock-up of a check with "taxpayer protection" written in the memo field. Upon completion of the grandstanding, they marched into the Capitol to deliver their "checks" to Speaker John Boehner (R-Ohio).

"Instead of just returning this money, we're asking, and then issuing a press release, and then patting ourselves on the back," Rep. Jeff Landry (R-La.) said. "We're going to call on and ask the speaker to use this money to pay down our national debt."

There were a few wrinkles in this grand plan, however. First, returning office money at the end of the year is a routine event on Capitol Hill. As Politico's Scott Wong noted this week, virtually every senator does it. Many House members do, too — without holding a news conference.

If anything, the exercise showed that thrift among the freshmen lawmakers is relatively rare. Landry said that he and the others invited any lawmaker who had saved office money last year to join them at the event — but the turnout was less than 10 percent of the freshman Republican class.

Worse, when the members finished their speeches, questioning revealed that they hadn't even secured a commitment from Boehner that the money would be used to defray debt; it might just be transferred to some other program. "All you can do is ask," Landry said. So did he ask Boehner? "No," he said. "We're going to follow up with a letter to him."

It was another sign that the revolutionaries who were swept to power in the 2010 midterms with visions of transforming Washington had been reduced to the same type of small and symbolic measures that have occupied lawmakers for years. It was a tacit admission of lowered expectations.

"I was part of a freshman class that pledged to do better, pledged to do bigger," said Rep. Tim Huelskamp (R-Kan.). But "better" and "bigger" apparently were out of reach, so he returned \$145,000 from his office kitty instead. "It's not enough to talk the walk, you've got to walk the walk," the confused lawmaker continued, "and that's why you see us here talking about this."

In other words, they're talking about walking the talk.

Huelskamp acknowledged the payments — the equivalent of about 12 percent of the lawmakers' office budgets overall — are "just a small dent."

And Landry, in his Louisiana drawl, agreed that "it doesn't take any Ivy League mathematician to do this math. This is like Cajun math, you know?"

But the low dollar value didn't detract at all from the lawmakers' overpowering sense of self-righteousness. As skeptical questions came in from the congressional reporters, Rep. Raul Labrador (R-Idaho) became defensive. "People like yourselves question the motives of people who are trying to cut down the debt," he complained.

No, but they do question the motives of people who, a year after arriving in Washington with plans to change it forever, march around the Capitol grounds with phony checks.

20120202-05

12:24

Pam

Re: "A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'" (reply to Art, above)

What can I say? I'm speechless.

20120202-04	11:59	GaryC	Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High
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Simply amazing that our Representatives are so stupid. But than again, it's the stupid people that vote them in. Stupid doesn't begin to describe this guy... This is unbelievable... Representative Hank Johnson is a **Democratic** U.S. Congressman, from the 4th District in Georgia.

THIS IS ONE OF THE MANY VERY QUESTIONABLE PEOPLE WE HAVE IN THE BIG HOUSE, IN DC. WATCH THE ADMIRAL'S FACE, HE ALMOST BREAKS OUT IN LAUGHTER, BUT DOESN'T LOSE IT.

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

20120202-09	15:40	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
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Maybe he was taking prescription pain killers for a backache like Rick Perry? But, you're right, sompthin' ain't right!

This is almost two years old, but...

If you can explain to me how he ran unopposed in 2008, long after this video was released, when no civic-minded Republican cared to run against the man who had racked-up the biggest margin of victory for a Democrat in Georgia history in 2006...

Then I will explain his behavior. Gulp!

20120202-10	15:45	GaryC	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to SteveB, above)
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Sure. it is a gerry mandered district set aside for blacks in Georgia. Just like we have in Indianapolis, where we have had two consecutive idiots from the same family representing us. There is no chance a republican can win in these districts even if they are black and not stupid or corrupt.

20120202-11	16:15	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
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Ditto. ^_^

20120202-06	12:25	SteveG	"Healthcare Reform Was the Tea Party's First Defeat"
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"Healthcare Reform Was the Tea Party's First Defeat" by Richard Kirsch, *The National Memo*

Feb. 1, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/health-care-reform-was-tea-partys-first-defeat>) [Many good comments. -SteveB]

(In an excerpt from his new book, Fighting for Our Health, Roosevelt Institute Senior Fellow Richard Kirsch explains how supporters of health care reform turned the Tea Party's own town hall tactics against them.)

With Mitt Romney's hold on the Republican nomination looking secure, the Tea Party will soon have to face the reality that despite pushing the Republican Party and its nominee to the right, they'll wind up losing the fight in the

end. This isn't the first time. The Tea Party leapt to national prominence in August 2009, when its activists held angry and often ugly protests in town hall meetings held by Democratic members of Congress. But in the end, the biggest impact was to stiffen Republican resolve to refuse any compromises on health care while the legislation continued to make its way through Congress.

The public first got notice of the upcoming Tea Party storm in late July, when South Carolina's Senator Jim DeMint warned that in August members of Congress would hear from "outraged" constituents. He promised that "Senators and Congressmen will come back in September afraid to vote against the American people... If we're able to stop Obama on this it will be his Waterloo. It will break him."

Tea Party activists delivered on the outrage, but in the biggest story of the entire health care fight missed by the press, they met their match on the battlefield that counted the most: town hall meetings held by Democratic members of Congress. It took about a week for health care supporters to organize a push back. But by August 10, most Democratic town hall meetings were filled with as many or more boosters of reform than opponents. Democratic members of Congress saw a large crowd of friendly faces, holding pro-reform signs, insisting that the meetings be civil and telling personal stories of how the health insurance industry and system were denying them the care they needed. It wasn't powerful TV, but it was powerful politics.

As a result, when Congress returned to Washington after Labor Day, the Tea Party was stunned to see Democrats moving ahead with health reform. Instead of being defeated, President Obama strengthened his party's resolve by giving a rousing speech that moved Democratic conferences in both Houses of Congress forward.

The following excerpt from *Fighting For Our Health* describes the beginning of that turn-around after a Tea Party demonstration in Philadelphia that made the national headlines.

On Sunday, August 2, Dr. Valerie Arkoosh, the Philadelphia physician and president of the National Physicians Alliance, was attending a large town hall meeting held in the flag-draped auditorium of the National Constitution Center. This was a modern museum dedicated to the Constitution, located two blocks from Philadelphia's Independence Hall, the home of the Liberty Bell. The Pennsylvania HCAN coalition had recruited more than half of the 350 people who filled the hall for a meeting with Pennsylvania Senator Arlen Specter and Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. Arkoosh remembers being terrified by the protestors, "I was scared. We'd had a very cursory bag check — no metal detectors. The vitriol was frightening. There were people in the room who were against the bill who had perfectly legitimate questions but they didn't get to talk either. The tea party people would not let any factual answers to be given — if anything remotely positive was said they would start shouting. I was in awe that the two of them [Specter and Sebelius] stuck it out."

Marc Stier, HCAN's Pennsylvania director, was sitting next to Philadelphia Congressman Chaka Fattah, who told Stier, "You've got to do something." Stier told me, "I tried to lead chants but we were outshouted. We were back on our heels. The vehemence and rudeness. Specter's chief of staff told me that in twenty years of politics, no one had ever treated Specter like that. People kept interrupting, kept shouting about socialism, liars, high taxes, death panels. We were just not prepared for anything like this. Press reports said that the crowd was evenly divided even though three-quarters of the people were our folks."

Marc Stier walked out of the disastrous town hall in the Constitution Center and quickly realized what every great organizer recognizes: The opposition always presents the greatest opportunities to build power. "I realized that we needed to call Carney and Dahlkemper's offices right away." Christopher Carney and Kathy Dahlkemper were two Democratic members of Congress from central Pennsylvania who represented conservative districts. "Up until then they would never tell us when they were holding a town hall. But that event in Philadelphia pushed them into our arms; they needed our help." Stier continued, "If we hadn't been doing all this work for months, sending regular delegations to their offices, meeting with them, generating press in their districts, they would have never come to us. From that point on, we got people out to all their town halls. We pretty much outnumbered the tea partiers consistently, even in rural areas. Now we had a partnership with these members of Congress.

(Richard Kirsch is a Senior Fellow at the Roosevelt Institute and a Senior Adviser to USAction. He was National Campaign Manager of Health Care for America Now during the legislative battle to pass reform. Fighting For Our Health is available in bookstores February 1. The Roosevelt Institute is a non-profit organization devoted to carrying forward the legacy and values of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt.)

20120202-07 13:26 Art "Romney's 1% Nation Under God"

"Romney's 1% Nation Under God" by Amy Goodman, Nation of Change

Feb. 2, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/romney-s-1-percent-nation-under-god-1328200310>)

Although Mitt Romney has yet to win a majority in a Republican primary, he won big in Florida. After he and the pro-Romney super PACs flooded the airwaves with millions of dollars' worth of ads in a state where nearly half the homeowners are underwater, he talked about whom he wants to represent. "We will hear from the Democrat Party the plight of the poor, and there's no question, it's not good being poor," he told CNN's Soledad O'Brien. "You could choose where to focus, you could focus on the rich, that's not my focus. You could focus on the very poor, that's not my focus. My focus is on middle-income Americans." Of the very rich, Romney assures us, "They're doing just fine." With an estimated personal wealth of \$250 million, Romney should know.

Romney's campaign itself is well-financed, but his success to date, especially against his current main rival, Newt Gingrich, is driven by massive cash infusions to a so-called super PAC, the new breed of political action committee that can take unlimited funds from individuals and corporations. Super PACs are legally prohibited from coordinating their activities with a candidate's campaign. Federal Election Commission filings made public Jan. 31 reveal that the principal super PAC supporting Romney, Restore Our Future, raised close to \$18 million in the second half of 2011, from just 199 donors. Among his supporters are Alice Walton, who, although listed in the report as a "rancher," is better known as an heir to the Wal-Mart fortune, and the famously caustic venture capitalist and billionaire Samuel Zell, the man credited with driving the Tribune media company into bankruptcy. William Koch, the third of the famous Koch brothers, also gave.

Juxtapose those 199 with the number of people living in poverty in the United States. According to the most recent figures available from the U.S. Census Bureau, 46.2 million people lived in poverty in 2010, 15.1 percent of the population, the largest number in the 52 years the poverty estimates have been published. 2010 marked the fourth consecutive annual increase in the number of people in poverty.

Romney, in his victory speech in New Hampshire, said: "This country already has a leader who divides us with the bitter politics of envy. We must offer an alternative vision. I stand ready to lead us down a different path, where we are lifted up by our desire to succeed, not dragged down by a resentment of success. ... We are one nation under God."

The next morning, NBC's Matt Lauer challenged him, asking: "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 doubled down, claiming: "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 1 percent—and those people who have been most successful will be in the 1 percent ... [it's] entirely inconsistent with the concept of one nation under God."

And not caring for the poor is consistent? Romney presents a confusing critique of President Barack Obama and the Occupy Wall Street movement. Put aside for the moment that Occupy Wall Street is generally very critical of President Obama, and especially of his appointees like Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner (who switched from Republican to independent in order to serve under Obama, but did not switch his politics) and former economic adviser Larry Summers. Romney clearly has no idea what the Occupy Wall Street movement is about if he thinks that the tens of thousands protesting, often facing police violence and risking arrest, are there because of envy. It is, as Lauer put it in his question, about fairness.

In the same New Hampshire speech, Romney said President Obama "wants to turn America into a European-style entitlement society." Curious words from a man who salted \$3 million into a Swiss bank account. His hastily closed UBS bank account stands out as its own form of European entitlement. Coupled with investments in tax havens like Bermuda and the Cayman Islands, Romney's effective tax rate was 13.9 percent in 2010, a fraction of the 35 percent paid by average middle-class families that he claims to care so much about.

As Romney campaigns across his 1 percent nation under God, he moves from Florida, the state with the highest foreclosure rate, to Nevada, the state with the highest unemployment rate. Expect him to increasingly care, if not for the very poor, then for the votes they will likely cast against him.

(Denis Moynihan contributed research to this column.)

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20120202-12	16:26	Beth	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #65)
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The letter is amusing and interesting, but I wonder if it is real. It sounds too tongue-in-cheek to me to be a real letter from a slave to a former master. Don't guess it matters. It is thought provoking. Our Governor Chris Christie is in hot water for his comments about putting civil rights to a referendum rather than marching and dying in the streets as happened in the civil rights movement. The comments came about when he suggested putting gay marriage to a referendum in NJ which was his cop out to maintain his "creds" as a conservative. He can be politically savvy, but he missed the boat by a mile on that one.

20120202-20	18:05	SteveB	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to Beth, above)
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I'm with you on Christie. I hadn't followed that story much, but intended to and wondered what was happening. Thank you for the update.

So you live in New Jersey? I hope you'll keep letting us know what's going on in your state. The battles, and there are so many, are having to be fought in every state, on every front, as well as nationally. All about things a majority of people decided long ago they wanted, like Social Security, good schools, unions, freedom of religion...little things like that.

I hope you're having a good winter there. We got some rain today, so it's sunny and 75 F. One of these days I'll see winter again. :-)

By the way, the letter's authenticity withstood my scrutiny. I could be wrong, but usually am not. I guess we all have kind of a batting average there, to be perfectly honest, heh? But I do try hard to provide history with a little personal and political piece of now, and my life, and the lives of our group, and our aspirations in the most truthful way possible. I honor and respect truth because it's the very thing I seek to discover. Few politicians and fewer Republicans seem to think along similar lines.

Thank you for being with us, Beth.

20120202-13	16:35	Dennis	"Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot"
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Are these Crackers absolutely delusional, or what?

"Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" by Right March, Conservative Action Alerts

Jan. 27, 2012, (<http://www.conservativeactionalerts.com/2012/01/georgia-judge-orders-obama-off-the-ballot/>)

[Snopes.com says President Obama was not kicked off the ballot:
<http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/birthers/georgia.asp>. --SteveB]

20120202-14	16:46	SteveG	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
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Delusional!!!

20120202-16	17:25	Art	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
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I am waiting for Pam to express the proper words.

I hope I am noting a sense of desperation from the right. Again, anyone who thinks has to realize the Republicans are looking more and more idiotic every day.

20120202-17	17:38	Pam	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
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You've gotta laugh. Any other response is unprintable.

20120202-15	16:50	Larry	Fw: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds
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I have no comment on this. ????

[Source of original email unknown. Urban Legends clearly states that this email is false:
http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/barackobama/a/obama_citizenship_questioned.htm.
--SteveB]

VERY QUIETLY OBAMA'S CITIZENSHIP CASE REACHES THE SUPREME COURT, AP

(WASHINGTON) In a move certain to fuel the debate over Obama's qualifications for the presidency, the group "Americans for Freedom of Information" has Released copies of President Obama's college transcripts from Occidental College ... Released today, the transcript school indicates that Obama, under the name Barry Soetoro, received financial aid as a foreign student from Indonesia as an undergraduate. The transcript was released by Occidental College in compliance with a court order in a suit brought by the group in the Superior Court of California. The transcript shows that Obama (Soetoro) applied for financial aid and was awarded a fellowship for foreign students from the Fulbright Foundation Scholarship program. To qualify, for the scholarship, a student must claim foreign citizenship.

This document would seem to provide the smoking gun that many of Obama's detractors have been seeking. Along with the evidence that he was first born in Kenya and there is no record of him ever applying for US citizenship, this is looking pretty grim. The news has created a firestorm at the White House as the release casts increasing doubt about Obama's legitimacy and qualification to serve as President article titled, "Obama Eligibility Questioned," leading some to speculate that the story may overshadow economic issues on Obama's first official visit to the U.K. In a related matter, under growing pressure from several groups, Justice Antonin Scalia announced that the Supreme Court agreed on Tuesday to hear arguments concerning Obama's legal eligibility to serve as President in a case brought by Leo Donofrio of New Jersey . This lawsuit claims Obama's dual citizenship disqualified him from serving as president.. Donofrio's case is just one of 18 suits brought by citizens demanding proof of Obama's citizenship or qualification to serve as president.

Gary Kreep of the United States Justice Foundation has released the results of their investigation of Obama's campaign spending. This study estimates that Obama has spent upwards of \$950,000 in campaign funds in the past year with eleven law firms in 12 states for legal resources to block disclosure of any of his personal records. Mr. Kreep indicated that the investigation is still ongoing but that the final report will be provided to the U.S. Attorney general, Eric Holder. Mr. Holder has refused to comment on the matter...

LET OTHER FOLKS KNOW THIS NEWS, THE MEDIA WON'T!

Subject: RE: Issue of Passport?

While I've little interest in getting in the middle of the Obama birth issue, Paul Hollrah over at FSM did so yesterday and believes the issue can be resolved by Obama answering one simple question: What passport did he use when he was shuttling between New York , Jakarta , and Karachi?

So how did a young man who arrived in New York in early June 1981, without the price of a hotel room in his pocket, suddenly come up with the price of a round-the-world trip just a month later?

And once he was on a plane, shuttling between New York , Jakarta , and Karachi , what passport was he offering when he passed through Customs and Immigration?

The American people not only deserve to have answers to these questions, they must have answers. It makes the debate over Obama's citizenship a rather short and simple one.

Q: Did he travel to Pakistan in 1981, at age 20?

A: Yes, by his own admission.

Q: What passport did he travel under?

A: There are only three possibilities:

1. He traveled with a U.S. ... Passport,
2. He traveled with a British passport, or
3. He traveled with an Indonesian passport.

Q: Is it possible that Obama traveled with a U.S. Passport in 1981?

A: No. It is not possible. Pakistan was on the U.S. .. State Department's "no travel" list in 1981.

Conclusion: When Obama went to Pakistan in 1981 he was traveling either with a British passport or an Indonesian passport.

If he were traveling with a British passport that would provide proof that he was born in Kenya on August 4, 1961, not in Hawaii as he claims.. And if he were traveling with an Indonesian passport that would tend to prove that he relinquished whatever previous citizenship he held, British or American, prior to being adopted by his Indonesian step-father in 1967.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the American people need to know how he managed to become a "natural born" American citizen between 1981 and 2008.

Given the destructive nature of his plans for America, as illustrated by his speech before Congress and the disastrous spending plan he has presented to Congress, the sooner we learn the truth of all this, the better.

[20120202-18](#) 17:44 SteveB Re: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds (reply to Larry, above)

Don't worry...all is in alignment...

http://urbanlegends.about.com/od/barackobama/a/obama_citizenship_questioned.htm

or <http://www.snopes.com/politics/obama/birthers/occidental.asp>

The insidiously evil and racist thing about these "birther" emails is that, without evidence, they grant President Obama as much legitimacy as if he were a slave. They grant him no legitimacy at all, not on his birth, not on his religion, not on his governing. He's a nobody. A non-citizen. An "empty suit" as my old friend SteveM used to say. Ah, if wishes were silver dollars, my friend.

Hope you're having a great winter. Don't overdo outside.

[20120202-19](#) 18:00 Pam Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)

78.79% Am I allowed to brag?

[20120202-21](#) 18:32 SteveG Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to Pam, above)

Yes. Be warned that SteveB only missed 1, or that is what he says.

[20120202-31](#) 11:01 Bill Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)

Just took the test and got 29 of the 33. Need to go back and see where I erred.

[20120202-22](#) 19:02 SteveB "Biggest Holders of US Government Debt"

A little perspective on the \$15 trillion national debt... **We owe it mostly to ourselves!**

What are we do do except slash all spending, even things important to our past promises and to our future promise, and run around shouting, "DOOM! DOOM! DOOM is coming!"

Gee, if the debt problem George Bush created is so HUGE, maybe we could just raise and equalize **taxes**? Maybe there are solutions, like becoming a peace-loving nation again?

Maybe Keynes is going to turn-out to be right again, after all? That would be great to see him have the last laugh on the Right.

"Biggest Holders of US Government Debt" by Paul Toscano, CNBC

Feb 2, 2012, (<http://finance.yahoo.com/news/biggest-holders-of-us-gov-t-debt.html>)

As the U.S. government spends an unprecedented amount of money to fix the economy, there is an equally great need to raise the cash to pay for it. This is accomplished through borrowing, whereby Uncle Sam sells Treasury securities of varying maturity.

For investors, government bills, notes and bonds are considered safe because they have a guaranteed rate of return, based on faith in future U.S. tax revenues. The government has been partially funding operations via Treasury securities for decades.

This borrowing adds to the national debt, which has recently surpassed \$15 trillion and is rising every second. The amount of debt is quickly approaching the federal debt ceiling, a legal limit to borrowing that currently stands at \$16.4 trillion.

Much of that debt is held by private sector, but about 40 percent is held by public entities, including parts of the government. Here's who owns the most. Foreign countries listed include private and public investors, according to monthly U.S. Treasury data.

1. Federal Reserve and Intragovernmental Holdings

U.S. debt holdings: **\$6.328 trillion**

That's right, the biggest single holder of U.S. government debt is inside the United States and includes the Federal Reserve system and other intragovernmental holdings. Of this number, The Fed's system of banks owns approximately \$1.65 billion in U.S. Treasury securities (as of January 2012), while other U.S. intragovernmental holdings - which include large funds such as the Medicare Trust Fund and the Social Security Trust Fund - hold the rest.

In the monthly Treasury bulletin, both are combined into one category and the total accounts for a stunning \$6.328 trillion in holdings as of September 2011 (the most recent number available). The amount is an all-time high as the Federal Reserve continues to expand its balance sheet, partially to purchase U.S. government debt securities. The Social Security Trust fund is required by law to invest in securities where the principal and interest is guaranteed by the Federal government.

About a decade ago, the total government holdings were "only" \$2.5 trillion.

2. China

U.S. debt holdings: **\$1.132 trillion**

The largest foreign holder of U.S. Treasury securities, China currently has \$1.132 trillion in American debt, although it is down from all time highs of \$1.173 trillion in July 2011. For more on China and currency, see CNBC Explains.

3. Other Investors/Savings Bonds

U.S. debt holdings **\$1.107 trillion**

With the most recent numbers from June 2011, this extremely diverse group includes individuals, government-sponsored enterprises, brokers and dealers, bank personal trusts, estates, savings bonds, corporate and noncorporate businesses for a total of \$1.107 trillion.

Although the level of debt held in U.S. savings bonds has remained basically constant since 2000, the broad category of "other" investors has nearly quadrupled since reaching a four-year low in December 2007.

4. Japan

U.S. debt holdings: **\$1.038 trillion**

One of the U.S.'s largest trade partners, Japan is also one of the U.S.'s largest debt holders, currently owning \$1.038 trillion in Treasury securities.

5. Pension Funds

U.S. debt holdings: **\$842.2 billion**

Pension funds control large amounts of money, reserved for personal retirements, and thus are obligated to make relatively safe investments. This group, which includes private and local government pension funds, holds \$842.2 billion in U.S. debt. The private pension fund category also includes U.S. Treasury securities held by the Federal Employees Retirement System Thrift Savings Plan G Fund.

6. Mutual Funds

U.S. debt holdings: **\$653.5 billion**

According to the Federal Reserve, mutual funds hold the sixth-largest amount of U.S. debt compared to any other group, although mutual fund holdings have diminished by more than \$105 billion since December 2008. Including money market funds, mutual funds and closed-end funds, this group of investments managed about \$653.5 billion in U.S. Treasury securities as of June 2011, which are the most recent numbers available.

7. State and Local Governments

U.S. debt holdings: **\$484.4 billion**

U.S. state and local governments have nearly a half-trillion dollars invested in American debt, according to the Federal Reserve. The level of investment has remained stable since 2006, moving within the range of \$484 billion and \$576 billion. The current debt holdings, however, represent the lowest aggregate level for state and local governments since December 2005, when they stood at \$481.4 billion.

8. The United Kingdom

U.S. debt holdings: **\$429.4 billion**

The U.K. currently holds \$429.4 billion in U.S. debt, but the country's investment has fluctuated dramatically during the past two years. Now at its all-time high (and rapidly increasing), British holdings were as low as \$55 billion in June 2008.

9. Depository Institutions

U.S. debt holdings: **\$284.5 billion**

As of June 2011 (the most recent numbers available), the Federal Reserve Board of Governors lists depository institutions as holding about \$284.5 billion in U.S. debt. This group includes commercial banks, savings banks and credit unions. In 2011, its holdings more than tripled from the 2008 low of \$105 billion. Between June and September 2011, holdings for depository institutions fell by nearly \$44 billion.

10. Insurance Companies

U.S. debt holdings: **\$250.1 billion**

According to the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, insurance companies hold \$250.1 billion in Treasury securities. This group includes property-casualty and life insurance firms.

Click here for CNBC's full list of the Biggest Holders of US Gov't Debt:

http://www.cnbc.com/id/29880401?_source=yahoo|usgovtdebt|&par=yahoo.

20120202-30	22:56	SteveG	"Bank of America Is Shrinking"
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"Bank of America Is Shrinking" by Mark Gongloff, Huffington Post

Feb. 2, 2011, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/02/bank-of-america-shrinking_n_1249960.html)

Once the biggest bank in the country, Bank of America is shrinking before our very eyes.

After more than three years at the top, Bank of America is no longer the nation's biggest mortgage servicer, falling behind Wells Fargo last year, according to industry newsletter Inside Mortgage Finance.

Wells Fargo is now the biggest mortgage servicer in the country, according to IMF, with \$1.82 trillion in business, or 17.7 percent of the total market, compared with Bank of America's \$1.77 trillion, or 17.2 percent.

To add insult to injury, Bank of America said today it was selling and leasing back three office buildings in New York and its home town of Charlotte.

This all comes less than four months after Bank of America lost its title as biggest bank in the U.S., when its reported assets fell to \$2.22 trillion, below JPMorgan Chase's \$2.29 trillion.

These are not necessarily bad things for the bank. It earned the title of biggest mortgage servicer with its 2008 takeover of Countrywide Financial -- a deal that saddled the company with subprime mortgage headaches that are still pounding to this day. The companies that now make up Bank of America originated more than \$2 trillion in loans between 2004 and 2008, which were arguably the worst years of the housing bubble and crisis, according to a new Morningstar analyst report.

Backing slowly away from that business must feel like sweet relief.

The bank's mortgage portfolio could still cost it billions of dollars in losses and lawsuits, which is why it is selling assets, raising capital and shedding debt as quickly as it can. Yesterday it learned creditors are willing to sell back \$3.59 billion of its debt, which is more than twice the amount it was looking for in a tender offer.

That's good news for the bank, whose stock price has risen 34 percent so far this year, making it one of the best performers in the S&P 500 stock index.

But that follows a 58 percent collapse in the stock price last year. Though the bank is making progress, it's still far too early to declare it fully safe from having to raise more capital at some point, which could hit its stock price again.

"Earnings must improve substantially," Morningstar analysts wrote, "in order for the bank to achieve escape velocity from the weight of billions of dollars in legacy mortgage-related liabilities threatening to reduce capital to unacceptable levels."

Morningstar and other analysts are optimistic the bank won't have to raise more capital. Getting small should help -- and smaller banks are probably better for the whole economy.

[20120202-23](#) 19:08 GaryC Brutal Winter, Travel to Chile (to SteveB)

It's been brutal up here this winter. Had to take off my light sweater at lunch so I could walk outside in my tee shirt. BTW visiting Peru in October. Ever been to Chile? Any good places to go?

[20120202-25](#) 19:52 SteveB Brutal Winter, Travel to Chile (reply to GaryC, above)

One of the guys in our group, BrentR, has been spending a lot of time there doing oil field seismology. Could put you in touch. I haven't been there, but hear it's a good place. Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Colombia generally more worthy of travel than Chile or Argentina, in my opinion, with Uruguay being a hidden gem, once you've hit the high points in the rest of South America, of which there are many. Brazil is cool but they speak the dreaded Portuguese,

which we Bolivians will read, but we hate to hear. And to think I once kinda knew some. Destroyed now. Venezuela? F*ck `em!

Tomorrow's Newsletter has a little feature on Marigot Bay in St. Lucia. To me, almost as perfect as it gets, and an easy three-day sail from as perfect as it gets—in the Tobago Cays.

20120202-24 19:47 Dennis Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, below)

from SteveB:

For those of you who have had enough winter! I present...paradise...

Paradise? The Caribbean is just overpriced resorts surrounded by seedy hovels and roaming goats. Never trust travel writers.

20120202-26 19:56 SteveB Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Dennis, above)

Tell me that when I'm kickin' back in the Tobago Cays or anchored in Canouan's Carenage Bay, where it's still almost like it's always been. Hell, St. Lucia is very nearly like it's always been. The resorts are weird islands of foreign capital. Nothing's changed, you just have to know where to go, Mon. Me territory. I've sailed almost the length and breadth of it and seen it from the real.

But, of course, all change in the places we love is hated and dreaded and loathed. All change. Ya know? Though I'm always happy when the ferry and inclined railcar are functional in my bay.

I'd love to go back to the days when I first discovered what too many have found.

Hey, I've got a great idea for you, America. Let's have Free Trade and Americanize the planet while not even making a profit off of it.

P.S. I'm going to tell Clark on you!

20120202-28 20:19 Dennis Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, above)

from SteveB:

Hey, I've got a great idea. Let's have Free Trade and Americanize the planet while not even making a profit off of it.

It's un-American not to profit from it.

Yeh, St. Lucia isn't too bad. Liked The Baths on Virgin Gorda too, even though I'm not a beach person.

But still you should never trust a travel writer. (I've traveled with Norton.)

20120202-29 22:50 SteveB Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Dennis, above)

I'm not entirely sure whether I want to be buried upright, hands swinging, taking my last (or first step), or if I want them to just bury my whole desk, chair, and computer so I'll have something to do in the afterlife. (Some pizza would be good too.)

One of my daughters is in the Caymans right now, probably sailing on R0mney's yacht. Wouldn't mind being there with her at all.

Take care, buddy. I'd love to get together with you sometime on St. Lucia for a Friday night Jump-Up with some 190 proof "Strong Rum" from the island, Mon. Maybe a little conch...

[20120202-32](#) 23:04 Jim Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, above)

A bit late with the guide.... We leave tomorrow on a cruise to Grand Turk, Samana, Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, plus the cruise lines' private island. Have been in Florida since January 2 in different places. Spending a little break from snow and cold.

[20120202-33](#) 23:15 SteveB Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Jim, above)

Way to go, Jim! The rest of us are just talking about it and you're doing it. Congratulations!

Say "Hi" to the ABC's for me and hope you two have a wonderful time! Keep us posted if you get a chance.

[Beach Guide to the Caribbean sent separately. –SteveB]

<http://www.oasismarigot.com>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZzUSxBAlA9M&feature=related>

Marigot Bay, St. Lucia, Windward islands



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

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FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #67 — FEB. 6, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

The Grand Old Party of Incompetence

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

The Cast of the 'Gilligan's Island' Remake



(Thanks to Dennis! Newt looks just like the Skipper! And Ron Paul in drag! I love it!
I can't imagine how they got the candidates to come down to the studio and dress up like that! :-)

Our great nation is beginning to wonder what the hell is wrong with the Republican Party.

First, they fielded a bunch of presidential candidates who seem to belong on the "Gong Show". We have gotten many good laughs from the field these past several months. There have been many more memorable moments of humor than I can recall, but we have seen very little sign of anything presidential.

Any seriousness that remained which wasn't already touched by greed or ambition was then destroyed by the vast, pervasive advertising of the Super-PAC's, which rode to the "rescue" with millions of dollars worth of acid to be thrown in the faces of the candidates and the voters. All in the name of "free speech". Just lovely!

Then it was proven in Iowa, and now Nevada, that Republicans don't even know how to count the votes for their precious, incompetent candidates.

Which also shows what a mess voting is in America. Again, other countries have figured it out, but not us. Republicans fight reform in memory, I believe, of when they could discourage or keep large groups of people from voting. The process of selecting a president is in much need of reform.

Look at the people in Iowa and Nevada with whom we entrust our sacred ballots. How can democracy be safe with such idiots even near such delicate instruments?

"Nevada GOP Rolls Snake Eyes" by Reid J. Epstein, Politico

Feb. 5, 2012 (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/72480.html>)

(LAS VEGAS) The biggest loser in Nevada's Republican caucuses? The state's feckless GOP.

Unable to control how its county parties count and report results, state Republicans were scrambling Sunday to explain why, almost 24 hours after most caucuses ended, the votes still have not been counted.

Here in Clark County, home to two-thirds of the state's population, officials counted ballots, by hand, until 4 a.m. before calling it a night. Counting resumed again at 9 a.m. By 11 a.m. local time Sunday, only half of the county's ballots had been counted.

"About midway through the night I said, 'This is ludicrous,'" state GOP Chairman Amy Tarkanian said Sunday morning. "So I sent my state party people down there, including my husband, and said, 'Go help them count, this is crazy.'"

Tarkanian, whose husband is Danny Tarkanian, who ran unsuccessfully for the GOP Senate nomination in 2010 and who is seeking the nomination in a new congressional seat, said state and county officials are seeking to avoid a situation like what happened in Iowa, where two weeks after voting ended the state party announced that it was Rick Santorum, not Mitt Romney, who won the state.

With second place still undecided between Newt Gingrich and Ron Paul — a consequential matter since delegates are awarded proportionally here — Tarkanian said she wants to avoid looking bad, as did her Iowa counterparts when they finally announced new results long after their contest ended.

But it may already be too late for that — unlike Iowa, Nevada hasn't even reported nearly complete results yet.

Chuck Muth, a former Nevada GOP executive director, wrote on his blog that the night was the "Nevada GOP's national embarrassment."

"You can say this about Nevada Republicans: they are consistent," Muth wrote. "They never blow an opportunity to blow an opportunity. And hoo-ahhh ... did they ever blow this one!"

Clark County GOP Chairman Dave Gibbs did not return messages left on his cell phone Sunday morning.

By all accounts, the night was a foreseeable disaster, months in the making.

The county party leaders rebuffed the state party's wishes for a streamlined method of delivering results and state officials here don't have sufficient clout to order the local officials around.

Then state officials planned to release results via Twitter — eschewing the traditional means of distributing them through The Associated Press for a method they had not yet tested. Cooler heads ultimately prevailed and the AP was given access to initial numbers, but the @nvgop Twitter feed through which results were streamed developed a relatively scant following — just over 2,000 followers as of Sunday morning.

It didn't help matters that, due to redistricting, the county clerks in Clark and Washoe counties — the population hubs where Las Vegas and Reno are located — renumbered all of the local precincts last month. So voters in the state's two largest cities were confused about where to caucus.

The new precinct numbers led to significant reporting problems, said Tarkanian and James Slack, the incoming state party chairman who will take over for Tarkanian whenever the caucus process is completed.

When Washoe County, the state's second largest, submitted its results to the state party — via an emailed Microsoft Excel spreadsheet — its columns didn't properly line up with the template the state party submitted to the counties, Tarkanian said.

So initial results submitted to and reported by the AP were wrong and had to be corrected. Slack said even if individual precinct numbers in Washoe are incorrect, he expressed confidence the sum total is accurate.

Slack said there were voters throughout the Reno and Las Vegas areas who didn't know where to caucus and, when results were submitted to the state party, precinct numbers didn't always match the caucus sites.

"There was some confusion at the caucus sites, and now the confusion is that some of the numbers that are showing up for precincts, we don't have any votes for them," Slack said. "So we don't know if nobody voted or if it's precinct number is one that that should have been disposed of."

Tarkanian said she was helpless to fix the obvious problems.

"There are a number of things that I wanted done differently, but the counties fought me tooth and nail on it," Tarkanian said. "The counties all felt that they knew what was best for the counties. So the state party threw up its hands and said, 'Fine, do it.'"

The first obvious sign that the Nevada caucuses could go off the track came in October, when Tarkanian announced the caucus would be held in February, then changed the date to January and then, after New Hampshire Secretary of State Bill Gardner threatened to move his state's primary to December, conceded and moved the event back to February.

Then, a new development: last month, Clark County arranged for a special Saturday evening caucus for people unable to vote on Saturday morning because of religious observances.

Scheduled largely at the behest of billionaire donor Sheldon Adelson and held at a school named after him, the caucus was ultimately hijacked by Ron Paul supporters who, like others voting there, had to sign affidavits swearing they could not participate in the daytime caucus because of a religious conflict.

"It was the rule that was brought forward by Clark County Republicans," Tarkanian said. "Once again the state party didn't have the say-all."

Former Nevada Gov. Bob List said Sunday that it may be time to consider switching from a caucus to a primary to "professionalize" the state's presidential contest.

"I would hope that we can improve on it next time," List told POLITICO. "This is the first time we really had a whole lot of scrutiny and a great deal riding on it. And we're still getting our act together in a sense."

20120203-01 09:57 Pam Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to all, FotM Newsletters #65 & #66)

You're all so well-informed! I should have done better. :-(

20120203-02 11:05 Art Re: Now, Even Our Constitution Ain't Up to Par (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #66)

Can't wait to see the tea bag reaction on Ginsburg's talk in Cairo. Should be explosive.

Agree with you on Keystone. Guy must be like Bonehead and bought lots of stock in Canadian oil companies. Still can't believe the Bonehead thing is just gonna pass by.

20120203-03 16:49 Pam I'm Still Here

I feel like I have some catching up to do. I feel like the conversation has been going on without me :-(but now I want to jump back in, at least for now. :-) I just read the FotM Newsletter for today, and several things jumped out at me. Let's see if I can remember them.

First, about Obama's citizenship. Give it a rest already. The man is our President, end of story. He should be judged on his performance in office, not where his mother happened to be when labor started. I don't give a flip where he was born; he's American enough to suit me, and I'm convinced he was born in Hawaii anyway. All this birther nonsense is a side show designed to stir up a pot of opposition out of slim pickings. What is it they say when you try a case, Beth? If the evidence is against you, argue the character; if the character is against you, argue something else; if that is against you, pound the table. I know that's not right, but you'll know what I'm referring to.

I just read an article in the Jan. 30th New Yorker about Obama. I'd like to quote from it, if I may.

"One of our two major parties, the Republicans, has become an insurgent outlier--ideologically extreme, contemptuous of the inherited social and economic policy regime, scornful of compromise, unpersuaded by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science, and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

So write Thomas Mann of the Brookings Institution and Norman Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute in their forthcoming book "It's Even Worse Than It Looks."

The article goes on to give an inside view of the Obama presidency, how decisions were made and compromises proposed. Some of it makes Obama look good, some doesn't. What it does do is show how complicated the whole can of worms is. I always worry that those of us with strong opinions (I am one of them) don't really know the whole story, and it's hard to get it from the usual sources. That's one reason I like this forum; I'm always learning something. It's like doctors disagreeing about treatment for a patient. They may all bring a great deal of knowledge and experience to the problem, but at the end of the day a decision has to be made. Watch and wait, or treat aggressively? The patient's only choice is to go with the doctor he trusts and hope for the best. I think that's what we need to do with politicians too--go with the ones we trust. I kind of trust Romney, although his war-mongering concerns me. I wouldn't trust Newt to tie my shoes. I trust Ron Paul, but I disagree with him. I don't trust Santorum, not just because of his policies but because he's so sure he has god on his side. No one can know that. That leaves Obama. Yes, I trust him, and this article only confirms my faith, not for his infallibility or his superior wisdom or his idealism, but for his intelligence and his desire to do the best thing possible given the real circumstances we're in. I believe he is trying to get re-elected, yes, but I don't think he goes to bed at night dreaming up nasty ways to destroy Republicans, the way they do with him. It's not even the Republican candidates, except for Newt, who are the nastiest; it's all the PACs and supporters making so much noise.

Because of the recent change in my family situation, I find myself less despairing and more optimistic. Whether that reflects a realistic view of the world or simply an altered one, I can't be sure, but I find myself watching the Republican race for the finish as the extremely entertaining production is certainly is.

20120203-07 21:30 Bill Re: I'm Still Here (reply to Pam, above)

There's some kind of name-although I've repressed it-- applied to those who make the non-native argument. It truly is amazing that this continues.

Why would his mother have left Hawaii and gone to Africa to have her son?

And the birth certificate is, indeed, in Hawaii. Agree with your diagnosis of severe extremism among Republican ranks.

20120203-04 16:59 SteveG Re: I'm Still Here (reply to Pam, above)

I watch the national news most nights, read through CNN & USA online plus a couple of other papers, watch the morning political shows on Sunday, watch some of the MSNBC spin of things at times (really like Rachel Maddow – she seems to document what she is saying), and have found that consistently the best news I get – for the US and the world – comes from Aljazeera. Maybe that is more of a statement about me rather than the quality of the news. Oh yeah, Jon Stewart is a pretty good source of news – seems to show a lot of Fox News clips.

Earlier there was a fact check on Obama and his movement toward “promises”, seemed like he was doing well on 508 items. SteveB – could you re-run that piece?

20120203-05 17:34 SteveB Re: I'm Still Here (reply to SteveG, above)

Steve, it's the Obameter in this issue: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/20120130-0062.pdf>

I love all the stuff you provide for us. Thank you much! Aljazeera? Mmmmm...

Take care. Stay warm. Do you ski? Can you do that with the pacemaker?

20120203-06 17:57 SteveG Re: I'm Still Here (reply to SteveB, above)

Can't do MRI's or hang around large electrical outputs or radiation - other than that - good to go - TSA's check me over pretty well - ride exercise bike 10 miles or so 3 X's a week - lift weights 3 times a week

Aljazeera is worth a watch - seem to be fair and balanced. LOL

20120204-01 13:20 Mary Video: "Debt Limit: A Guide to American Federal Debt Made Easy"

Gotta love it!

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Li0no7O9zmE>

20120204-03 19:14 SteveBA Re: Video: "Debt Limit..." (reply to Mary, above)

Cute.

[20120204-04](#) 19:40 Dennis Re: Video: "Debt Limit..." (reply to Mary, above)

The gall of this banker suggesting that this guy "generate new income."

That would be like "raising taxes." I thought all bankers were Republicans.

Better report this guy to Grover Norquist.

[20120204-02](#) 14:31 Dennis 'Gilligan's Island' Remake (see this FotM Newsletter cover)

The new crew...

[20120204-05](#) 21:54 SteveG Report from Occupy Yakima

Below is from a report of the local Occupy Yakima results – small number of demonstrators (20 or so) – persistence does pay off. Solarity is a local credit union.

We have been so successful harassing Bank of America (101 N. 2nd St.) in downtown Yakima that when they see us getting our signs out of my truck, the security guard locks the bank's doors before we even get across the street to the bank. That forces the people trying to get in the bank to either come back on a different day, or walk all the way round the block to the back door accessing the bank from a private parking lot. We had their parking area cleared of cars in 15 minutes after we arrived! We hand out flyers to all the disappointed customers explaining why they should close their accounts and move their money to a credit union. I spoke with Solarity Credit Union last week and was told they have seen a sudden surge of new accounts, many Hispanic. This has been very noticeable over the last 3 months. I told Solarity, our Spanish flyers are working!

With that thought in mind, we thought it would be a good idea to demonstrate first at Bank of Am, then hold our meeting afterward at St. Michaels. This shuts them down for 1-1/2 hours, instead of the 30- 45 minutes we normally do if we go after the meeting to demonstrate. Please note the change in time next Saturday for Occupy's activities and join us. I have signs you can carry if you don't have any.

[20120205-02](#) 16:14 SteveB Re: Report from Occupy Yakima (reply to SteveG, above)

The sounds really good, Steve. Are the last two paragraphs from a local OWS group?

We seem to be waking up and getting some things done. Could you believe how quickly Komen turned around? Our group helped a little with that, but mainly, a bunch of us not afraid to speak up can be powerful! I think the line is being drawn. We're not going to be dragged back in time any further by the Right.

First we're going to put a complete halt to the Republican bullying. Then we're going to sit them down and serve them up some of their lies to eat. Must taste much like putrefied worm guts.

[20120205-05](#) 16:54 SteveG Re: Report from Occupy Yakima (reply to SteveB, above)

Yes - they are from a local occupy Yakima email - took a month off through the holidays and back at it.

[20120205-01](#) 15:44 SteveG "U.S. Citizen Prevented from Returning Home"

Interesting reading.

"U.S. Citizen Prevented from Returning Home" by Brian Walker, Nation of Change

Feb. 5, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/us-citizen-prevented-returning-home-1328458356>)

(A Portland, Oregon local has been barred re-entry to the United States after being added to the No-Fly list for unknown reasons.)

20120205-04	16:35	Pam	Re: "U.S. Citizen Prevented from Returning Home" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Very.

20120205-03	16:34	Pam	"Memo from Austerity Land to Teachers: Caring No Longer Counts"
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"Memo from Austerity Land to Teachers: Caring No Longer Counts" by Jeff Bryant, Nation of Change

Feb. 5, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/memo-austerity-land-teachers-caring-no-longer-counts-1328452310>)

("It's important, by the way, to remember that the spending cuts that slammed Chester-Upland and other school districts like it were deliberately aimed at those schools.")

Although it's a bit early to know for sure, let's hope that 2012 is the year that the economic policies known as "austerity" finally crashed and burned. Nobel Prize-winning economist Paul Krugman is certainly ready to bid adieu to austerity, writing in *The New York Times* this week that deep spending cuts leveled by state and local governments have proven to be "a major drag on the overall economy" and most probably have erected an "unnecessary" detour in "the road to self-sustaining growth."

Nowhere have the ravages of austerity policies been more apparent and more ruinous than in public education, where deep budget cuts to schools have taken spending back to 2008 levels or earlier. What we've witnessed over the past two years is the biggest cut to education since the Great Depression, and it has had catastrophic and long-lasting effects on a generation of kids -- beginning with the very youngest.

Austerity Is Eviscerating Early Childhood Education

A recent article in the Huffington Post recounted that, due to state budget cuts and roll-backs to early childhood programs, "roughly a quarter of the nation's 4-year-olds and more than half of 3-year-olds attend no preschool, either public or private."

Unbelievably, only three states currently offer prekindergarten to all 4-year-olds, even though "kids from low-income families who start kindergarten without first attending a quality education program enter school an estimated 18 months behind their peers. Many never catch up, and research shows they are more likely to need special education services and to drop out."

Simultaneous to this article's warning bell, the medical journal *Pediatrics* reported the results of a new study showing that "lack of adult support" in a child's early years results in a build up of "toxic stress" that has life-long negative ramifications, including harmful effects to "learning capacities, adaptive behaviors, lifelong physical and mental health, and adult productivity."

Writing at the Core Knowledge blog, Robert Pondisco commented that "the report should have a profound impact on educators and education policymakers because we now know that interventions in children's lives -- especially those who grow up in the difficult circumstances associated with poverty, homelessness, crime, malnutrition, and abusive households -- "must start from Day One. Not Day One of school, Day One of life. Kindergarten is too late."

The federal government's attempt to alleviate some of the harm being done to the youngest Americans falls way short of what's needed. The Obama administration's recent debut of a \$500 million Race to the Top grant competition for early childhood education has been widely dismissed as being "too little, too late" and being too reliant on reviving assessments of four-year-olds that were tried and abandoned by the Bush administration.

So there's little doubt that the dreadful results of economic austerity have been equal to if not worse to education than they've been to the economy. But as the failure of economic austerity becomes a more widespread realization (hopefully) in the media, far less attention is being paid to another form of austerity that is at least as pernicious and potentially far more poisoning.

Austerity of the Soul

This other austerity -- call it "austerity of the soul" -- is most obvious when you look at how the people on the frontlines of public education -- classroom teachers -- are being treated. By now, for instance, anyone who is paying attention has heard about classroom teachers in the Chester-Upland, Pennsylvania school district who agreed to work without pay while their school budgets were being savaged by state officials and their resources and students were bled away to competitive charter schools.

One of the teachers, writing at Valerie Strauss's blog at the *Washington Post* explains what should trouble everyone who cares about the welfare of children:

My heart bleeds for these kids. Many of these students have seen so much tragedy, loss, and rejection in 16 years than most will see in a lifetime. Now, when faced with the possibility of their schools closing they are hit yet again. In discussions between students regarding the possibility of being sent to other districts, a common response from students is, "They won't do that; nobody wants us." Heartbreaking.

These teachers refused to abandon the kids because they cared, unlike the hapless Italian cruise ship captain who recently abandoned ship before his passengers had fled to safety. So what do they get in return for their sacrifice?

The governor's office has drafted a legislative proposal that calls for a state takeover of the distressed district. And if this state takeover follows the course of others in Pennsylvania, this will put a "school reform commission-type" oversight board in place which would likely cancel the teachers' contracts and turn all the district's schools into charters.

In other words, these teachers, despite their sacrifice, are more apt to get fired.

It's important, by the way, to remember that the spending cuts that slammed Chester-Upland and other school districts like it were deliberately aimed at those schools. State lawmakers purposefully designed the budget cuts to draw the most money away from the poorest districts. And regardless of the rationale used justify such an act, this has been nothing but a despicable attack on people who are least capable of fighting back.

"People like you destroy morale"

Pennsylvania isn't the only place where teachers are being treated badly. In Dallas, Texas classroom teachers are being forced to work longer days, with no extra pay, simply because local school officials, regardless of any objective evidence, decided that the district wasn't getting its money's worth from teachers.

Texas is, of course, a "right to work" state that prohibits unions from organizing on a mass scale to negotiate fair wages. But when one of the school officials made the comment that he didn't feel the district was getting its "eight hours" worth from teachers, it prompted one teacher to speak out in an email: (emphasis added)

It is sad that individuals like you make this noble profession of teaching America's future leaders more and more miserable each day. We already give more of our daily selves to the students and community than an average worker, including lawyers. I have been on the same salary step for 4 years, due to the fact that the district shifts it each time I am due for that coveted next step. I have received no

substantial raise in 4 years. I am the father of 6 children and am the only income for my family. I am struggling to pay bills and just make it through life. **We get dumped on by administration each day, cursed out by students, yelled at by parents, receive very little respect from the community, work long hours, and receive meager pay.** But that's okay. I see, on the other hand, that according to the Dallas CAD you have several nice properties in your name at [address deleted] (value \$155,770), [address deleted] (value \$187,310), and [address deleted] (value \$225,330). I, on the other hand, am struggling to pay bills and just make it through life. **I used to think I was doing something good for society. People like you destroy morale, beat us down into the ground, and make us wish we had been greedy enough to go into the business world as yourself.**

For speaking his mind, the teacher, Joseph Drake, was summarily placed on leave. And although he has since been reinstated, the message is clear that how teachers feel about the way they're being treated matters little to local politicians.

The Great Big Disconnect

Politicians at all levels love to talk in glittering generalities about how "valuable" good teachers are and how much they "matter." In his recent State of the Union address, President Obama, with one of the Chester-Upland teachers sitting practically within arm's length of his wife, called for an end to teacher "bashing" and exhorted them to "teach with creativity and passion" and "stop teaching to the test."

All this sounds well and good -- except it is completely disconnected to what is happening on the ground.

As Diane Ravitch recently wrote in her regular blog at Education Week, the President's policies actually promote "teaching to the test" and do more to advance "teacher bashing" than quell it.

The truth is that if we want teaching with "creativity and passion," we want to reinforce in teachers that act of caring. But teachers everywhere are being told that caring -- whether it's caring about the welfare of students or caring about work conditions -- is no longer something that counts.

This discrepancy of what our political leaders profess and the deliberate actions they take produces an austerity of the soul that is at least as crippling to education as economic austerity has been. The reality is that in addition to closing its pocketbooks, America is hardening its heart to children and the people who care for and educate them.

As a Texas school superintendent, John Kuhn, recently wrote at the site of edu-blogger Anthony Cody,

Accountability is only for the teachers in our modern republic. There is no visible or sustained pressure to address school funding, no pressure to address the inequity of resources or the unequal opportunity to learn that, while many are content to pretend it doesn't exist, nonetheless devastates kids... We [teachers] are supposed to accept poverty as "part of the deal." There will be no hue and cry in opposition to inequality. And to that I can only say, "Why?"

Why indeed!

As John Dickerson recently observed at Slate.com, we're likely heading into a Presidential election between two candidates -- Barack Obama and Mitt Romney -- who portray all the characteristics of "aloof men trading charges about who is more out of touch." This stands in stark contrast to what's needed for the times.

Writing at, coincidentally, *In These Times*, Thomas Franks notes that in the destructive wake of economic austerity what's needed is an "idealism in the grand sense" that can rise above "our fallen economic world" and point the way to a better future.

If Obama can heed the times and break through with an idealistic message extolling the value of caring and the need to extinguish our current austerity of the soul, it could make all the difference.

20120205-06 17:44 Mary Federal Birth Control Mandate

Regardless of your political persuasion or position on birth control, it's imperative that you familiarize yourself with the latest federal birth control mandate. It is an unprecedented attack on religious liberty, a fundamental freedom protected by the first amendment. For an administration that believes in "choice", how can it justify forcing this on groups if it's against their moral beliefs??

If you agree, please write your congressmen.

"Evil exists when good men do nothing" —Edmund Burke

20120205-07 19:35 SteveB Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary, above) & "Birth-Control Fight Unlikely to Hurt Obama, His Strategists Say"

Here's an article for those who might need an introduction to the subject Mary raised, above.

As I wrote to SteveG: "We seem to be waking up and getting some things done. Could you believe how quickly Komen turned around? Our group helped a little with that, but mainly, a bunch of us not afraid to speak up can be powerful! I think the line is being drawn."

"Birth-Control Fight Unlikely to Hurt Obama, His Strategists Say" by Kathleen Hennessey and Christi Parsons, *LA Times*

Feb. 5, 2012, (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-contraceptives-fight-20120206,0,2117906.story>)

(Democratic strategists think that most U.S. Catholic women believe birth control should be available and that people who oppose Obama because of a new rule for employers would not vote for him anyway. The 2010 healthcare law requires employers -- including Catholic hospitals and universities -- to provide their workers with insurance coverage for contraceptives.)

Reporting from Washington— Even as angry Catholic leaders vow to fight a new federal requirement that most employers include contraceptives in their health insurance coverage, the Obama administration believes any political damage will be limited because it's on the side of women's rights.

Democratic strategists think voters who oppose President Obama because of the birth-control rule wouldn't have voted for him anyway. The strategists think most Catholic women — like most other American women — believe that birth control should be affordable and available.

The Susan G. Komen Foundation can attest to the volatility of family-planning politics. After saying it would cut off most funding to Planned Parenthood, Komen reversed itself last week in the face of public outcry.

"I think we saw with Komen that this is a country where voters, and particularly women voters, support affordable access to birth control, and that is true among Catholic women as well as women who are not Catholic," said Geoff Garin, a pollster for Democrats and Planned Parenthood.

Democratic strategists point to statistics showing widespread approval of birth control among Catholic voters, suggesting a gulf between clergy and parishioners. Catholic doctrine opposes birth control, but surveys show many Catholics use contraceptives.

The new rule stems from the 2010 healthcare law, which requires employers to provide insurance coverage for contraceptives to patients who want them. Churches and other houses of worship are exempt, but Catholic hospitals and universities are not. Bishops call the rule an affront to religious freedom.

The rule doesn't force doctors who object to contraception to prescribe it.

As the Komen Foundation discovered last week, public opinion can be hard to predict. After the breast cancer charity decided to stop funding about \$650,000 in breast-health services at 16 Planned Parenthood affiliates, a public uproar ensued, and Komen reversed itself within days.

The controversy underscored broad support for access to birth control, prevention and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases and cancer screenings for women, which altogether totaled 86% of Planned Parenthood's services in 2010, according to the group's website. Abortion accounted for 3%.

Still, angering Catholic voters — or doing anything that appears to restrict religious freedom — in swing states could come back to bite Obama. At least one Democrat, Sen. Joe Manchin III, a moderate and a Catholic in a tough reelection fight in West Virginia, came out against the administration's plan.

"This is America. Under our Constitution, religious organizations have the freedom to follow their beliefs, and government should honor that," Manchin said in a statement. "The Obama administration's position on this mandate is wrong and just doesn't make any sense to me. I'm talking to my Democratic and Republican colleagues about any ways we can fight this misguided decision."

House Speaker John A. Boehner (R-Ohio), a Catholic, has urged the administration to reconsider, saying the regulation violates the Constitution. Some bishops and priests have urged parishioners to pressure lawmakers.

Religious groups see the fight as about more than birth control. Sister Carol Keehan, head of the Catholic Health Assn. of the United States, argued that the rule potentially establishes a new test for what is and isn't a religious institution — one separate from the Internal Revenue Service definition and one that could have implications for other policies, on issues such as covering abortion.

"We have a long history in this country of ensuring that religious groups' issues are respected," Keehan said. "It's always a challenge in a pluralistic society to be sure that that's done in the appropriate way. But all of a sudden we no longer qualify, and that was a jolt."

Administration officials say that the exemptions mean religious organizations don't have to do anything that violates their beliefs, and that the law's intent is to protect the rights of employees who work for Catholic-owned institutions, many of whom are not Catholic.

Though Obama won the overall Catholic vote in 2008 by 9 percentage points, he lost among those voters who attend church weekly by 8 percentage points. Sen. John McCain won white Catholics by 5 percentage points.

Aligning himself with the interests of women is crucial if Obama is to win a second term. He garnered 53% of women voters in 2008, besting McCain by 13 percentage points. In 2010, when Republicans took control of the House, that edge evaporated and women were essentially evenly divided between Republicans and Democrats. Recent polling shows the gender gap in Democrats' favor has reemerged.

Among voters in the Republican primary, where opposition to abortion motivates a key slice of the electorate, front-runner Mitt Romney is voicing his objections to the rule on grounds that it violates religious liberty. Romney is committed to repealing the whole Obama healthcare law, and the birth control rule along with it, said Amanda Henneberg, a campaign spokeswoman.

"This is a direct attack on religious liberty and will not stand in a Romney presidency," she said.

Garin said Romney's position was unlikely to hurt Obama but risks placing the former Massachusetts governor at odds with the majority of women voters.

"It is reasonable to think that the Catholics who are opposed to birth control are unlikely to be Obama supporters for a whole host of other reasons," Garin said. "But for the significant majority of the electorate, being identified with increasing access to affordable birth control is a clear-cut positive."

The administration pledges to stand behind its decision, with the White House seeing a different moral issue at stake: access to preventive healthcare.

"We need to make sure that those employees of all different faiths have access to contraception," said White House Press Secretary Jay Carney. "That's why we sought what we believe is an appropriate balance."

[20120205-08](#) 23:59 SteveB Photo: Mt. Katahdin, Maine

<http://trekalong.com/chaseoutdoors/>

The Knife Edge (and Half of New England) from Baxter Peak, Mt. Katahdin, Maine



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

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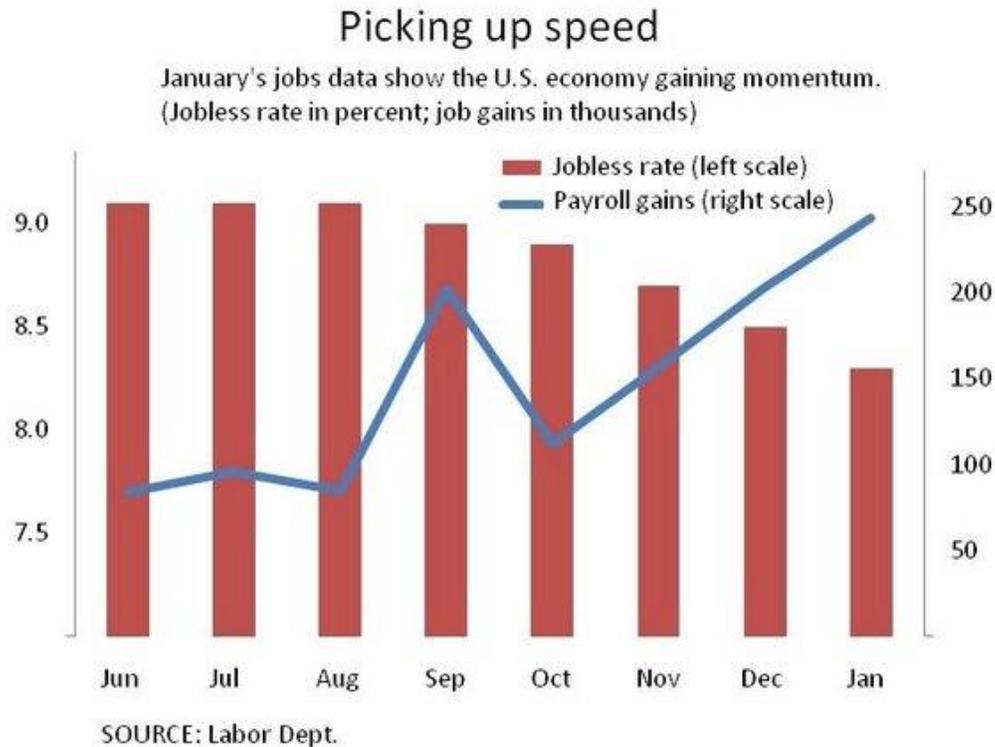
FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #68 — FEB. 7, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Is the Economic Recovery for Real?

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 7, 2012)



I'm not going to get my hopes up too much, because, if it could occur, it would just be too much poetic justice, but the much maligned economic recovery seems to be happening, despite Republican hopes and dreams.

Now, since we know from reading all the Republican screeds that it won't last long, probably just until after the election (the "last" election, if President Obama wins), because President Obama's goal is to "destroy the country".

Hard to do that while the economy is growing.

So, I don't know what you're going to do, but I'm keeping my fingers crossed and buying American. It's really unfortunate that a little less than half the country is rooting for disaster instead of a full recovery from the gutter President Bush drove us into.

"Recovery Is Gathering Speed, Jobs Data Confirm" by John W. Schoen, TheBottomLine/MSNBC

Feb. 3, 2012, (<http://bottomline.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/02/03/10310764-recovery-is-gathering-speed-jobs-data-confirm>)

The U.S. economy is like a flywheel: It takes a lot to get it going. Once it starts moving, it can pick up speed pretty quickly.

To see why, look no further than Friday's jobs report, which offered convincing evidence that the U.S. recovery is finally gaining momentum.

After months of subpar growth in their payrolls, American companies added 243,000 new jobs in January, considerably more than the 150,000 that forecasters expected. That drove the unemployment rate down from 8.5 percent in December to 8.3 percent, extending a rapid decline from 9.1 percent last August.

Since last fall, a series of economic reports have pointed to gradual improvement. But the January employment report tore the cover off the ball.

"It's very unusual to get an unambiguous jobs report; usually you have a lot of cross currents in the data," said Mark Zandi, chief economist of Moody's Analytics. "This is unambiguous. Everything is good."

The job gains were spread across the economy, from the leisure and hospitality industry, which added 44,000 jobs, to 11,000 new hires by retailers. The battered construction industry added 21,000 jobs, the second straight monthly gain, helped in part by unseasonably warm weather this winter.

The data also included heartening signs of more hiring to come. Employers added more temporary staff and increased the hours of their existing workers. That's typically a sign that demand has picked up; once companies are convinced the uptick isn't fleeting, they tend to add more full-time jobs.

January's drop in the jobless rate also came as more people began looking for work. That's especially encouraging because, for the rate to go down, a larger number had to have found work.

Many economists have warned that the jobless rate could rise again this year as "discouraged" workers resumed their job hunt; until they land a position, they're counted as unemployed, which tends to boost the jobless rate until they get hired. That didn't happen in January, which means jobs are being created even faster than discouraged workers are returning to the labor force.

Forecasters were surprised by just how fast the employment data have improved; as of last month, the jobless rate has fallen by eight-tenths of a point in just five months.

"If you go back and look at the cycle after the '90-91 recession and the '01 recession, there was this period of no job growth, and then all of sudden it was like a light switch went on in corporate America," said Zandi. "It almost feels like that with this report."

Though the report was good news by itself, the monthly employment data confirmed separate reports showing the U.S. economy getting back on its feet after a long, slow slog.

The economy's gradual acceleration showed up in a separate report Friday showing ongoing strength in U.S. manufacturing. The Commerce Department said factory orders rose 1.1 percent in December, supported by a rebound in orders for heavy machinery, after a 2.2 percent gain in November. For the year, total orders were up 12.1 percent following a gain of 12.9 percent in 2010, the government reported Friday. Orders had plunged 22.1 percent in the 2009, the year the recession ended.

Some of that surge in December came as companies rushed to place orders before an investment tax credit expired at the end of last year. But the spending on new equipment is expected to continue as companies seek to boost output by upgrading equipment and continuing to look for ways to use technology to boost productivity.

Since the 2007 recession ended, companies have been relying heavily on automation to boost the productivity of their existing workforce to meet rising demand. But the recent reports on productivity show those gains fading, indicating that employers may be exhausting their output gains available from automation, forcing them to add to payrolls.

Service companies grew at the fastest pace in 11 months in January as companies hired more workers to keep up with rising demand. The Institute for Supply Management says its index of non-manufacturing activity jumped to 56.8 percent in January from 53 percent in December. Any reading above 50 indicates expansion. The survey tracks hotels, retailers, financial services firms and construction companies.

As hiring picks up, the pace of layoffs appears to be easing. Initial claims for unemployment insurance have been trending lower. One reason may be that the wave of government job cuts that followed the 2007 recession appears to be slowing. Friday's jobs report showed that government employment leveled off in January after falling by 276,000 jobs over the past 12 months.

State and local finances have begun to turn around as the improvement in the overall job market and the economy has boosted incomes and has helped sales tax receipts to recover. And though home prices continue falling in many parts of the country, the rapid drop in local property tax receipts has begun to ease.

"The picture has been slices of better news just about everywhere," said Robert Brusca, chief economist at FAO Economics. "All of this is consistent with improvement."

The stock market has already begun placing bets that strong growth is taking hold; the Standard & Poor's 500 index has risen 6.5 percent in the last four weeks. Stock prices jumped sharply on Friday's jobs data; the S&P 500 index added another 1.3 percent, on track for its fifth straight weekly gain.

The surprise drop in the unemployment rate bodes well for the Obama administration, too. The president faces a tough re-election campaign with some 12.8 million Americans still out of work and another 11 million who are working part-time but want a full-time job, or who have given up looking. When those workers are accounted for, the so-called "underemployment" in January stood at 15.1 percent, down just a tenth of a percentage point from December.

But the "headline" jobless rate has fallen to the lowest since February 2009, a month after Obama took office. Economists who have studied the link between the job market and presidential elections say the overall level of unemployment matters less than the pace of improvement in the job market and broader economy.

"There are still far too many Americans who need a job ... but the economy is growing stronger. The recovery is speeding up. And we need to do everything in our power to keep it going," Obama said Friday.

Still, the White House can expect continued withering criticism of its record as the campaign gathers momentum through November. Republican House Majority whip Kevin McCarthy of California Friday called the jobs data "welcome numbers" but said employment gains aren't coming fast enough.

"There is a better way of going about doing this," he said. "You've got a Senate sitting on 27 bills out of 30 that would help job creation. So there's a lot of work to be done."

Most economists were surprised by the jobs data, prompting some to nudge their growth forecast higher for 2012.

But others noted that significant obstacles remain before the U.S. economy gets back up to cruising speed. The housing market remains mired in its worst recession since the 1930s; falling home prices continue to eat into household wealth. The ongoing debt crisis in Europe has forced widespread spending cutbacks that have thrown

much of the continent into recession. It's not at all clear what impact a deeper European recession would have on U.S. growth

"We're reluctant to get too carried away just yet," said Paul Dales, senior U.S. economist at Capital Economics. "The economy began both 2010 and 2011 strongly before fading later in each year. As the unwinding of the previous fiscal stimulus starts to bite and as global demand falters, something similar may be on the cards this year."

20120206-01 07:35 SteveB Fw: Notice from The99%Declaration.org

from The99%Declaration.org:

Hi, this email is being replaced by our committee system and FAQ.

Please visit our webpage for contact information, chats and delegate/voter registration information. Thanks for contacting the 99% Declaration Working Group!

<http://www.the99declaration.org>

20120206-02 11:09 Pam Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary & Art, FotM Newsletter #67)

I cannot believe we are fighting the contraception wars all over again. I'm not going to become alarmed and take this seriously, because I know it's a political ploy. I can see no chance that contraception would be banned or limited in this country, but how idiotic to even bring it up. It's religion insinuating itself into politics, not good. It's ironic that the very people who yell loudest about protecting our freedoms are the very ones who want to clip its wings. The religious right wants to tell the country what it CAN'T do: use birth control, have an abortion, marry someone of the same sex. Ever notice how everything the right fulminates about most has to do with sexual behavior. Methinks the lady doth protest too much.

There is a wonderful article in this week's *New Yorker* about our prison system, the rate of incarceration, and some ideas about how we could curb even further the incidence of crime. In a nutshell, we need to police the hell out of crime-ridden neighborhoods, legalize marijuana, let non-violent criminals out of jail and impose alternative sentences, allow judges discretion in sentencing. We do not need to eliminate capitalism, poverty, or the entire justice system. Relatively small changes here and there could add up to big changes that could happen relatively quickly. Maybe that's the way we need to think about our huge national problems of debt and unemployment, education and health care that plague us. Perhaps the big picture has blinded us (me especially, I think), when what we need are lots and lots of small solutions, like local gardens, more farm markets, clinics on wheels, new approaches in teaching and running schools, one classroom, one school at a time. Some of these things are already emerging. You can get a flu shot at Walgreen's, and many communities have Community Sustainable Agriculture. I don't want to be like the Vikings in Greenland or the Easter Islanders whose practices did them in. We need to be more like the Inuits who survived where Europeans, with all their advances, didn't. (You can tell I'm reading Jeremy Diamond's *Collapse*, great book.)

What's with Nevada? This is so embarrassing. We sent envoys to Afghanistan to monitor their elections, and we can't find our own nose in the dark? People can be so stupid. (My profound remark for the day.)

20120206-06 14:17 Dennis Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary, FotM Newsletter #67)

from Mary:

Regardless of your political persuasion or position on birth control, it's imperative that you familiarize yourself with the latest federal birth control mandate. It is an unprecedented attack on religious liberty, a

fundamental freedom protected by the first amendment. For an administration that believes in "choice", how can it justify forcing this on groups if it's against their moral beliefs??

How is it a religious issue? The mandate is for health care to be provided on an equal basis to all women. Sounds to me like a public health issue that is being exploited by the right to stir up their base.

20120206-03	11:36	Art	"How to Discourage Virginia Voters"
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Ya just can't make this stuff up. Note the credentials of the chief sponsor of the bill.

"How to Discourage Virginia Voters" by *The Washington Post* Editorial Board, Sunday

Feb. 5, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/todays_paper?dt=2012-02-06&bk=A&pg=16)

(Step one: Invent a problem. Step two: Draft a discriminatory solution.)

FOR DECADES Virginia has allowed residents who lack proof of identification or whose IDs have been lost or stolen to vote, provided they are listed in the voting rolls and sign sworn statements attesting to their identities. Now, in response to no known problem, Republicans are backing a change already approved by the House of Delegates that would allow such citizens to cast only provisional ballots, which would be counted only if their identities were subsequently verified with IDs. Given that 11 percent of voting-age citizens nationally lack photo IDs, that would place unmanageable burdens on thousands of would-be voters in the commonwealth.

The bill's chief sponsor is Del. Mark R. Cole (R-Fredericksburg), whose previous claim to fame was a bill in 2010 banning employers from planting microchips in their workers, on the grounds that doing so might enable a surreptitious incursion by the antichrist. Yes, really.

Mr. Cole says that his voting legislation would prevent voter fraud — specifically, ballots cast by impersonators. However, in an e-mail exchange with us on the subject, he did not respond when asked to name a single instance of such fraud in Virginia. Nor could he provide evidence when questioned directly by Democratic lawmakers in committee. In fact, he admitted, he knew of no instances.

A 2006 study by the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University, which supports voting rights, found that 21 million people, or 11 percent of American citizens, lack government-issued photo IDs such as driver's licenses and millions more women have only out-of-date IDs with their maiden names.

The percentage of voting-age citizens lacking IDs was significantly higher among African Americans (25 percent); among people aged 65 or older (18 percent); and among low-income Americans (15 percent).

So the effect of Mr. Cole's legislation would be to disenfranchise voters who helped Democrats, including President Obama, get elected in Virginia. If it survives a vote in the Senate, we hope it will be vetoed by Gov. Robert F. McDonnell (R).

If it does become law, Virginia risks a challenge by the Justice Department, which may review any changes in the state's voting rules under the 1965 Voting Rights Act.

Just over a year ago, Virginia Attorney General Ken Cuccinelli II said that Virginia, one of nine states covered by the law, had outgrown its history of institutional racism and should be released from Justice Department oversight. Legislation such as Mr. Cole's undermines that argument.

20120206-04	11:43	Dale	Video: "Keynes vs. Hayek Smackdown: Battle Still Rages Between Long-Dead Economists"
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"Keynes vs. Hayek Smackdown: Battle Still Rages Between Long-Dead Economists"

http://www.advisorone.com/2012/02/03/keynes-vs-hayek-smackdown-battle-still-rages-between?utm_source=weekendreview2041212&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=weekendreview

or

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GTQnarzmTOc&feature=player_embedded

[20120206-05](#) 13:52 SteveBA Cartoon: Mideast Re-Mapping?



[20120206-07](#) 15:30 Dennis "Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud"

It appears Indiana Republicans are contending for best of the breed.

"Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud" by Stephen D. Foster Jr., Addicting Info

February 5, 2012 (<http://www.addictinginfo.org/2012/02/05/indiana-republican-secretary-of-state-found-guilty-of-voter-fraud/>) or (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/05/us/indiana-secretary-of-state-convicted-in-voter-fraud-case.html>)

[20120206-11](#) 16:43 Phil Re: "Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud" (reply to Dennis, above)

ANOTHER DESPICABLE ACT BY A POLITICIAN. I HOPE HE IS SENTENCED TO THE MAXIMUM ON EACH OF THE COUNTS. HOWEVER, IT IS NO MORE CRIMINAL NOR DESPICABLE THAN THE INSIDER TRADING BEING DONE ON BOTH SIDES OF THE AISLE IN CONGRESS.

[20120206-13](#) 16:57 Bill Re: "Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud" (reply to Phil, above)

The guy they've pictured is the one who preceded the guilty one and is now in Congress. The one who was just convicted is Charlie White, a man of very bad judgment.

20120206-08 15:56 SteveG Cartoon: Mitt Washes Off the 'Ordinary Americans' Grime



20120206-09 15:59 Art Re: Cartoon: Mitt Washes Off the 'Ordinary Americans' Grime (reply to SteveG, above)

Now, SteveG, I'm not sure I'd want to touch many tea baggers myself.

20120206-10 16:16 Pam Re: Cartoon: Mitt Washes Off the 'Ordinary Americans' Grime (reply to Art & SteveG, above)

Maybe with a ten-foot pole.

20120206-12 16:50 SteveG "Warren Buffett Exposed: The Oracle of Omaha & the Tar Sands"

"Warren Buffett Exposed: The Oracle of Omaha and the Tar Sands" by Steve Horn, NationofChange

Feb. 6, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/warren-buffett-exposed-oracle-omaha-and-tar-sands-1328539987>)

20120206-14 17:18 SteveG Fw: MoveOn Petition: Oppose President Obama's FDA Appointment!

from Frederick Ravid, MoveOn.org:

President Obama appointed former Monsanto vice president and lobbyist Michael Taylor as senior advisor to the Food and Drug Administration commissioner.

This is a classic example of the fox guarding the henhouse. President Obama should isolate the FDA from corporate influence by asking Taylor to step down immediately.

That's why I created a petition to President Obama on SignOn.org. Click here to add your name, and then pass it along to your friends:

<http://signon.org/sign/tell-obama-to-cease-fda?source=mo&id=35467-18997482-l85zdGx>.

20120206-15	18:28	GaryF	Fw: Status Message from 'Make Congress Work'
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from <http://www.NoLabels.org/work>:

Thank you for your help in spreading the word about No Labels. We appreciate your help.

"Make Congress Work" is No Labels' first grassroots campaign to effect real change in our government.

At a time when our nation faces immense challenges, the American people have never had less faith in the ability of Congress to do anything about them.

This problem couldn't be more serious – because if Congress is broken, so is the United States of America.

Every law addressing any substantial issue has to go through Congress first. That means if we want a better tax code, a balanced budget, a better immigration system or more effective educational and energy policies, we first need to fix our broken Congress.

No Labels believes the biggest problem with Congress is not necessarily the people in it. It's the outdated rules, procedures and traditions that govern the institution and make it impossible for anything to get done. Congress has become a place where even good, talented people get dragged down by a broken system. But if the rules of Congress change, we can make our government work again.

Our dozen proposals to Make Congress Work mostly don't require new laws or any new spending, and they don't favor any party or particular cause. These are simple, straightforward proposals to break gridlock, promote constructive discussion and reduce polarization in Congress. They can be adopted, almost all at once, when the next Congress convenes in January 2013.

Throughout 2012, No Labels will conduct an intensive grassroots campaign to mobilize 1 million people behind our action plan to Make Congress Work again.

Click here to view a pdf of our Make Congress Work booklet:
http://nolabels.3cdn.net/91487f08f08f87870a_p2m6iii9t.pdf

Breaking Gridlock

1. No Budget, No Pay

Congress rarely passes spending bills on time, which makes it virtually impossible for members to intelligently consider why they are spending taxpayer dollars in the first place. No Labels Solution: If Congress can't make spending and budget decisions on time, they shouldn't get paid on time either.

2. Up or Down Vote on Presidential Appointments

The Senate now routinely holds up critical presidential appointments to the Cabinet and the courts for purely political reasons. No Labels Solution: All appointees should receive an up or down vote within 90 days of their name being sent to the Senate. If deadline is not met, the nominee would be confirmed by default.

3. Filibuster Reform

Constant use of the filibuster has ground the Senate to a halt. One reason the filibuster is used so often is that senators don't even have to show up on the floor to explain themselves anymore. No Labels Solution: Our filibuster fix is based on a simple idea: If senators want to filibuster legislation, they should actually have to publicly explain why. Also, filibusters can be used to prevent a bill from reaching the floor for debate (motions to proceed). Eliminating the filibuster for motions to proceed would allow more issues to be debated and voted on by the whole Senate.

4. Empower the Sensible Majority

Good legislation that is supported by a sensible bipartisan majority often isn't even debated because congressional leaders or committee chairs see political benefit in keeping Democrats and Republicans at one another's throats. No Labels Solution: House and Senate rules should be reformed to make it easier for a bipartisan majority to bring legislation to the House or Senate floor over the objection of party leaders.

5. Make Members Come to Work

Part of the reason why Congress can't get much done is that they're not showing up in the halls of the Senate or House more than a few days a week due to constant fundraising and trips home. No Labels Solution: Congress could get more done if they actually came to their offices in the capital. The House and Senate should be in Washington, DC for three weeks in any given month. The House and Senate should also have five-day work weeks and they should be in session at the same time.

Promoting Constructive Discussion

6. Question Time for the President

Leaders in Washington rarely debate one another anymore, choosing instead to just talk past one another through the media. No Labels Solution: America should take a cue from the British Parliament's regular questioning of the prime minister to create question time for the president and Congress.

7. Fiscal Report to Congress

Hear it. Read it. Sign it: Perhaps the chief obstacle to fixing America's finances is that no one agrees what's really on our balance sheet. When leaders in Washington debate our budget, they routinely use different baselines, projections and assumptions, which tend to conveniently support whatever policy they are pushing at the moment. The No Labels Solution: Every year, a nonpartisan leader, such as the comptroller general, should deliver a fiscal update that must be signed off on by our senior political leaders, just as CEOs are required to affirm the accuracy of their company's financial reporting.

Reducing Polarization

8. No Pledge but the Oath of Office

One of the biggest barriers to solving problems in Congress is that many members literally sign away their ability to legislate with repeated pledges to narrow interest groups. The No Labels Solution: It's time to cut the puppet strings that allow narrow interest groups to control members of Congress. Members should make no pledge but the pledge of allegiance and their formal oath of office.

9. Monthly Bipartisan Gatherings

Democrats and Republicans in Congress rarely socialize or even meet with members of the other party anymore. Like any workplace, Congress depends on good human relationships to function. When there are no relationships, there is dysfunction. The No Labels Solution: To get members talking to one another, both the House and Senate should institute monthly bipartisan gatherings.

10. Bipartisan Seating

More often than not, seating in Congress resembles boys and girls at a middle school dance, with each side keeping an (un)comfortable distance from one another. The No Labels Solution: It's time to curb the cliques in Congress. At all joint meetings or sessions of Congress, each member should be seated next to at least one member of the other party.

11. Bipartisan Leadership Committee

In today's Congress, almost every meeting or get-together is partisan, with legislative problem-solving taking a back seat to discussion of how to stick it to the other side. The No Labels Solution: Congressional party leaders should form a bipartisan congressional leadership committee as a forum for discussing both legislative agendas and substantive solutions.

12. No Negative Campaigns Against Incumbents

When incumbent members of Congress from one party negatively campaign against the incumbents from the other party, it destroys the trust necessary to work together. The No Labels Solution: Incumbents from one party should not conduct negative campaigns against incumbents from the opposing party. That means no appearing in negative ads, no signing nasty direct mail letters and no traveling to an incumbent's district or state to play attack dog. Members would, of course, be free to campaign or fundraise in support of candidates from their party.

<http://www.sailmagazine.com/getting-away-it-all-lake-michigan>

Paradise Bay, Beaver Island, Michigan (Fred Bagley)



—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.

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #69 — FEB. 8, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

GOP Race Now in 'No Man's Land'

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 8, 2012)

Gee, where was it before? I already thought the Republican Primaries were off the map. Now Rick Santorum, Mr. Glitter Bomb in Your Bedroom, has made it official, both by winning all three contests yesterday and with his "No Man's Land" quote. Maybe Google will have so much Santorum activity that he and his family won't have to be embarrassed quite so much. Maybe the bad stuff will move all the way down to, say, page two. LOL

Don't ask me what's going on in the Republican Party except that it's clear they don't want their own candidate, Mitt Romney, Mr. Zero. I wonder how they think they are going to jam this jerk down our throats in the election if they don't even want to nominate him? I don't see how any amount of super-PAC money could do that. The guy is a loser. Head-to-head against President Obama, he's a born loser! All the GOP has up front are losers and it has been like that, seemingly, for a very long time. No offence intended

"Santorum: GOP Race Now in 'No Man's Land'" by Deirdre Walsh, CNN

Feb. 8, 2012, (<http://us.cnn.com/2012/02/08/politics/santorum-whats-next/index.html>)

(ST. CHARLES, Mo) As he was handily winning three Republican contests and stalling frontrunner Mitt Romney's clear path to the Republican presidential nomination, Rick Santorum proclaimed to CNN that the 2012 GOP race was now "in a little bit of no man's land."

The former Pennsylvania senator's campaign got a massive dose of momentum after stunning frontrunner Mitt Romney with a clean sweep on Tuesday night, beating him by double digits in Minnesota, a state Romney won in 2008; stunning him in Colorado, another state in Romney's column in 2008; and trouncing him in Missouri, one of the country's biggest battleground states.

"I don't stand here to claim to be the conservative alternative to Mitt Romney," Santorum told supporters in a convention hall just west of St. Louis. "I stand here to be the conservative alternative to Barack Obama."

The crowd erupted in cheers, chanting "We pick Rick! We pick Rick!"

Never mind that Tuesday night's win in Missouri won't actually rack up any delegates for Santorum.

The state's 52 delegates will be awarded when GOP caucuses are held in mid-March. But he touted the win as proof that his message is gaining traction even without the campaign checkbook or ground operation that Romney has.

"Tonight we had an opportunity to see what a campaign looks like when one candidate isn't outspent 5- or 10-to-1 by negative ads, impugning their integrity and distorting the record," Santorum said, standing with his wife. "This is a more accurate representation frankly of what the fall race would look like."

Even before the results started coming in Tuesday evening, Santorum's advisers were setting expectations high on the first multi-state polling day of the year.

Santorum advisers told CNN that his website's traffic was up over the past few days, saying it was "going through the roof."

Although they didn't have any of their own polling showing they were gaining support in Minnesota, Missouri and Colorado, the campaign pointed out that crowds were getting bigger at their stops and the anecdotal evidence gave them a good feeling going into Tuesday's vote.

The Romney campaign emphasized Missouri's primary wasn't a true test because delegates weren't officially awarded.

"Part of the process. No delegates," Romney spokeswoman Andrea Saul told CNN after Missouri was called for Santorum.

But Santorum aides call that argument "laughable" and pointed to Romney's major focus on the Iowa caucuses, another state where delegates won't be awarded until months after the vote.

One Santorum adviser told CNN that the strong showing this month will be a springboard for Santorum heading into Super Tuesday to solidify him -- not Gingrich -- as the alternative to Romney, who has not been able to bring the conservative base into his camp.

"February is about perception and momentum leading into Super Tuesday," the adviser said.

The Santorum campaign believes that Tuesday's strong showing will be a huge boost to its fund-raising efforts, even scheduling its next stop in Texas.

"That's where the money is," the adviser said.

This is a sample of the UNCLASSIFIED, non-covert US Military Bases! How do you think a "crazed & fanatic religious ruled country" would feel! They are set to bring the Apocalypse, are we spurring them on?

Each of the 45 black dots is a U.S. military base.



But Iran is the one threatening the U.S.?

Kind of gives you a little bit different view, huh? Thanks, Tom!

I'm going to forward this right to the member who sent the Israel cartoon yesterday. ^_^

Well, I've been to most of those bases and they are there for the most part to prosecute the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Still, you make an interesting point, Tom.

Yesterday's FotM Newsletter contained an error in attribution (Art instead of SteveB on one submission).

Once an edition has been emailed, it cannot be corrected. Instead, I try to keep the FotM Newsletters on the website corrected. For instance, yesterday's corrected FotM Newsletter is at:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/20120206-0067.pdf>.

All of the FotM Newsletters in PDF format can be read in multiple-sized type with full search capabilities using Acrobat or your regular browser. See:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org>.

In the future, the indexed monthly compilations will become the definitive editions. These will continue to be corrected in lieu of the daily editions, which will become semi-obsolete once they are compiled into a monthly.

20120207-04	11:02	SteveB	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (to Bill)
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I had been thinking about Davos and woke up in the middle of the night still extremely puzzled by your opposition to my statement that American companies and corporations don't pay income taxes, their customers and clients do. Remember, we have always been talking only about income taxes—federal and state.

You maintained that this was not always the case. What are those cases and, if they exist, aren't they so rare as to be incredibly of no impact to the veracity of my original statement?

Let's look at the case of every single business in America. They have to pay taxes on Apr. 15 (without an extension) and/or quarterly (ditto). All of these tax payments are all made after the quarter in question has ended, not before or during. Businesses know or make pretty good guesses, nowadays, the amounts of those tax payments that are due AFTER THE FACT. They are very simple and must be one of two cases:

1. The business did not make a profit that quarter. No one will owe any income taxes at any time (pending possible future adjustments which do not dilute my argument).
2. The business made a profit (because of sales and/or services sold, nothing else will turn a profit, not even selling the factory), in which case a tax must be paid, but it comes directly out of the profit that was made that quarter. **The customers/clients money will be used to pay it, because that is the only source of profit.**

Capital gains are something else but, again, have no impact on my argument, just as vehicle licensing taxes don't.

My more important argument is, since they don't exist anyway, let's just get rid of all business income taxes and let everything be like proprietorships and S corps. Why not?

20120207-12	16:11	Bill	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (reply to SteveB, above)
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Hate to make your sleep uneasy. Let me try again to explain why I couldn't accept your statement. First I'll show the case related to accelerated depreciation—admittedly a bit esoteric but still wholly relevant—and then I'll make the more general, risk-related argument as to why what you asserted isn't accurate.

Let's say a business entity opts to use accelerated depreciation. Almost all do, because it amounts to free money. In fact, the competitive pressures typically require that they do, otherwise, competitors will have an edge. Congress allows accelerated depreciation in its many forms as measures that will augment business fortunes, allowing the business entity to retain capital and to re-invest it. What should be known also is that many industries, particularly those that are capital-intensive, lobby for accelerated depreciation preferences or their renewal to feather their own nests or keep their stock prices higher.)

Now, as to the mechanism of accelerated depreciation and its effects on earnings—the part that is of greatest concern to you: The business entity is allowed to depreciate a disproportionate amount of its capital investment early in the life of that investment. Depreciation expense, then, is raised, and earnings, *ceteris paribus*, are reduced in the period when that disproportionate expense, i. e. accelerated depreciation, is taken. (Do bear in mind—and I think this is important to your concerns—that capital investments are typically depreciated over several years, so depreciation for accelerated depreciation of a given capital investment is high early in the investment's life and low later in its life.)

In consequence of the accelerated depreciation, then, greater depreciation expense is not available in later years. The result, again *ceteris paribus*, is that taxable earnings rise. Now, juxtapose that mechanism with a deteriorating economy in a time when many businesses cannot or choose not to make additional capital investment to continually avail themselves of accelerated depreciation.

Their revenue may be decreasing because of a weakening economy, but their taxable earnings, because of artificially low depreciation, won't be diminishing at the same rate. The crucial question is whether the resulting (state, federal, and other) taxes can be priced into the market. The answer for many entities was or is that they can't do it when the economy is on a downer.

More generally with respect to businesses that can't price taxes into charges for their goods and services (this happens again and again and again), such businesses first suffer reduced return and then consume their own capital.

These are the scenarios that caused me to demur when you asserted that "Businesses don't pay any taxes. Ever." It just ain't so. I suppose you could argue that those businesses that enter bankruptcy, whether Chapter 7 or 11, don't pay their taxes, but I would counter-argue that the great majority of them will have suffered loss of return and all or part of their capital. Risk is at the center of my disagreement with your assertion. You go into business, and you can lose your shirt—and wind up, as either owner or shareholder, effectively paying taxes that your business or investee owes—until your capital is consumed. If you're as big as GM, maybe you can get the taxpayers to make your solvent, but the old shareholders of GM were left with their capital having flown over the horizon.

20120207-21	22:30	SteveB	Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (reply to Bill, above)
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It can get complicated.

And your point argues well for why businesses should not have their incomes taxed.

It benefits a business to depreciate assets quickly, in most cases (all cases?). In the early years this decreases profit and, therefore, taxes. These gains cannot be ignored in analyzing the last years of the depreciation cycle when the opportunity to decrease profit and taxes is reduced.

Ah...what you're saying is that in the early years of depreciation, part of the "apparent" profit comes from capital because the depreciation is in essence too rapid at that point? So these taxes come from capital? I think this is irrelevant.

Still, any profit which appears at the end of a quarter arises out of all you discuss, among other things. Depreciation doesn't hurt you here. During the whole cycle, either you made a profit in a quarter or not. If you did, the money needed to pay taxes came from sales. Regardless of what accounting (if consistent) is used to calculate profit. Regardless of the results of depreciation for that quarter. If a profit is made in a quarter, that money came from sales. Therefore, any income taxes paid came from sales.

Income taxes on profit are not what will eat the capital of a business and should never do so. They are not intended to do so, otherwise business income taxes would be on gross income.

You say: "Their revenue may be decreasing because of a weakening economy, but their taxable earnings, because of artificially low depreciation, won't be diminishing at the same rate. The crucial question is whether the resulting (state, federal, and other) taxes can be priced into the market. The answer for many entities was or is that they can't do it when the economy is on a downer."

The business you discuss is suffering some at that time, but it isn't paying taxes out of anything but sales. If the profit looks artificially high at this time, it only compensates for when it looked high before. But I don't think pricing has anything to do with it. And it doesn't matter if, at the end of the depreciation cycle, the business doesn't benefit as much as it did at the beginning. If the company pays income taxes, it is because it made a quarterly profit. If it made a profit it had taxable earnings. Those earnings came from sales. If taxes are due, they came from sales.

Maybe if you could clearly explain to me a quarter that a business could experience where it would pay income taxes out of anything but income. I'm still unable to picture the situation. Accounting tricks can be used to cut the pie in many different ways, but when there is no pie, it doesn't matter because no taxes are paid. Where quarterly accounting tricks are used, things will even out eventually.

Please let me know the error of my ways, but I'm pretty damned sure I'm on to something really important.

20120207-05	11:08	SteveG	"Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops"
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ANY TRUTH TO THIS??

from "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" by Pat Dollard, The War Starts Here!

Feb. 4, 2012, (<http://patdollard.com/2012/02/obama-pulls-combat-pay-for-u-s-troops/>)

President Obama's latest policy outrage makes no attempt to hide his contempt for our military, as he is ordering that our troops serving overseas in war zones overseas are not to receive combat pay unless they are being shot at. A Marine who lives in Florida has just posted a note on Facebook which stated that he received a letter from his PayPal account that he would only be receiving his Hazard pay (Imminent Danger Pay) if he is actually in a hostile area and at risk of being shot at.

Continues...

20120207-06	11:18	Art	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Far as I know it has always been that way. You only draw combat pay if you are in a combat zone. This is not new unless I missed something in the last few years.

Some of it is pretty goofy actually. Saudi Arabia was considered a combat zone for tax purposes at least throughout the 90's. The USAF folks, active duty, would plan their TDYs to go on the last day of a month and stay through the 1st day of the next month, thereby getting two months of pay tax free. I found that pretty ugly even if it was legal.

SNOPEs backs me up.

20120207-07	11:43	Pam	Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)
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If this is true, it's terrible. EVERYONE in Afghanistan and Iraq should get combat pay. When I lived in Afghanistan in the early 60s, it was considered a "hardship post" and everyone got combat pay for just being there.

[20120207-09](#) 11:53 SteveB Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)

Art is right.

The article is misleading and untruthful. Looks to me like everyone in Afghanistan would continue to get combat pay as usual because they would be: "On duty in a foreign area in which he was subject to the threat of physical harm or imminent danger on the basis of civil insurrection, civil war, terrorism, or wartime conditions."

The one exception is that, starting Feb. 1, 2012, what Congress did was change the prorating of the monthly combat pay to daily, saving a little taxpayer money and make things a little fairer. This is what the Right wants, right? Funny it gets so distorted and blamed on Obama, huh? See: <http://www.snopes.com/politics/military/combattpay.asp>, where it's all explained pretty well.

[20120207-10](#) 11:59 SteveG Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to all, above)

If someone is stationed in Afghanistan, getting combat pay, and then goes on a 2 week leave, do they get combat pay for those 2 weeks?

During Vietnam my brother was on a B52 crew stationed for 6 months in Guam and later in Thailand. Daily 12 hour missions of bombing Vietnam but no combat pay as he was stationed in a non-combat area.

[20120207-11](#) 12:27 Art Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to SteveG, above)

Well the way they used to do it is designate by areas. Vietnam was a combat zone but Thailand and Guam were not. We didn't get much in those days - maybe \$125 a month. Of course, flight crews got flight pay which we ground pounders did not. Steve, are you sure your brother did not get some special pay if he was on bombing missions over Vietnam???

During Desert Storm I think Northern Saudi was combat pay but not sure about the rest. You have to be careful here because there are many different subsidies according to the organization you belong to and so forth. Pam was talking about when she was Afghanistan. As a hardship post the State and USAID folks got a differential, maybe 25% of their pay, but the active duty military, probably all attaches, did not. Military folks on the other hand get a housing allowance, if they live off post in the USA, State Dept. folks do not. And so on. As Steve B say the article is misleading. The guy is stationed in Florida, probably Tampa, for gosh sakes. He shouldn't get combat pay.

[20120207-13](#) 17:59 SteveG "Komen's Ambiguous Apology"

This is interesting and gives a good perspectives on their unconscionable decision to not help fund Planned Parenthood, but make sure you read the last paragraph---talk about "pro life".

"Komen's Ambiguous Apology" by Katha Pollitt, *The Nation*

Feb. 3, 2012, (<http://www.thenation.com/blog/166076/komens-ambiguous-apology>)

The Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation must have been totally unprepared for the firestorm provoked by its announcement that it was severing its long relationship with Planned Parenthood, which for at least five years had been receiving grants to provide low-income women with breast exams and mammogram referrals. Komen showed

itself to be both dishonest and ridiculous: there was its initial long silence over the decision, followed by a flurry of flimsy and inconsistent explanations—first it was that Planned Parenthood was being investigated by Representative Cliff Stearns; then it was a change in criteria for funding. And what PR genius advised it to childishly delete negative comments on its Facebook page? Result: Planned Parenthood was deluged with donations to keep its breast care services going, including a \$250,000 matching grant from New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg; twenty-two senators signed a critical statement; there were resignations among staffers and open rebellion among volunteers. Andrea Mitchell's interview with Nancy Brinker on MSNBC was as close to open distaste as that very polite journalist ever gets. Mitchell is herself a breast cancer survivor, and the expression on her face as she questioned Brinker was as if she were steeling herself to pick up a dead mouse.

The massive show of prochoice strength worked. Friday morning Komen released a statement apologizing for its decision and acknowledging the unfairness of cutting off PP because of the Stearns investigation: "We will amend the criteria to make clear that disqualifying investigations must be criminal and conclusive in nature and not political. That is what is right and fair." (Forget for the moment that Brinker denied the investigation had anything to do with the ban on PP). This is excellent news: Komen has in essence admitted that the Stearns probe is politically motivated, which must sting recently hired senior VP for public policy Karen Handel, who publicly favored defunding PP when she ran as a Palin-endorsed candidate in the 2010 Republican gubernatorial primary.

But the rest of the statement is less clear. It continues:

We will continue to fund existing grants, including those of Planned Parenthood, and preserve their eligibility to apply for future grants, while maintaining the ability of our affiliates to make funding decisions that meet the needs of their communities.

This has widely been taken to mean Komen has backed down completely, i.e., will return to making grants to PP. But look more closely: that is not what it says. Komen says only that it will fund "existing grants"—that means, it will fund grants it has already formally agreed to make. Well, it is legally required to do that, isn't it? It can't rescind a grant on the basis of a rule made after the grant was offered. The original banning always referred to the future, and as to that, Komen says only that PP can apply for funding, not that Komen will continue to make grants to it as it has for many years. Nothing prevents Komen from altering its criteria in ways designed to exclude PP—for example, as Brinker suggested to Mitchell, deciding against funding breast care outside of mammogram centers.

And what about the bit about allowing affiliates "to make funding decisions that meet the needs of their communities?" Does that mean affiliates will be free to refuse to support PP, setting the stage for state and local anti-choice takeover efforts? It's all rather unclear, and much too soon to declare victory and go home. It could mean a lesson well learned—but it could be just spin. After all, Handel, whoever hired her and whoever approved the original ban on PP are still there.

Nonetheless, this is a real win for pro-choicers. We hear so much anti-choice propaganda, we may not always remember that, actually, Planned Parenthood is not sketchy and controversial out there in mainstream America. It is beloved. Beloved. Note the relief- and gratitude-saturated testimonies like the ones collected practically overnight by the social media activist Deanna Zandt at the Tumblr site [Planned Parenthood Saved Me](#). And it is beloved most of all by women who care a lot about women's health—among whom Komen volunteers figure prominently. Breast cancer activism began as a feminist cause, after all: the initial impetus, back when Komen was founded in 1982, was the silence and shame surrounding the disease, the lack of research funding and the general sexism pervading treatment. Those are all feminist issues, and were structured as such in public discourse at the time. It was like *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in action.

Komen miscalculated by thinking its base cares only about breast cancer: in fact, those women in pink t-shirts and sneakers, raising their thousands upon thousands of dollars a year for breast cancer research, understand quite well that women's health means more than tumor-free breasts. If Komen understood that but thought—and maybe still thinks—it can deceive those activists, or gradually shed them and acquire a whole other, equally dedicated, base of anti-choicers, it will dwindle and die. Anti-choicers are not interested in breast cancer activism; they're interested in stopping abortion. They proved that by their eagerness to deprive of breast care women for whom PP was the only available option.

How things now stand: by Friday afternoon, PP was reporting that it has raised \$3,000,000 since the Komen story broke. Meanwhile, just in time for February, Breast Cancer Awareness Month, Komen is partnering with Discount Gun Sales, a Seattle distributor, to market a pink handgun. Because nothing says "pro-life" like a Walther P-22 Hope Edition.

[20120207-15](#) 18:07 Pam Re: "Komen's Ambiguous Apology" (reply to SteveG, above)

Wow. A pink gun. How quaint.

There's an article on Romney in the latest *New Yorker* that's worth a read.

[20120207-17](#) 19:56 Art Re: "Komen's Ambiguous Apology" (reply to SteveG, above)

You have got to be kidding!

On another note our progressive State Legislature and senate has, in the interest of dealing with critical issues that affect us all, voted to overturn a law that limited purchases of hand guns to one a month in the Old Dominion. Now you can buy many as many handguns as you want every day. Can anyone give me one reason anything good could come from this?

[20120207-18](#) 20:54 Pam Guns in an Insane Asylum

On the local news tonight, there was a segment on the state legislature's (or the county's, not sure which) debate over whether to allow guns in public parks. There's been talk also of allowing guns on college campuses. We all live in an insane asylum.

[20120207-19](#) 21:19 Art Re: Guns in an Insane Asylum (reply to Pam, above)

Remember the pictures/news shots of tea baggers wearing/carrying guns to political events a couple of years ago? There are 3 parks outside of Yakima where shooting is allowed – one is unsupervised and reportedly there have been automatic weapons used to shoot everything from discarded couches, appliances, & propane tanks.

[20120207-20](#) 21:27 Dennis Re: Guns in an Insane Asylum (reply to Pam, above)

An article in the *New York Times* today about diminishing interest around the world for using the U.S. Constitution as a model for other national constitutions revealed two interesting points, at least to me.

One was that Thomas Jefferson thought that a new constitution would be needed every 19 years so that it could meet the needs of succeeding generations. I guess the Jefferson-loving original constructionists do their best to ignore this.

The second was that only three constitutions in the whole world say that citizens have the right to own guns. Those three are Mexico, Guatemala, and the US of A. Must be why Mexico is such a great market for Americans selling guns across the border to drug-dealing gangsters.

[20120207-14](#) 18:00 SteveG "Anniversaries from Unhistory"

"Anniversaries from Unhistory" by Noam Chomsky, [NationofChange](#)

Feb. 7, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/anniversaries-unhistory-1328625093>)

"The core of unhistory is to 'disappear' what happened." —Noam Chomsky

20120207-16

19:34

SteveG

Fw: MoveOn Petition: Tell President Obama to Veto Extending Bush Tax Cuts to the 1%!

from MoveOn.org:

<http://pol.moveon.org/vetobushtaxcuts/?id=35508-18997482-6FHqLax&t=2>

[This is a good one! –SteveB]

20120207-22

23:05

SteveG

Yakima, WA City Council Meeting

Below is a local email in regards to Occupy Yakima efforts against big banks. There was one city manager for about 30 years – he retired several months ago. His replacement was from Florida, lasted 4 months and quit to return to Florida because of a close relative's illness. The current city manager is acting until a permanent replacement is found. I think it will be interesting to find out why the national banks were chosen and if the council makes a change.

I went to the Yakima City Council Meeting for round 2 of my discussion with them why they were banking with Bank of America. Last meeting they told me they would research why B of A was their chosen bank. This meeting they informed me they bank with US Bank, Key Bank and Bank of America. The acting City Manager Morales said the banks were chosen because they met the cities needs (wonder why no one else did?). With that grand explanation, I discussed with them why they were banking with an bank that was found guilty of criminal activity with many national cases pending? I asked them why they werenot using a pre-qualification bidding process to screen OUT bidders that have been found guilty of crimes and have legal actions pending against them? Went from there to discuss researching the bidders to see if they have provided services to similiar agencies, and have those agencies been satisfied with their bidder's services. Then I closed to remind them of B of A's criminal activities and thanked them, then left.

Last time I got a lot of blank stares, and some irritated looks. This time they were quiet, attentive, and actually looked at me. I felt good about it, because they paid attention this time. No telling whether this will make a difference in their way of thought, but at least the thought was presented to them.

I am leaving town for a couple of days for the coast, but definitely will be back for fun at B of A on Saturday for demonstration.

<http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/national-parks/yellowstone-national-park/>

Grand Prismatic Spring, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming/Montana (David Mencia)



—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 #70 — FEB. 9, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

More Than Politics

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

At Friends of the Middle, we're always trying to understand why things are the way they are. One of the biggest puzzles we've come across is roughly this: Why do we seem to just beat our heads against walls when Left tries to talk to Right or Right tries to talk to Left? We've discussed how there appears to be some kind of unbridgeable chasm between us. Why this would be the case now, when it wasn't the case with our Founding Fathers more than 200 years ago, who but the "Controller\$" would know?

Then, there was much more at stake, when revolution and insurrection could easily have broken the fragile union. Now, we have dangerous idiots who run around spouting dogma they are fed by big money—when they can remember and spit it out. They don't truly even seem to understand it. They certainly have not thought it through, except for Newt, maybe, who has thought it all the way through to the Gestapo.

Or maybe this article will put the problem in a little more perspective.

"Conservatives vs. Liberals: More Than Politics" by Thomas B. Edsall, Huffington Post

Feb. 8, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/thomas-b-edsall/conservatives-vs-liberals_b_1262309.html?ref=politics&ir=Politics)

(The following is an excerpt from *The Age of Austerity: How Scarcity Will Remake American Politics*.)

The contest for power between Democrats and Republicans pits two antithetical value systems against each other; two conflicting concepts of freedom, liberty, fairness, right, and wrong; two mutually exclusive notions of the state, the individual, and the collective good.

A wide range of academic scholarship exploring political belief-formation reveals that those who identify themselves as politically conservative, for example, exhibit distinctive values underpinning their world view and their orientation towards political competition.

Conservatives, argues researcher Philip Tetlock of the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, are less tolerant of compromise; see the world in "us" versus "them" terms; are more willing to use force to gain an advantage; are "more prone to rely on simple (good vs. bad) evaluative rules in interpreting policy issues;" are "motivated to punish violators of social norms (e.g., deviations from traditional norms of sexuality or responsible behavior) and to deter free riders."

Some of these conservative values can be discerned in public opinion data.

In one September 2010 survey question, The Pew Research Center asked voters, "If you had to choose, would you rather have a smaller government providing fewer services, or a bigger government providing more services?" White Republican men chose a smaller government by a 92-7 margin and white Republican women made the same choice by an 82-12 margin. Conversely, white Democratic men chose bigger government by a 53-35 margin and white Democratic women by 56-33. This is an ideological gap between Republicans and Democrats of 57 points among white men and 49 points among white women.

Along similar lines, Pew asked voters to choose between "Most people who want to get ahead can make it if they're willing to work hard" and "Hard work and determination are no guarantee of success for most people." White Republican men and women both picked "hard work" by decisive margins of 78-21 and 73-24, respectively. White Democratic men and women, in contrast, were far more equivocal, supporting hard work by modest margins of 52-44 and 53-43.

These Pew findings demonstrate that the differences of opinion between liberals and conservatives are far greater than the differences in opinion between men and women commonly referred to as the gender gap.

The Pew questions are designed to test opinion on public policy issues. The strength of the Pew surveys and other comparable, well-designed polls is that the sample is carefully selected to be representative of either the general public or of all voters. The limitation of such surveys is that they are not designed to reveal more subtle distinctions that can be equally or more significant.

This less easily answered question has been explored by a team of academic researchers collaborating at a website – <http://www.YourMorals.org> -- designed to test a variety of theories about the connection between views on morality and politics. Jonathan Haidt and Nicholas Winter of the University of Virginia, and Ravi Iyer of the University of Southern California, have collected and systematized very large numbers of responses to questions designed to elicit new information about political values orientation. Haidt et al. have ranked responses to a set of online public opinion surveys to show where self-described liberal/moderates differ most sharply from conservative/moderates. The strength of the YourMorals.org surveys lies in the large number of respondents; the weakness grows out of the fact that the participants are self-selected, and represent well-educated elites on the left, right, and center, with little representation of the poor, working class, or lower-middle class.

The findings published by Haidt et al. powerfully reinforce the paradigm of two roughly equivalent political coalitions: the first, a socially and economically dominant coalition on the right; the second, a coalition on the left composed of relatively disadvantaged (subdominant) voters in alliance with relatively well-educated, well-off, culturally liberal professionals ('information workers,' 'symbol analysts,' 'creatives,' 'knowledge workers,' etc.). The Haidt et al. data sheds new light on what it means, across a gamut of issues, when someone says he or she is a liberal or a conservative.

What kinds of questions and values statements provoke the sharpest divide between left and right? The team looked at responses to 107 questions and found that the most divisive questions included those in the following areas:

1. WAR, PEACE, VIOLENCE, EMPATHY WITH THE WORLD:

On key questions and statements in this category, liberals scored high, conservatives low: "I believe peace is extremely important"; "Understanding, appreciation, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature"; "One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal"; "How close do you feel to people all over the world?"

On other key questions in this area, conservatives scored high, and liberals low: "War is sometimes the best way to solve a conflict"; "There is nothing wrong in getting back at someone who has hurt you."

2. CRIME AND PUNISHMENT; MORAL ELASTICITY; AUTHORITY:

Again, on some questions in this category, liberals scored high, conservatives low: "I believe that offenders should be provided with counseling to aid in their rehabilitation"; "What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another."

On other questions, conservatives scored high and liberals low: "People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed"; "Respect for authority is something all children need to learn"; "I believe that 'an eye for an eye' is the correct philosophy behind punishing offenders"; "The 'old-fashioned ways' and 'old-fashioned values' still show the best way to live"; "It feels wrong when...a person commits a crime and goes unpunished."

3. THE POOR, REDISTRIBUTION, FAIRNESS:

Liberal high, conservative low: "It feels wrong when...an employee who needs their job, is fired"; "I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing"; "I often have tender, concerned feelings for people less fortunate than me."

Conservative high, liberal low: "[I place a high value on] safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self"; "[It's desirable when] employees [who] contribute more to the success of the company receive a larger share"; "[I value] social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources."

4. MORALS, HEDONISM, SELF-FULFILLMENT, HIERARCHY:

Liberals high, conservatives low: "I see myself as someone who...is original, comes up with new ideas"; "Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself"; "What is ethical varies from one situation and society to another."

Conservative high, liberal low: "If certain groups stayed in their place, we would have fewer problems"; "People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong"; "Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs that traditional culture provide"; "[I favor] restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms."

Their findings show how profound the chasm is on values questions between liberals and conservatives. Generally speaking, not only do liberals place high importance on peace, mutual understanding, and empathy for those who have difficulty prevailing in competition, they demonstrate concern for equality of outcome, while conservatives place pointedly low or negative importance on such values. On the other side, conservatives believe that the use of force is a legitimate method of conflict resolution across a range of domains, from war to law enforcement to the discipline of children. Conservatives are more likely to believe in an "eye for an eye," are more likely to respect received tradition, and are overwhelmingly committed to the proposition that individuals are responsible for their own economic condition -- all views rejected by liberals.

From a different vantage point -- taking data from American National Election Studies (ANES) surveys conducted between 1972 and 2004, the University of Virginia's Nicholas Winter analyzed the words respondents used to describe the two political parties. In *Masculine Republicans and Feminine Democrats: Gender and Americans' Explicit and Implicit Images of the Political Parties*, Winter categorized words respondents volunteered as stereotypically "male" or "female:"

[M]asculine men are thought to be active, independent, and decisive; feminine women are thought to be compassionate, devoted to others, emotional, and kind. These core traits are linked with a range of other features, including other traits (masculine men are aggressive, practical, tough, hardworking, and hierarchical; feminine women are gentle, submissive, soft, ladylike, and egalitarian); physical characteristics (masculine men are big, strong, and muscular; feminine women are small, weak, and soft-spoken).

(This excerpt first appeared at <http://www.theatlantic.com>.)

[20120208-01](#) 09:44 Pam Re: Yakima, WA City Council Meeting (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #69)

Go, SteveG. This kind of activism is exactly what we need.

[20120208-02](#) 11:47 Art Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to all, FotM Newsletter #69)

Here's the full story. It does fix a real abuse problem in my opinion. The good Marine was probably stationed at CENTCOM HQ in Tampa. He would fly into Afghanistan on 30 MAR and fly back home on 1 APR and got two months worth of combat pay, since it was calculated on a monthly basis only. Now it is calculated on a daily basis and he will only get two days worth. And, of course, it was a Congressional fix. More tea bag BS.

<http://www.snopes.com/politics/military/combattpay.asp> [And see FotM Newsletter #69. -SteveB]

[20120208-03](#) 12:21 Pam Re: "Obama Pulls Combat Pay For Deployed U.S. Troops" (reply to Art, above)

Thanks for clearing that up.

[20120208-05](#) 13:30 SteveBA Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Tom, FotM Newsletter #69)

Why do we need that many bases? I think it's time to revamp our strategy to the new world.

Here's the problem with any revamping. It isn't profitable for the American oligarchy.



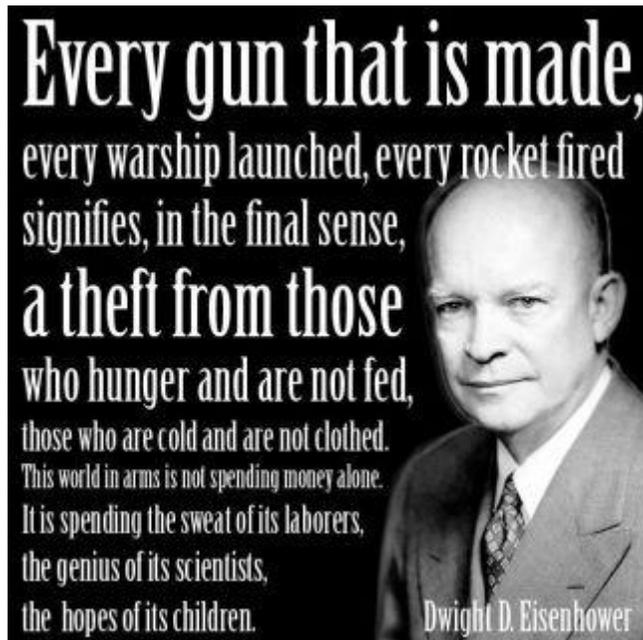
Well, sooner or later, when we realize we are out of money, then the changes will get made out of necessity. Do we still need to maintain a military presence in Europe? I think not, same with Japan.

What are you, SteveBA, some kind of leftist peace-nik?

They didn't listen to Eisenhower fifty years ago and I doubt being out of money will change the thinking in Washington now. There is too much profit to be made for the vultures around the Pentagon to give up their feasting, even if it must be charged to a credit card as it was for Iraq and Afghanistan. The corporate-militarists will keep up the national security fear-mongering drumbeat as needed to keep the revenues flowing into their greedy pockets.

They'll argue that troops are needed in Europe so they'll be close to Iran (and/or Hamas and Hezbollah) and in Japan to keep an eye on North Korea (and/or China). And we'll need to keep developing that ultra-expensive high tech weaponry so we can kill our enemy du jour in the most costly way possible.

Hey guys, I am an ex professional soldier. It may take me a little time to swing over to the Dark Side.



[20120208-15](#) 19:19 Dennis Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to Art, above)

So was Eisenhower. If he could do it....

[20120208-16](#) 19:38 SteveG Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to all, above) & "America's Empire of Bases"

[Wow! What great corroboration of Tom's map in FotM Newsletter #69! -SteveB]

"America's Empire of Bases" by Chalmers Johnson, TomDispatch.com /CommonDreams

Jan. 15, 2004, (<http://www.commondreams.org/views04/0115-08.htm>)

As distinct from other peoples, most Americans do not recognize -- or do not want to recognize -- that the United States dominates the world through its military power. Due to government secrecy, our citizens are often ignorant of the fact that our garrisons encircle the planet. This vast network of American bases on every continent except Antarctica actually constitutes a new form of empire -- an empire of bases with its own geography not likely to be taught in any high school geography class. Without grasping the dimensions of this globe-girdling Baseworld, one can't begin to understand the size and nature of our imperial aspirations or the degree to which a new kind of militarism is undermining our constitutional order.

Our military deploys well over half a million soldiers, spies, technicians, teachers, dependents, and civilian contractors in other nations. To dominate the oceans and seas of the world, we are creating some thirteen naval task forces built around aircraft carriers whose names sum up our martial heritage -- Kitty Hawk, Constellation, Enterprise, John F. Kennedy, Nimitz, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Carl Vinson, Theodore Roosevelt, Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, John C. Stennis, Harry S. Truman, and Ronald Reagan. We operate numerous secret bases outside our territory to monitor what the people of the world, including our own citizens, are saying, faxing, or e-mailing to one another.

Our installations abroad bring profits to civilian industries, which design and manufacture weapons for the armed forces or, like the now well-publicized Kellogg, Brown & Root company, a subsidiary of the Halliburton Corporation of Houston, undertake contract services to build and maintain our far-flung outposts. One task of such contractors is to keep uniformed members of the imperium housed in comfortable quarters, well fed, amused, and supplied

with enjoyable, affordable vacation facilities. Whole sectors of the American economy have come to rely on the military for sales. On the eve of our second war on Iraq, for example, while the Defense Department was ordering up an extra ration of cruise missiles and depleted-uranium armor-piercing tank shells, it also acquired 273,000 bottles of Native Tan sunblock, almost triple its 1999 order and undoubtedly a boon to the supplier, Control Supply Company of Tulsa, Oklahoma, and its subcontractor, Sun Fun Products of Daytona Beach, Florida.

At Least Seven Hundred Foreign Bases

It's not easy to assess the size or exact value of our empire of bases. Official records on these subjects are misleading, although instructive. According to the Defense Department's annual "Base Structure Report" for fiscal year 2003, which itemizes foreign and domestic U.S. military real estate, the Pentagon currently owns or rents 702 overseas bases in about 130 countries and HAS another 6,000 bases in the United States and its territories. Pentagon bureaucrats calculate that it would require at least \$113.2 billion to replace just the foreign bases -- surely far too low a figure but still larger than the gross domestic product of most countries -- and an estimated \$591,519.8 million to replace all of them. The military high command deploys to our overseas bases some 253,288 uniformed personnel, plus an equal number of dependents and Department of Defense civilian officials, and employs an additional 44,446 locally hired foreigners. The Pentagon claims that these bases contain 44,870 barracks, hangars, hospitals, and other buildings, which it owns, and that it leases 4,844 more.

These numbers, although staggeringly large, do not begin to cover all the actual bases we occupy globally. The 2003 Base Status Report fails to mention, for instance, any garrisons in Kosovo -- even though it is the site of the huge Camp Bondsteel, built in 1999 and maintained ever since by Kellogg, Brown & Root. The Report similarly omits bases in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Qatar, and Uzbekistan, although the U.S. military has established colossal base structures throughout the so-called arc of instability in the two-and-a-half years since 9/11.

For Okinawa, the southernmost island of Japan, which has been an American military colony for the past 58 years, the report deceptively lists only one Marine base, Camp Butler, when in fact Okinawa "hosts" ten Marine Corps bases, including Marine Corps Air Station Futenma occupying 1,186 acres in the center of that modest-sized island's second largest city. (Manhattan's Central Park, by contrast, is only 843 acres.) The Pentagon similarly fails to note all of the \$5-billion-worth of military and espionage installations in Britain, which have long been conveniently disguised as Royal Air Force bases. If there were an honest count, the actual size of our military empire would probably top 1,000 different bases in other people's countries, but no one -- possibly not even the Pentagon -- knows the exact number for sure, although it has been distinctly on the rise in recent years.

For their occupants, these are not unpleasant places to live and work. Military service today, which is voluntary, bears almost no relation to the duties of a soldier during World War II or the Korean or Vietnamese wars. Most chores like laundry, KP ("kitchen police"), mail call, and cleaning latrines have been subcontracted to private military companies like Kellogg, Brown & Root, DynCorp, and the Vinnell Corporation. Fully one-third of the funds recently appropriated for the war in Iraq (about \$30 billion), for instance, are going into private American hands for exactly such services. Where possible everything is done to make daily existence seem like a Hollywood version of life at home. According to the Washington Post, in Fallujah, just west of Baghdad, waiters in white shirts, black pants, and black bow ties serve dinner to the officers of the 82nd Airborne Division in their heavily guarded compound, and the first Burger King has already gone up inside the enormous military base we've established at Baghdad International Airport.

Some of these bases are so gigantic they require as many as nine internal bus routes for soldiers and civilian contractors to get around inside the earthen berms and concertina wire. That's the case at Camp Anaconda, headquarters of the 3rd Brigade, 4th Infantry Division, whose job is to police some 1,500 square miles of Iraq north of Baghdad, from Samarra to Taji. Anaconda occupies 25 square kilometers and will ultimately house as many as 20,000 troops. Despite extensive security precautions, the base has frequently come under mortar attack, notably on the Fourth of July, 2003, just as Arnold Schwarzenegger was chatting up our wounded at the local field hospital.

The military prefers bases that resemble small fundamentalist towns in the Bible Belt rather than the big population centers of the United States. For example, even though more than 100,000 women live on our overseas bases -- including women in the services, spouses, and relatives of military personnel -- obtaining an abortion at a local

military hospital is prohibited. Since there are some 14,000 sexual assaults or attempted sexual assaults each year in the military, women who become pregnant overseas and want an abortion have no choice but to try the local economy, which cannot be either easy or pleasant in Baghdad or other parts of our empire these days.

Our armed missionaries live in a closed-off, self-contained world serviced by its own airline -- the Air Mobility Command, with its fleet of long-range C-17 Globemasters, C-5 Galaxies, C-141 Starlifters, KC-135 Stratotankers, KC-10 Extenders, and C-9 Nightingales that link our far-flung outposts from Greenland to Australia. For generals and admirals, the military provides seventy-one Learjets, thirteen Gulfstream IIIs, and seventeen Cessna Citation luxury jets to fly them to such spots as the armed forces' ski and vacation center at Garmisch in the Bavarian Alps or to any of the 234 military golf courses the Pentagon operates worldwide. Defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld flies around in his own personal Boeing 757, called a C-32A in the Air Force.

Our "Footprint" on the World

Of all the insensitive, if graphic, metaphors we've allowed into our vocabulary, none quite equals "footprint" to describe the military impact of our empire. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Richard Myers and senior members of the Senate's Military Construction Subcommittee such as Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) are apparently incapable of completing a sentence without using it. Establishing a more impressive footprint has now become part of the new justification for a major enlargement of our empire -- and an announced repositioning of our bases and forces abroad -- in the wake of our conquest of Iraq. The man in charge of this project is Andy Hoehn, deputy assistant secretary of defense for strategy. He and his colleagues are supposed to draw up plans to implement President Bush's preventive war strategy against "rogue states," "bad guys," and "evil-doers." They have identified something they call the "arc of instability," which is said to run from the Andean region of South America (read: Colombia) through North Africa and then sweeps across the Middle East to the Philippines and Indonesia. This is, of course, more or less identical with what used to be called the Third World -- and perhaps no less crucially it covers the world's key oil reserves. Hoehn contends, "When you overlay our footprint onto that, we don't look particularly well-positioned to deal with the problems we're now going to confront."

Once upon a time, you could trace the spread of imperialism by counting up colonies. America's version of the colony is the military base. By following the changing politics of global basing, one can learn much about our ever larger imperial stance and the militarism that grows with it. Militarism and imperialism are Siamese twins joined at the hip. Each thrives off the other. Already highly advanced in our country, they are both on the verge of a quantum leap that will almost surely stretch our military beyond its capabilities, bringing about fiscal insolvency and very possibly doing mortal damage to our republican institutions. The only way this is discussed in our press is via reportage on highly arcane plans for changes in basing policy and the positioning of troops abroad -- and these plans, as reported in the media, cannot be taken at face value.

Marine Brig. Gen. Mastin Robeson, commanding our 1,800 troops occupying the old French Foreign Legion base at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti at the entrance to the Red Sea, claims that in order to put "preventive war" into action, we require a "global presence," by which he means gaining hegemony over any place that is not already under our thumb. According to the right-wing American Enterprise Institute, the idea is to create "a global cavalry" that can ride in from "frontier stockades" and shoot up the "bad guys" as soon as we get some intelligence on them.

"Lily Pads" in Australia, Romania, Mali, Algeria...

In order to put our forces close to every hot spot or danger area in this newly discovered arc of instability, the Pentagon has been proposing -- this is usually called "repositioning" -- many new bases, including at least four and perhaps as many as six permanent ones in Iraq. A number of these are already under construction -- at Baghdad International Airport, Tallil air base near Nasariyah, in the western desert near the Syrian border, and at Bashur air field in the Kurdish region of the north. (This does not count the previously mentioned Anaconda, which is currently being called an "operating base," though it may very well become permanent over time.) In addition, we plan to keep under our control the whole northern quarter of Kuwait -- 1,600 square miles out of Kuwait's 6,900 square miles -- that we now use to resupply our Iraq legions and as a place for Green Zone bureaucrats to relax.

Other countries mentioned as sites for what Colin Powell calls our new "family of bases" include: In the impoverished areas of the "new" Europe -- Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria; in Asia -- Pakistan (where we already

have four bases), India, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, and even, unbelievably, Vietnam; in North Africa -- Morocco, Tunisia, and especially Algeria (scene of the slaughter of some 100,000 civilians since 1992, when, to quash an election, the military took over, backed by our country and France); and in West Africa -- Senegal, Ghana, Mali, and Sierra Leone (even though it has been torn by civil war since 1991). The models for all these new installations, according to Pentagon sources, are the string of bases we have built around the Persian Gulf in the last two decades in such anti-democratic autocracies as Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates.

Most of these new bases will be what the military, in a switch of metaphors, calls "lily pads" to which our troops could jump like so many well-armed frogs from the homeland, our remaining NATO bases, or bases in the docile satellites of Japan and Britain. To offset the expense involved in such expansion, the Pentagon leaks plans to close many of the huge Cold War military reservations in Germany, South Korea, and perhaps Okinawa as part of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's "rationalization" of our armed forces. In the wake of the Iraq victory, the U.S. has already withdrawn virtually all of its forces from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, partially as a way of punishing them for not supporting the war strongly enough. It wants to do the same thing to South Korea, perhaps the most anti-American democracy on Earth today, which would free up the 2nd Infantry Division on the demilitarized zone with North Korea for probable deployment to Iraq, where our forces are significantly overstretched.

In Europe, these plans include giving up several bases in Germany, also in part because of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's domestically popular defiance of Bush over Iraq. But the degree to which we are capable of doing so may prove limited indeed. At the simplest level, the Pentagon's planners do not really seem to grasp just how many buildings the 71,702 soldiers and airmen in Germany alone occupy and how expensive it would be to reposition most of them and build even slightly comparable bases, together with the necessary infrastructure, in former Communist countries like Romania, one of Europe's poorest countries. Lt. Col. Amy Ehmann in Hanau, Germany, has said to the press "There's no place to put these people" in Romania, Bulgaria, or Djibouti, and she predicts that 80% of them will in the end stay in Germany. It's also certain that generals of the high command have no intention of living in backwaters like Constanta, Romania, and will keep the U.S. military headquarters in Stuttgart while holding on to Ramstein Air Force Base, Spangdahlem Air Force Base, and the Grafenwöhr Training Area.

One reason why the Pentagon is considering moving out of rich democracies like Germany and South Korea and looks covetously at military dictatorships and poverty-stricken dependencies is to take advantage of what the Pentagon calls their "more permissive environmental regulations." The Pentagon always imposes on countries in which it deploys our forces so-called Status of Forces Agreements, which usually exempt the United States from cleaning up or paying for the environmental damage it causes. This is a standing grievance in Okinawa, where the American environmental record has been nothing short of abominable. Part of this attitude is simply the desire of the Pentagon to put itself beyond any of the restraints that govern civilian life, an attitude increasingly at play in the "homeland" as well. For example, the 2004 defense authorization bill of \$401.3 billion that President Bush signed into law in November 2003 exempts the military from abiding by the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

While there is every reason to believe that the impulse to create ever more lily pads in the Third World remains unchecked, there are several reasons to doubt that some of the more grandiose plans, for either expansion or downsizing, will ever be put into effect or, if they are, that they will do anything other than make the problem of terrorism worse than it is. For one thing, Russia is opposed to the expansion of U.S. military power on its borders and is already moving to checkmate American basing sorties into places like Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. The first post-Soviet-era Russian airbase in Kyrgyzstan has just been completed forty miles from the U.S. base at Bishkek, and in December 2003, the dictator of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, declared that he would not permit a permanent deployment of U.S. forces in his country even though we already have a base there.

When it comes to downsizing, on the other hand, domestic politics may come into play. By law the Pentagon's Base Realignment and Closing Commission must submit its fifth and final list of domestic bases to be shut down to the White House by September 8, 2005. As an efficiency measure, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld has said he'd like to be rid of at least one-third of domestic Army bases and one-quarter of domestic Air Force bases, which is sure to produce a political firestorm on Capitol Hill. In order to protect their respective states' bases, the two mother hens of the Senate's Military Construction Appropriations Subcommittee, Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-TX) and Dianne Feinstein, are demanding that the Pentagon close overseas bases first and bring the troops now stationed there

home to domestic bases, which could then remain open. Hutchison and Feinstein included in the Military Appropriations Act of 2004 money for an independent commission to investigate and report on overseas bases that are no longer needed. The Bush administration opposed this provision of the Act but it passed anyway and the president signed it into law on November 22, 2003. The Pentagon is probably adept enough to hamstring the commission, but a domestic base-closing furor clearly looms on the horizon.

By far the greatest defect in the "global cavalry" strategy, however, is that it accentuates Washington's impulse to apply irrelevant military remedies to terrorism. As the prominent British military historian, Correlli Barnett, has observed, the U.S. attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq only increased the threat of al-Qaeda. From 1993 through the 9/11 assaults of 2001, there were five major al-Qaeda attacks worldwide; in the two years since then there have been seventeen such bombings, including the Istanbul suicide assaults on the British consulate and an HSBC Bank. Military operations against terrorists are not the solution. As Barnett puts it, "Rather than kicking down front doors and barging into ancient and complex societies with simple nostrums of 'freedom and democracy,' we need tactics of cunning and subtlety, based on a profound understanding of the people and cultures we are dealing with -- an understanding up till now entirely lacking in the top-level policy-makers in Washington, especially in the Pentagon."

In his notorious "long, hard slog" memo on Iraq of October 16, 2003, Defense secretary Rumsfeld wrote, "Today, we lack metrics to know if we are winning or losing the global war on terror." Correlli-Barnett's "metrics" indicate otherwise. But the "war on terrorism" is at best only a small part of the reason for all our military strategizing. The real reason for constructing this new ring of American bases along the equator is to expand our empire and reinforce our military domination of the world.

(Chalmers Johnson's latest book is *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan). His previous book, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, has just been updated with a new introduction.)

[20120208-17](#) 20:59 SteveBA Re: No Warm, Fuzzy Feeling for Iran (reply to all, above)

I think the buzz word is asymmetrical response. The f35 is not a good weapon to fight urban guerrillas, maybe to counter a north Korean invasion of the south or a conventional war with China, if we were to be so foolish. I think that if we had taken all of those dollars spent in Iraq and paid the citizens the money everyone would be too rich to bother with fighting.

[SteveBA, I like the distributing money instead of fighting idea. Maybe we could do that instead of attacking Iran? I'm very happy to see you reject the Republican Party line on this one, SteveBA. The war machine has got to be somehow stopped! -SteveB]

[20120208-07](#) 14:07 Beth Re: GOP Race Now in 'No Man's Land' (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #69)

The scary thing about the Santorum story is that there are any people anywhere who are delusional enough to vote for him. Other than that, the media as usual is making more of this story than is justified.

[Beth, I hope you're right about the media dancing when they should be sitting. But what if this guy has no affairs or gayness in his closet and starts to zoom? It seems the Republicans have no appetite at all for their candidate, R0mney. For many of us, the more we see of him, the less we like his flakery-fakery. -SteveB]

[20120208-08](#) 14:37 SteveB "Obama's Wrong Note on Foreclosures"

This problem is not going away, a solution is way past due, and all parties must be dealt with fairly and, sometimes, harshly. Especially BoA, whom I have not trusted for many years and will not use.

"Obama's Wrong Note on Foreclosures" by Alan Jenkins, NationofChange

Feb. 8, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/obama-s-wrong-note-foreclosures-1328715543>)

As Election Day nears, President Obama is regaining his populist mojo. His State of the Union speech was mostly pitch perfect, evoking core American themes of opportunity and optimism, and calling for "an economy where everyone gets a fair shot, and everyone does their fair share, and everyone plays by the same set of rules."

But the President has repeatedly hit a wrong note in talking about the foreclosure crisis. Not only is his story inaccurate, but he is promoting a harmful narrative that will make it harder to fix the problem.

The President said in his State of the Union address that "we've all paid the price for lenders who sold mortgages to people who couldn't afford them and buyers who knew they couldn't afford them." He repeated that theme a week later at a speech in Falls Church, VA, contending that people who did the "right and the responsible thing" were hurt by "lenders who sold loans to people who they knew couldn't afford the mortgages; and buyers who bought homes they knew they couldn't afford; and banks that packaged those mortgages up and traded them to reap phantom profits, knowing that they were building a house of cards."

According to the President's narrative, then, large numbers of Americans who are struggling beneath unsustainable mortgages willfully chose that fate and deserve roughly equal blame as do the lending and financial giants who cooked up the subprime scheme, targeted vulnerable communities, engaged in deceptive and discriminatory practices, chopped up and distributed faulty loans, and forced fraudulent foreclosures. A different class of "innocent, hard-working" people are the only ones paying the price in this narrative.

Let's be clear. The foreclosure crisis was caused by reckless misconduct by the lending and financial industries, inadequate rules and enforcement, and staggering long-term unemployment. America's long history of overwhelmingly successful homeownership went to pot because regulators looked the other way and unscrupulous corporations took advantage, not because working Americans suddenly became wildly irresponsible. Indeed, conscientious lenders like Self-Help Credit Union in North Carolina successfully made loans to the same group of working Americans over the same period with negligible default rates.

Am I saying that no American homeowner ever applied for a mortgage without a realistic plan to repay it? Of course not. A key purpose of proper underwriting standards and regulations is to help lenders and buyers determine what's mutually sustainable. But to divide American homeowners into "responsible" ones who've managed to stay current on their payments and supposedly "irresponsible" ones who've fallen behind is inaccurate and harmful.

After confessing that he and the First Lady—two Harvard-trained lawyers—had trouble deciphering their own first mortgage, the President has nonetheless failed to convey how many Americans were victimized by deceptive and predatory practices; how many families sacrificed all to pay the mortgage after one or both parents lost a job; and how many people facing foreclosure today would be successful homeowners if fair rules and vigilant regulators had been in place. He also leaves out how much each of us benefits when we help our neighbors avoid foreclosure, even if we've personally managed to stay current on our own mortgages.

The President's flawed story erodes the public will to aid struggling homeowners and bolsters those who say that the foreclosure crisis should be allowed to "run its course"—why rally to help people you've told us are irresponsible? Yet, without a more ambitious policy agenda than we have now, we'll see millions more Americans lose their economic security, families uprooted from schools and communities, senior citizens thrown into uncertainty or destitution, and the economy in continued chaos.

The President's current story is also deepening the feelings of shame that keep too many Americans from seeking the advice that could help them save their homes or, at least, make a successful transition. Housing counselors say the stigma attached to foreclosure keeps many people in the shadows instead of accessing the services that exist. It doesn't help when the Commander in Chief labels them irresponsible.

It's time for a new, accurate story about homeownership, opportunity, and the American Dream. It's a story that places blame where it belongs while recognizing that we each have economic and moral responsibilities. It's a story

about the solutions to the crisis that exist, including many that the Administration can take without any action from Congress. And it's a story about why, in this crisis as in so many others, we are all in it together. As communicator-in-chief, the President should take the lead in telling that story.

[20120208-09](#) 15:14 SteveB Fw: From the Right: Birth Control Perspective

from an email from Audrey Hudson, *Human Events*.

The Senate is gearing up for a fight over the Obama administration's controversial decision to require that insurance coverage provided by faith-based employers include free contraceptives and abortifacients.

"This is a huge mistake that I hope the administration is currently reconsidering. And if they don't, Congress will act," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) said Tuesday.

Several women on the Democratic side of the aisle responded Tuesday night to McConnell's statements on the Senate floor and said they are ready for a fight to protect the expanded coverage that is part of ObamaCare.

"It's going to be a battle here on the floor of the Senate," said Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.). "I'm not afraid of the fight. I welcome it."

Beginning Aug. 1, hospitals and universities with religious affiliations must comply with the new requirement to provide insurance that pays for contraceptives, the Obama administration announced in late January. Churches and synagogues are exempt from the new rules.

Some Congressional Republicans disagree with the birth control mandate and say it tramples religious liberties.

Sen. Marco Rubio has authored the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to give a religious exemption to the insurance requirement and Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) is sponsoring the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act that allows organizations to decline coverage for services that are contrary to their religious beliefs.

"If the administration does not take care of this administratively, I believe it will be taken care of legislatively," Blunt said.

The new requirements are opposed by the Catholic Church, which McConnell said operates the largest network of private schools in the country. Additionally, Catholic Charities is the major provider to social services to the poor, and one out of six patients in the U.S. are treated at a Catholic hospital.

"The Obama administration has crossed a dangerous line," McConnell said.

Boxer said the Obama administration's decision had "nothing to do with politics," but accused Republicans opposing the rule of unleashing "right-wing politics" with women's health.

"My Republican friends want to turn back the clock on birth control. Some of us remember the days when birth control was illegal. Well I have news for them: this is the 21st Century. We are not going quietly in the night on this one. We will fight back for women and their families, and health care, and we will fight to keep politics out of the equation," Boxer said.

[20120208-10](#) 17:01 Bill Re: Thinking About Davos / Business Income Taxes (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #69)

You thinking seems to be stuck in a single period, whether quarter or year. Think in terms of year over year. In general, the profit that a business may earn belongs to the business and, to the extent it is not paid out, becomes part of the capital of the business. When market circumstances—competition!—preclude the enterprise being able to factor all its costs into its prices charged to customers, then the erosion begins. First, shareholders and owners

don't receive a return commensurate with the risk they take. Then, with further deterioration of sales to the point where return is negative, then the entity's capital begins to be consumed, and taxes and other expenses are paid from that capital.

You presume that in this case earnings will be zero, but the accelerated depreciation scenario I've described for capital-intensive businesses can negate that presumption. Further, and more generally, other taxes will continue to be due: property taxes, employment taxes, business-privilege taxes, and whatever other taxes (e. g. gross receipts taxes) may fall on the entity. When the entity isn't making any money, then its payments of those taxes that continue, despite no profit, will come from the accumulated, and presumably shrinking, capital of the entity.

I suppose you could argue that the accumulated capital came from previous earnings gained when the entity could factor all taxes into its prices, but that's not the way accounting (and economics) works. The capital belongs to the entity. Further, some of that capital earned in times when all costs were covered, is typically contributed capital—i. e. what the original entrepreneurs put into the business to start it. The latter source of capital may be immaterial in the case of larger corporations, but it's still to be considered for smaller entities.

So, I've huffed and I've puffed, and I still cannot accept your assertion that "Businesses don't pay taxes. Ever."

[Yet, with apologies to Bill, who has done a yeoman's job of trying to talk me out of it, I still maintain that American businesses don't pay income taxes, their customers do. Therefore, all business income taxes should be eliminated and higher top-end personal income taxes instituted instead. All the business taxes would still be paid, but would be paid by real persons on personal income, they way S corps work now. Money reinvested in the business in America would not be taxed. Profit not reinvested in the U.S. or paid to persons in the U.S. would be taxed at a penalty rate of 50-60%. This is my super-simple, super-effective business plan to create jobs where we need them. –SteveB]

20120208-12	17:56	Dale	"War of Borrowers Against Savers: News Analysis"
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"War of Borrowers Against Savers: News Analysis" by Gil Weinreich, AdvisorOne

Feb. 8, 2012, (http://www.advisorone.com/2012/02/08/war-of-borrowers-against-savers-news-analysis?t=life-planning-ltc&utm_source=dailywire20812&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=dailywire)

(A zero percent rate, under strictly limited terms, is about the best borrowers [Savers??? –SteveB] can do under the current financial repression.)

When Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke announced two weeks ago that the Fed expected to maintain its near-zero interest rate policy at least as long as the end of 2014, it was the latest salvo in our loose monetary regime's increasing repression of savers.

Like the Syrian army unleashing heavily armored vehicles and massacring civilians, American savers are feeling the financial equivalent of fighting a desperate and so far losing battle against the might of the U.S. central bank. Indeed, until two weeks ago, U.S. savers were being massacred by a zero-rate policy intended to last until the middle of 2013, so the most recent Fed announcement must have seemed like a body blow to this beleaguered group.

As in all other cases of repression, the violence is aimed at protecting the interests of some favored group—the Assad regime and its ethnic Alawite supporters in Syria or in the case of the U.S., the borrowing class.

Why should the U.S. favor borrowers? Economists and bankers offer all sorts of reasons, and usually focus on the need to revive the battered financial and housing sectors, which triggered our economic crisis. With zero rate returns, the thinking goes, those with capital will be forced to enter risk markets, thereby spurring investment and creating a wealth effect while consumers will flock to homeownership since the cost of financing a purchase is so low.

Cynics will argue that the real reason for low rates is that the government itself has assumed the interests of borrowers because, like Assad's Alawites, they come from the same group. The U.S. after all is the world's biggest borrower and is running trillion-dollar annual deficits. U.S. debt-service costs would balloon if interest rates were at normal levels. According to this thinking, the Fed is playing for time with the hope that the economy will be growing again and debt trending downward when it once again imposes costs on credit.

In what must seem to some savers as a coordinated attack, the Securities and Exchange Commission this week revealed proposed regulatory changes on money market funds that would have the effect of lowering rates. For those not hip to money funds these days, the current average seven-day yield on a taxable money market fund is 0.02%, which may not sound like much, but is double the 0.01% rate on a comparable tax-free fund.

If the SEC's proposals were all adopted, it is highly likely that savers would have to pay fund companies to hold their money. And if that sounds far-fetched, the Bank of New York Mellon Corp. made headlines last summer when it announced it would be charging institutional clients 0.13% on deposits of more than \$50 million.

The SEC has legitimate concerns about the need to prevent a bank-run style run on funds—as occurred in the wake of the Lehman crisis leading to the Reserve Fund's breaking the buck. Reasonable people can differ on the propriety of such changes, but the fact remains that savers remain a repressed political class today with few options.

Headline inflation is 3% today, so arguably the U.S. government is offering investors in its bonds the same kind of deal BNY Mellon is offering its customers. For the cost of a 10-year bond, which currently yields 1.97%, U.S. investors get to pay Uncle Sam over 1% a year to hold their money.

Across the board, savings rates are low and declining. The current savings rate average is 0.266% nationally and five-year bank CDs are paying 1.687%, according to depositaccounts.com, which expects rates to continue to fall in the wake of the Fed's extended zero-rate plans. Savers can of course protect themselves from inflation by purchasing Treasury Inflation Protected Securities. But TIPS are currently paying a negative interest rate of -1.15%. Inflation-protected savings bonds (I Bonds) may be the only bargain around. They pay a flat zero percent!

Savers have been struggling to find ways to preserve their income in the past several years' low environment. A recent analysis by the free-market-oriented Cato Institute has quantified this problem, revealing that "since 2008, household interest income has fallen by about \$400 billion annually. That's \$400 billion each year that families have not had to spend." (Of course, these same numbers also quantify the huge gains eligible borrowers have reaped in cheap financing of homes, for instance – another win for the ruling borrower class.)

There is a paucity of alternatives for outgunned savers in the current financial repression. But for beleaguered savers with their fistful of dollars clamoring for the scintillating zero-percent rate on I Bonds, a warning: the government allows a maximum purchase of just \$10,000 a year, down from \$30,000 annual limit available back in the good old days of 2007.

20120208-04	13:26	SteveB	Fw: DCCC Petition: Stop Eric Cantor from Watering Down the Stock Act!
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from Steve Israel, DCCC:

Eric Cantor is at it again.

We just got word that Majority Leader Eric Cantor and House Republicans caved to pressure from right-wing special interest groups, going behind closed doors to water down the STOCK Act, a bill banning insider trading in Congress. A vote on the STOCK Act is scheduled for tomorrow and Republicans are trying to carve it up at the last minute.

The vote is scheduled in less than 24 hours: Sign our petition telling Eric Cantor not to water down this vital accountability and transparency bill because of special interest demands

Even some Republicans, including Senator Chuck Grassley, are blasting House Republicans for softening this landmark ethics bill.

Help us send a strong message to House Republican leaders that the American people's interests should come before the special interests. The vote is scheduled for tomorrow afternoon, so add your name right now.

<http://dccc.org/pages/stockact>

20120208-18 09:01 mgobble01 Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Mary, FotM Newsletter #67)

I didn't understand it to be a mandate, it is just going to be mandatory for insurance companies to cover birth control IF a woman chooses to use it.

20120208-19 22:43 SteveG Cartoon: Carl Rove vs. Clint Eastwood



20120208-20 23:58 SteveB Quote: SteveB on Keynesian vs. Republican Economics

"KEYNESIAN ECONOMICS, WHILE SEEMINGLY ILLOGICAL, HAS PROVEN ITSELF MANY TIMES ALL OVER THE WORLD. REPUBLICAN ECONOMICS, THOUGH LOGICAL ON ITS SURFACE, HAS PROVEN ONLY THAT IT CAN TANK A THRIVING AMERICAN ECONOMY AND DESTROY THE MIDDLE CLASS."

—Steven W. Baker

<http://www.wayfaring.info/2010/07/20/hiking-in-sedonaarizona/>



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #71 — FEB. 10, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

'Fair and Balanced': Mitt Romney vs. Barack Obama

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

Let's let the challenger begin:

"Mitt Romney Is Dazed and Confused" by Roger Simon, POLITICO

Feb. 9, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/72637.html>)

You never want to let them see how much it hurts.

You get hit by a pitch, you don't rub the spot. You get rocked by a punch, you try to throw a counterpunch. You lose three races in one night as a political candidate and, well, you don't do what Mitt Romney did.

Romney is known as an even-keel kind of guy. Doesn't get too high, doesn't get too low. But Tuesday he lost three states to Rick Santorum, and it threw him and his campaign into disarray and confusion.

But before we get to that, we ought to answer your chief question: Which one is Rick Santorum?

You can be forgiven for forgetting. Santorum was the guy who back in January came in second in Iowa to Mitt Romney by eight votes. Santorum had spent the most time in Iowa, and Romney had spent the least time in Iowa, and so Santorum seemed finished.

A few weeks later after a recount, however, GOP officials announced that Santorum had actually won Iowa by 34 votes, with the proviso that they didn't actually know who the hell had won Iowa. The votes of eight precincts had gone permanently "missing." Maybe a hog ate them, maybe they were converted into ethanol, maybe they were deep-fat fried and put on a stick for the next Iowa State Fair. Nobody knows.

Which is why Santorum got no boost from his sudden turnaround victory in Iowa. He was just another candidate on the right of his party, and the media had others to concentrate on, like Newt Gingrich.

Gingrich is colorful, quotable, unpredictable and utterly vicious. So vicious that even after he won the South Carolina primary, he began using rhetoric directed at his fellow Republicans that was so reckless he effectively disqualified himself as the alternative to Romney.

If you were a Republican who really could not bring yourself to vote for Romney — and as one wag put it, the Republicans seem torn over which of their candidates they despise the least — then your choices were limited to Santorum and Ron Paul.

Faced with that choice, anti-Romney Republicans found it easy to coalesce around Santorum on Tuesday, giving him victories in Minnesota, Missouri and Colorado.

None of these contests awarded any delegates to the Republican National Convention — if you think presidential candidates are bizarre, you ought to take a look at the rules by which they are selected — but neither did the Iowa caucuses. By my way of thinking, if the media are going to go nuts over Iowa, they ought to go at least semi-nuts over Minnesota, Missouri and Colorado.

But the Romney campaign decided not to shrug off its losses — it has tons of money and is well positioned to win future contests — but instead to concentrate on how Santorum's victories were meaningless because they landed him no delegates.

On Wednesday, POLITICO's Mike Allen began his highly influential Playbook with this quote from a Romney campaign official: "It's about delegates. We could have made the decision to spend money, resources. ... We could have run television, run radio or spent more time. You can't do everything. You gotta run your race."

Brilliant. You got to save that money in big sacks and not spend it, because you "gotta run your race" and, oh, by the way, LOSE THREE STATES IN ONE NIGHT.

At this stage of the game, Romney should be making sure the race is not about delegates, but momentum. As long as he has the momentum, the other candidates can pick up a few delegates here and a few there and it will not matter at all, because Romney will eventually run away with the contest.

But when you decide in early February that you can let an opponent walk off with three victories and huge media attention, then you have made a critical error. You have let the momentum shift, and when that happens, anything can happen.

And Romney seemed to realize this Tuesday night even if his staff did not. He looked understandably down and read his concession speech from two teleprompters as if he were seeing it for the first time — which he may have been.

He began with a long riff on his father, with Romney portraying himself as the son of a humble carpenter. (Wasn't there another humble carpenter who was the earthly father of somebody famous?)

"My father never graduated from college. He apprenticed as a lath and plaster carpenter. And he [was] pretty good at it," Romney said. "He actually could take a handful of nails, stick them in his mouth and then, you know, spit them out, pointy end forward. On his honeymoon, he put aluminum paint in the trunk of the car and sold it along the way to pay for the gas in the hotels."

Which makes me admire Mitt's father, George Romney. My grandfather was a carpenter, and I don't remember him sticking nails in his mouth, but he could pound nails straight and true with just a few powerful whacks from his hammer. (Go try it if you think it's so easy.) But let's get real: Mitt Romney did not grow up in the days when his father was a humble carpenter. By the time Mitt was 7, his father was already chairman and CEO of American Motors.

Then Mitt used a line in his speech that was even more questionable. "I am the only person in this race — Republican or Democrat — who has never served a day in Washington!" he proudly said.

It's true. But it's disingenuous. Mitt tried very hard to spend a day serving in Washington. He tried very hard to spend at least 2,191 days, the term of a U.S. senator, in Washington. The only thing that stopped him was his 17-percentage-point loss to Ted Kennedy in 1994.

There is nothing shameful about losing a Senate race to Ted Kennedy. But the fact that Romney even tried shows you how badly he wanted to get to Washington.

So it was left to Rick Santorum — who was enormously aided in his victories by the lack of a Donald Trump endorsement — to have the line of the evening. “I don’t stand here as the conservative alternative to Mitt Romney,” Santorum said. “I stand here as the conservative alternative to Barack Obama.”

There is actually no reason for anyone to count Romney out at this point. In the weeks ahead, we are going to learn if he can take a punch or if he has a crystal jaw.

Not all are downcast. Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) said: “Mitt Romney has the organization and the resources to go the distance in this election, and I believe he’ll ultimately win our party’s nomination.”

All Romney has to do is pick himself up off the canvas and get his head straight first.

(Roger Simon is POLITICO’s chief political columnist.)

“The Political Transformation of Barack Obama” by Jim Vandehei, Politico

Feb. 9, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/72644.html>)

There are two indisputable facts about politics.

The first is that every modern president in the fourth year of his presidency resorts to the cheap political stunts, broken promises and truth-fudging it takes to win reelection in what has been and will be a 50-50 nation. The reason is simple: Politics is not clean-living; it’s survival.

The second is that Barack Obama, for all his talk of moving beyond conventional political tricks, is doing just that, which wouldn’t be so glaring had it not been for his incessant call for a newer, cleaner and more transparent paradigm for American politics.

So much for the high road: Victory is more important than purity.

It’s debatable whether Obama is more crudely political than George W. Bush or Bill Clinton or Ronald Reagan. But what’s transpired over the past several weeks isn’t debatable: He’s made a series of calculated, overtly political gestures that are far more transactional than transformational.

Here’s just a sample:

Sucking up to Wall Street — again

The president better hope those Occupy Wall Street voters don’t read Bloomberg News. Hans Nichols, who covers Obama for Bloomberg, has a richly reported piece that Obama’s most important advisers are privately pleading with the same Wall Street titans they vilify to help fund their reelection campaign.

Jim Messina, one of the president’s top political advisers, met privately with financial services industry executives — big banks, money managers — and promised them Obama will not demonize Wall Street as his reelection efforts unfold. Not demonize Wall Street? Hasn’t that been a consistent theme of the Obama presidency?

Messina provided big donors with a private briefing at the members-only Core Club in Manhattan, a nice perk for the rich and powerful.

Let’s not be naive. All politicians hit up the people who have money for money. But in the middle of a political campaign that pits the rich against the rest of America, the optics are not great for the White House.

This is classic dual messaging: For the 99 percent, Obama is playing up his attacks on Wall Street, especially the Dodd-Frank bill.

For the 1 percenters, there's a different message, as Ron Suskind reported in his book on Obama's economic team. "I'm not out there to go after you," the president reportedly told Wall Street titans, not long after allowing Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner to quietly kill a plan to stop bonuses for bailed-out bankers. "I'm protecting you. But if I'm going to shield you from public and congressional anger, you have to give me something to work with on these issues of compensation."

A super flip-flop

Obama needs the millionaires in the financial services industry to buy his go-easy-on-you-guys spin because they can cut limitless checks to super PACs.

Super PACs are the newest way for rich people to influence elections. Obama was vehemently opposed to them, calling them a "threat to our democracy." That vehemence was heartfelt and consistent — until Monday night, when it wasn't.

To understand how big a flip-flop this actually represents, rewind the tape to 2007, when Obama discussed his opposition to outside groups taking and spending unlimited funds in campaigns. "You can't say yesterday you don't believe in them and today, you are having three-quarters of a million dollars being spent for you. You can't just talk the talk. The easiest thing in the world is to talk about change during election time. Everybody talks about change during election time. You have got to look at how they will act when it's not convenient, when it's hard. And the one thing I'm proud of is my track record is strong on this and I've walked the walk."

He's not only not walking the walk — he has green-lighted White House officials to walk right into super PAC fundraisers and hit donors up for as much money as they can cough up. The explanation is simple to anyone who was a kid or has one now: Hey, everyone's doing it. This is risky business. White House officials will be appealing to donors for super PACs that are legally prohibited from coordinating in any share or form with the president's reelection efforts. Again, everyone's doing it. So, to hear Obama's aides tell it, the president is all-in, too, by necessity.

A little secret about Washington: Everyone loves this decision. Democrats get more money, strategists and pollsters and ad-makers get bigger checks; Republicans will use this to call Obama a hypocrite and to scare donors into giving them more money, which in turns means more money for their strategists, pollsters and ad-makers; and the media make more money as all of this is funneled into TV and Web ads. Incestuous, isn't it?

There is some danger for Obama of a public backlash. But everyone in Washington — with the exception of the good souls at the Center for American Politics and Citizenship, Sunlight Foundation and a few other do-gooders — lives by the creed that no one wins or loses elections on campaign fundraising as a political issue. Just ask John McCain — who is wholeheartedly backing Mitt Romney, the candidate whose record-breaking super PAC fundraising is trashing the legacy of the overturned McCain-Feingold law.

Feingold isn't nearly as forgiving of Obama: "It is a dumb approach. ... It will lead to scandal, and there are going to be a lot of people having corrupt conversations about huge amounts of money," the Wisconsin Democrat told The Huffington Post after Obama flopped.

"Part of his political identity is someone who's not of Washington," said a Democratic strategist who supports Obama. "So the consequences for his brand, if actions look political or craven, are exponentially worse than they would be for most politicians."

The State of the Union is ... very political

No one accuses Obama of playing small ball quite as cynically as Bill Clinton did — no school uniforms this year, thanks. But Obama's January speech to the country was more like a slam dunk contest than a blueprint for sober

governance, with no-miss poll-tested proposals that won't translate into points on the board unless Democrats win super-majorities in both houses, and even then maybe not.

Take the so-called "Buffett Rule," which seems to have been introduced for the sole purpose of getting Republicans to reject it. It won't appear on the House floor but it will be a mainstay in Democratic campaign ads. Some of 'em might even be bankrolled by super PACs.

The plan to levy a 30 percent tax on billionaires makes the GOP look bad, and it makes Romney — who paid 15 percent on his earnings — look even worse. But the tax revenue it raises would barely make a dent in deficits.

Another one: Obama proposed to pay for a new infrastructure program by offsetting the costs with savings from ending the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Again, this isn't likely to pass, but Obama gets 1) credit for offering up a funding source, albeit one that has been criticized as a gimmick; 2) props for ending two unpopular wars; and 3) Republicans to shoot down a jobs program.

Then there's housing. The White House and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development have proposed a series of fixes for the crisis, the black hole of the U.S. economy, that have thus far proven to be ineffectual or ill-conceived. Obama's latest proposal — to offer lower interest rates to 3.5 million homeowners struggling to pay mortgages — earned praise for its audacity, even if there's no hope of passage.

A senior aide to a Senate Republican dismissed criticism, leveled publicly by other GOP-ers, that Obama's something-for-everybody speech late last month was a boring, laundry list-y dud.

"It was brilliant," the staffer said, admiringly. "Nothing in it, with a few exceptions, will see the light of the day. But that wasn't the point. It was this great list of stuff the base wants, pitched in a way that dares the GOP to buck public opinion."

Does that make Obama a cynic? Isn't it a president's job to lay out his vision for the country, to dare small-minded lawmakers to aspire and to give voters a meaningful template for the future?

Maybe. But timing is everything in politics.

And Obama's progressive backers were clamoring for this kind of boldness in 2010 and 2011, only to get the bum's rush. Instead, he heeded the political lessons of the 2010 midterms, embraced deficit reduction and saved the base-tickling talk for an election year when his name is on the ballot.

Jamming the pipeline

Never has Obama more angered an essential part of his political coalition than when he decided last year to punt on stricter ozone regulations — without even alerting Lisa Jackson, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency, until the decision had been made. Environmentalists were apoplectic.

So when it came time last month to pick between environmentalists and supporters of the Keystone XL pipeline, which would move oil and jobs through a key part of the country, Obama had no choice but to go green.

He wanted to punt until after the election, but Republicans forced a decision. Presidents face these political jams all the time. Like it or not, they often choose the path of least political resistance. So Obama did.

To recap: The president had the chance to bring significant oil into the United States from Canada, rather than Middle Eastern petro-dictators or Venezuela, and create some U.S. jobs. Environmentalists opposed the pipeline, partly because the Canadian oil is extracted from tar sands and partly because of concerns about the construction of the pipeline.

Joe Nocera, writing in The New York Times on Tuesday, probably nailed it on the head. "I realize that President Obama rejected Keystone because, politically, he had no choice," he wrote in his column titled, "Poisoned Politics of Keystone XL."

"My guess is that, in his centrist heart of hearts, the president wanted to approve it. But to give the go-ahead before the election was to risk losing the support of the environmentalists who make up an important part of his base."

The contraception conundrum

The administration's decision to require Catholic hospitals and universities to provide workers free contraceptive coverage seems on its surface to buck the trend of this story — a principled protection of reproductive rights that risks sparking a culture war with white independents, the critical swing-voter bloc.

But even if you accept the premise that Obama's original decision was apolitical — and conservatives don't, accusing him of kowtowing to women's groups — the president's advisers are scrambling to defuse an endless stream of attacks from church officials, presidential hopefuls and House Speaker John Boehner, who cast it as an assault on religious liberty.

And that, at the very least, makes the administration appear to be playing politics with a sensitive personal and religious issue.

Amid the administration's ongoing cleanup effort, one Democratic operative allied with the Obama campaign said the president will still get credit for the original decision, "a political winner with women voters who will decide the election."

20120209-05	11:49	Pam	Freedom of Information & So Much More (to SteveB)
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It's strange to say since I really don't remember ever seeing you (sorry), but I do feel like we're old friends. And I do feel comfortable, thanks to you. I love Friends of the Middle and think of the "regulars" as good buddies too. Who says technology is deleterious?!

We are all aware of various interest groups that have garnered public attention as they lobby for their cause, whether it be AIDS, breast cancer, environmental protection, animal rights, etc. I have a cause that is both personal and widespread, affecting thousands of birth parents and adoptees by denying them a very basic civil right: full access to personal information. I will focus my argument on New York, as that is where my son was adopted and I am not versed in the adoption laws of other states. In New York adoption records are sealed. I am unaware of any instances where that has not been maintained, despite the pleas of desperate mothers and their relinquished children.

In the decades after WW II, up until the 1970s, adoption was a lot like breast cancer, in that it was mentioned in hushed tones, "unwed mother" was a shameful epithet, and some adoptees were never even told they were adopted or only found out by accident. The idea was that adoptive families were just like regular families, blood ties weren't all that important, and children were better off in two-parent households than with a single mother, no matter how competent and loving she might be. The focus of social workers and adoption agencies was squarely on the adoptive parents. Finding "good" children for childless couples was a primary goal. There were the elite agencies, like the Cradle in Chicago or Spence-Chapin in New York, as well as local welfare departments, and doctors and lawyers who facilitated private adoptions. Until the Korean and Viet Nam wars, when thousands of half-American children were abandoned by their soldier-fathers, adoption workers tried hard to match children with parents who resembled them in significant ways. Red-haired children went to red-haired parents, babies with musical birth parents went to musicians, and so on. I know of one case back in the 1960s where a couple took a baby home, only to return it once they began to suspect it was half Black. I will concede that the whole adoption industry back in the day was mostly trying to do what it considered the "right" thing, and that was to think as little as possible about birth mothers and assume they were bestowing a great good on illegitimate (hate that term)

babies. Adoption workers didn't understand the full ramifications of what they were doing, or they made every effort to believe that adoption was about generosity, the creation of loving families, and the prospect of better material lives for children. They did not recognize, and too many social workers and legislators still don't, the terrible destruction they caused.

I speak for myself, but I also speak for thousands like me, when I say, the law must change to reflect contemporary mores and recognize a social injustice that is as injurious to the soul as any other you care to name. Recently on the Diane Rhiem show, there was a discussion about unsealing adoption records and facilitating reunions of first mothers and their offspring. Some "experts" argued for keeping the records closed. Birth mothers were promised anonymity, they averred. It would be wrong to traumatize a woman, who might have a family that was unaware of her past, by intruding into her life years after an adoption took place. Or what if the reunion was unsuccessful? Maybe the child was removed from the birth mother for good reason--insanity, criminality, addiction. Wouldn't it be better to let sleeping dogs lie and protect adult adoptees from possible disappointment or worse? Perhaps the birth mother really doesn't want to be found. Isn't that her right?

My first argument is statistical. Extensive research shows that as much as 95% of birth mothers would welcome contact by their relinquished children. An even greater percentage of adult adoptees long for reunion with their birth mothers, if only to know who they are and what their family medical history is. The law of New York, as it stands, slams a door on the deeply felt, legitimate needs of this vast majority. I am less interested in statistics, however, than in personal experience, and I hope my story might soften the stony hearts of those NY Assemblypersons (yes, that's what they call themselves) who vote time and time again against unsealing adoption records so that all adult parties to the adoption triangle could have the complete information they deserve.

Like so many young woman of my era, I was counseled to give up my baby so he would have a "good home." The fact that I was college educated, healthy, and over 21 did not count in my favor. The fact that I loved my child did not count in my favor. The fact that my parents were devastated by my predicament did not count in my favor. I felt I was inflicting unbearably painful harm on my family, whom I also loved, and I decided that I could bear unhappiness better than they could. I would give up my child and the world would never know. Everyone would pretend that what the world didn't know simply didn't exist. Sylvia Plath wrote, "Dying is an art./ I do it exceptionally well." I felt that way about suffering; I was very good at it. That meant taking a vow of silence. My parents never mentioned their grandson again, and I only told a few people I got very close to over the years. The secrecy became a stain on my life, and the grief I experienced never diminished.

On Jan. 26, the day after his 44th birthday, I found my son, thanks to Facebook. I am lucky; my search took only a couple of months. Many take as long as ten years, and some are never concluded. The saddest thing is when an adoptee finds her mother, only to learn that her mother died only a short time before. David and I are getting to know each other after 44 years of painful separation. He longed for me as much as I longed for him. Virtually all adoptees feel that something is missing, that they somehow do not belong, that they are alone, even those who don't know they were adopted. I have a friend who always thought her father was rather remote, not unkind, just distant. She was married and a mother herself when she discovered that the woman she had believed to be her mother was really her aunt, and her father was in fact no blood relation. The knowledge settled so many issues for her and allowed her to feel whole for the first time.

I am grateful to have my son back in my life, more than grateful, and I am outraged by do-goodnik, know-it-alls who presume to decide matters of the greatest consequence for people they don't even know.

An entire cohort of young women was punished for skirting the rules, and generations of children were given alternative lives. I am an adoptive parent as well (my son is Black/Vietnamese). I believe in adoption in principle, when it clearly is in the best interests of all involved. I believe my adopted son might very well be dead had he remained in Danang, where he was born. He landed with a family who love him, but when he learned about his new brother, he revealed all the painful feelings he's tried to repress all his life. "The truth shall set you free" could be my motto. Maybe I'll paint a sign and hang it over my front door. What I will do is advocate for the rights of birth parents and adult adoptees everywhere, and I urge you to do the same.

What a wonderful story and email...and sad, but more in transcendence of sadness and loss...

But I was crying. I cannot even imagine counting the tears you guys must all have shed. But now so many of happiness!

I am so happy you have had the courage to do this. I thank you for sharing it with your friends here. I think I can tell you that we are all behind you 100%. You make me feel like going out and wringing some bureaucratic necks! This should be fixable. How archaic!

20120209-01 09:04 SteveG Fw: UUSC Petition: Have a Heart, Hershey!

from UUSC:

<https://secure2.convio.net/uusc/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=291>

Have a Heart, Hershey!

Hundreds of thousands of children work in hazardous conditions on the cocoa farms from which Hershey purchases. The recent report Still Time to Raise the Bar: The Real Corporate Social Responsibility Report for the Hershey Company, published by Green America, Global Exchange, and the International Labor Rights Forum, found that Hershey has not honored the commitments the company made 10 years ago to put an end to forced child labor in the chocolate industry.

More than 1,100 UUSC supporters sent letters to Hershey last fall, demanding that Hershey end the use of child labor and go fair trade. They joined with 50,000 consumers nationwide as part of the "Raise the Bar, Hershey" campaign, led by UUSC's partner organizations Green America and Global Exchange.

Hershey announced on January 30 that it will purchase Rainforest Alliance Certified cocoa for its Bliss Chocolate products, starting later this year. This is the first commitment that Hershey has made to using an independent, third-party certification system to ensure that its cocoa is grown sustainably, including the monitoring of forced and child labor.

This first step to victory is sweet! It's clear that consumer feedback can make an impact on Hershey. But the company has not yet made a full commitment to ending its use of child labor. We must continue to pressure Hershey to increase traceability and justice throughout its chocolate supply chain.

Send a message to Hershey today. Acknowledge that Hershey has taken this first step, and urge the company to ensure that all of the cocoa it uses, in all of its products, is free from child labor and worker exploitation.

20120209-02 09:21 SteveB Re: UUSC Petition: Have a Heart, Hershey!

I don't really know much about the interaction of chocolate and children in the Third World. I think all of us who crave chocolate probably need to learn more.

I worry about whether the production of chocolate might be detrimental to the rain forests, though I know it doesn't need to be. It also doesn't need to employ child labor, but it does.

I have lots of questions. How hard do they work these kids? How much will the families suffer if the kids don't work? Where are the adults? Too lazy to work? :-) Was I an abused kid when I used to "put up hay" at 12 or 13? Or set pins at the bowling alley at 13? I was happy to have a little spending money. I know this is different, but we have to be careful about imposing our culture on others, to some extent. That being said, I'm sure there are some things none of us would want to allow.

This chocolate "controversy" is very pertinent to our discussion of business and society. In my entire life, the chocolate companies have never brought-up these problems. I doubt if they have done anything to address them, since the problems are still apparently so persistent and pervasive.

Big corporations will exploit people and children and environments to squeeze every dime they can out of their flesh and fruits. That is the simple truth. These creations of ours are exactly like the battle robots in the *Terminator* movies, they just look a little more innocent, but they are not. We need businesses, big and little. They are essential to our lives. But they must be controlled or they will eat us all alive.

Surely you realize history proves this over and over and over again? It's not just chocolate. Big business is heartless by nature. It must be that way.

Chocolate is a case where the marketplace is now trying to regulate. It's like pulling teeth. Governments must not be afraid or too corrupt to act.

Once again: \$\$\$ + GREED = TROUBLE!

20120209-03 09:41 Pam Re: More Than Politics (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #70)

I found the article about liberals vs conservatives interesting, though rather a blunt instrument. Some of the questions seemed to force answers that could only be approximately on target. What I'd like to know, though, is whether those of you who consider yourselves conservative felt an intuitive positive response when reading the conservative positions on issues, as I did when reading the liberal ones. On each I found myself saying, but..... or unless..... Are liberals more likely to find the subtleties and gray areas than conservatives? If it all boils down to a question of whether absolute principles always trump even murky circumstances or whether there is wiggle room when deciding what is right and wrong, then we have a disagreement about first principles (a priori) that I don't see any way to resolve. Many conservatives seem to me to defend absolute principles (sexual restraint, capitalism, Christianity) until they come in conflict with a real-world situation that strikes close to home. Unwed motherhood is bad until or unless it happens to your daughter (la Palin).

20120209-04 11:30 Beth Re: More Than Politics (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #70)

If Santorum has any staying power he will pull the Republicans further right, which should be a good thing for Obama. But who knows.

20120209-06 13:33 SteveG Fw: Consumers Union Petition: Tell Washingtonians What They're Eating!

from Consumers Union:

<https://secure.consumersunion.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=2628&JServSessionIdr004=z2ml8y66v2.app244a>

Unless Washington legislators act soon, you may never know that the salmon you are shopping for, or the tortilla chips in your cart, have been genetically engineered.

Bills that would require labeling of GE food are stalled in Olympia, and the bio-tech industry and grocery manufactures want to keep them stalled. We need consumer support to get these bills moving, so YOU can have the choice of whether or not you want to buy GE food.

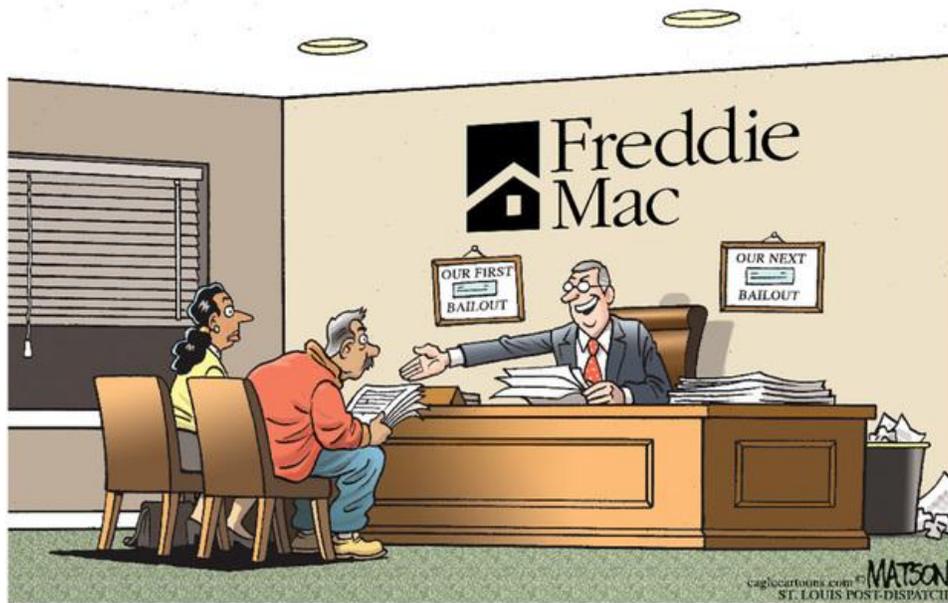
Tell your state lawmakers you want the right to know what's in the food you're eating. Send your email now to support labeling of GE food sold in Washington.

20120209-08

14:57

SteveG

"\$25B Settlement Reached Over Foreclosure Abuses" & "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising"



"I'LL BET YOU \$10,000 WE WON'T BE ABLE TO REFINANCE YOUR MORTGAGE."

"\$25B Settlement Reached Over Foreclosure Abuses" by Derek Kravitz, AP/Seattle Times

Feb. 9, 2012,

(http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/business/2017461294_apusmortgagesettlement.html)

A landmark \$25 billion settlement with the nation's top mortgage lenders was hailed by government officials Thursday as long-overdue relief for victims of foreclosure abuses. But consumer advocates countered that far too few people will benefit.

Article continues...

"3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising" by Carol M. Ostrom, The Seattle Times

Feb. 8, 2012, (http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/localnews/2017460805_surplus09m.html)

Noting that health-insurance companies are amassing growing surpluses while raising rates, state Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler says lawmakers should allow him to consider an insurer's surplus before he agrees to any rate increase.

Article continues...

20120209-10

15:49

Pam

Re: "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising"
(reply to SteveG, above)

Single payer. Universal coverage.

20120209-11

16:41

SteveB

Re: "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising"
(reply to all, above)

I have to laugh a little. Most of the time, when healthcare comes up, Pam has her mantra ready, "Single payer, universal coverage," like a stuck record. "Single payer, universal coverage. Ommmmm"

And she is absolutely, positively 100% correct!

"If it's good enough for Canucks, it's good enough for me!" That's my mantra.

20120209-12	17:43	SteveG	Re: "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising" (reply to all, above)
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In the meantime we need to find a way to stop the insanity surrounding insurance and medical services.

20120209-09	14:58	SteveG	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Hold Banks Accountable!
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from MoveOn:

<http://pol.moveon.org/bankaccountability/?id=35586-18997482-rrlNLGx&t=1>

We're Watching: Hold Banks Accountable!

State attorneys general just announced a major settlement on foreclosure fraud, or "robo-signing," and it keeps the banks from getting the "Get Out of Jail Free" card they wanted. The final settlement still has major flaws, but it provides a small first step towards compensating homeowners who were directly affected, though it's not nearly enough.

For every family helped by this deal, there are many, many more who still face foreclosure or who owe the bank far more than their home is worth. We all have to keep fighting hard to make sure they get the help they need and that we hold banks fully accountable.

The President heard your demand for a federal investigation and created the federal taskforce co-chaired by New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman. But that investigation is just getting started, and is going to face major obstacles from banks fighting hard to conceal their actions—and from their allies in the administration. That's why we need the White House to know we'll be watching the investigation to make sure it truly holds banks accountable, and that we're committed to fighting to make sure banks deal fairly with homeowners who are trying to reset their mortgages to fair market value.

A compiled petition with your individual comment will be presented to the White House.

20120209-13	18:27	SteveG	Media's Political Spin Cycle
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Corruption pays...

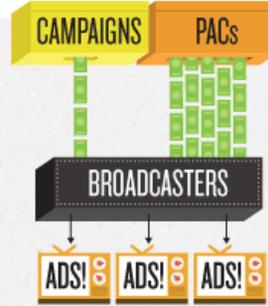
from FreePress.net:

The supreme court says that businesses can pay as much as they want to get influence in government. They call this "free speech" from corporate persons like GE, Monsanto, GM, Ford, etc. Businesses benefit from this influence. For every dollar they pay they get \$1000 in benefits or profits, as a rule. Do you get this kind of return on your savings account?

MEDIA'S POLITICAL SPIN CYCLE

In an election year billions of dollars are raised by political campaigns and political action committees (PACs).

Campaigns, PACs and Super PACs spend a lot of that money on political ads.



For every dollar contributed to Obama's 2008 presidential run, his campaign spent nearly 60 cents on media.



Super PACs spend an even greater percentage of the money they raise on TV ads.

And with limits on corporate spending now eradicated by the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision, Super PACs are producing hundreds of ads designed to mislead American voters.



Broadcasters put these ads on the air and the cash in their pockets.

Instead of using that money to pay for actual reporting on the candidates and the issues, broadcasters pinch pennies and favor cheap programming like celebrity gossip and junk news.



The end result?

Broadcasters record immense profits and unleash a torrent of misinformation that leaves voters in the dark.



Political advertising beats news coverage of elections anywhere from 6-to-1 to 17-to-1 (2004)*



Viewers saw 4 minutes and 24 seconds of political ads but only 1 minute and 43 seconds of actual election news coverage in an average 30-minute broadcast (2006)**



learn more at freepress.net/democracy

* Kaplan, Goldstein & Hale, *Local News Coverage of the 2004 Campaigns: An Analysis of Nightly Broadcasts in 11 Markets*. Lear Center Local News Archive. <http://www.localnewsarchive.org/pdf/LCLNAFinal2004.pdf>.
 ** University of Wisconsin NewsLab Midwest News Index, *An Analysis of Local Television News Coverage of Elections and Government in Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio and Wisconsin*. <http://bit.ly/xyBbrs>.

Repubs trying to gather votes?

Catholic church trying to divert thoughts from victims of sexual abuse to the church as a victim?

Churches are people too just like corporations?

Morally we can be against war, but have to pay for it while the Catholic church can be morally against contraception and not pay for it?

98% of Catholic women use contraception at some point in their life – is that morally/ethical given their religious beliefs?

15% of contraception is prescribed because of medical conditions such as endometriosis – is that morally ok with Catholics?

The typical number of children in Catholic families has declined, is that because they have sex less or use contraception?

Should we return to the days of yesteryear?

"Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" by Alan Silverleib, CNN

Feb. 10, 2012, (http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/09/politics/contraception-controversy/index.html?hpt=hp_c1)

(WASHINGTON) Congressional Democrats and Republicans escalated their rhetorical war Thursday over a pending federal rule requiring religiously affiliated employers to provide full contraception coverage to women -- one day after hints emerged of a possible compromise between the White House and conservative religious critics.

Numerous rank-and-file Democrats urged the White House not to back away from its support for the rule, while Republicans demanded a full retreat.

"It is time for the extreme right wing to stop playing football with women's health," said Rep. Nita Lowey, D-New York. "My colleagues and I stand in solidarity with American women who have waited decades for equity in contraceptive coverage. We have fought for too long."

"I woke up this morning in the 21st century, not in the Middle Ages," said Rep. Diana DeGette, D-Colorado. "Family planning and birth control (are) an essential part of women's health."

But Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum said the issue is about the rights of churches, not women.

"This has to do with the right of a church not to spend their moral resources in a way that's inconsistent with their faith," the former Pennsylvania senator, a staunch conservative Catholic, told CNN's "John King USA."

"We're not talking about denying women the access to contraception," he added. "They can go and get it. But we're talking about having a church of which they happen to choose to work for, and they know their position in working for them. You're now forcing them as a condition of employing people to pay for something that again is a grievous moral wrong."

EWTN: Health mandate violates conscience And Rep. Virginia Foxx, R-North Carolina, called the proposed rule "an attack by the federal government on religious freedom for everyone in our country and our rights of conscience."

"It must not stand, and it will not stand, if we are going to keep the freedoms that we love and cherish in this country," Foxx said.

The question of whether institutions with religious ties should be required to offer insurance plans covering birth control and the so-called morning after pill, among other things, hits a number of political hot buttons. Liberal groups defend the requirement on grounds of gender equality in health care; conservatives consider it a violation of the First Amendment and an infringement on religious liberty.

Republican leaders have repeatedly blasted the administration's decision, raising the issue's profile on both Capitol Hill and the presidential campaign trail.

Speaking on a Cincinnati radio show Thursday, Vice President Joe Biden said the Obama administration hopes to find a middle ground that would allow women to get insurance coverage for contraception while allowing an institution like the Roman Catholic Church, which opposes birth control, "to be consistent with its teachings."

"What I'm making a commitment is there's going to be a significant attempt to work this out, and there's time to do that," Biden said. "And as a practicing Catholic, you know, I am of the view that this can be worked out and should be worked out."

Biden told radio station WLW that there has been "a lot of misunderstanding" about the rule. "There's not enough focus on the fact that we've decided that there's a year to work this out so we can accommodate it," he said.

While churches themselves are exempt from the rule, hospitals and schools with religious affiliations would have to comply. The new policy is set to go into effect on August 1, though religious groups would have a yearlong extension to implement the rule.

Pressure on Obama over HHS ruling Published polls show a slight majority of U.S. Catholics actually favor the requirement. But the Catholic media network EWTN sued the federal government Thursday, seeking to stop the mandate's implementation and get it ruled unconstitutional.

"We had no other option but to take this to the courts," EWTN President Michael Warsaw said. "We are taking this action to defend not only ourselves but also to protect other institutions -- Catholic and non-Catholic, religious and secular -- from having this mandate imposed upon them."

Two other lawsuits have also been filed seeking to block the mandate. All three lawsuits are backed by the Becket Fund, a conservative religious legal organization.

Some political analysts think the controversy will cost President Barack Obama votes in politically critical states like Pennsylvania and Ohio in November, while others insist it will ultimately hurt Republicans with suburban women.

Bloomberg reported Wednesday that there was a deep internal administration split on the matter, with Biden and former White House Chief of Staff Bill Daley warning Obama about the possibility of negative political repercussions in swing states, But several female aides -- including Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius -- urged the president to move forward with the rule, Bloomberg said.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney denied the report, though he declined to offer any details.

Several high-profile Democrats -- including Pennsylvania Sen. Robert Casey, West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, Connecticut Rep. John Larson and former Democratic National Committee Chairman Tim Kaine -- pushed the White House on Wednesday to reconsider its position and expand the exemption for religious employers.

Manchin joined Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Florida, in introducing legislation Thursday that would immediately repeal the mandate. The reproductive health group Planned Parenthood condemned the bill, arguing it would let any business lift birth-control coverage for its employees "on the basis of personal religious belief or moral conviction."

"It should not be left up to a boss's personal beliefs whether his employees should be allowed birth control coverage," Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards said in a written statement. "Birth control is basic health

care and women should have access to birth control, no matter where they work. That's why a majority of Americans, including Catholics, support the Obama administration's birth control benefit."

But Sen. John Kerry, D-Massachusetts, suggested the White House change its stance.

"What I am urging is a compromise that respects the substantive goal of making sure that women have access and that no person is without the care, but at the same time that finds a way to respect issues of conscience and matters of religious belief. I think there is a balance," Kerry told reporters.

"I do know the president is sensitive to this," Kerry said.

Policymakers are examining laws in 28 states that have similar coverage requirements, senior administration sources said. Two sources have told CNN that the administration is particularly interested in the Hawaii model, in which female employees of religious institutions can purchase contraceptive coverage directly from the insurer at the same price offered to employees of all other employers.

Another possible solution, one source said, would be legislation allowing women employed by religiously affiliated employers to get contraceptive insurance from the exchanges created under Obama's sweeping health care reform rather than from their employer's insurer.

Sources familiar with White House thinking said the administration is convinced approval from conservative Catholics is out of reach and is trying to win over progressive Catholics. New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan, head of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, said Thursday that the decision to require full contraception coverage was a "terribly misguided judgment."

"We can't compromise on principle. That's almost rewarding bad behavior," Dolan told "CBS This Morning."

On Wednesday, House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, called the policy an "unambiguous attack on religious freedom" and announced his chamber would pursue legislative action to prevent the rule from going into effect. And on the presidential campaign trail, GOP front-runner Mitt Romney has pledged to eliminate the rule on his first day in office.

Both the White House and Romney's Republican opponents, however, have noted a Massachusetts law in effect, while Romney was governor that required hospitals -- including Catholic ones -- to provide emergency contraception to rape victims.

It's ironic for Romney to criticize "the president for pursuing a policy that is virtually identical to the one that was in place when he was governor of Massachusetts," Carney said Wednesday.

Romney, in turn, said Carney needs to "check his history."

In 2005 then-Gov. Romney vetoed a bill that would have required all hospitals -- including Catholic hospitals -- to provide emergency contraception. The heavily Democratic state legislature overrode his veto.

According to news reports at the time, Romney initially said his administration would not enforce the law at Catholic hospitals. But he later reversed course, saying all hospitals would have to supply the morning-after pill.

Romney was quoted at the time as saying, "My personal view in my heart of hearts is that people who are subject to rape should have the option of having emergency contraception or emergency contraception information."

"I worked very hard to get the legislature to remove all of the mandated coverages, including contraception," Romney told reporters Wednesday. This "was a provision that got there before I did, and it was one that I fought to remove."

Romney's campaign released a statement from former U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican Mary Ann Glendon on Thursday defending Romney's past stance on the issue.

"The charge that Mitt Romney has not stood tall to defend freedom of religion is preposterous," Glendon said. "He has shown backbone on every critical issue at every juncture when it counted."

(CNN's Dan Gilgoff, Eric Marrapodi, Jessica Yellin, Brianna Keilar, Paul Courson, Ted Barrett, and Dana Bash contributed to this report.)

[20120209-15](#)

23:49

Carol

Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to mgobble01, FotM Newsletter #70)

Anything that is mandatory is a mandate. PPACA is forcing Christian & Catholic organizations who oppose abortifacient forms of birth control or sterilization to offer and to pay for what their consciences object to. For our government to put Catholics and others with similar convictions in the position of obeying their convictions or dropping health care coverage for their employees (and pay large fines), is a tremendous power grab. Where will this end? Will they someday require Jews and Muslims to serve pork in their restaurants? Will they required the Amish to serve in the military and kill against their consciences? Will they require Christian or Catholic adoption services to place children in homosexual households? (oh, wait....they're already doing this one). When will they start requiring doctors to perform abortions or to kill their terminally ill patients? This is a very slippery slope. Birth control is ultimately not the issue. This is a violent infringement to religious freedom and our First Amendment rights.

If you want birth-control, just go down to the pharmacy and buy it yourself.

<http://www.schooneradventures.com/Destinations-.html>

'Charlie's Pants' at Low Tide, near Wallilabou, St. Vincent



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #72 — FEB. 13, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

They Want Slaves Not Consumers!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 13, 2012)

Will America be brought down like Greece?



The takeaway continues long after workers have suffered enough abuse. Republicans can try as hard as they want to destroy the unions, the minimum wage, overtime, and safe working conditions, but they will not succeed. This is the last gasp of a bankrupt political idea whose time has come to be burned. Notice one very important fact about the Republicans: For everything they take from the lower and middle classes always ends up in the hands of their rich buddies. Weird, huh? And the nation permits them to do it. Amazing!

"House Transportation Bill 'Technical Correction' Would Strip Workers of Pay Protections" by Dave Jamieson, Politico

Feb. 12, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/12/house-transportation-bill-rail-drivers_n_1271644.html)

(WASHINGTON) **A little-noted provision in the House Republicans' controversial energy and transportation bill would strip several thousand workers within the rail-industry of their federal minimum-wage and overtime protections, potentially making low-wage jobs pay even less.**

Listed in the bill under the heading "Technical Correction," provision 6602 would exempt several companies who transport rail workers from their obligations under the Fair Labor Standards Act, the 1938 law that guarantees basic

worker rights. The carveout would allow a handful of boutique contractors to pay no overtime to their drivers who haul rail workers between worksites, often driving long distances of 300 miles or more.

"It's outrageous that House Republicans are trying to take away overtime protections for a class of workers at the behest of a special interest," Rep. George Miller (D-Calif.) said of the provision in a statement to HuffPost. "These workers deserve the right to overtime pay. It's not only a matter of fairness, but also a matter of public safety."

Earnings for rail-crew drivers often work out to little more than minimum wage, and many drivers must remain on-call for long stretches. Miller and others worry that by depressing wages further, the quality of the work -- and, hence, roadway safety -- could decline. Miller is expected to offer an amendment to the bill this week that would maintain the labor protections for rail drivers.

The House's transportation committee, which is chaired by Rep. John Mica (R-Fla.) and approved the bill, did not return a request for comment from The Huffington Post. Officials at several of the companies that could potentially benefit from the change -- including Professional Transportation, Inc., RailCrew Express and Coach America -- also did not respond to requests for comment.

Jim Stem, legislative director at the United Transportation Union, said he just recently became aware of the provision's implications, given that the bill would merely tweak a few words in existing law. He called the provision a giveaway to contractors in the rail industry. According to Stem, many of the rail drivers already earn low wages and work long hours; the loss of overtime, he said, would have an immediate effect on their paychecks.

"It amuses me when [House Speaker] John Boehner says there are no earmarks in there," Stem said of the bill. "This is an earmark for a handful of wealthy people who own these companies. This is a windfall."

It isn't merely Democrats who are angered by the transportation plan put forth by House Republicans. Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood, who was a Republican congressman before taking the helm at the department, last week declared it "the worst transportation bill I've ever seen during 35 years of public service," saying it "hollows out" the department's top priority of safety and "guts" the administration's transportation efforts of the last three years.

"This is the most partisan transportation bill that I have ever seen," LaHood told Politico.

The \$260 billion, five-year bill calls for more highways and toll roads to be paid for with offshore drilling. In addition to cutting funding for bike and pedestrian projects, the bill would slash subsidies for Amtrak by 25 percent; privatize food and drink vending on Amtrak trains while guaranteeing such sales with taxpayer money; and substantially increase the size of trucks allowed on roadways, a potential boon for the trucking industry but a change that's opposed by environmental groups.

20120210-01	08:33	Dick	"The Economics of Abbott and Costello"
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Barack Obama spent considerable time during the State of the Union address on jobs and the economy -- both of which are in a sorry state.

As a result of the smoke-and-mirrors Obama-spin, the following little dialog provides a good review of real unemployment. Credit is due to Barry Levinson, the famed Academy Award winning director, screenwriter, and producer who created and first published this a couple of months ago in the Huffington Post. Enjoy!

"The Economics of Abbott and Costello" by Barry Levinson, Huffington Post

Nov. 28, 2011, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/barry-levinson/the-economics-of-abbott-and-costello_b_1115502.html)

Unemployment as reported is at 9 percent. But it's actually more than 16 percent. Some smart statistician came up with a distinction. A slight of hand to make the unemployment number tolerable rather than frightening. The concept was simple: 9 percent are unemployed and are actively looking for work. The 16 percent includes those who gave up and are no longer actively looking for work. So those casualties are no longer counted. They cease to exist. The 9 percent is a fake. A sham. And worthy of an Abbott & Costello routine. If that great comedy team were still alive, the routine on our unemployment woes might go something like this:

COSTELLO: I want to talk about the unemployment rate in America.

ABBOTT: Good Subject. Terrible Times. It's 9%.

COSTELLO: That many people are out of work?

ABBOTT: No, that's 16%.

COSTELLO: You just said 9%.

ABBOTT: 9% Unemployed.

COSTELLO: Right 9% out of work.

ABBOTT: No, that's 16%.

COSTELLO: Okay, so it's 16% unemployed.

ABBOTT: No, that's 9%...

COSTELLO: WAIT A MINUTE. Is it 9% or 16%?

ABBOTT: 9% are unemployed. 16% are out of work.

COSTELLO: IF you are out of work you are unemployed.

ABBOTT: No, you can't count the "Out of Work" as the unemployed. You have to look for work to be unemployed.

COSTELLO: BUT THEY ARE OUT OF WORK!!!

ABBOTT: No, you miss my point.

COSTELLO: What point?

ABBOTT: Someone who doesn't look for work, can't be counted with those who look for work. It wouldn't be fair.

COSTELLO: To who?

ABBOTT: The unemployed.

COSTELLO: But they are ALL out of work.

ABBOTT: No, the unemployed are actively looking for work... Those who are out of work stopped looking. They gave up. And, if you give up, you are no longer in the ranks of the unemployed.

COSTELLO: So if you're off the unemployment rolls, that would count as less unemployment?

ABBOTT: Unemployment would go down. Absolutely!

COSTELLO: The unemployment just goes down because you don't look for work?

ABBOTT: Absolutely it goes down. That's how you get to 9%. Otherwise it would be 16%. You don't want to read about 16% unemployment do ya?

COSTELLO: That would be frightening.

ABBOTT: Absolutely.

COSTELLO: Wait, I got a question for you. That means they're two ways to bring down the unemployment number?

ABBOTT: Two ways is correct.

COSTELLO: Unemployment can go down if someone gets a job?

ABBOTT: Correct.

COSTELLO: And unemployment can also go down if you stop looking for a job?

ABBOTT: Bingo.

COSTELLO: So there are two ways to bring unemployment down, and the easier of the two is to just stop looking for work.

ABBOTT: Now you're thinking like an economist.

COSTELLO: I don't even know what the hell I just said!

Abbott and Costello did a comedy routine about fictitious ball players called "Who's On First?" The absurdist number of the real unemployed is not a joke.

20120210-02	08:48	Pam	Re: "Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #71)
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Well said, SteveG for the truth and Pam for incisive brevity!

20120210-04	10:50	Art	Re: "Contraception Controversy Consumes D.C., Campaign[s]" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #71 & Pam, above)
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Well said, Steve for the truth and Pam for incisive brevity!

20120210-03	10:00	Pam	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, FotM Newsletter #71)
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Catholic taxes for contraception--a violation of religious liberty or the price of living in a democracy? Many of us would prefer our taxes not be used to prosecute wars or subsidize corn farmers or prop up dictators, but we pay them. Why should being a Catholic carry more weight than being a Quaker? The whole contraception brou-ha-ha is more politics as usual, which is to say, ridiculous.

20120210-08	14:25	Dennis	Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, FotM Newsletter #71)
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Why is this not religion dictating public policy? What gives Catholic bishops the authority to discriminate against employees of a hospital serving the general public? Is this not the religious tyranny that the separation of church and state is intended to prevent?

The above nonsense about Jews, Muslims, and pork dictates is just a red herring. Christians and Catholics can believe any narrow minded thing they want in their churches, but when they provide commercial services to the public, they can't determine what services to provide according to their own religious biases. I suppose you might believe it was a government power grab to require a member of the KKK who owned a restaurant to refuse service to blacks a couple of generations ago. That was the slippery slope argument then.

20120211-01 00:23 Carol Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Dennis, above)

This isn't public policy. These are not government-run hospitals, they are faith-based charities, hospitals and schools. Any of their employees are welcome to get different jobs that have more inclusive health insurance that suits their personal desires. This is not discrimination against employees. They won't pay for their cigarettes either; have a problem with that? I would go to jail before paying for someone else's morning-after pill. It completely violates my conscience, and it is absolutely ridiculous to assign me to the same category as the KKK (talk about red herring & nonsense!). Racism is evil, and so is abortion. I am completely against both.

You have the tyranny exactly backwards. The "separation of church and state" phrase comes from a personal & private letter between President Thomas Jefferson and the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, shortly after he became president. Mr. Jefferson wrote the letter in the context of not allowing the government's restriction or interference in religious practices. He and the Founders believed and wrote extensively that the First Amendment was written to prevent the federal establishment of a national denomination and to keep them from trying to regulate or restrict religious expression (which unfortunately is what is going on now).

Found some quotes of his:

[N]o power over the freedom of religion...[is] delegated to the United States by the Constitution. —Kentucky Resolution, 1798

In matters of religion, I have considered that its free exercise is placed by the Constitution independent of the powers of the general [federal] government. —Second Inaugural Address, 1805

[O]ur excellent Constitution...has not placed our religious rights under the power of any public functionary. —Letter to the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1808

I consider the government of the United States as interdicted [prohibited] by the Constitution from intermeddling with religious institutions...or exercises. —Letter to Samuel Millar, 1808

I looked up Jefferson's letter too: Clearly, his intention in this letter is to keep governmental tyranny out of religion and religious expression and not the other way around. Before you quote personal and private letters, you should read the entire letter to ensure you're correctly understanding the context.

Gentlemen,

The affectionate sentiments of esteem and approbation which you are so good as to express towards me on behalf of the Danbury Baptist Association give me the highest satisfaction. . . . Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God; that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship; that the legislative powers of government reach actions only and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should "make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof," thus building a wall of separation between Church and State. Adhering to this expression of the supreme will of the nation in behalf of the rights of conscience, I shall see with sincere satisfaction the

progress of those sentiments which tend to restore to man all his natural rights, convinced he has no natural right in opposition to his social duties. I reciprocate your kind prayers for the protection and blessing of the common Father and Creator of man, and tender you for yourselves and your religious association assurances of my high respect and esteem.

During the 1789 debates of the ninety Founding Fathers who framed the First Amendment, not once was the phrase "separation of church and state" mentioned. Today this phrase is regularly used pretty much the opposite of what it originally meant.

—Thomas Jefferson

As for this new "concession" the Obama administration issued today, it is just more politics. So now religious employers won't have to pay for abortion pills, sterilization and contraception, but their insurance companies will. Hmmm. Who pays for the insurance policy? The cost will still be theirs, because of course, the insurance companies will simply raise their premiums.

If you want your birth control paid for, just don't get a job at a Catholic hospital. People switch jobs to get greater benefits all the time.

[20120211-02](#) 14:55 Dennis Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, above)

From Dennis (Feb. 11, 2012, 2:55 pm)—reply to Carol, above, ref: Federal Birth Control Mandate

Wrong. The insurance companies will absorb the cost of contraception gladly. It is cheaper for them than paying for unintended pregnancies and deliveries.

[20120211-03](#) 15:02 Carol Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Dennis, above)

From Carol (Feb. 11, 2012, 3:02 pm)—reply to Dennis, above, ref: Federal Birth Control Mandate

Doubt it. Insurance companies see their overhead go up, and they raise rates. They don't sit there and calculate how much they're "saving" by not paying for deliveries. No businesses absorb increased costs "gladly."

[20120211-04](#) 15:05 Dennis Re: Federal Birth Control Mandate (reply to Carol, above)

From Dennis (Feb. 11, 2012, 3:05 pm)—reply to Carol, above, ref: Federal Birth Control Mandate

If you don't think insurance companies calculate every last penny of costs, then you must be some kind of naive libertarian.

[20120210-07](#) 11:53 Beth Re: Freedom of Information and So Much More (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #71)

First of all, Pam, thank you for your story. When I became pregnant in 1966 my father wanted me to go to Washington D.C. to live with my aunt and then give up the baby when it was born. I refused. It was the first time I ever stood up to him. As a result I have a handsome son who is the image of his father and three beautiful grandchildren.

As for the noise the Catholic Church is making, I recommend the article on the front page of the *New York Times* today. This issue has nothing to do with birth control and nothing to do with religious freedom. It is all about power and politics. The vast majority of practicing Catholics do not agree with the church's position on birth control, and do not follow it.

I also recommend David Brook's column today on Mitt Romney.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/us/bishops-planned-battle-on-birth-control-coverage-rule.html?pagewanted=all>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/11/nyregion/catholic-institutions-reluctantly-comply-with-ny-contraceptives-law.html>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/brooks-the-crowd-pleaser.html>

20120210-10	16:48	Pam	Re: Freedom of Information and So Much More (reply to Beth, above)
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Thanks, Beth. You did the right thing, but then you did marry John. My beau went back to England and no marriage was forthcoming. I still wish I had stood my ground. I feel about the injustice of that time vis a vis girls like us the way I do about racial segregation. It was just wrong.

I'll check out those articles.

20120210-05	10:55	SteveG	"White Nationalists Share Spotlight with GOP at CPAC"
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"White Nationalists Share Spotlight with GOP at CPAC" by Joe Conason, *The National Memo*

Feb. 10, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/white-nationalists-share-stage-gop-cpac>)

If the Conservative Political Action Conference can be expected to accomplish anything more than angry bellowing, it is to reliably embarrass every decent and sane conservative in America. Sometimes the problem is a conspiratorial extremist co-sponsor, like the John Birch Society; sometimes the problem is a certifiable kook giving the keynote address, like Glenn Beck; and sometimes the problem is just vicious bullying of gay conservatives, who have been officially expelled from the conference.

But now the annual Washington showcase of the far right is plunging toward new depths of disgrace, by featuring "white nationalists" among its speakers.

To explain the perils of multiculturalism and (nonwhite) immigration, the CPAC organizers have invited several avowed white nationalists -- who will spew their bigotry in the same conference hall that will host speeches by Republican presidential candidates Mitt Romney, Rick Santorum, Newt Gingrich, and Ron Paul (and has already been visited by Herman Cain, who complained about the damage being done to the nation by "stupid" people).

According to reports by People For the American Way and the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights (IREHR), the CPAC contingent this week will include Peter Brimelow, the notorious race-baiting activist who founded VDARE.com, an anti-immigration website that has long been described by the Southern Poverty Law Center as a hate site. Brimelow's website regularly publishes the work of white supremacist and anti-Semitic writers.

Joining Brimelow on at least one panel will be Robert Vandervoort, identified by CPAC as executive director of ProEnglish, a group advocating "English-only" policies -- but Vandervoort is also the former organizer of the "Chicagoland Friends of American Renaissance," another white nationalist hate group that is affiliated with the same racist authors who appear on Brimelow's website. Their panel is called "The Failure of Multiculturalism: How the Pursuit of Diversity Is Weakening the American Identity."

Actually, Vandervoort was slated to appear on two panels at CPAC, including one titled "High Fences, Wide Gates: States vs. the Feds, the Rule of Law & American Identity" where he will be joined by Republican politician Kris Kobach, the Kansas Secretary of State. As IREHR recently reported, Vandervoort "was at the center of white nationalist activity during his time in Illinois." His "Chicagoland" outfit often held joint activities with the local

chapter of the Council of Conservative Citizens, the group that directly succeeded the White Citizens Councils of the anti-civil rights era in the South and Midwest. In their own nod to diversity, Vandervoort and Kobach's panel will also include two Latino Republican legislators from Florida, Rep. David Rivera and Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart.

Questioned about the invitations extended to such unsavory figures as Brimelow and Vandervoort, a CPAC spokeswoman told BuzzFeed that the American Conservative Union, which operates CPAC with a coalition of other right-wing groups, accepts no responsibility for their presence. "CPAC is proud to have more than 150 sponsors and exhibitors this year," boasted Kristy Campbell, the CPAC flack, in an email. "This panel was not organized by the ACU, and specific questions on the event, content or speakers should be directed to the sponsoring organization. Cosponsors and affiliated events do not necessarily represent the opinions of the American Conservative Union."

But CPAC did decide to bar participation by the gay conservative groups such as the Log Cabin Republicans, and to remove the tainted John Birch Society as a co-sponsor. The gays bother them and the conspiracy nuts humiliate them, but evidently they feel no imperative to shun the white supremacists.

20120210-06	11:26	Art	The Theory of Hippos
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This is a little off our usual subjects but the pictures of Hippos made me think of one of my many wacko historical development theories. (No all wacko theories don't necessarily reside on the hands of tea baggers).

As a somewhat haphazard student of history I always seemed attracted to the to me little nagging questions that sometimes arose as I studied. Although often not productive, that little trait did win me an award in college for the best senior essay - of course it was The Citadel, so maybe competition wasn't all that tough.

At any rate, one of the little things that always nagged at me was, why Africa south of the Sahara never really developed any notable civilization. Oh, I know you can argue a few things but in truth they did not. I think the Hippos had a lot to do with it. Hippos are very territorial and very aggressive. You do not just canoe through their river sites. If you figure early civilizations needed trade to develop, and the shipment of goods normally follows rivers where it can be easily shipped, not so in sub Saharan Africa because of the Hippos. Early civilizations would have used dugouts or other small boats all of which can be and are easily swamped by the Hippos. Hence no trade along rivers and no early development of civilization. Just a thought.

FYI I have chosen not to try to share my theories with Mr. Jared Diamond figuring he has enough to think about. However I am considering the topic, 'The effect of the Turnip upon the Industrial Revolution' for my PhD dissertation.

20120210-09	15:30	FotM	Re: The Theory of Hippos (FotM group discussion)
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SteveG: A reasonable theory, much more reasonable than any Tea Bagger.

Pam: Art, you should write a monograph: *The Hippo and the Failure of Civilization*. They could make it into a movie. :-) I think you're onto something, though. Your theory makes as much sense as anything. Maybe all it takes is one little variable to send evolution (even social evolution) in a different direction.

I also agree that the turnip had a pivotal role in the Industrial Revolution--see Thomas Hardy's **Jude the Obscure**. Or maybe it's **Tess of the d'Urbervilles**. In one of them there is a very dramatic scene of a field of grain being harvested by a huge mechanical combine, or whatever it is they use for such purposes. The tines of the machine gather up the grain and feed it into a hopper where it is ground into wheat and chaff, so far so good. But along with the grain dozens of baby rabbits get scooped up and macerated too. It's a chilling example of nature vs. industry. D. H. Lawrence had a few things to say about that as well. History is so fascinating because, for one thing, it's never black and white. More grain means more bread means more people get fed, but it also means the gruesome deaths of innocent creatures. We are all complicit.

SteveB: Art's on the right track. My ex-wife's grandfather used to go on safaris. He always said the hippos were much more dangerous than lions. Even in North America nobody went very far except via river in Indian times. Lewis and Clark always had bigger problems when they couldn't be on a river. You can still hardly get around Amazonia except by river. Much of Africa must have been similar and infested by those nasty fat boys. It could have a big effect on civilization. Plus they didn't have good internet or cell phone service, so it was tough to get civilization going real well.

About the bunnies in the fields...I doubt if Snopes.com says anything, but it's highly unlikely. Almost all bunny children are born in the spring or soon after. Harvesting is in the fall, when it's unlikely baby bunnies are around. The adults run. Snakes and mice would be a worse problem, but most equipment doesn't go that low, so small animals can run away or duck. I've spent some time in fields and noticed very little to no problem with bloody little corpses in the grain. Also, grain doesn't get ground into flour at picking time, it's just separated from the chaff, not even the hulls, normally. Corn, of course, is shucked in the field as it is picked.

Pam: Hummmmm. My memory might be hazy, but I distinctly remember bunnies in the harvester. I always thought Hardy was great on country matters (no pun intended), but maybe he got this wrong. Or maybe I did. Of course, you're right, the timing is off.

Phil: I remember when SteveG and I were rafting down the Big Walnut; dodging gators, hippos, piranha... I won't boar you, it's ancient history.

Pam: Oh, I can picture it all!

SteveG: Ahhhh, back in the day.

Phil: In an effort to follow the animal theme, I chose boar rather than bore. I was disappointed someone didn't hassle me about it. Especially you, SteveB.

Pam: I caught it, but I didn't want to embarrass you. ;-)

Phil: Being the lady that you are. Thanks.

Clark: I was going to compliment you on the pun, but I wasn't sure it was intentional. :) Anyway, the Big Walnut riff was the best laugh of the day,

SteveB: I plead temporary insanity, Phil. I read it, but it was late last night after coming home from a pre-Carnaval/birthday party. I didn't know if I was reading English or Spanish. I'm better today, just a bit of a headache...I do like the pun, though. Hope everyone is having a great weekend! Take care.

Bill: Phil, better to be a boar than a bore. I know some Boers from South Africa... All the talk about water and the water horse (hippo) ignores the truly dangerous rhinoceros, an animal with a congenitally bad temper that may weigh 4,000 pounds or more and that can run thirty miles per hour in order to gore you and crush you under its angry hooves.

Clark: Rhino -- Republican hippo in name only?

Bill: It's up to Phil. What's that other moniker/acronym that some Rs use, CINO, i. e. conservative in name only.

Clark: The theory [Art's Hippo Theory of Civilization] is a good one. Hippos are said to kill more people than any other animal in Africa. River traffic would certainly be affected. I'd love to see Jared Diamond tackle it.

Dennis: I remember you telling me this, Clark, when we were in that boat on Lake Kariba surrounded by hippos. I haven't recovered emotionally yet.

SteveB: Seriously? That would be most hilarious!

Clark: Dennis has, indeed, been an emotional cripple ever since.

Bill: Thank you, WFWP for illustrations [below], Dennis. And them rhinos have bad breath, too.

Dennis: As an internationally renowned wildlife photographer (stop laughing, Clark), I'd like to add my expertise to the discussion of really big, ugly African animals:



When hippos are in a pool and you are snug on land in a bush buggy, then it's
NO PROBLEM.



When a rhino is approaching your bush buggy at this angle, then it's
TIME TO WORRY A BIT.



When a rhino gets this close and stares straight at you, then it's
TIME TO CR*P YOUR PANTS!

20120210-11 17:04 Pam "Money and Morals"

"Money and Morals" by Paul Krugman, *New York Times*

Feb. 9, 2012 (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/krugman-money-and-morals.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

Lately inequality has re-entered the national conversation. Occupy Wall Street gave the issue visibility, while the Congressional Budget Office supplied hard data on the widening income gap. And the myth of a classless society has been exposed: Among rich countries, America stands out as the place where economic and social status is most likely to be inherited.

So you knew what was going to happen next. **Suddenly, conservatives are telling us that it's not really about money; it's about morals. Never mind wage stagnation and all that, the real problem is the collapse of working-class family values, which is somehow the fault of liberals.**

But is it really all about morals? No, it's mainly about money.

To be fair, the new book at the heart of the conservative pushback, Charles Murray's *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010*, does highlight some striking trends. Among white Americans with a high school education or less, marriage rates and male labor force participation are down, while births out of wedlock are up. Clearly, white working-class society has changed in ways that don't sound good.

But the first question one should ask is: Are things really that bad on the values front?

Mr. Murray and other conservatives often seem to assume that the decline of the traditional family has terrible implications for society as a whole. This is, of course, a longstanding position. Reading Mr. Murray, I found myself thinking about an earlier diatribe, Gertrude Himmelfarb's 1996 book, *The De-Moralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values*, which covered much of the same ground, claimed that our society was unraveling and predicted further unraveling as the Victorian virtues continued to erode.

Yet the truth is that some indicators of social dysfunction have improved dramatically even as traditional families continue to lose ground. As far as I can tell, Mr. Murray never mentions either the plunge in teenage pregnancies among all racial groups since 1990 or the 60 percent decline in violent crime since the mid-90s. Could it be that traditional families aren't as crucial to social cohesion as advertised?

Still, something is clearly happening to the traditional working-class family. The question is what. And it is, frankly, amazing how quickly and blithely conservatives dismiss the seemingly obvious answer: A drastic reduction in the work opportunities available to less-educated men.

Most of the numbers you see about income trends in America focus on households rather than individuals, which makes sense for some purposes. But when you see a modest rise in incomes for the lower tiers of the income distribution, you have to realize that all — yes, all — of this rise comes from the women, both because more women are in the paid labor force and because women's wages aren't as much below male wages as they used to be.

For lower-education working men, however, it has been all negative. Adjusted for inflation, entry-level wages of male high school graduates have fallen 23 percent since 1973. Meanwhile, employment benefits have collapsed. In 1980, 65 percent of recent high-school graduates working in the private sector had health benefits, but, by 2009, that was down to 29 percent.

So we have become a society in which less-educated men have great difficulty finding jobs with decent wages and good benefits. Yet somehow we're supposed to be surprised that such men have become less likely to participate in the work force or get married, and conclude that there must have been some mysterious moral collapse caused by snooty liberals. And Mr. Murray also tells us that working-class marriages, when they do happen, have become less happy; strange to say, money problems will do that.

One more thought: The real winner in this controversy is the distinguished sociologist William Julius Wilson.

Back in 1996, the same year Ms. Himmelfarb was lamenting our moral collapse, Mr. Wilson published "When Work Disappears: The New World of the Urban Poor," in which he argued that much of the social disruption among African-Americans popularly attributed to collapsing values was actually caused by a lack of blue-collar jobs in urban areas. If he was right, you would expect something similar to happen if another social group — say, working-class whites — experienced a comparable loss of economic opportunity. And so it has.

So we should reject the attempt to divert the national conversation away from soaring inequality toward the alleged moral failings of those Americans being left behind. Traditional values aren't as crucial as social conservatives would have you believe — and, in any case, **the social changes taking place in America's working class are overwhelmingly the consequence of sharply rising inequality, not its cause.**

20120210-12 18:05 Dennis Photo: Rick Santorum Crowd Reaction

So how's that religious voter thing workin' out for you, Rick?



20120210-13 18:09 Pam Re: Rick Santorum Crowd Reaction (reply to Dennis, above)

A picture really IS worth a thousand words.

20120210-14 18:59 Dennis Palin-Beck 2012

It's Glenn Beck's birthday. Time to soak up some of his infinite wisdom:

<http://politicalhumor.about.com/library/bl-glenn-beck-conspiracy.htm>.

This is still on my bumper. I haven't given up hope.



20120211-05 15:57 Dick Antique Cars

Were you a hot-rodder?

<http://cruzintheavenue.com/CarsWeDrove.htm>

From SteveG (Feb. 12, 2012, 8:01 am)—Animals Not Allowed on Yakima Zip Lines?

No hippos, rhinos, alligators, crocodiles, or boars up here – just a few bores.



Andrew Hacker's essay in the NYRB "We're More Unequal Than You Think," should be read by every American and political candidate. At the very least, YOU should read it. Did you know that more homicides and suicides occur under Republican Presidents than under Democratic ones? Did you know that during the 2000s US corporations cut domestic employment by 2.9 million and added 2.4 million workers overseas? Did you know that between 1985 and 2010 income for all Americans increased 7%, while the CEO of Johnson & Johnson saw an increase of 719%?

In my very humble opinion, I suspect the right wing of distracting the public with arguments about religious liberty, class warfare, personal responsibility, and private morality merely in order to keep voters from thinking about the two biggest crises we face: global warming and an expanding income gap.

"We're More Unequal Than You Think" by Andrew Hacker, *The New York Review of Books*

Feb. 23, 2012 (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/feb/23/were-more-unequal-you-think/>)

Imagine a giant vacuum cleaner looming over America's economy, drawing dollars from its bottom to its upper tiers. Using US Census reports, I estimate that since 1985, the lower 60 percent of households have lost \$4 trillion, most of which has ascended to the top 5 percent, including a growing tier now taking in \$1 million or more each year.¹ Some of our founders foresaw this happening. "Society naturally divides itself," Alexander Hamilton wrote in *The Federalist*, "into the very few and the many." His coauthor, James Madison, identified the cause. "Unequal faculties of acquiring property," he said, inhere in every human grouping. If affluence results from inner aptitudes, it might seem futile to try reining in the rich.

All four of the books under review reject Hamilton and Madison's premises. All are informative, original, and offer unusual insights. None accepts that social divisions are inevitable or natural, and all make coherent arguments in favor of less inequality, supported by persuasive statistics.

The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, Bloomsbury, 331 pp., \$28.00; \$18.00 (paper)

The Spirit Level is a prodigious empirical effort directed to a moral purpose. It ranks the quality of life in twenty-three countries, mainly European, but with Singapore, Israel, and the United States also on the list. To evaluate the well-being of each society, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett use indices ranging from obesity and incarceration rates to teenage births and the feelings people have about their fellow countrymen. They then relate these variables to how income is distributed in each society. Here they deploy the Gini ratio, a three-digit coefficient purporting to measure the extent of income inequality within any grouping for which figures are available. Their national Gini scores range from .230 in egalitarian Sweden to .478 in highly stratified Singapore, with the United States second highest at .450. Linking social indicators to economic disparities, the authors conclude that "reducing inequality is the best way of improving the quality of the social environment."

As income gaps grow, they write, it's not only the poor who suffer. Unequal societies not only bear "diseases of poverty," but also "diseases of affluence." The latter include cancer and cardiovascular disease as well as the afflictions of well-off people who are "anxiety-ridden," "prone to depression," and "seek comfort in overeating, obsessive shopping and spending." At this point, as elsewhere, the authors tend to get carried away. I'm not sure I'm ready to rank compulsive spending or eating too much as diseases. Even so, Wilkinson and Pickett are blunt in their summary: "inequality is socially corrosive." What's missing in their analysis is how far, if at all, income disparities may also degrade the deprived.

The authors don't go so far as to say that people with above-average incomes would end up better off were they to take home less money, and if greater numbers of their poor compatriots had more. But they do contend that "the benefits of greater equality seem to be shared across the vast majority of the population." Thus one of their tables shows that those in the middle class in more egalitarian England have lower rates of cancer and diabetes than their counterparts in the United States. American children don't perform as well academically as their peers in Finland and Belgium, where incomes are not as widely spread.

The broader argument was made by Oliver Wendell Holmes, who reputedly told one of his clerks that taxation is how we "buy civilization." Lower Gini scores generally tell us that the business and professional classes of such countries as Norway and Denmark consent to higher tax rates because publicly provided higher education and health care and cultural amenities make for a more congenial society, in which everyone shares.

Wilkinson and Pickett teach at Britain's University of York, and they aim for an international audience. Yet they seem to have America mainly in mind when they remark that "instead of a better society, the only thing almost everyone strives for is to better their own position." Here too we're into hyperbole. The United States has a large stratum of professionals who choose public service careers; indeed much, even most, of the middle class doesn't set its sights on more than routine personal advancement. Still, it's appropriate to ask how many of the rich care about creating a "better society." Wealth brings higher-quality health care, private schooling, and personal pension plans, along with shielding from lines, crowds, and captious service.

Like many modern studies, most of the findings in *The Spirit Level* derive from statistical formulations. I found myself wanting to know more about the actual people represented by indicators and indices. In Belgium, taxes take 42 percent of an average worker's earnings, compared with 23 percent in the United States; in Denmark, personal income taxes absorb 27 percent of its gross domestic product, against 8 percent in the US. How do their middle-class professionals balance the public and private in their conceptions of the good life? Do they, for example, feel that high take-home pay is needed to bring out people's best efforts? "We see no indication," Wilkinson and Pickett say, "that standards of intellectual, artistic or sporting achievement are lower in the more equal societies." And as a measure of innovation, they show that such countries file more patents per capita. But they don't consider keenly competitive enterprises—such as Apple and Facebook—from which Forbes 400 fortunes grow. We hear it claimed that innovations such as iPhones and iPads are much encouraged by hopes of inordinate wealth. Is there an egalitarian alternative?

There's a limitation to the Gini ratio that the authors don't mention. Because Spain (.320) and Canada (.321) are so close in Gini ratio, *The Spirit Level* would have us conclude they have comparable levels of income. But similar scores can conceal quite different distributions of income. Unfortunately, Wilkinson and Pickett don't explain why. For example, the Gini ratios for New Hampshire (.425) and Iowa (.427) make them relatively egalitarian on the American spectrum. However, New Hampshire gets there by having the same number of high- and low-income households: 26 percent have annual income over \$100,000 with 26 percent under \$35,000. Iowa has almost the same ratio, but only 15 percent of its households make above \$100,000 and 36 percent fall below \$35,000. *The Spirit Level's* message is that if countries want a more equable and equitable society, they should move toward closing their income gaps. But what can we say about Iowa's equality if it still has a substantial low-income segment? Reducing the proportion of the rich may be a pyrrhic victory if poverty persists.

To say that America's rich are getting richer, which is true, is only part of the story. Also important is that considerably more Americans are now enjoying an affluence that was once the preserve of only a very small stratum. Despite Occupy Wall Street's focus on the wealthiest one percent, the rise of two other groups tells us more about recent redistributions. The first consists of households having annual incomes of \$1 million or more, a passable definition of "rich." (Entry to the top 1 percent now comes with \$347,421, which I'd simply call comfortably off.)

As can be seen in Table A, in 1972, altogether 22,887 tax returns were filed with today's equivalent of \$1 million in income. By 1985, the number had expanded to 58,603. And in 2009, the most recent year for figures, this bracket had multiplied to 236,893. In 1972, for every \$1 million household there were 3,393 earning less. Now for every \$1 million household there are only 591 with less. True, the population has grown since 1972, as has the overall income pool. But not nearly enough to explain the expansion at the top.

Table A

MORE ROOM AT THE TOP?

<i>All in 2010 Dollars</i>	1972	1985	2010
<i>IRS Returns Declaring Over \$1 Million in Income</i>			
\$1 Million+ Returns	22,887	58,603	236,893
Per 100,000 Returns	30	58	162
Share of All Income	1.3%	3.0%	9.5%
Average Tax Paid	47%	37%	25%
Average After-Tax	\$1,159,595	\$1,465,947	\$2,319,236
<i>Best-Off 5% of Families</i>			
Top 5% Families	2,718,650	3,177,500	3,932,750
Entry Income	\$129,739	\$149,107	\$200,354
Share of All Income	15.9%	16.1%	20.0%
Inequality (Gini) Index	.359	.389	.440

Sources: Internal Revenue Service, Bureau of the Census. A lower index signifies a more equal income distribution.

Moreover, the \$1 million (and up) in the three illustrative years was the amount these taxpayers declared as gross income; that is, before they paid taxes to the IRS. As is also shown in Table A, the share of income paid in taxes by this group has declined markedly. In 1972, households in the \$1 million bracket kept 53 percent of what they declared. Today, they retain 75 percent for personal purchases and pleasures. There would still be more rich Americans if their taxes hadn't been reduced, due to the rise in salaries and other sources of wealth at the top. But those abatements have allowed the kind of gilded lives not known for over a century.

Where did all these earners of \$1 million incomes come from? Many are owners of small but prosperous businesses. But even with high-tech start-ups, we don't have more fledgling enterprises than in the past. In fact, the greatest growth in high incomes has been in "financial services." Here what's bought and sold largely amounts to advice, about when people should buy and sell financial holdings, or have holdings bought and sold for them, as with public offerings and investing pension funds.

Financial services also includes devising algorithms for complex securities, like credit default swaps and collateralized debt obligations. In either case, what's being created often seems so arcane that clients don't object to eight-digit fees, which are in turn bestowed as seven-figure bonuses. Or they don't cavil at such payments because they intend to do well themselves. According to Adam Smith, we should expect competitors to emerge, offering the same services at palpably lower fees. While this sometimes happens, customers tend to feel safer with well-known names, including Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers, until their days of reckoning.

The wish to focus on millionaires is understandable. But the upward movement of money has in fact benefited a second and considerably larger group, the best-paid 5 percent, which includes some four million families. As Table A shows, this group's real earnings have more than doubled since 1972, while its share of aggregate income has grown by almost a quarter. As Table A also notes, it now takes about \$200,000 a year to join this tier. In my view, this stratum warrants at least as much attention as the superrich, not just because there are more of them, but because their paychecks tell us a lot about an emerging pattern of rewards.

The Darwin Economy: Liberty, Competition, and the Common Good by Robert H. Frank, Princeton University Press, 240 pp., \$26.95

The Age of Austerity: How Scarcity Will Remake American Politics by Thomas Byrne Edsall, Doubleday, 272 pp., \$24.95

Robert Frank's *The Darwin Economy* and Thomas Edsall's *The Age of Austerity* provide much-needed information and analysis to explain why so much of the nation's money is flowing upward. Frank, an economist at Cornell, draws on social psychology to shatter many myths about competition and compensation. While he doesn't explicitly cite the classical French economist Jean-Baptiste Say, much in his exposition echoes Say's axiom that "supply creates demand." This doesn't mean that if items are put on display, people will automatically buy them. Consumers decide what or if they'll purchase, and clearly can only do so if they have the credit or money. Even so, the items they decide they want have been created by the suppliers, who put things on the shelves.

Frank carries this a step further. In recent years, he argues, the products and enjoyments set before us have become increasingly enticing—including houses, vacations, television programs, video games, electronic devices, and the attractions of the Internet. In many cases, the rich acquire them first; since what they have and do becomes widely known, emulation descends down the line.

Nor are these just Tiffany trinkets. Frank's most vivid examples are newly built houses. As the very rich installed grander entrance halls and rarely used bathrooms, the professional classes felt they should have a semblance of such amenities. "By 2007," Frank writes, "the median new single-family house built in the United States had an area of more than 2,300 square feet, some 50 percent more than its counterpart from 1970." Indeed, it's revealing that this expansion was happening as people were having fewer children. However, these homes—along with more elaborate wardrobes, holidays, and technical gear—are costly. If they were to be bought, salaries needed to keep pace.

Hence, I would argue, an unstated but still real compact was made between the employers and the new upper-middle class. Their pay would be raised to support their ascending status. As the samplings in Table B show, while real earnings for the overall workforce have risen only 7 percent since 1985, professions like physicians and professors have done several times better. Incomes of lawyers and executives, for their part, have soared much further than anyone would have forecast a few decades ago.²

Table B

PROFESSIONAL PAYDAYS

<i>All in 2010 Dollars</i>	<i>1985</i>	<i>2010</i>	<i>Real Increase</i>
<i>All Employed Americans</i>	\$39,044	\$41,919	+7%
<i>Physicians and Surgeons</i>			
Radiologists	\$335,400	\$448,900	+34%
Urologists	\$266,200	\$380,400	+43%
Psychiatrists	\$167,200	\$216,500	+29%
<i>University Professors</i>			
Harvard University	\$132,000	\$193,800	+47%
University of Chicago	\$112,100	\$190,400	+70%
University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill)	\$97,000	\$143,300	+37%
<i>Law Partners</i>			
Wachtell Lipton	\$1,669,000	\$4,345,000	+160%
Kirkland & Ellis	\$850,000	\$3,075,000	+262%
Latham & Watkins	\$819,000	\$1,995,000	+144%
<i>Corporate CEOs</i>			
Union Pacific	\$3,825,000	\$23,060,000	+502%
Occidental Petroleum	\$2,440,000	\$20,130,000	+825%
Johnson & Johnson	\$2,241,000	\$18,360,000	+719%

Sources: Medical Economics, Modern Healthcare, American Association of University Professors, American Lawyer, Forbes. Men's earnings rose by 2.1% in 1985–2010; women's by 12.2%.

Rationales aren't lacking for these raises. One is that skills and talents are in short supply for such jobs as video game designers, so higher pay must be proffered to get and keep the better performers. But a more plausible reason is that money to push up pay was becoming available as profits generally increased, and lower-level jobs were increasingly performed by workers abroad. So a tacit compact came into play. Health plans gave doctors most of what they billed, with few questions asked. Colleges, knowing that parents would pay, found they could increase tuition and fees, much of which went to boost the pay of those fortunate to be full-time faculty. Corporate clients didn't object to higher legal fees, at least for top partners, since their overall labor costs were less.

Here Thomas Edsall provides useful information. "US multinational corporations cut domestic employment by 2.9 million during the 2000s, while adding 2.4 million workers overseas," he writes. At the same time, "recession-forced layoffs resulted in increased productivity, which in turn translated into higher profits with fewer workers." In this setting, clubby corporate boards approved eight-figure pay packages to their CEOs, which were seen as affirming the stature of their firms. In these and other instances, accepted standards for corporate compensation went by the board. No one asked what might be a competitive rate for whatever skills were needed; or if there might be equally talented people who would do just as good a job for less.

The crucial fact is that the upward flow of money has reduced the spending power of those lower down, most notably the bottom 60 percent. This loss has had consequences. For example, in a not-so-distant past, families of modest means made enough to put something aside for their children's college fees. That cushion is gone, which is why millions of undergraduates are now forced to take much larger loans. Adding interest and penalties, many will face decades paying off six-figure debts. By way of contrast, parents in the top 5 percent can write full tuition checks, which gives their children an edge in admissions decisions, even if colleges deny this.³

James Gilligan has written a quirky book that deserves to be taken seriously. His exposition is based primarily on public statistics, and he uses the numbers responsibly, always allowing for alternative interpretations. His book isn't explicitly about economic inequality, but something graver: death, and its two most dramatic causes, suicide and homicide. Yet even here, how the economy functions is crucial. Gilligan starts with figures on these two ways life may end, for which we have reliable records going back to 1900. The numbers start with county coroners, are forwarded to state health agencies, and are finally collated in federal reports. To be sure, not all deaths have clear-cut causes. We can't always be sure if ingesting too many pills was accidental or intentional, just as a road fatality can be a means of suicide. Gilligan is aware of ambiguities like these and factors them into his equations.

Still, his initial step may raise some questions. For each year starting with 1900, he adds homicide and suicide rates together to yield a "violent death rate," which becomes the principal variable in his analysis. True, a carbon monoxide suicide is in a sense a violent act; but it's not in the same category as plunging a knife into someone else's chest. Gilligan acknowledges the differences in the two kinds of deaths, but they also overlap. At least a few of those who choose to carry lethal weapons know they are rolling dice with their own lives.

The two modes of death involve different groups of people. In 2007, the most recent for figures, there were 34,598 suicides and 18,361 homicides. As it happens, men accounted for precisely 79 percent of both groups of victims. However, relative to their numbers, whites were almost three times as likely as blacks to take their own lives, while blacks had an eight times greater chance of being killed by someone else. Altogether, 56 percent of the men used firearms to end their lives; so did 30 percent of the women.

What makes Gilligan's analysis interesting is his view that the two forms of death have many parallels. Suicide, he argues, may be seen as "self-punishment," the sternest possible reproof, but inflicted on oneself. In a not wholly dissimilar vein, "aggressive behavior toward other people, which can escalate to homicide," is often impelled by resentment over not receiving respect felt to be one's due. (Shots have been fired over parking spaces.) Both sets of feelings are exacerbated, Gilligan argues, when social conditions swell the pool of people who are made to feel "worthless," "shamed," and "redundant."

According to his calculations, "epidemics of lethal violence" are closely correlated with the party affiliation of the president. In the 107 years following 1900, Republicans held the White House for fifty-nine of them, leaving forty-eight for Democrats. He found that for all but fourteen of the 107 years, his combined homicide-suicide rate fell when Democrats were president and rose under Republican administrations. (Eisenhower and Carter accounted for twelve of the fourteen exceptional years.)

Gilligan's most specific surmise is that these linkages result largely from unemployment, which tends to rise under Republican presidents. An inability to find a job, he says, is the foremost driver of feelings of shame and worthlessness. (If this pattern persists, unemployment and violence-related deaths will rise even further if we have a President Romney.) It's obvious that the 52,959 suicides and homicides recorded in 2007 were a minute fraction of the seven million out of work that year. Gilligan, a professor of psychiatry at NYU, conjectures that "they are the tip of the iceberg...underneath which are many times more people who suffer grievously from these stresses but do not respond to them by killing others or themselves."

Gilligan also shows that states usually carried by Republicans have higher homicide and suicide rates, as well as inflicting more deaths in the form of executions. But he doesn't relate this to the job market in these states—an important omission. He considers another explanation. Republicans muster their majorities from just above the median, pitting "members of the lower middle class against the very poorest lower class." So when they take power, they are basically telling Americans who are first to be fired that they no longer count. What I take Gilligan to be saying is that those who are subject to the humiliations of being poor at least sense that when a Democrat is in the White House someone there cares more than would be the case if there were a Republican. This is class analysis with a new twist.

Well, we now have a Democratic president, with three years of high jobless rates. We don't yet have suicide statistics for 2009 and 2010. But figures for homicides are available from the FBI, which collects them from local police departments. In 2009, the national rate for the FBI combined "murder and manslaughter" rate was 5.0 per 100,000 in the population, and in 2010 it dropped to 4.8 per 100,000. By way of contrast, those rates during George W. Bush's eight years averaged 5.6 per 100,000. Thus far Gilligan's inferences are standing up. Despite

disheartening levels of unemployment, having a Democratic administration correlates with a moderately declining murder rate.

While Gilligan doesn't discuss income inequality explicitly, he argues that one of our major parties has no real concern for those below the economic median. Here his book complements the other three. If the Republicans win the presidency, it will be largely with votes from the upper half of the electorate, which provided their needed margin in the 2010 contests.⁴ Using this base, the GOP claims that the rich must be cosseted because they are "job creators."

What isn't said is that its business supporters seek the cheapest possible workforce—domestic, immigrant, or foreign—because bonuses and profits rise when payroll costs are low. If this strategy succeeds, the Americans who are most desperate for jobs will face a future as casual labor. (The college "adjuncts" who are poorly paid to do much of the teaching formerly done by upper-middle-class professors are one white-collar harbinger.) Like other overleveraged nations, the US may well be facing Thomas Edsall's "age of austerity." If so, it remains to ask who will be making most of the sacrifices. Americans have votes and voices; much of the decision will rest with them.

¹See www.census.gov/hhes/www/income/data/historical/household, Tables H-1 and H-17. All 1985–2010 amounts are in 2010-value dollars.

²Frank argues that Darwin's natural selection better explains the results of competition than Smith's invisible hand. To underwrite the "common good"—for which he finds scant concern in Darwin—he would impose onerous taxes on "positional" (i.e., conspicuous) consumption like lavish "weddings and coming-of-age parties."

³According to *The Princeton Review*, of the 15,141 students admitted by ten highly competitive colleges last year (the Ivy League plus Stanford and Duke), 48.8 percent were able to pay the full bill, which averaged \$53,158.

⁴See my "The Next Election: The Surprising Reality," *The New York Review*, August 18, 2011.

20120212-03	14:47	Art	"Republicans Undiscover Fire"
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As we all sort through the growing crescendo of political verbiage that precedes the President election still, God help us, many, many months away, I have been struck by what seems to be a virtually constant theme. Every time I read anything about the current President (in AOL the letters below the news items are often more revealing than the new item itself) it is always couched in these vague generalities. "He is a godless communist Nazi out to destroy America." Never any specifics - ever. The e-mail mass send outs I receive blaming him for this or that are virtually all wrong - not just some of them, all of them. (I use SNOPEs or Fact Checker a lot.) I have asked all of my friends who tend to lean to the right to give just one specific example of his evilness that we could discuss. Nothing. Even the main contenders for the Republican nomination state "Our primary goal is to defeat Obama". What about jobs, or global warming or the deficit?

To me this seems to be missing something - a lot actually. Why is the current president so bad and evil and what must we do to fix this? The below articulates it far better than I could ever do.

Worth a read. The science stuff is particularly interesting.

"Republicans Undiscover Fire" by Mark Sumner, Daily Kos

Feb. 12, 2012, (<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/02/12/1063989/-Republicans-undiscover-fire?detail=hide>)

There's a mythology around politics, one that sees the ballot box and the floor of Congress as a battleground of ideas. In this star-spangled arena, progressives and conservatives square off in the competition to prove the worth of their opposing philosophies and the merit of their plans. Of course it's not all high-minded rhetoric and reasoned

discourse, there are selfish motives and personal ambitions, angry outbursts and plain old mistakes, but in the end the best ideas win out in the great experiment that is America! Cue the brass section and wave the flag.

The truth is it was probably never that way. It doesn't take much prompting for people to produce examples of nastiness in campaigns back Jefferson and Adams, or to revisit instances of corruption from decades or centuries gone by. We all know that Mr. Smith is a fictional character.

However, just because it's possible to unearth grizzled examples of ugliness doesn't mean that the current season is not unique. Uniquely dangerous. And what makes it dangerous is the pretense that we're still in that fantasyland where ideas arm wrestle for history's approval. In fact, that time is long past. It's not even that what's now coming from the right consists of 100% emotional, fear-based appeals without a factual basis. In 2012, a campaign of suggestive fear-mongering seems almost quaint.

It's that the Republicans have staked out a position that requires that they lie, 24/7, 365. Not shade the facts their way. Not put their own spin on the situation. Lie. Big, sloppy, and constantly.

The lies go beyond instantly dismissible claims like President Obama being the "food stamp president" (why you have to go back one whole administration to discover that more people joined the food stamp ranks under Bush than Obama, but then the Republicans don't seem to remember Bush in any case). The blatant lies extend through every aspect of the Republican platform, such as it is. The simple reason is that the Republicans have no ideas left, at least no ideas that have not been tested and proven to be failures again, and again, and again.

The economy didn't just crash under a Republican president, it crashed under Republican policies. It crashed with low taxes. It crashed with deregulated markets. It crashed with huge restrictions on union activity. It crashed with massive cuts in environmental regulations. It crashed with lowered trade barriers. It crashed with big fat Pentagon spending.

They got what they wanted. They got CEOs with no limits on their wealth. They got banks with no limits on their "creativity." They got trade agreements that guaranteed manufacturing could be moved to the dirtiest, cheapest, most desperate source available. They got massive cuts in capital gains taxes and equally large boosts in the wealth they could pass along in estates. They got everything they said would make us all wealthy. They got record oil and gas drilling. They got record giveaways of public land. They got everything they said would create jobs. They got the middle class to shoulder more, more, more of the burden so that those beautiful job creators would be free to work their magic.

They can't say the economy crashed because taxes went up, because they didn't. They can't say that the economy crashed because there was a raft of new regulation, because there wasn't. They can't blame it on "union thugs" or Saul Alinsky or the guy who writes Happy Holidays cards at Hallmark. They can't blame it on a president who was elected when the world was already in free fall. Only, of course they do. They say it because they have no choice.

For the same reason that they have to maintain that global warming is the creation of a conspiracy of scientists, and that evolution is a conspiracy of other scientists, and that gay marriage is a threat to "traditional" marriage. They have to lie about the threat of illegal immigrants. Lie about the state of the national debt. Lie about the effects of the President's health care plan. They have to lie, because lies are all they have left.

They certainly can't admit the truth about the economy. They can't admit that they did it. Own it. That their policies directly caused the worst economic failure in American history. Strike that. Make it "the greatest failure in American history since the last time that these same policies were tried." But then, they've been lying about that bit of history for years.

The truth is that the Republicans have nothing to offer. Not even anything that looks like a governing philosophy. Conservatism has moved out of the ranks of political theories and simply become a cult; one that requires that certain phrases be mouthed, that certain hatreds be nourished, and that purity be maintained regardless of cost. That schism with reality is increasingly large and increasingly obvious. They try to paper over that gap by dismissing little things like science, reason, history. Real science fails to support their contentions, so they have to write it off. Reason doesn't work for them, so any question must be met with red-faced indignity — every question a gotcha

question. Real history is full of warts, quirks, and unfortunate truths that don't fit their ritualized beliefs. So they have to try to rewrite history, giving us rewrite Reagan who never raised a tax or increased a debt, rewrite FDR who created the issues he actually solved, rewrite Lincoln who championed the Confederate cause, rewrite founding fathers who never owned slaves, never supported government regulation of the economy, never wavered in their ardent love for a form of religiosity that didn't yet exist. Tricorner hats are the new tinfoil.

The real danger isn't that someone might listen to the Republicans—anyone who lies long enough and loud enough can always find an audience, especially when that someone has three quarters of the television media and ninety+ percent of radio. The danger is that we might forget that they're lying. Too often Democrats, including this president, have felt that the best way to handle Republican fantasies is to compromise with them. You can't compromise reality, no matter how loud the lies.

20120212-04	16:33	SteveG	"300,000 Organic Farmers Sue Monsanto in Federal Court..."
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"300,000 Organic Farmers Sue Monsanto in Federal Court: Decision on March 31st to Go to Trial" by Jane Ayers, NationofChange

Feb. 12, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/300000-organic-farmers-sue-monsanto-federal-court-decision-march-31st-go-trial-1329059467>)

Little did Willie Nelson know when he recorded "Crazy" years ago just how crazy it would become for our cherished family farmers in America. Nelson, President of Farm Aid, has recently called for the national Occupy movement to declare an "Occupy the Food System" action.

Nelson states, "Corporate control of our food system has led to the loss of millions of family farmers, destruction of our soil..."

Hundreds of citizens, (even including NYC chefs in their white chef hats) joined Occupy the Food System groups, ie Food Democracy Now, gathered outside the Federal Courts in Manhattan on January 31st, to support organic family farmers in their landmark lawsuit against Big Agribusiness giant Monsanto. (Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association v. Monsanto) Oral arguments were heard that day concerning the lawsuit by 83 plaintiffs representing over 300,000 organic farmers, organic seed growers, and organic seed businesses.

The lawsuit addresses the bizarre and shocking issue of Monsanto harassing and threatening organic farmers with lawsuits of "patent infringement" if any organic farmer ends up with any trace amount of GM seeds on their organic farmland.

Judge Naomi Buckwald heard the oral arguments on Monsanto's Motion to Dismiss, and the legal team from Public Patent Foundation represented the rights of American organic farmers against Monsanto, maker of GM seeds, [and additionally, Agent Orange, dioxin, etc.]

After hearing the arguments, Judge Buckwald stated that on March 31st she will hand down her decision on whether the lawsuit will move forward to trial.

Not only does this lawsuit debate the issue of Monsanto potentially ruining the organic farmers' pure seeds and crops with the introduction of Monsanto's genetically modified (GM) seeds anywhere near the organic farms, but additionally any nearby GM fields can withstand Monsanto's Roundup herbicides, thus possibly further contaminating the organic farms nearby if Roundup is used.

Of course, the organic farmers don't want anything to do with that ole contaminated GM seed in the first place. In fact, that is why they are certified organic farmers. Hello? But now they have to worry about getting sued by the very monster they abhor, and even have to spend extra money and land (for buffers which only sometimes deter the contaminated seed from being swept by the wind into their crop land). At this point, they are even having to resort to not growing at all the following organic plants: soybeans, corn, cotton, sugar beets, and canola, ...just to protect themselves from having any (unwanted) plant that Monsanto could possibly sue them over.

"Crazy, crazy for feeling so....."

The farmers are suffering the threat of possible loss of Right Livelihood. They are creating good jobs for Americans, and supplying our purest foods. These organic farmers are bringing Americans healthy food so we can be a healthy Nation, instead of the undernourished and obese kids and adults that President Obama worries so much about us becoming.

So what was President Obama doing when he appointed Michael Taylor, a former VP of Monsanto, as Sr. Advisor to the Commissioner at the FDA? The FDA is responsible for "label requirements" and recently ruled under Michael Taylor's time as FDA Food Czar that GMO products did not need to be labeled as such, even though national consumer groups loudly professed the public's right to know what is genetically modified in the food system. Sadly to remember: President Obama promised in campaign speeches that he would "let folks know what foods are genetically modified." These are the conflict of interests that lead to the 99% movement standing up for the family farmers.

Just look at the confusing headlines lately that revealed that mid-western farms of GM corn will be sprayed with 2,4-D toxins found in the deadly Agent Orange. Just refer to the previous lawsuits taken all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court by U.S. Veterans who tried to argue the dangers of Monsanto's Agent Orange, and high rates of cancers in our soldiers who had to suffer the side effects from their wartime exposures in Vietnam.

In 1980 alone, when all this mess started with corporations wiping out the livelihoods of family farmers, the National Farm Medicine Center reported that 900 male farmers in the Upper Midwest committed suicide. That was nearly double the national average for white men. Even sadder is the fact that some of the farmers' children also committed suicide. Studies show that when one generation of family farmers lose their farms, then the next generation usually can't revive the family business and traditions later.

Jim Gerritsen, President of the Organic Seed Growers and Trade Association, has pointed out that there are 5th and 6th generation family farmers being pushed off their farms today, and because of a "climate of fear" (from possible lawsuits from Monsanto), they can't grow some of the food they want to grow.

These farmers are the ones who have been able to survive the changes over the past twenty years by choosing to go into the budding niche of organic farming. Now look at what they have to deal with while trying to grow successful businesses: Monsanto's threats.

Even organic dairy farmers have had to suffer lawsuits (from Monsanto) when they labeled their organic milk "non-BGH" referring to Monsanto's bovine growth hormone used by conventional dairies.

Consumers want organic food, and they want America's pure food source to stay protected in America. Made in America, organically, is the way of the future, and family farmers and seed businesses should be free to maintain their high standards for organic foods. They deserve protection from Big Agribusiness' dangerous seeds trespassing on their croplands, not to mention the use of pesticides and herbicides on GM crops. The organic industry has an "organic seal" which is also important to the success of family businesses, and even that stamp of quality is threatened by the spread of Monsanto's GM seed contaminating their pure seed banks.

The Banking industry is also partly to blame. Years before the mortgages and home fiasco we have now, the farmers were the first to feel the squeeze. I interviewed Willie Nelson in the 1980's, and he mentioned even then the high rates of farmer suicides, and that Farm Aid was receiving letters from family farmers saying the banks had "called in their loans", even though "we had never missed a payment". Was this just a veiled land grab for fertile lands, or to intentionally bankrupt independent family farmers?

It was so inspiring years ago when Michelle Obama planted an organic garden at the White House. It was a great precedent for the future, but what happened? It was ruined when they discovered sewer sludge from previous Administrations had contaminated their beautiful soil where the organic vegetables were planted. Just one small upset but it was remedied for future plantings. What about our whole country's organic food supply being

contaminated by previous Administrations' bad choices? Why did they ever allow Monsanto to introduce genetically engineered seeds into our pure, organic, and heirloom stockpiles across America in the first place?

Recently, the Obama Administration, in an effort to boost food exports, signed joint agreements with agricultural biotechnology industry giants, including Monsanto, to remove the last barriers for the spread of more genetically modified crops.

But in this recent lawsuit filed by the Organic Seed Growers & Trade Association, it was argued that a previous contamination of a "genetically engineered variety of rice", named Liberty Link 601, in 2006, before it was approved for human consumption, "extensively contaminated the commercial rice supply, resulting in multiple countries banning the import of U.S. rice." The worldwide economic loss was "upward to \$1.285 billion dollars" due to the presence of GMOs...

What are everyday Americans going to do to turn it around, to get rid of Monsanto's genetically modified seeds and its dangerous threat to America's heirloom and organic seed caches?

There is high rate of cancer in America, and eating healthier, especially organic foods, has been shown to have great benefits in beating cancer and other diseases. When we have Agribusiness threatening independent family farmers, which leads to the farmers feeling so scared that they don't even plant their organic crops that Americans need, then perhaps we can all see what the 99% Occupy Movement is trying to say about their conflict of interest and seemingly abuse of powers.

Willie Nelson just released a new poem on You Tube: "We stand with Humanity, against the Insanity, We're the ones we've been waiting for... We're the Seeds and we're the Core, We're the ones we've been waiting for; We're the ones with the 99%."

Monsanto's practices are a clear example of the wrong direction that the 99% want our country to go in. How about shining some light on Monsanto, and before it is too late, realize the dangers of genetically modified seeds which are contaminating the world's food supply.

"Crazy, crazy for feeling so....." 99%.

20120212-05	20:33	SteveB	Fw: Change.org Petition: Stop Chase Bank Foreclosure on Helen Bailey!
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from Change.org:

http://www.change.org/petitions/chase-bank-dont-foreclose-on-helen-bailey?utm_medium=email&utm_source=action_alert

While Chase misappropriates the memory and image of Martin Luther King this Black History Month, the bank is still going forward with its plans to foreclose on Helen Bailey on Feb. 15.

Helen Bailey is a 78-year-old grandmother who participated in the civil rights movement, worked as a childcare provider for autistic children, and was a community volunteer. She has paid her mortgage since 1999, but now she can't keep up the payments. All she wants is to stay in her home until she dies, in the neighborhood where she feels safe and has lived for nearly quarter of a century. She could have refinanced with a company willing to let her live in the house for free until her death, but Chase Bank would not reduce her principal by \$9,000. She's been paying 7% interest, well above most rates, so Chase could have decided they had made enough. Instead, they have started foreclosure and Ms Bailey could end on the street.

<http://steadyddie.posterous.com/exotic-plants-once-a-century-bloom-in-picture>

Queen of the Andes, Thumi, Bolivia



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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>
FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #73 — FEB. 14, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

Even Newt Knows

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 14, 2012)

Perhaps now that arch conservative Newt Gingrich has rejected the issue, we can all move forward. Here's my plan: We bury this "birther" issue and all the other racist cr*p in a big, deep hole and move on to solving our nation's problems. If anyone needs more evidence, please see: <http://factcheck.org/2008/08/born-in-the-usa/>. Case closed!

"Newt Goes Positive, Encounters Orly Taitz" by Alexander Burns, Politico

Feb. 13, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/2012/02/newt-goes-positive-encounters-orly-taitz-114382.html#comments>)

Via POLITICO's Ginger Gibson on the Newt Gingrich West Coast Tour, the former House speaker says he expects to accomplish yet another political comeback by – switching back to a positive message:

Newt Gingrich said he's backing off his attacks on Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum moving forward, and made little mention of his opponents in his stump speech on Monday.

"I think my ideas are much bolder than Santorum or Romney's," Gingrich said when asked why he didn't mention either during his speech. "I think my ideas are much clearer and more specific and I have to focus on communicating those ideas. The two periods I focused on communicating those ideas I ended up No. 1 in Gallup both times. And we're going back to doing what we did that worked."

"When we went back and analyzed it I do dramatically better when I focus on the nation's problems and I focus on the nation's solutions," he said. "I don't do nearly as well when I focus on my competitors. So we took the lesson that has worked twice in the last 3 months."

And from the "Close Encounters" department of campaign events, Ginger reports:

At an event later in Pasadena, Gingrich got a question from Orly Taitz, the California attorney who fanned the "birther" phenomenon by filing a flurry of federal lawsuits challenging President Obama's legitimacy to hold office.

Taitz laid out her arguments against Obama and told Gingrich it could be a "boost" to his campaign if he picked up the issue.

Gingrich responded largely by ignoring her question, instead outlining a litany of issues he sees facing the country.

"I think I have enough issues to debate Obama about," he said.

20120213-02

11:27

Mary

Fw: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!

Would you consider putting this in your newsletter? I would like to know how Obama supporters defend him. Obviously the last paragraph is appealing to emotion, but, aside from that, how can one explain/justify the documented actions of our American president. Wrong is still wrong...regardless of what side of the aisle one sits on.

[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

When?

It's happening fast — WAKE UP AMERICA!

"When you see that in order to produce, you need to obtain permission from men who produce nothing; when you see that money is flowing to those who deal not in goods, but in favors; when you see that men get rich more easily by graft than by work, and your laws no longer protect you against them, but protect them against you... you may know that your society is doomed." ... Ayn Rand

WHEN...

1. He ["Barrack Hussein Obama", to assuage your curiosity. -SteveB] refused to disclose who donated money to his election campaign, as other candidates had done...
2. He received endorsements from people like Louis Farrakhan, Moamar Kaddafi and Hugo Chavez...
3. It was pointed out that he was a total newcomer and had absolutely no experience at anything except community organizing...
4. He chose friends and acquaintances such as Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn who were revolutionary radicals...
5. His voting record in the Illinois Senate and in the U.S. Senate came into question...
6. He refused to wear a flag lapel pin and did so only after a public outcry...
7. People started treating him as a Messiah and children in schools were taught to sing his praises...
8. He stood with his hands over his groin area for the playing of the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance...
9. He surrounded himself in the White House with advisors who were pro-gun control, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual marriage and wanting to curtail freedom of speech to silence the opposition...
10. He said he favors sex education in kindergarten, including homosexual indoctrination...
11. His personal background was either scrubbed or hidden and nothing could be found about him...
12. The place of his birth was called into question, and he refused to produce a birth certificate...
13. He had an association in Chicago with Tony Rezco - a man of questionable character and who is now in prison and had helped Obama to a sweet deal on the purchase of his home...
14. It became known that George Soros, a multi-billionaire Marxist, spent a ton of money to get him elected...
15. He started appointing White House Czars that were radicals, revolutionaries, and even avowed Marxist /Communists...
16. He stood before the Nation and told us that his intentions were to "fundamentally transform this Nation" into something else...
17. It became known that he had trained ACORN workers in Chicago and served as an attorney for ACORN...

18. He appointed cabinet members and several advisors who were tax cheats and socialists...
19. He appointed a Science Czar, John Holdren, who believes in forced abortions, mass sterilizations and seizing babies from teen mothers...
20. He appointed Cass Sunstein as Regulatory Czar who believes in "Explicit Consent," harvesting human organs without family consent and allowing animals to be represented in court, while banning all hunting...
21. He appointed Kevin Jennings, a homosexual and organizer of a group called Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network as Safe School Czar and it became known that he had a history of bad advice to teenagers...
22. He appointed Mark Lloyd as Diversity Czar who believes in curtailing free speech, taking from one and giving to another to spread the wealth, who supports Hugo Chavez...
23. Valerie Jarrett, an avowed Socialist, was selected as Obama's Senior White House Advisor...
24. Anita Dunn, White House Communications Director, said Mao Tse Tung was her favorite philosopher and the person she turned to most for inspiration...
25. He appointed Carol Browner, a well known socialist as Global Warming Czar working on Cap and Trade as the nation's largest tax...
26. He appointed Van Jones, an ex-con and avowed Communist as Green Energy Czar, who since had to resign when this was made known...
27. Tom Daschle, Obama's pick for Health and Human Services Secretary could not be confirmed because he was a tax cheat...
28. As President of the United States , he bowed to the King of Saudi Arabia...
29. He traveled around the world criticizing America and never once talking of her greatness...
30. His actions concerning the Middle East seemed to support the Palestinians over Israel , our long time ally...
31. He took American tax dollars to resettle thousands of Palestinians from Gaza to the United States...
32. He upset the Europeans by removing plans for a missile defense system against the Russians...
33. He played politics in Afghanistan by not sending troops early-on when the Field Commanders said they were necessary to win...
34. He started spending us into a debt that was so big we could not pay it off...
35. He took a huge spending bill under the guise of stimulus and used it to pay off organizations, unions, and individuals that got him elected...
36. He took over insurance companies, car companies, banks, etc....
37. He took away student loans from the banks and put it through the government...
38. He designed plans to take over the health care system and put it under government control...
39. He claimed he was a Christian during the election and tapes were later made public that showed Obama speaking to a Muslim group and 'stating' that he was raised a Muslim, was educated as a Muslim, and is still a Muslim...
40. He set into motion a plan to take over the control of all energy in the United States through Cap and Trade...

...PEOPLE SAID IT DIDN'T MATTER!

He finally completed his transformation of America into a Socialist State , people woke up but it was too late. Add these up one by one and you get a phenomenal score that points to the fact that Barrack Hussein Obama is determined to turn America into a Marxist-Socialist society. All of the items in the preceding paragraphs have been put into place. All can be documented very easily. Before you disavow this do an Internet search. The last paragraph alone is not yet cast in stone. You and I will write that paragraph.

Will it read as above or will it be a more happy ending for most of America? Don't just belittle the opposition. Search for the truth. We all need to pull together or watch the demise of a free democratic society. Pray for Americans to seek the truth and take action for it will keep us FREE. Our biggest enemy is not China , Russia , North Korea or Iran . Our biggest enemy is a contingent of politicians in Washington , DC . The government will not help, so we need to do it ourselves.

Question ... will you delete this, or pass it on to others who don't know about Obama's actions and plans for the USA, so that they may know how to vote in November, 2012 and the ensuing years? It's your decision. I believe it does matter. How about you? November 2012 comes, it will matter who you vote for!

20120213-05	16:26	SteveB	Re: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist! (reply to Mary, above)
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Hi, I'll be happy to post it. I love this stuff! Here are a few facts I dug up, there are lots more. This is apparently a pretty old, widely discredited email.

I notice that you mention "the documented actions of our American president" yet I don't find any evidence of any kind in the email, just a laundry list of old disproven and unproven allegations or things that are so obvious they don't matter, like President Obama being left of George Bush. I'm kind of surprised that one of the 40 points is not something like: "WHEN he was born half-black, PEOPLE SAID IT DIDN'T MATTER"...and, lo and behold, it turned out that it didn't matter, except to the Right, who can't seem to get it out of their minds. I find this email blatantly racist. That's just my humble opinion.

It's interesting that the original email contained several points that were apparently so disproven, so untrue that they were deleted.

If anyone is interested, I will publish additional arguments presented on any of the 52 points of contention.

1. Quotations from the email in question are in quotation marks and, often, all caps. Where there is a one-to-one correspondence with the above email, I have numbered the point.
2. SteveB's commentary is bracketed [] and indented.
3. Analysis from the article in question are in italics and indented.

"They Said It Didn't Matter' (A Giant Mess of Propaganda and Lies)" posted by voice13, CrazyEmailsAndBackStories

Sept. 8, 2011, (<http://crazyemailsandbackstories.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/they-said-it-didnt-matter-a-giant-mess-of-propaganda-and-lies/>)

Sigh, another day, another crazy right wing email. This one was credited to John W. Wallace, a self proclaimed "oathkeeper" teabagger, birther, and far-right activist, but I did not see it on his website, so it may have falsely been attributed to him. It is so full of misinformation, typical FOX "news" innuendo, and outright lies — AND it is so very LONG, that I didn't really want to take the time to address each and every item.

A very smart liberal blogger posted a copy of this email back in 2009, so evidently my email sender is way, way behind in his propaganda promotion. So, I'm currently posting it as a work in progress. I'll fill in each answer over time, or hopefully some of you can help out. Feel free to look up some of the items I've not yet addressed, and email them to me via this site. I'd love any help I can get in addressing this mountain of misinformation...and will happily credit YOU for your contribution.

N/A. "AMERICA IS SLOWLY BEING TURNED INTO A SOCIALIST COUNTRY BECAUSE MANY AMERICANS SAID OBAMA'S PAST AND HIS POST-ELECTION ACTIONS DIDN'T MATTER."

[The version of the email, above, did not include this sentence. But this is the theme of the email, just slightly different words are used: "PEOPLE SAID IT DIDN'T MATTER! He finally completed his transformation of America into a Socialist State , people woke up but it was too late. Add these up one by one and you get a phenomenal score that points to the fact that Barack Hussein Obama is determined to turn America into a Marxist-Socialist society." The discussion below is completely pertinent. —SteveB]

Your initial statement is ridiculous. Firstly, exactly HOW is America even close to being a "socialist" country? Right Wingers (or perhaps more correctly: Reich-wingers) constantly use this word as a knee-jerk swear word, yet few seem to even know what they're talking about. Can you even define "socialism"? How does it work? What do you find bad about it? And how on earth could the U.S. be considered even remotely socialist? Because we collectively build roads that anyone can use and hire firefighters who will save both the rich and the poor? Oooh, the horror! Come on, this is a meaningless and ridiculous statement.

And, by the way, are you aware that Socialist Democracies top the Forbes list of the globe's happiest citizens year after year? Why do you think that is? They pay FAR higher taxes, but their government is responsive to THE CITIZENS. For their taxes they get, among other things, free medical care and free education FOR ALL. This results in a healthy, educated society.

Progressive taxation means that a doctor won't make all that much more than a teacher. This system results in people seeking employment in fields that they LOVE, rather than tolerating a job in a field that detest, just to make a ton of money. The result? High job satisfaction, which equals higher happiness in life. And what about the claim that greed is the only driver of innovation? These countries top ours in the amount of new patent applications, which remains the gold standard of determining the creativity and output of a society.

Further, these Socialist Democracies have lower crime rates per capita, than we do. They demand – and get – better quality food and labeling. Cleaner air. Cleaner water. Higher quality of life. Meanwhile our country is being looted and dismantled by the wealthy elite.

Barack Obama is nowhere near socialist, he is painfully CENTRIST. The right has moved so far right that even Saint Reagan would now be considered too liberal to run for office in the Republican party. The Democrats are boringly centrist. Progressive, liberals are not even on the political map, but for a few brave and notable exceptions. Let me repeat, President Obama is not even a liberal, he is a centrist like the rest of the Democratic party.

Now back to this ridiculous email:

N/A. "When Barack Obama wrote a book and said he was mentored as a youth by Frank (Frank Marshall Davis) an avowed Communist, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[This is a point that has apparently been scrubbed from the email in question. I can only guess that the statement is such a huge lie that "it didn't matter." –SteveB]

While Obama briefly mentions his grandfather's friend, Frank Marshall Davis, (the journalist, poet, and social activist) in his memoir "Dreams From My Father", NOTHING in the book could lead to the conclusion that Davis was Obama's MENTOR during Obama's childhood and adolescence in Hawaii. Obama wrote of imagining him back in the 30s "in a baggy suit and wide lapels, standing in front of the old Regal Theatre, waiting to see Duke or Ella emerge from a gig." Not exactly sitting at the foot of a raving "communist mentor"! This is just silly.

N/A. "When it was discovered that his grandparents, were strong socialists who sent Obama's mother to a socialist school where she was introduced to Frank Marshall Davis, a Black Liberation communist. He was later introduced to young Barrack Hussein Obama. People said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[Another missing point that didn't stand up to even minimal scrutiny, I guess. –SteveB]

WTF? This seems like a re-statement of the first accusation, see the above response. Are you accusing people of socialism or communism? The two are NOT the same. Educate yourself, get your facts straight, and get back to us when you make sense.

N/A. "When people found out that Barrack Hussein Obama was enrolled as a Muslim child in school and his father and stepfather were both Muslims, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[See #39, below. –SteveB]

N/A. "When Barack Obama wrote in another book he authored "I will stand with them (Muslims) should the political winds shift in an ugly direction", people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

What a surprise – this is taken out of context and misleading. From The Audacity of Hope, p.261, "Of course, not all my conversations in immigrant communities follow this easy pattern. In the wake of 9/11, my meetings with Arab and Pakistani Americans, for example, have a more urgent quality, for the stories of detentions and FBI questioning and hard stares from neighbors have shaken their sense of security and belonging. They have been reminded that the history of immigration in this country has a dark underbelly; they need specific assurances that their citizenship really means something, that America has learned the right lessons from the Japanese internments during World War II, and that I will stand with them should the political winds shift in an ugly direction."

N/A. When he admittedly, in his book, said he chose Marxist friends and professors in college, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

The actual quote refers to a time in college when, like many young people, he was concerned about what his friends thought. He didn't want to appear a "sell-out" to his friends. From Dreams From My Father: "To avoid being mistaken for a sellout, I chose my friends carefully. The more politically active black students. The foreign students. The Chicanos. The Marxist professors and structural feminists and punk-rock performance poets." Nothing scary there, unless you are a right wing wack job. ... "Boo!"

N/A. When he traveled to Pakistan, after college on an unknown national passport, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Factcheck.org calls this statement "More Birther nonsense" and explains that in 1981, at the time of Obama's visit, Americans freely traveled to Pakistan without incident, as shown by a travel piece that appeared in the New York Times in 1981, dated June 14. Barbara Crossette, an assistant news editor of the Times, told her mostly American readers they could travel to Lahore, Pakistan, by air, rail or road, adding: "Tourists can obtain a free, 30-day visa (necessary for Americans) at border crossings and airports."

N/A. When he sought the endorsement of the Marxist Party in 1996 as he ran for the Illinois Senate, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

OMG, what a load of crap. This was shown false years ago. Party founder denies Obama was member; campaign denies Obama sought party's endorsement. Carl Davidson stated that "Obama was never a man of the left, either in his view or in being a member of an actual socialist organization" It came from a right wing book that's been laughed at as "throwing the kitchen sink" at Obama.
<http://mediamatters.org/research/201005070018>

N/A. When he sat in a Chicago Church for twenty years and listened to a preacher spew hatred for America and preach black liberation theology, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Anyone who has been paying attention to the black experience in America and has listened to the sermons in context, knows that 1)the preacher had a point and 2)the right took a couple of quotes far out of context. We won't even point out the white preachers to tell their followers to hate gays, Muslims, Mexicans, etc. We won't even bring up the crazy right wing preacher who says that Hitler was sent by "god". We won't even bring up the wack-jobs who protest at funerals with signs tht say god hates everybody. Nope, don't need to do it.

N/A. When an independent Washington organization, that tracks Senate voting records, gave him the distinctive title as the "most liberal senator," people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Yawn. If Obama is a "liberal" then I'm George Washington. Being slightly human is not being liberal. I only wish he were actually liberal.

N/A. When the Palestinians in Gaza set up a fund raising telethon to raise money for his election campaign, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

In a case earlier this year, the Obama campaign returned \$33,000 to two Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip who had bought T shirts in bulk from the campaign's online store. They had listed their address as "Ga.," which the campaign took to mean Georgia rather than Gaza. When the error was discovered, the funds were returned in full.

N/A. When his voting record supported gun control, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Yawn again. So far, only two gun bills have crossed the President's desk. Both liberalized gun rights, and both were signed into law by Obama. Many of us disagreed with his allowing loaded weapons into our National Parks, for example, but President Obama supported the rights of gun owners to do so. However, the NRA and gun manufacturers make a LOT of money by stoking the fears of gun fetishists. Stores sold out of both guns and ammunition after the election because the propaganda was so effective.

1. "When Barack Obama refused to disclose who donated money to his election campaign, as other candidates had done, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

2. "When he received endorsements from people like Louis Farrakhan, Mummar Kadaffi, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

This is another complex situation that requires actual critical thinking. We'll have to list each name individually to get to the truth:

Farrakhan: *Barack Obama denounced the recent support for his candidacy expressed Sunday by controversial minister and Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.*

"I have been very clear in my denunciation" of Farrakhan's history of anti-Semitic remarks, Obama said at the Democratic debate in Cleveland, "I did not solicit his support." Some commentators found Farrakhan's "endorsement" suspect because Farrakhan knew full well that his endorsement would badly damage Obama. Rumors about that he was paid to make this endorsement, but the question is: by whom? The GOP or the Clinton campaign are likely suspects, but "the truth may never come out." Unrelated fact: McCain was endorsed by White Racist David Duke, but did NOT reject Duke's endorsement, probably out of fear that he would alienate The Base. This is the same "Southern Strategy" Republican politics that has been successfully at work since the Nixon years.

Kadaffi: *Did indeed say he preferred Obama over McCain, but his ties with the US, the GOP and McCain specifically have been very close for many many years. Wikileaks cables memorialize an August 2009 meeting between Gaddafi and his son Muatassim, with US Republican Senators John McCain (Arizona), Lindsey Graham (South Carolina), Susan Collins (Maine) and Connecticut "independent" Joe Lieberman. McCain took the lead in currying favor with the Gaddafis. According to the embassy cable, he "assured" them that the United States wanted to provide Libya with the military equipment and weaponry it needed.*

Castro: *The subject line of an e-mail from the Republican Party of Florida was designed to deceive and grab attention: "Fidel Castro endorses Obama." Inside was a doctored phony image of Castro holding a poster of Obama. Above Castro are the words, "I love this guy!" The truth? Castro actually spent most of his words criticizing a speech Obama made to the Cuban American National Foundation in Miami just a few days before this email was crafted, on May 23. According to Politifact, Castro said, "Presidential candidate Obama's speech may be formulated as follows: hunger for the nation, remittances as charitable handouts and visits to Cuba as propaganda for consumerism and the unsustainable way of life behind it." Not exactly*

a warm and fuzzy endorsement. Katie Gordon, press secretary for the Republican Party of Florida, said the whole thing was a "joke". The "cartoon" image, she said, was not meant to be taken literally.

Chavez: *Chavez said there was no difference between the Obama and McCain, and that US-Venezuela relations would not improve if Obama won in November.*

3. "When it was pointed out that he was a total newcomer and had absolutely no experience at anything except community organizing, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

As the first black president of the Harvard Law Review, Obama made history. He also worked as a civil rights attorney and taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School from 1992 to 2004. He served three terms representing the 13th District in the Illinois Senate from 1997 to 2004. President Obama had plenty of experience in leading, legislating, and working with diverse types of people, and indeed, specialized in getting people of differing ideas to come together and compromise. So, yes, he is quite experienced and equipped to govern – far more than a certain half-term governor from Alaska, for example. Read more about Obama at Harvard: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/news/obama-at-hls.html>.

4. "When he chose friends and acquaintances such as Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn who were convicted revolutionary radicals, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

What should we address first? That Bill Ayers is a retired professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, formerly holding the titles of Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar, or that they're not "close friends" but barely know one another? Another snooze fest.

5. "When his voting record and lack of taking positions in the Illinois senate and in the U.S. Senate came into question, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

6. "When he refused to wear an American flag lapel pin, and did so only after a public outcry, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Oh Pull-eeze, not that crazy idea. As if wearing a made-in-China flag pin on your lapel says anything at all, except that your PR person thinks that Americans are dumb enough to be swayed by it.

7. "When people started treating him as a Messiah and children in schools were taught to sing his praises, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Latest Right-Wing Ragegasm: School Kids Sing of Obama for Black History Month

So, a school teacher had some kids sing a song about the country's first black president for Black History Month. Perhaps more partisanship in our education system than one would like, but given the context a relatively minor manner. For normal people, that is — but the video got posted on Youtube and the usual suspects on the right freaked out, screaming of socialist indoctrination and yadda, yadda.

Predictably, there were right supremacist death threats against the school's principal.

Dangerous though they may be, it can be pretty hard to take the kind of people who freak out over this stuff seriously.

By the way, have you watched "Jesus Camp"? The children were encouraged to pray "at" a life size cutout photo of G.W. Bush. Some were crying hysterically. The teachers routinely blended conservative politics, fetishism of Bush and Christianity into one unholy mix. You can watch the entire movie at the link above. It is truly frightening.

8. "When he stood with his hands over his groin area for the playing of the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Oh look, we found one that's partially true! Someone did manage to snap a photo showing Barack Obama with hands clasped respectfully in front of him (presumably what the author considers "his groin area") during the singing of the national anthem, which got a lot of right-wing publicity. And, of course, there are multiple photos of Barack Obama with hand over heart during the pledge. Does this matter? Evidently to the author, posing correctly during the entire anthem every time makes the man. Certainly we could find GOP candidates in various positions during the National Anthem, but I doubt that anyone other than a right-wing PR firm would take the time to find such images.

9. "When he surrounded himself in the White house with advisors who were pro-gun control, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual marriage and wanting to curtail freedom of speech to silence the opposition, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Wrong again. One of Obama's first rules allowed MORE guns into National Parks. Liberals, progressives, animal lovers, and sane people decried this decision, but the NRA loved it. Many liberals are deeply disappointed in Obama's pro-gun decision, among others.

N/A "When he aired his views on abortion, homosexuality and a host of other issues, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[He upholds the Constitution as mandated by the Constitution itself and the Supreme Court, even in the matter of *Roe v. Wade*, just as George Bush did. He has stated that his goal is fewer abortions. I don't know what more you can rationally expect from a President in a secular country based on a system of Law. And, as stated below, his position can't possibly be construed as weird or unusual since it has been proven time and time again that the majority of Americans do not favor a return to abortions being illegal. Period. – SteveB]

Actually, people said it DID matter and voted him in because of it. The majority of Americans are not afraid of gay people and still favor women's right to choose.

10. "When he said he favors sex education in Kindergarten, including homosexual indoctrination, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

False. A McCain-Palin campaign ad claims Obama's "one accomplishment" in the area of education was "legislation to teach 'comprehensive sex education' to kindergarteners." But the claim is simply false, and it dates back to Alan Keyes' failed race against Obama for an open Senate seat in 2004.

Obama, contrary to the ad's insinuation, does not support explicit sex education for kindergarteners. And the bill, which would have allowed only "age appropriate" material and a no-questions-asked opt-out policy for parents, was not his accomplishment to claim in any case, since HE WAS NOT EVEN A COSPONSOR – and the bill never left the state Senate.

11. "When his personal background was either scrubbed or hidden and nothing could be found about him, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

12. "When the place of his birth was called into question, he initially refused to produce a birth certificate, then produced one that is an obvious forgery, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Bwaaa-ha-ha! Oh, sorry, we're not here to laugh at the birthers. Snopes.com, Politifact, and factcheck.org have called the entire birth certificate "question" a joke, including the charge that the long form is somehow a forgery. We'll file this under "loonie bin".

13. "When he had an association in Chicago with Tony Rezco—a man of questionable character and who is now in prison and had helped Obama to a sweet deal on the purchase of his home, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

14. "When it became known that George Soros, a multi-billionaire and Marxist, spent a ton of money to get him elected, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

George Soros is not a Marxist, but is a philanthropist and human rights champion, and has helped bring down three communist governments. He has stated that he will no longer support President Obama because Obama's policies are so conservative, and more resemble a republican of about 30 years ago than a democrat, much less a liberal democrat. By the way, the Koch brothers control far more money than Mr. Soros, and outright have purchased many, many republican politicians and continue to use their vast wealth to influence elections in multiple states. One of the worst corporate polluters in this United States, they continue to destroy our lands, air, and water while they also actively attempt to destroy the middle class in America. These guys are power-hungry despots, while Soros is an acclaimed author, a philanthropist and human rights champion world-wide.

15. "When he started appointing White House Czars that were radicals, revolutionaries, and even avowed Marxist/Communist, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

WTF?

16. "When he stood before the Nation and told us that his intentions were to "fundamentally transform this Nation" into something else, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Ooh, "something else" sounds scary. Let's use real descriptions: How about this? "Into a better, stronger nation, more fair, with a stronger middle class". However, his continued compromising with corporatists who are intent upon looting our country, has made any kind of "transformation" impossible.

17. "When it became known that he had trained ACORN workers in Chicago and served as an attorney for ACORN, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Acorn, a wonderful organization that has helped the poor and disenfranchised to register to vote and to gain some help in America for decades, was the target of a dishonest right-wing activist who edited tapes and created false impressions. Fox "news" and its acolytes hammered this false story into the ground, and Congress rushed to de-fund Acorn – even while all charges against them were proven false and malicious. Sadly, this champion of democracy in America did not recover.

18. "When he appointed cabinet members and several advisors who were tax cheats, marxists and socialists, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

WTF?

19. "When he appointed a Science Czar, John Holdren, who believes in forced abortions, mass sterilizations and seizing babies from teen mothers, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

PolitiFact Gave Rumor A "Pants On Fire!" Rating, the rating reserved for the biggest lies.

20. "When he appointed Cass Sunstein as Regulatory Czar who believes in "Explicit Consent," harvesting human organs without family consent, and allowing animals to be represented in court, while banning all hunting, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

The campaign against Sunstein has largely written itself. One of the most regularly cited legal scholars, the author, co-author, or editor of dozens of books — two of them published since he was nominated to run OIRA — Sunstein has left a trail of theoretical writings and speeches that have provided plenty of ammo for

conservative opponents— and frustrated his many conservative and libertarian supporters. StopSunstein.com, a Website launched by the American Conservative Union, is festooned with out-of-context quotes (“We ought to ban hunting”) and fake newspaper headlines written as if Sunstein’s opinions had become law — “Guns Banned!” and “FCC Pulls Plug on Limbaugh!” Much of the damaging material comes from “Nudge,” a thoughtful 2007 book Sunstein wrote with the University of Chicago’s Richard Thaler, which investigates the possibilities for “libertarian paternalism,” not government control, to encourage good behavior. This, for example, is where the conservative CNSNews.com drew its damaging allegation headlined “Obama Regulation Czar Advocated Removing People’s Organs Without Explicit Consent.”

In January, the libertarian blogger and law professor Glenn Reynolds wrote a hearty endorsement of Sunstein, telling readers that the nomination “shows that the Obama Administration is perhaps willing to look at new and less intrusive approaches to regulation.” Today, he sees the lengthy campaign against Sunstein as an unflattering example of “how the messed-up appointments process works.”

By the way Sunstein is not only a friend of many conservatives, but is well respected and has testified before congressional committees on many subjects, and he has been involved in constitution-making and law reform activities in a number of nations, including Ukraine, Poland, China, South Africa, and Russia. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Mr. Sunstein has been Samuel Rubin Visiting Professor of Law at Columbia, visiting professor of law at Harvard, vice-chair of the ABA Committee on Separation of Powers and Governmental Organizations, chair of the Administrative Law Section of the Association of American Law Schools, a member of the ABA Committee on the future of the FTC, and a member of the President’s Advisory Committee on the Public Service Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters.

21. “When he appointed Kevin Jennings, a homosexual, and organizer of a group called Gay, lesbian, straight, education network as Safe School Czar and it became known that he had a history of bad advice to teenagers, people said IT DIDN’T MATTER.”

False. In an interview with Media Matters, the young man in the center of the controversy said the charges against Jennings isn’t true:

Since I was of LEGAL CONSENT at the time, the fifteen-minute conversation I had with Mr. Jennings TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO is of nobody’s concern but his and mine. However, since the Republican noise machine is so concerned about my “well-being” and that of America’s students, they’ll be relieved to know that I was not “inducted” into homosexuality, assaulted, raped, or sold into sexual slavery. In 1988, I had taken a bus home for the weekend, and on the return trip met someone who was also gay. The next day, I had a conversation with Mr. Jennings about it. I had no sexual contact with anybody at the time, though I was entirely legally free to do so. I was a sixteen year-old going through something most of us have experienced: adolescence. I FIND IT REGRETTABLE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE COMPASSION AND INTEGRITY TO PROTECT OUR NATION’S STUDENTS ARE THEMSELVES IN NEED OF PROTECTION FROM HOMOPHOBIC SMEAR ATTACKS. Were it not for Mr. Jennings’ courage and concern for my well-being at that time in my life, I doubt I’d be the proud gay man that I am today.

22. “When he appointed Mark Lloyd, as Diversity Czar, who believes in curtailing free speech; taking from one and giving to another to spread the wealth; who supports Hugo Chavez, people said IT DIDN’T MATTER.”

Since the FCC appointed Mark Lloyd as the agency’s Chief Diversity Officer/Associate General Counsel on July 29, conservatives have made him their new target in the ongoing campaign to baselessly warn about the reemergence of the Fairness Doctrine.

The most absurd attacks have come from pundits like right-wing radio host Michael Savage, who has called Lloyd a “neo-Nazi” and “piece of garbage” intent on closing down “conservatives in the media.” He said that Lloyd’s title — Chief Diversity Officer — is “code word for the KGB.” For the record, Lloyd has a distinguished career on communications policy issues. Most recently he was a vice president at the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He taught communications policy at

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, served as general counsel to the Benton Foundation, worked as a communications attorney at a major D.C. law firm, and has nearly 20 years of experience in journalism. Obviously, the right-wing noise machine continues unchecked and its lies continue to go uncorrected in the corporate media.

23. "When Valerie Jarrett was selected as Obama's Senior White House Advisor and she is an avowed Socialist, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Valerie Jarrett is NOT a communist, although it is rumored that her husband's father was once affiliated with them. How do these lies take hold? This one was invented in the conservative World Net Daily, and then repeated ad nauseum by Glenn Beck on Fox "news". WorldNetDaily's smear-monger-in-chief, Aaron Klein, ran an attack piece on Valerie Jarrett, the president's senior adviser, accusing her of Communist ties. It's Beck candy, wrapped up with a big, fat, racist bow.

His lead: "Was Valerie Jarrett, one of President Obama's closest advisers, introduced to the president's political circles by her father-in-law, a communist sympathizer who worked with the radical Obama mentor Frank Marshall Davis?"

The icing: "Jarrett reportedly interviewed Obama's former environmental adviser Van Jones for his White House position from which he resigned this past weekend. WND exposed Jones is an admitted black nationalist and radical communist. Jarrett defended Jones after his appointment in March. She stated in an interview that the White House staff were 'so delighted to be able to recruit him into the White House.'"

Klein goes on to claim that "Jarrett's family background and her initial introduction to Obama may tie her to Jones' radical ideology" because her father-in-law worked with Davis, whom Klein describes as "the controversial labor movement activist who has been identified as an early influence on Obama." As well as Jarrett's own work with—gasp!—lots of black people in Chicago. By the way, World Net Daily's board of directors is mostly comprised of secretive, powerful California conservatives — plus a man on the lam for tax evasion.

24. "When Anita Dunn, White House Communications Director said Mao Tse Tung was her favorite philosopher-and the person she turned to most for inspiration, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

N/A "When Barack Obama, as president, refused to uphold the Defense of Marriage Act, unilaterally declaring it unconstitutional, the people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Thank any gods and goddesses! Maybe we can finally stop appeasing the religious theocratic dominionists and move out of their craziness. They had far too much influence in the Bush administration and nearly destroyed our country with their backward attempt to force their ideas on the rest of us.

25. "When he appointed Carol Browner as Global Warming Czar, and her being a well known Socialist working on Cap and Trade as the nations largest tax, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

I am tempted to make a rude sound here.

26. "When he appointed Van Jones, an ex-con and avowed Communist as Green Energy Czar, who since had to resign when this was made known, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

There was no such thing as a "Green Energy Czar." Van Jones was not an ex-con. Van Jones is not a communist. He is a rather amazing man who cares deeply about America, who advises us to "keep the love" and "work for the best". To read a good de-bunking of the bull about Van Jones, visit: <http://www.grist.org/article/2009-09-02-cleaning-some-of-the-fox-off-of-van-jones>.

27. "When Tom Daschle, Obama's pick for health and human services secretary could not be confirmed, because he was a tax cheat, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Ooh, we found a true statement! Yes, Tom screwed himself — and us — by owing taxes on unreported income and the use of a car and driver provided to Daschle . He would have probably made a good health and human services secretary. Too bad so many wealthy people 'forget' to pay what little taxes they owe...on both sides of the aisle.

28. "When as President of the United States , he bowed to the King of Saudi Arabia , people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Oh that's just funny. Can't resist this:



29. "When he traveled around the world criticizing America and never once talking of her greatness, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[This one is completely and positively ridiculous! –SteveB]

nothing

30. "When his actions concerning the Middle-East seemed to support the Palestinians over Israel, our long time ally, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

31. "When he took American tax dollars to resettle thousands of Muslim Palestinians and Somalis in the United States, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

32. "When he upset the Europeans by removing plans for a missile defense system against the Russians, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

33. "When he played politics in Afghanistan by not sending troops early-on when the Field Commanders said they were necessary to win, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

34. "When he started spending us into a debt that was so big we might never be able to pay it off, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Excuse me? What planet are you living on? Is anyone, anywhere not aware that George W. Bush wracked up the highest debt in the history of the United States? Even with budgetary trickery such as moving Social Security Funds and not entering the costs of his TWO WARS into the budget, Bush is still on record as the biggest spender of any administration, EVER.

35. "When he took a huge spending bill under the guise of stimulus and used it to pay off international bankers, Wall Street donors, socialists organizations, unions, and individuals that got him elected, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[See #34. -SteveB]

36. "When he took over insurance companies, car companies, banks, etc., people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

The federal government temporarily

37. When he took away student loans from the banks and put it under the control of the government, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

nothing

38. When he designed plans to take over the health care system and put it under government control, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

What? Despite the fact that most citizens favored the public option, President Obama took it "off the table" and left the private corporate insurance in charge – NOT the government. His painfully modest bill address a few of the insurance companies most onerous and cruel policies. For example: They must now spend 80% of what they take in on the customers health rather than ever higher CEO pay. (Ooh, that's so scary!) They are no longer allowed to drop a customer when they become ill and require treatment (so un-American!). They cannot refuse to accept a person with a pre-existing condition.(Isn't this anti-capitalism?) To reiterate, the government of THE PEOPLE is still not in control of health care in America. Not even close. Liberal citizens are frustrated and disappointed with Obama over this, as well as many other policies.

39 "When he claimed he was a Christian during the election and tapes were later made public that showed Obama speaking to a Muslim group and 'stating' that he was raised a Muslim; was educated as a Muslim; and that he is still a Muslim, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[President Obama has said very seriously that he is a Christian. When did Christians stop taking the word of other Christians as to their faith? Not very Christ-like, if you ask me. -SteveB]

How very faux news-like to use a clever misspelling of "Barack" and adding the "Husseini" middle name. Why, he must not be a "real Amerikin" like somebody named "Bubba" or "Jim-Bob"!

According to snopes.com, Barack Obama's FATHER although raised a Muslim, like many people raised as Christians, had rejected his childhood religion and was actually an ATHEIST when he married Barack's mother. Obama's mother went out of her way to educate her son in a multitude of religious studies. Obama's book says, "In our household the Bible, the Koran, and the Bhagaved Gita sat on the shelf alongside books of Greek and Norse and African mythology. On Easter or Christmas Day my mother might drag me to church, just as she dragged me to the Buddhist temple, the Chinese New Year celebration, the

Shinto shrine, and ancient Hawaiian burial sites. "In the 4-5 years spent in Indonesia, Obama attended both Catholic and Muslim schools because his mother wanted him to obtain the very best education possible. He never attended a "madrassa". Barack Obama is a Christian.

40. "When he set into motion a plan to take over the control of all energy in the United States through Cap and Trade regulations, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Cap and Trade was originally a Republican idea.

[20120213-01](#) 10:12 NormF The State of the Nation

I've read your information sent to me via email. Would "Friends of the Middle" be willing to state a few thing on my behalf? I made a bid to have my name placed on the ballet in West Virginia. (see twitter, fergn). America has no idea about this sad situation. America has not a clue as to what's actually occurring. For instance, the countries we have invaded in the search for weapons of mass destruction, the oil fields now in the hands of the USA, the same rich countries whose common citizens have no electricity, not to mention vehicles.

It seems Iran is the new target of USA propaganda. As with Saddam or the guy with a dialysis machine (O.bin laden). The common man will never see/hear their opinions (Whooh, for the Iran president). Only what the major 3 networks allow (news/media). Example being: UH forgive me for my ignorance, but I could have sworn I heard there was some kind of protest upon Wall Street or Oakland, Caliifornia—a 99% vs. 1% debate occurring. This is my point. The upper class has chosen, most are not a part. Think about it. In all states the same group of people run for politics. Some have spent generations ~40 to 75 years in power. Yeah, it's going to change , ha ha ha. Well I love America. So god bless the meek.

[20120213-03](#) 15:29 GaryF Life Expectancy Calculator

I appear to be good until 91.

This is a calculator that estimates your life expectancy. It's pretty cool. It was developed by Northwestern Mutual Life. It's interesting that there are only 13 questions. Yet, they believe they can predict how long you're likely to live.

<http://media.nmfn.com/tnetwork/lifespan>

[20120213-04](#) 15:32 SteveG Fw: DCCC Petition: Support President Obama's Budget!

<http://dccc.org/pages/budget>

President Obama just sent his budget to Congress that would finally end special tax breaks for the top 1%. The President's plan includes the "Buffett Rule," which would put an end to the days of multi-millionaires paying a smaller share of their income in taxes than middle-class families.

Republicans in Congress and right-wing pundits are already attacking President Obama's plan, which would ensure the wealthy pay their fair share. Will you stand behind President Obama's budget?

Help us reach 100,000 signatures in the next 24 hours supporting President Obama's budget that would ensure millionaires pay their fair share.

[I fully support this petition, but, to me, the problem is not the people taking a stand with the President, it's the President taking a stand he doesn't sell-out on. -SteveB]

Given the contents of the article below, the talk from Catholics about the US movement on birth control seems even more irrelevant – they have more problems than most governments all cloaked in the name of religion.

"Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" by Philip Pulella, Reuters

Feb. 13, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/monsignors-mutiny-revealed-vatican-leaks-140524856.html>)

(VATICAN CITY) Call it Conspiracy City. Call it Scandal City. Call it Leak City. These days the holy city has been in the news for anything but holy reasons.

"It is a total mess," said one high-ranking Vatican official who spoke, like all others, on the condition of anonymity.

The Machiavellian maneuvering and machinations that have come to light in the Vatican recently are worthy of a novel about a sinister power struggle at a medieval court.

Senior church officials interviewed this month said almost daily embarrassments that have put the Vatican on the defensive could force Pope Benedict to act to clean up the image of its administration - at a time when the church faces a deeper crisis of authority and relevance in the wider world.

Some of those sources said the outcome of a power struggle inside the Holy See may even have a longer-term effect, on the choice of the man to succeed Benedict when he dies.

From leaked letters by an archbishop who was transferred after he blew the whistle on what he saw as a web of corruption and cronyism, to a leaked poison pen memo which puts a number of cardinals in a bad light, to new suspicions about its bank, Vatican spokesmen have had their work cut out responding.

The flurry of leaks has come at an embarrassing time - just before a usually joyful ceremony this week known as a consistory, when Benedict will admit more prelates into the College of Cardinals, the exclusive men's club that will one day pick the next Roman Catholic leader from among their own ranks.

"This consistory will be taking place in an atmosphere that is certainly not very glorious or exalting," said one bishop with direct knowledge of Vatican affairs.

The sources agreed that the leaks were part of an internal campaign - a sort of "mutiny of the monsignors" - against the pope's right-hand man, Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

Bertone, 77, has a reputation as a heavy-handed administrator and power-broker whose style has alienated many in the Curia, the bureaucracy that runs the central administration of the 1.3 billion-strong Roman Catholic Church.

He came to the job, traditionally occupied by a career diplomat, in 2006 with no experience of working in the church's diplomatic corps, which manages its international relations. Benedict chose him, rather, because he had worked under the future pontiff, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in the Vatican's powerful doctrinal office.

"It's all aimed at Bertone," said a monsignor in a key Vatican department who sympathizes with the secretary of state and who sees the leakers as determined to oust him. "It's very clear that they want to get rid of Bertone."

Vatican sources say the rebels have the tacit backing of a former secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, an influential power-broker in his own right and a veteran diplomat who served under the late Pope John Paul II for 15 years.

"The diplomatic wing feels that they are the rightful owners of the Vatican," the monsignor who favors Bertone said.

Sodano and Bertone are not mutual admirers, to put it mildly. Neither has commented publicly on the reports.

Whistle-Blowing Archbishop

The Vatican has been no stranger to controversy in recent years, when uproar over its handling of child sex abuse charges has hampered the church's efforts to stem the erosion of congregations and priestly recruitment in the developed world.

But the latest image crisis could not be closer to home.

It began last month when an Italian television investigative show broadcast private letters to Bertone and the pope from Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the former deputy governor of the Vatican City and currently the Vatican ambassador in Washington.

The letters, which the Vatican has confirmed are authentic, showed that Vigano was transferred after he exposed what he argued was a web of corruption, nepotism and cronyism linked to the awarding of contracts to contractors at inflated prices.

As deputy governor of the Vatican City for two years from 2009 to 2011, Vigano was the number two official in a department responsible for maintaining the tiny city-state's gardens, buildings, streets, museums and other infrastructure, which are managed separately from the Italian capital which surrounds it.

In one letter, Vigano writes of a smear campaign against him by other Vatican officials who were upset that he had taken drastic steps to clean up the purchasing procedures and begged to stay in the job to finish what he had started.

Bertone responded by removing Vigano from his position three years before the end of his tenure and sending him to the United States, despite his strong resistance.

Other leaks center on the Vatican bank, just as it is trying to put behind it past scandals - including the collapse 30 years ago of Banco Ambrosiano, which entangled it in lurid allegations about money-laundering, freemasons, mafiosi and the mysterious death of Ambrosiano chairman Roberto Calvi - "God's banker."

Today, the Vatican bank, formally known as the Institute for Works of Religion (IOR), is aiming to comply fully with international norms and has applied for the Vatican's inclusion on the European Commission's approved "white list" of states that meet EU standards for total financial transparency.

Bertone was instrumental in putting the bank's current executives in place and any lingering suspicion about it reflects badly on him. The Commission will decide in June and failure to make the list would be an embarrassment for Bertone.

Italian Pope?

Last week, an Italian newspaper that has published some of the leaks ran a bizarre internal Vatican memo that involved one cardinal complaining about another cardinal who spoke about a possible assassination attempt against the pope within 12 months and openly speculated on who the next pope should be.

Bertone's detractors say he has packed the Curia with Italian friends. Some see an attempt to influence the election of the next pope and increase the chances that the papacy returns to Italy after two successive non-Italian popes who have broken what had been an Italian monopoly for over 450 years.

Seven of the 18 new "cardinal electors" -- those aged under 80 eligible to elect a pope -- at this Saturday's consistory are Italian. Six of those work for Bertone in the Curia.

Bertone, as chief administrator, had a key role in advising the pope on the appointments, which raised eyebrows because of the high number of Italian bureaucrats among them.

"There is widespread malaise and delusion about Bertone inside the Curia. It is full of complaints," said the bishop who has close knowledge of Vatican affairs.

"Bertone has had a very brash method of running the Vatican and putting his friends in high places. People could not take it any more and said 'enough' and that is why I think these leaks are coming out now to make him look bad," he said.

Pope "Isolated"

Leaked confidential cables sent to the State Department by the U.S. embassy to the Vatican depicted him as a "yes man" with no diplomatic experience or linguistic skills and the 2009 cable suggests that the pope is protected from bad news.

"There is also the question of who, if anyone, brings dissenting views to the pope's attention," read the cable, published by WikiLeaks.

The Vatican sources said some cardinals asked the pope to replace Bertone because of administrative lapses, including the failure to warn the pope that a renegade bishop re-admitted to the Church in 2009 was a well-known Holocaust denier.

But they said the pope, at 84 and increasingly showing the signs of his age, is not eager to break in a new right-hand man.

"It's so complicated and the pope is so helpless," said the monsignor.

The bishop said: "The pope is very isolated. He lives in his own world and some say the information he receives is filtered. He is interested in his books and his sermons but he is not very interested in government."

(Editing by Jon Boyle and Alastair Macdonald)

20120213-07	16:39	Dennis	Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Hope they don't change their medieval clown costumes. They're soooo photogenic.

If that offends any Catholics or Christians of any other sect, then check out this bit of blasphemy (or revelations of religious myths, depending on how you look at it):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uIyVWACkii0&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AfFcAmx-Ro&feature=share>

20120213-08	18:43	Pam	Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)
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If only humanity could think of religion the way we think about art or music, something meaningful to enjoy but nothing to go to war over. You don't like Mozart? Off with your head! You find abstract art revolutionary? Lock up all the abstract expressionists. Ridiculous and pointless--just like hating and killing because someone prefers Allah to Ganesh.

20120213-09	20:26	SteveB	"The War for Privatization"
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"The War for Privatization" by Dekker Dreyer, NationofChange

Feb. 13, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/war-privatization-1329146614>)

Can the private sector really do a better job than the government? That's what lobbies in the health insurance, energy, and educational sectors would have us believe.

A Gallop poll from November of 2009 shows that 81% of Americans were satisfied with their personal health care options, as opposed to the results of a 2003 *Washington Post*-ABC News poll which indicated over 62% of Americans wanted, "a universal health insurance program, in which everybody is covered under a program like Medicare that's run by the government and financed by taxpayers". As of November 2011 Gallup indicates, within a four point margin of error, that the nation is in favor of repealing the Obama administration's health care reforms.

Does this indicate that over the last decade our private health insurance system has drastically increased the quality of its services? It's possible, but unlikely. Unless there was a dramatic shift in the American health industry there is no data to dispute the widening gap between the US mortality rate and that of other developed nations like Australia, as cited in a 2010 article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Despite the positive message being put forward by special interests, the private health care system continues to decline against the public options presented by other first world countries.

This under-performance is also true for the energy industry, where deregulation in the state of New Jersey caused unexpected increases in the average cost of electricity as opposed to the theorized consumer savings. Lack of incentive to improve facilities contrasted with few new players entering the market lead to poor service and rising prices.

Arguments toward privatizing our nation's educational system are also gaining considerable ground against public schools and teachers' unions across the country, even with less than stellar performance by for-profit alternatives. K12 Inc., one of the nation's leading online charter school companies, is the subject of a damning new report previewed to the *New York Times* from Western Michigan University and the National Education Policy Center highlighting the fact that only one in three of K12's total student population are achieving adequate progress. This new data reinforces the position of the center's president Jack Jennings that, "Contrary to popular belief, we can find no evidence that private schools actually increase student performance".

With all the available information leaving private enterprise, at best, on-par with their government run counterparts, why are private businesses still widely believed to be more efficient than public services? Since the 1980s The corporate lobby for privatized social services has backed many conservative campaigns and developed a public-facing media strategy to undermine government services that were once considered the envy of the developed world.

Right-wing financiers, like the DeVos family, have waged one such war against the American school system for decades. Through organizations like The Alliance for the Separation of School & State they have engineered the concept of school vouchers as a first step toward dismantling public education as we know it.

Joseph Bast, President and CEO of the conservative Heartland Institute is quoted as saying, "The complete privatization of schooling might be desirable, but this objective is politically impossible for the time being. Vouchers are a type of reform that is possible now, and would put us on the path to further privatization."

Are the rewards of deregulation worth the cost of such a massive public relations effort? All indications are yes, privatization can be incredibly profitable. Take, for example, Affiliated Computer Services' (a division of Xerox) contract to distribute California's welfare benefits. Bank fees and other end-user charges took \$17.4 million from the state's working poor in 2010; this is on top of the company's lucrative service contract.

In late 2011, K12 Inc. posted record profits, and although their stock (NYSE: LRN) recently took a 46% drop, they are still estimated to reap revenues north of \$680 million in the 2012 fiscal year. K12 is only one of a myriad of players in the semi-private charter education field.

The real question is what happens to the quality of these services when they're under pressure to keep a high market capitalization. As a publicly traded corporation K12 is required to act in the best interest of its shareholders, which translates to producing increased profits. Having essentials, like education, monetized in this way raises real concerns about how such a business will keep its profits growing after enrollment reaches a saturation point. Consolidation of classes, reduction of the teaching force, and cuts to day to day expenses will all become realities as the corporation stretches to meet the goals of financial analysts.

Another danger is that every industry which becomes privatized is one less industry in which tax payers have a direct say. In the most extreme scenario, any debate over school curriculums or what medications to provide under schemes like planned parenthood would be immediately settled by closed votes in shareholder meetings. The average citizen would be at a complete disadvantage to challenge any aspect of these programs without the financial means to buy stock in their service provider.

Public agencies do not have the budget to craft an effective counter-marketing message because every dollar goes toward the operation of much needed services. These services, which are accountable to the general public, will never be volatile to financial markets or become budget line-items on corporate ledgers. For the immediate future there is no clear strategy for cleaning up the image of our nation's public services, but without such a strategy we may find ourselves in an American wasteland of even lower educational standards and few social safety nets that aren't somehow bankable.

<http://www.photographyblogger.net/25-amazing-locations-every-landscape-photographer-should-visit/>

Magog Lake Sunrise, Assiniboine Provincial Park, British Columbia, Canada (Jeff Pang)



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #74 — FEB. 15, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Important Stuff: How We Got to Where We Are, Part 1

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 15, 2012)

Those of you who worry that President Obama is “destroying” (the favorite word on Fox) America’s image and reputation abroad would do well to consider the new, lavish American Embassy in Iraq. Remember the scandal over Saddam Hussein’s palaces? Our embassy is essentially at the same level, in a country we left dirt poor and war-torn.

What do you think George Bush’s and Dick Cheney’s and Halliburton’s embassy does to America’s reputation in at least one crucial part of the modern world? This embassy is a testament to blind ambition. It is a blatant symbol of America as a crazy, power hungry bunch of a*s-holes.

Just what we need. And the big Republican lie is that President Obama did it. He’s responsible. Please tell me how it is that he is responsible for: 1) the idiotic Iraq war; 2) the more idiotic American embassy in Baghdad; 3) the more than \$1 trillion wasted in Iraq (I don’t want to think of the lives!); 4) resulting in (with other Bush Administration screw-ups) the Crash of 2008; 5) hence joblessness, malaise, and deficits. According to Republicans (see yesterday’s Newsletter), Mr. Obama is an evil imposter responsible for everything that has ever gone wrong anywhere in American history.

Yet, despite all these huge problems President Obama “caused”, the stock markets are doing well and the economy is growing. The markets tell us that, despite their predictions of gloom and doom intended to gain political power, the big money believes recovery is here and/or coming very soon.

What a President!

I wonder if the day will ever come that the Right realizes that these lies stand between us, these lies prevent communications, these lies prevent democracy. Or is that what the Right really wants?

“Losing’ the World: American Decline in Perspective, Part 1” by Noam Chomsky, TomDispatch.com/Nation of Change

Feb. 14, 2012,

(http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175502/tomgram%3A_noam_chomsky%2C_hegemony_and_its_dilemmas/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+tomdispatch%2FesUU+%28TomDispatch%3A+The+latest+Tomgram%29&utm_content=Google+Reader) (<http://www.nationofchange.org/losing-world-1329237182>)

"Tomgram Introduction: Noam Chomsky, Hegemony and Its Dilemmas" by Thomas Engelhardt

Back in May 2007, I stumbled across online sketches at the website of a Kansas architectural firm hired to build a monster U.S. embassy-cum-citadel-cum-Greater-Middle-Eastern command center on 104 acres in the middle of the Iraqi capital, Baghdad. They offered an artist's impressions of what the place would look like -- a giant self-sufficient compound both prosaic (think malls or housing projects) and opulent (a giant pool, tennis courts, a recreation center).

Struck by the fact that the U.S. government was intent on building the largest embassy ever in the planet's oil heartlands, I wrote a piece, "The Mother Ship Lands in Iraq" about those plans and offered a little tour of the project via those crude drawings. From TomDispatch, they then began to run around the Internet and soon a panicky State Department had declared a "security breach" and forced the firm to pull the sketches off its website.

Now, more than five years later, we have the first public photos of the embassy -- a pool, basketball court, tennis courts, and food court to die for -- just as the news has arrived that the vast boondoggle of a place, built for three-quarters of a billion of your tax dollars, with a \$6 billion State Department budget this year and its own mercenary air force, is about to get its staff of 16,000 slashed. In a *Washington Post* piece on the subject, Senator Patrick Leahy is quoted as saying: "I've been in embassies all over the world, and you come to this place and you're like: 'Whoa. Wow.' All of a sudden you've got something so completely out of scale to anything, you have to wonder, what were they thinking when they first built it?"

The answer is: in 2004, when planning for this white elephant of embassies first began, the Bush administration was still dreaming of a Washington-enforced *Pax Americana* in the Greater Middle East and saw it as its western command post. Now, of course, the vast American mega-bases in Iraq with their multiple bus routes, giant PXes, Pizza Huts, Cinnabons, and Burger Kings, where American troops were to be garrisoned on the "Korean model" for decades to come, are so many ghost towns, fading American ziggurats in Mesopotamia. Similarly, those embassy photos seem like snapshots from Pompeii just as the ash was beginning to fall. Meanwhile, in Afghanistan, the news is similarly dismal with drawdowns and withdrawals suddenly the order of the day. Something's changing. It feels tectonic. Certainly, we're receiving another set of signs that American imperial plans on the Eurasian mainland have crashed and burned and that the U.S. is now regrouping and heading "offshore."

What a moment then for Noam Chomsky to weigh in on the subject of American decline. (His earlier TomDispatch post "Who Owns the World?" might be considered a companion piece to this one.) For him, a TomDispatch first: a two-day, back-to-back two-parter on imperial hegemony and its discontents. (To catch Timothy MacBain's latest Tomcast audio interview in which Chomsky offers an anatomy of American defeats in the Greater Middle East, click here: <http://tomdispatch.blogspot.com/2012/02/america-in-decline.html>.)

"Losing' the World: American Decline in Perspective, Part 1" by Noam Chomsky, TomDispatch.com/Nation of Change

Significant anniversaries are solemnly commemorated -- Japan's attack on the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, for example. Others are ignored, and we can often learn valuable lessons from them about what is likely to lie ahead. Right now, in fact.

At the moment, we are failing to commemorate the 50th anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's decision to launch the most destructive and murderous act of aggression of the post-World War II period: the invasion of South Vietnam, later all of Indochina, leaving millions dead and four countries devastated, with casualties still mounting from the long-term effects of drenching South Vietnam with some of the most lethal carcinogens known, undertaken to destroy ground cover and food crops.

The prime target was South Vietnam. The aggression later spread to the North, then to the remote peasant society of northern Laos, and finally to rural Cambodia, which was bombed at the stunning level of all allied air operations in the Pacific region during World War II, including the two atom bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In this, Henry Kissinger's orders were being carried out -- "anything that flies on anything that moves" -- a call for

genocide that is rare in the historical record. Little of this is remembered. Most was scarcely known beyond narrow circles of activists.

When the invasion was launched 50 years ago, concern was so slight that there were few efforts at justification, hardly more than the president's impassioned plea that "we are opposed around the world by a monolithic and ruthless conspiracy that relies primarily on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence" and if the conspiracy achieves its ends in Laos and Vietnam, "the gates will be opened wide."

Elsewhere, he warned further that "the complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history [and] only the strong... can possibly survive," in this case reflecting on the failure of U.S. aggression and terror to crush Cuban independence.

By the time protest began to mount half a dozen years later, the respected Vietnam specialist and military historian Bernard Fall, no dove, forecast that "Vietnam as a cultural and historic entity... is threatened with extinction...[as]...the countryside literally dies under the blows of the largest military machine ever unleashed on an area of this size." He was again referring to South Vietnam.

When the war ended eight horrendous years later, mainstream opinion was divided between those who described the war as a "noble cause" that could have been won with more dedication, and at the opposite extreme, the critics, to whom it was "a mistake" that proved too costly. By 1977, President Carter aroused little notice when he explained that we owe Vietnam "no debt" because "the destruction was mutual."

There are important lessons in all this for today, even apart from another reminder that only the weak and defeated are called to account for their crimes. One lesson is that to understand what is happening we should attend not only to critical events of the real world, often dismissed from history, but also to what leaders and elite opinion believe, however tinged with fantasy. Another lesson is that alongside the flights of fancy concocted to terrify and mobilize the public (and perhaps believed by some who are trapped in their own rhetoric), there is also geostrategic planning based on principles that are rational and stable over long periods because they are rooted in stable institutions and their concerns. That is true in the case of Vietnam as well. I will return to that, only stressing here that the persistent factors in state action are generally well concealed.

The Iraq war is an instructive case. It was marketed to a terrified public on the usual grounds of self-defense against an awesome threat to survival: the "single question," George W. Bush and Tony Blair declared, was whether Saddam Hussein would end his programs of developing weapons of mass destruction. When the single question received the wrong answer, government rhetoric shifted effortlessly to our "yearning for democracy," and educated opinion duly followed course; all routine.

Later, as the scale of the U.S. defeat in Iraq was becoming difficult to suppress, the government quietly conceded what had been clear all along. In 2007-2008, the administration officially announced that a final settlement must grant the U.S. military bases and the right of combat operations, and must privilege U.S. investors in the rich energy system -- demands later reluctantly abandoned in the face of Iraqi resistance. And all well kept from the general population.

Gauging American Decline

With such lessons in mind, it is useful to look at what is highlighted in the major journals of policy and opinion today. Let us keep to the most prestigious of the establishment journals, *Foreign Affairs*. The headline blaring on the cover of the December 2011 issue reads in bold face: "Is America Over?"

The title article calls for "retrenchment" in the "humanitarian missions" abroad that are consuming the country's wealth, so as to arrest the American decline that is a major theme of international affairs discourse, usually accompanied by the corollary that power is shifting to the East, to China and (maybe) India.

The lead articles are on Israel-Palestine. The first, by two high Israeli officials, is entitled "The Problem is Palestinian Rejection": the conflict cannot be resolved because Palestinians refuse to recognize Israel as a Jewish state -- thereby conforming to standard diplomatic practice: states are recognized, but not privileged sectors within

them. The demand is hardly more than a new device to deter the threat of political settlement that would undermine Israel's expansionist goals.

The opposing position, defended by an American professor, is entitled "The Problem Is the Occupation." The subtitle reads "How the Occupation is Destroying the Nation." Which nation? Israel, of course. The paired articles appear under the heading "Israel under Siege."

The January 2012 issue features yet another call to bomb Iran now, before it is too late. Warning of "the dangers of deterrence," the author suggests that "skeptics of military action fail to appreciate the true danger that a nuclear-armed Iran would pose to U.S. interests in the Middle East and beyond. And their grim forecasts assume that the cure would be worse than the disease -- that is, that the consequences of a U.S. assault on Iran would be as bad as or worse than those of Iran achieving its nuclear ambitions. But that is a faulty assumption. The truth is that a military strike intended to destroy Iran's nuclear program, if managed carefully, could spare the region and the world a very real threat and dramatically improve the long-term national security of the United States."

Others argue that the costs would be too high, and at the extremes some even point out that an attack would violate international law -- as does the stand of the moderates, who regularly deliver threats of violence, in violation of the U.N. Charter.

Let us review these dominant concerns in turn.

American decline is real, though the apocalyptic vision reflects the familiar ruling class perception that anything short of total control amounts to total disaster. Despite the piteous laments, the U.S. remains the world dominant power by a large margin, and no competitor is in sight, not only in the military dimension, in which of course the U.S. reigns supreme.

China and India have recorded rapid (though highly inegalitarian) growth, but remain very poor countries, with enormous internal problems not faced by the West. China is the world's major manufacturing center, but largely as an assembly plant for the advanced industrial powers on its periphery and for western multinationals. That is likely to change over time. Manufacturing regularly provides the basis for innovation, often breakthroughs, as is now sometimes happening in China. One example that has impressed western specialists is China's takeover of the growing global solar panel market, not on the basis of cheap labor but by coordinated planning and, increasingly, innovation.

But the problems China faces are serious. Some are demographic, reviewed in *Science*, the leading U.S. science weekly. The study shows that mortality sharply decreased in China during the Maoist years, "mainly a result of economic development and improvements in education and health services, especially the public hygiene movement that resulted in a sharp drop in mortality from infectious diseases." This progress ended with the initiation of the capitalist reforms 30 years ago, and the death rate has since increased.

Furthermore, China's recent economic growth has relied substantially on a "demographic bonus," a very large working-age population. "But the window for harvesting this bonus may close soon," with a "profound impact on development": "Excess cheap labor supply, which is one of the major factors driving China's economic miracle, will no longer be available."

Demography is only one of many serious problems ahead. For India, the problems are far more severe.

Not all prominent voices foresee American decline. Among international media, there is none more serious and responsible than the *London Financial Times*. It recently devoted a full page to the optimistic expectation that new technology for extracting North American fossil fuels might allow the U.S. to become energy independent, hence to retain its global hegemony for a century. There is no mention of the kind of world the U.S. would rule in this happy event, but not for lack of evidence.

At about the same time, the International Energy Agency reported that, with rapidly increasing carbon emissions from fossil fuel use, the limit of safety will be reached by 2017 if the world continues on its present course. "The door is closing," the IEA chief economist said, and very soon it "will be closed forever."

Shortly before the U.S. Department of Energy reported the most recent carbon dioxide emissions figures, which "jumped by the biggest amount on record" to a level higher than the worst-case scenario anticipated by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). That came as no surprise to many scientists, including the MIT program on climate change, which for years has warned that the IPCC predictions are too conservative.

Such critics of the IPCC predictions receive virtually no public attention, unlike the fringe of denialists who are supported by the corporate sector, along with huge propaganda campaigns that have driven Americans off the international spectrum in dismissal of the threats. Business support also translates directly to political power. Denialism is part of the catechism that must be intoned by Republican candidates in the farcical election campaign now in progress, and in Congress they are powerful enough to abort even efforts to inquire into the effects of global warming, let alone do anything serious about it.

In brief, American decline can perhaps be stemmed if we abandon hope for decent survival, prospects that are all too real given the balance of forces in the world.

"Losing" China and Vietnam

Putting such unpleasant thoughts aside, a close look at American decline shows that China indeed plays a large role, as it has for 60 years. The decline that now elicits such concern is not a recent phenomenon. It traces back to the end of World War II, when the U.S. had half the world's wealth and incomparable security and global reach. Planners were naturally well aware of the enormous disparity of power, and intended to keep it that way.

The basic viewpoint was outlined with admirable frankness in a major state paper of 1948 (PPS 23). The author was one of the architects of the New World Order of the day, the chair of the State Department Policy Planning Staff, the respected statesman and scholar George Kennan, a moderate dove within the planning spectrum. He observed that the central policy goal was to maintain the "position of disparity" that separated our enormous wealth from the poverty of others. To achieve that goal, he advised, "We should cease to talk about vague and... unreal objectives such as human rights, the raising of the living standards, and democratization," and must "deal in straight power concepts," not "hampered by idealistic slogans" about "altruism and world-benefaction."

Kennan was referring specifically to Asia, but the observations generalize, with exceptions, for participants in the U.S.-run global system. It was well understood that the "idealistic slogans" were to be displayed prominently when addressing others, including the intellectual classes, who were expected to promulgate them.

The plans that Kennan helped formulate and implement took for granted that the U.S. would control the Western Hemisphere, the Far East, the former British empire (including the incomparable energy resources of the Middle East), and as much of Eurasia as possible, crucially its commercial and industrial centers. These were not unrealistic objectives, given the distribution of power. But decline set in at once.

In 1949, China declared independence, an event known in Western discourse as "the loss of China" -- in the U.S., with bitter recriminations and conflict over who was responsible for that loss. The terminology is revealing. It is only possible to lose something that one owns. The tacit assumption was that the U.S. owned China, by right, along with most of the rest of the world, much as postwar planners assumed.

The "loss of China" was the first major step in "America's decline." It had major policy consequences. One was the immediate decision to support France's effort to reconquer its former colony of Indochina, so that it, too, would not be "lost."

Indochina itself was not a major concern, despite claims about its rich resources by President Eisenhower and others. Rather, the concern was the "domino theory," which is often ridiculed when dominoes don't fall, but remains a leading principle of policy because it is quite rational. To adopt Henry Kissinger's version, a region that falls out of control can become a "virus" that will "spread contagion," inducing others to follow the same path.

In the case of Vietnam, the concern was that the virus of independent development might infect Indonesia, which really does have rich resources. And that might lead Japan -- the "superdomino" as it was called by the prominent

Asia historian John Dower -- to "accommodate" to an independent Asia as its technological and industrial center in a system that would escape the reach of U.S. power. That would mean, in effect, that the U.S. had lost the Pacific phase of World War II, fought to prevent Japan's attempt to establish such a New Order in Asia.

The way to deal with such a problem is clear: destroy the virus and "inoculate" those who might be infected. In the Vietnam case, the rational choice was to destroy any hope of successful independent development and to impose brutal dictatorships in the surrounding regions. Those tasks were successfully carried out -- though history has its own cunning, and something similar to what was feared has since been developing in East Asia, much to Washington's dismay.

The most important victory of the Indochina wars was in 1965, when a U.S.-backed military coup in Indonesia led by General Suharto carried out massive crimes that were compared by the CIA to those of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. The "staggering mass slaughter," as the *New York Times* described it, was reported accurately across the mainstream, and with unrestrained euphoria.

It was "a gleam of light in Asia," as the noted liberal commentator James Reston wrote in the *Times*. The coup ended the threat of democracy by demolishing the mass-based political party of the poor, established a dictatorship that went on to compile one of the worst human rights records in the world, and threw the riches of the country open to western investors. Small wonder that, after many other horrors, including the near-genocidal invasion of East Timor, Suharto was welcomed by the Clinton administration in 1995 as "our kind of guy."

Years after the great events of 1965, Kennedy-Johnson National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy reflected that it would have been wise to end the Vietnam war at that time, with the "virus" virtually destroyed and the primary domino solidly in place, buttressed by other U.S.-backed dictatorships throughout the region.

Similar procedures have been routinely followed elsewhere. Kissinger was referring specifically to the threat of socialist democracy in Chile. That threat was ended on another forgotten date, what Latin Americans call "the first 9/11," which in violence and bitter effects far exceeded the 9/11 commemorated in the West. A vicious dictatorship was imposed in Chile, one part of a plague of brutal repression that spread through Latin America, reaching Central America under Reagan. Viruses have aroused deep concern elsewhere as well, including the Middle East, where the threat of secular nationalism has often concerned British and U.S. planners, inducing them to support radical Islamic fundamentalism to counter it.

The Concentration of Wealth and American Decline

Despite such victories, American decline continued. By 1970, U.S. share of world wealth had dropped to about 25%, roughly where it remains, still colossal but far below the end of World War II. By then, the industrial world was "tripolar": US-based North America, German-based Europe, and East Asia, already the most dynamic industrial region, at the time Japan-based, but by now including the former Japanese colonies Taiwan and South Korea, and more recently China.

At about that time, American decline entered a new phase: conscious self-inflicted decline. From the 1970s, there has been a significant change in the U.S. economy, as planners, private and state, shifted it toward financialization and the offshoring of production, driven in part by the declining rate of profit in domestic manufacturing. These decisions initiated a vicious cycle in which wealth became highly concentrated (dramatically so in the top 0.1% of the population), yielding concentration of political power, hence legislation to carry the cycle further: taxation and other fiscal policies, deregulation, changes in the rules of corporate governance allowing huge gains for executives, and so on.

Meanwhile, for the majority, real wages largely stagnated, and people were able to get by only by sharply increased workloads (far beyond Europe), unsustainable debt, and repeated bubbles since the Reagan years, creating paper wealth that inevitably disappeared when they burst (and the perpetrators were bailed out by the taxpayer). In parallel, the political system has been increasingly shredded as both parties are driven deeper into corporate pockets with the escalating cost of elections, the Republicans to the level of farce, the Democrats (now largely the former "moderate Republicans") not far behind.

A recent study by the Economic Policy Institute, which has been the major source of reputable data on these developments for years, is entitled *Failure by Design*. The phrase "by design" is accurate. Other choices were certainly possible. And as the study points out, the "failure" is class-based. There is no failure for the designers. Far from it. Rather, the policies are a failure for the large majority, the 99% in the imagery of the Occupy movements -- and for the country, which has declined and will continue to do so under these policies.

One factor is the offshoring of manufacturing. As the solar panel example mentioned earlier illustrates, manufacturing capacity provides the basis and stimulus for innovation leading to higher stages of sophistication in production, design, and invention. That, too, is being outsourced, not a problem for the "money mandarins" who increasingly design policy, but a serious problem for working people and the middle classes, and a real disaster for the most oppressed, African Americans, who have never escaped the legacy of slavery and its ugly aftermath, and whose meager wealth virtually disappeared after the collapse of the housing bubble in 2008, setting off the most recent financial crisis, the worst so far.

(Noam Chomsky is Institute Professor emeritus in the MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy. He is the author of numerous best-selling political works. His latest books are *Making the Future: Occupations, Intervention, Empire, and Resistance*, *The Essential Chomsky* (edited by Anthony Arnone), a collection of his writings on politics and on language from the 1950s to the present, *Gaza in Crisis*, with Ilan Pappé, and *Hopes and Prospects*, also available as an audiobook.)

(Note: Part 2 of Noam Chomsky's discussion of American decline, "The Imperial Way," will be posted at TomDispatch and here in the FotM newsletter, tomorrow.)

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20120214-01 02:09 SteveG Fw: NationofChange Action: Donate to Help Us Speak Truth to Power!

from NationofChange:

Oil baron brothers Charles and David Koch are the third and fourth richest men in the United States controlling Koch Industries, the second largest privately owned company in the country.

They have used their power to defraud countless citizens, illegally manipulate our democratic process, engineer fraudulent popular movements, influence mass media, fund false "scientific studies," and now they are intent on fast-tracking the "fuse to North America's biggest carbon bomb," a pipeline that would bring toxic, dangerous Tar Sands crude from Alberta, Canada, 1,700 miles across the United States to the Gulf Coast.

The Kochs have set out to buy the White House, pledging 100 million dollars to defeat President Obama and supplant the office with a candidate bought and paid for with Koch money (a practice which after Citizens United is perfectly legal).

We must take action to curb the unchecked and destructive greed of these plutocrats and send a clear message to the White House that this pipeline is unacceptable to the American people and that corporate personhood must end now.

This Presidents' Day weekend we are fighting back in "Koch Town," Wichita, Kansas, home base of the Koch Brothers and Koch Industries.

We need your support today to help raise \$5,000 for essential supplies for the event.

If you believe that we need to stand up to corporate greed and protect our communities and our environment stand with us with your tax-deductible donation now!

Please click here to make a secure tax-deductible donation or call in your donation at 1-800-803-6045. You can also mail a check to: 6319 Dante Ln NW, Albuquerque, NM 87114

To Donate: <https://secure.nationofchange.org/occupy-koch-town/?ref=email>

Thank you for all that you do.

Respectfully Yours, Rebecca Buell, Executive Director, Donna Luca, Board President, and the NationofChange Team

20120214-02 10:17 Phil Re: The "Church", Chapter 23 (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #73)

from Pam:

If only humanity could think of religion the way we think about art or music, something meaningful to enjoy but nothing to go to war over. You don't like Mozart? Off with your head! You find abstract art revolutionary? Lock up all the abstract expressionists. Ridiculous and pointless--just like hating and killing because someone prefers Allah to Ganesh.

Pam, I'll certainly second that.

20120214-06 13:08 Art Re: The "Church", Chapter 23 (reply to SteveB & Pam, FotM Newsletter #73)

Although admittedly religion is not a strong point in my study of history, I recall the Catholic church solidified its opposition to birth control somewhat late in its formation. By the end of the 4th century the Catholic Church and the Roman Empire are pretty much bound together. The Empire desperately needs troops to stave off all those encroaching barbarians but the population of the empire is declining. Answer, birth control becomes a religious anathema. . There's a bit more to it but that's the source. Not sure it had anything to do with God.

It's like the ban against eating pork by both Jews and Moslems. Trichinosis. Common in pork, especially in warmer climates. How to stop it, make it a religious taboo.

Most American Catholics practice birth control in any event. With 7 Billion people in the world (about 5 Billion too many by my count), the planet is about to take action to shed its parasites in any event.

20120214-07 13:23 Pam Re: The "Church", Chapter 23 (reply to Art, above)

And the pope wasn't "infallible" until rather late--perhaps as late as the 19th c., I forget, but late. Everything changes. Why should religion be exempt? It's as flexible and protean as an oil spill, and it can be as dangerous. If my saying that makes you angry, you might ask yourself why, if what you believe is true, it should matter so much what I say or think?

20120214-03 10:24 NormF Re: The State of the Nation (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)

Thanks, brother! I just wanted you & yours to know that, when I can, I read the letters. If you're for the meek, then your mail is welcome here.

[Thank you, NormF. Thank you so much for reading, and, believe me, we are for the meek, because that is how we save the nation. --SteveB]

[20120214-05](#) 12:47 Art Re: "Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)

God bless you. We may need this debunking thing down the road, as this will come up again.

[20120214-04](#) 11:35 Pam Re: "Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #73)

SteveB, you have way more patience than I have. Mary's laundry list of grievances against Obama are patently ridiculous. Since you deal with them one by one, I won't bother. Here's the thing: this mindset is the problem. We all know that. It is steeped in hysteria, short on argument, and riddled with logical fallacies, not to mention guilt by association. It's an odd phenomenon--feeling threatened when there is no threat. Newt says that the day after an Obama re-election, the first thing Obama will do is "wage war on the Catholic Church." Absurd. "Obama is a socialist." Not true, and do those who charge him with being a leftist even know what socialism is? I very much doubt it. I'm sick of hearing George Soros maligned. He has done more to encourage democracy around the world than just about anyone, and his ideas for saving the Euro and the European Union are sensible and smart.

It is difficult to argue with someone who is not arguing policy and citing concrete evidence. Mary's list of accusations has more to do with manners and courtesy (Obama bowed to the king of wherever; Bush held hands with a middle-eastern oil baron)--the custom of the country--than with truckling to despots. Obama didn't tout America's superiority over the rest of the world during his travels? If you caught a six-year old telling a friend, "I'm better than you," you'd put him in time-out. If we're better, we won't need to tell the world about it. So long as immigrants are desperate to come here, the numbers speak for themselves.

I hate Newt because he says stupid things and tries to manipulate people with big lies--like making the moon the 51st state. I hate Santorum because he thinks all laws come from god--his. I hate Romney because he's like a weathervane in a wind storm. What good has any of them done the country? Romney got a good health care plan going in MA, but now he disowns it like a bastard child. I'm surprised Santorum didn't join the priesthood and retire to a monastery where he could await the second-coming. And Newt? Mr. "best defense is a good offense" personified. Don't answer difficult questions; make your interviewer look like a jackass. What this country needs is a good course in basic logic, then maybe we could begin to argue the merits of cases rather than the misperceptions of personality.

[Incredibly well put, Pam. The one thing I would add is that we are all learning a lot about truth and lies in this group. I believe anyone who reads the unfinished, but not for long, *FotM Archive* (online at: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/archives/FotM-Archive-1.pdf>) and the daily FotM Newsletters is receiving a college education in American Current Affairs. Some of us are further along the path than others, but I have to believe we all seek the same goal—a truly great nation, not the sham of one. We have spelled out, here, in great detail, what we believe this nation would have to be like to be great. We're still waiting to hear from the Right. -- SteveB]

[20120214-08](#) 15:59 SteveG "Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors"

Good reasons for election reform...

About 2.7 million people have active registrations in multiple states, including about 2,000 people registered in four or more states, according to the Pew report. Election officials said it is difficult to track when someone has moved to another state without canceling their previous registration.

This is the acknowledged legal form of voter fraud that can legally occur. Some fraudsters actively vote in multiple states if they have residences in multiple states.

"Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors" by AP

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://nbcpolitics.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/02/14/10405361-study-1-in-8-voter-registrations-have-errors>)

Some 24 million voter registrations in the United States contain significant errors, including about 1.8 million dead people still on the rolls and many more approved to vote in multiple states, according to a report released Tuesday.

Even though the inaccuracies impact one in eight registrations, researchers at the Pew Center on the States said they don't see it as an indicator of widespread fraud. Rather, they believe outdated systems are failing to keep pace with the most basic changes in people's lives, feeding perceptions that U.S. elections are not as airtight as they could be.

In conjunction with Pew's report, eight states said they are working this year on a centralized data system to help identify people whose registrations may be outdated.

"A lot of people probably assume we do this already," said Sam Reed, who oversees elections as Washington's secretary of state. "I think it's going to bring more trust and confidence in the election system."

About 2.7 million people have active registrations in multiple states, including about 2,000 people registered in four or more states, according to the Pew report. Election officials said it is difficult to track when someone has moved to another state without canceling their previous registration.

Some 1.8 million deceased people are still listed as active voters, according to the study, which is based on a computer analysis of a proprietary voter database used by Democrats. Researchers believe 12.7 million records do not reflect the current addresses of active voters while 12 million contain address inaccuracies, including those that make it unlikely that mail could reach them.

Some of the files contain multiple problems, with Pew estimating that a total of 24 million have problems.

The numbers are at least partially supported by anecdotal evidence. For example, Washington state and Alaska — one of the nation's least populous states — compared each other's voter registration systems last year and found an estimated 4,500 duplicates.

The eight states involved in the centralization project are Colorado, Delaware, Maryland, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Virginia and Washington.

Pew believes the centralized system and online voter registrations will help save money by eliminating the need to print millions of forms, enter data by hand or send mail to outdated or incorrect addresses.

"That's a tremendous cost to the taxpayers," said David Becker, director of Election Initiatives at the Pew Center on the States. The centralized system has not settled on participation fees yet but is expected to be in the tens of thousands of dollars per state per year.

The Brennan Center for Justice, which has been working on voter registration issues, is also pushing for a modernization of the system but cautions that states need to take particular care to not rush to eliminate voters from their rolls. Lawrence Norden, an attorney at the center, said there have been a number of cases in recent years where people have been improperly removed from the system based on an incomplete match — for example, two people who have the same name and birthdate.

"This is something that has to be done very carefully," he said.

Some states have adopted laws in the past couple years to require photo IDs to vote — hoping it would prevent fraud even though examples of such cheating are rare. That tactic was one the Brennan Center is directly opposing.

Linda Lamone, the administrator of elections in Maryland, said the Pew work has already pushed the state toward online voter registration, which will also allow voters to update their information electronically. Maryland has also changed its system so that voters who choose to register while getting a driver's license must complete the process there. Previously, voters had to separately file paperwork and the state ended up having conflicting information about registrants.

Lamone said dead people who are registered in the state but end up dying in another state that does not actively share death information can leave deceased voters on the rolls. She said the centralized system will help ease those administrative challenges.

"We're going to get better information on voters," she said. "Overall, it's going to result in much more accurate voter registration lists."

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20120214-09	17:05	SteveB	Re: "Study: 1 in 8 Voter Registrations Have Errors" (reply to SteveG, above)
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You would think, after more than 200 years at least thinking we're the greatest Democracy in the history of the Universe, that we would know how to run a fair, accurate election.

We don't. We simply do not. Think: Florida.

It's the pathetic truth. The voting process has been especially casual and incompetent in the 2012 Republican primaries and caucuses. Iowa evidently still doesn't know who won, and they may have altered the course of history by declaring the wrong winner. Now we find that Maine didn't bother to count a bunch of ballots.

The problem needs to be fixed. To do it, we need bulletproof federal ID's for all citizens eligible to vote (at least), and we need uniform federal election standards mandated to the states. We need accountability.

One comment about the article. I think very little of the double registration and registration problems are to cause fraud or do cause fraud. It's the process that is the problem, not the voters. I have never heard of any "un-registration" process in my life. Whenever I have moved to another state, I have registered. It never occurred to me that any necessary un-registration would not automatically occur. I suppose I could have voted twice, but I would not have done that. I guess if I could move fast enough, I could vote in about sex states this year. Am a guilty of election fraud and eligible for prison for that? Most people see voting as a task, not as fun. Once is usually enough. That said, nefarious souls might seek to take advantage of all the registration problems and casual voting laws to rig elections. I worry a lot more about the politicians than any voters, but...

THE SYSTEM MUST BE FIXED IF DEMOCRACY IS TO ENDURE!

20120214-10	17:38	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Keep the Senate & Your Employer Out of Your Bedroom!
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from MoveOn:

Republicans in Congress want to put your boss right in your bedroom, deciding whether you have access to contraception and even what kind you can use—and the Senate's voting on it tomorrow. It's Senator Roy Blunt's radical response to President Obama's balanced approach to ensuring that women have access to birth control coverage.

Senator Blunt wants to let any employer deny coverage for any health care treatment to which they claim a religious or moral objection. That means your employer could claim an objection to almost any kind of medical

treatment: contraception, HIV treatment, vaccination, substance-abuse counseling, blood transfusions, prenatal care for unmarried women, or mental health care, just to name a few.

We can stop the Blunt amendment and future attacks on health care access if we insist that our Senators leave medical decisions where they belong: in the hands of doctors and patients. But we have to act before tomorrow's crucial vote.

Click here to sign and tell the Senate that you don't want your boss to decide if you get the health care you need: <http://pol.moveon.org/healthcoverage/?id=35767-20195165-AX%3Dk%3DTx&t=1>.

The Blunt amendment was proposed to get around the new health care rule that ensures all women have access to contraception coverage, no matter who they work for. Under the guise of "religious freedom" the Republicans are attacking the very idea of comprehensive health insurance.

Having someone else's beliefs dictate your ability to get care isn't religious freedom—and it isn't good for workers, families, or public health and safety.

And this is just the latest in a long-running series of attacks on health care reform, women's health care, and reproductive choice.⁵ We have to stop these attacks once and for all by bringing attention to the real issue. It comes down to one simple thing: Your employer's religion shouldn't decide what medical treatment you're able to get.

Thanks for all you do. –Elena, Joan, Carrie, Marika, and the rest of the team

20120214-11	23:24	SteveG	"OWS Meets with Members of Dissident Movements from All Over the World"
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All bases being touched here.

"OWS Meets with Members of Dissident Movements from All Over the World" by J.A. Myerson, TruthOut

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://www.truth-out.org/ows-meets-members-dissident-movements-all-over-world/1329229242>)

In late January, two Wall Street Occupiers took a trip to Porto Alegre, Brazil, to meet with members of dissident movements from all over the world. The thematic Social Forum, serving as an anti-Davos economic forum, was set up to tackle the "capitalist crisis, social and environmental justice." Nelini Stamp and Amin Husain met with, among others, Chilean student demonstrators, Tunisian revolutionaries and "indignant citizens" from Greece and Spain.

"All roads lead to Rio," Stamp tells me, was the credo among participants. This refers to the "Rio +20" conference that will convene in late June "to mark the 20th anniversary of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), in Rio de Janeiro" and "secure renewed political commitment for sustainable development," in the "green economy."

At the thematic Social Forum, global youth and democratic movements mobilized not for the UN conference, but for the "People's summit of Rio +20" event, which is set to happen several days earlier. Stamp says that the prevalent attitude among the Porto Alegre attendees was the one articulated by Esther Vivas. "All indications," she wrote, "are that the Rio +20 Earth Summit will to serve to clear the way for multinationals to justify their practice of appropriation of natural resources." The People's summit will present an alternative program to "green capitalism."

"We found that ecology was an issue that could unite us all," Stamp says, but not in the way official state bodies were prepared to endorse. For her, the ecological battle is the same as the battle against neoliberal globalization. "We need to globally challenge the G8, the G20, the UN, NATO, the World Bank, the IMF [International Monetary Fund] - and we have to organize to figure out strategies." She adds, "It is easy to understand globalization at a basic level, but it is difficult to understand in its particulars," contending that the global capitalist economy's grip on

governments everywhere renders politicians impotent to reduce carbon emissions, deforestation, and other harmful industrial practices.

Husain agrees that 2011's social movements and uprisings were all local protests against the same global forces, telling me, "I was in the West Bank in July and we watched the international arena and what was happening. We saw self-immolation in Tunisia and there was something in the air from that - an act of desperation, but also a wake-up call. In Egypt, we saw an affirmation of people power in a productive way, reclaiming of public space signaling to the world that the problem was with democracy. It's not about better politicians, there's something more fundamental going on. The movement is very strong in Greece, the bedrock of democracy. We're still watching."

In Porto Alegre, Stamp noticed a split between the institutional affiliations that come with the World Social Forum process and the social movement on the ground. "The NGOs [nongovernmental organizations] and labor and government-run projects [staples of the World Social Forum] were all in the Legislative Assembly building, but the social movement folks basically didn't attend. Instead, they were at the youth camp in an occupied building, Utopia E Luta." Far from the tent cities that "occupied" conjures in American heads, "They have a theater there, sewing machines and sewing classes and a hydroponics set-up on the roof."

In addition to challenging globalization, she counsels, "we also have to challenge the Social Forum process." Utopia E Luta and its international counterparts, she says, have to become the dominant politics of the anti-globalization left. "NGOs need to stop dropping people in a certain neighborhood and having them canvass for two months. That's why we're not building movements. We're too busy building campaigns. We have to have many more forums and interactive spaces." The problem is that NGOs are where a lot of the money is and as Stamp laments, "It costs a lot of money to fly people in."

Flight costs weren't the only obstacle. When the formal forum procedure was in order, conference-goers had a translators and earphones arrangement, a luxury not available at Utopia E Luta. "It's hard to do collective work, when we all don't speak the same language. Everyone translated for each other in mutual languages. I know Spanish, so I helped translate the Spanish indignados into English, which the Greek indignados understood."

Nevertheless, events like this, says Husain, are valuable. "We left," he says, "thinking that we need to see more of each other. There is something to be built upon this network of connections. It's beyond ultra globalization and connectivity. We're all fighting the same battle in different spaces." Husain sees the "federalism" at play when different American Occupy camps adopt differentiating procedures and policies (which best fit their local circumstances) on a global scale, as each country's People's movement operates differently too. Next month, Husain will be going to Egypt for ten days to expand international social movement interconnectivity.

"The question now," according to Husain, becomes, "that cross-fertilization, that sharing - what does it mean? What does it look like? The World Social Forum could be a good vehicle."

Stamp is asking the same question. "What does movement connection look like? Is it training? Is it that there's a big Skype call that we can try to do internationally? In Nice in November, we had a global assembly." Ultimately, she shares Husain's answer, concluding, "The World Social Forum process can be much stronger with the social movements having a strong hand. The NGO stuff, the union stuff, is necessary, but it has to stop being old people talking down to the movement."

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff skipped Davos to address the Porto Alegre Social Forum. She called neoliberalism "a failed recipe" for development in the Global South, pointing to neoliberal efforts in Brazil's resultant "stagnation, loss of democratic space and sovereignty, deepening poverty, unemployment and social exclusion." She called for "a development model that articulates growth and job creation, battles poverty and decreases inequalities," and promotes the "sustainable use and preservation of natural resources."

<http://handlensandbinoculars.blogspot.com/2011/01/to-honor-botanical-legend.html>

White Trillium (*Trillium grandiflorum*), Apr. 18, 2010, Bentley Woods, St. Joseph County, IN (Scott Namestnik)



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #75 — FEB. 16, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

Important Stuff: How We Got to Where We Are, Part 2

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 16, 2012)

This article is a continuation of yesterday's history of America's decline. I hope it is not too late to employ the lessons we should have learned.

"The Imperial Way: American Decline in Perspective, Part 2" by Noam Chomsky, TomDispatch/Nation of Change

Feb. 15, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/imperial-way-1329323857>)

In the years of conscious, self-inflicted decline at home, "losses" continued to mount elsewhere. In the past decade, for the first time in 500 years, South America has taken successful steps to free itself from western domination, another serious loss. The region has moved towards integration, and has begun to address some of the terrible internal problems of societies ruled by mostly Europeanized elites, tiny islands of extreme wealth in a sea of misery. They have also rid themselves of all U.S. military bases and of IMF controls. A newly formed organization, CELAC, includes all countries of the hemisphere apart from the U.S. and Canada. If it actually functions, that would be another step in American decline, in this case in what has always been regarded as "the backyard."

Even more serious would be the loss of the MENA countries -- Middle East/North Africa -- which have been regarded by planners since the 1940s as "a stupendous source of strategic power, and one of the greatest material prizes in world history." Control of MENA energy reserves would yield "substantial control of the world," in the words of the influential Roosevelt advisor A.A. Berle.

To be sure, if the projections of a century of U.S. energy independence based on North American energy resources turn out to be realistic, the significance of controlling MENA would decline somewhat, though probably not by much: the main concern has always been control more than access. However, the likely consequences to the planet's equilibrium are so ominous that discussion may be largely an academic exercise.

The Arab Spring, another development of historic importance, might portend at least a partial "loss" of MENA. The US and its allies have tried hard to prevent that outcome -- so far, with considerable success. Their policy towards the popular uprisings has kept closely to the standard guidelines: support the forces most amenable to U.S. influence and control.

Favored dictators are supported as long as they can maintain control (as in the major oil states). When that is no longer possible, then discard them and try to restore the old regime as fully as possible (as in Tunisia and Egypt). The general pattern is familiar: Somoza, Marcos, Duvalier, Mobutu, Suharto, and many others. In one case, Libya,

the three traditional imperial powers intervened by force to participate in a rebellion to overthrow a mercurial and unreliable dictator, opening the way, it is expected, to more efficient control over Libya's rich resources (oil primarily, but also water, of particular interest to French corporations), to a possible base for the U.S. Africa Command (so far restricted to Germany), and to the reversal of growing Chinese penetration. As far as policy goes, there have been few surprises.

Crucially, it is important to reduce the threat of functioning democracy, in which popular opinion will significantly influence policy. That again is routine, and quite understandable. A look at the studies of public opinion undertaken by U.S. polling agencies in the MENA countries easily explains the western fear of authentic democracy, in which public opinion will significantly influence policy.

Israel and the Republican Party

Similar considerations carry over directly to the second major concern addressed in the issue of *Foreign Affairs* cited in part one of this piece: the Israel-Palestine conflict. Fear of democracy could hardly be more clearly exhibited than in this case. In January 2006, an election took place in Palestine, pronounced free and fair by international monitors. The instant reaction of the U.S. (and of course Israel), with Europe following along politely, was to impose harsh penalties on Palestinians for voting the wrong way.

That is no innovation. It is quite in accord with the general and unsurprising principle recognized by mainstream scholarship: the U.S. supports democracy if, and only if, the outcomes accord with its strategic and economic objectives, the rueful conclusion of neo-Reaganite Thomas Carothers, the most careful and respected scholarly analyst of "democracy promotion" initiatives.

More broadly, for 35 years the U.S. has led the rejectionist camp on Israel-Palestine, blocking an international consensus calling for a political settlement in terms too well known to require repetition. The western mantra is that Israel seeks negotiations without preconditions, while the Palestinians refuse. The opposite is more accurate. The U.S. and Israel demand strict preconditions, which are, furthermore, designed to ensure that negotiations will lead either to Palestinian capitulation on crucial issues, or nowhere.

The first precondition is that the negotiations must be supervised by Washington, which makes about as much sense as demanding that Iran supervise the negotiation of Sunni-Shia conflicts in Iraq. Serious negotiations would have to be under the auspices of some neutral party, preferably one that commands some international respect, perhaps Brazil. The negotiations would seek to resolve the conflicts between the two antagonists: the U.S.-Israel on one side, most of the world on the other.

The second precondition is that Israel must be free to expand its illegal settlements in the West Bank. Theoretically, the U.S. opposes these actions, but with a very light tap on the wrist, while continuing to provide economic, diplomatic, and military support. When the U.S. does have some limited objections, it very easily bars the actions, as in the case of the E-1 project linking Greater Jerusalem to the town of Ma'aleh Adumim, virtually bisecting the West Bank, a very high priority for Israeli planners (across the spectrum), but raising some objections in Washington, so that Israel has had to resort to devious measures to chip away at the project.

The pretense of opposition reached the level of farce last February when Obama vetoed a Security Council resolution calling for implementation of official U.S. policy (also adding the uncontroversial observation that the settlements themselves are illegal, quite apart from expansion). Since that time there has been little talk about ending settlement expansion, which continues, with studied provocation.

Thus, as Israeli and Palestinian representatives prepared to meet in Jordan in January 2011, Israel announced new construction in Pisgat Ze'ev and Har Homa, West Bank areas that it has declared to be within the greatly expanded area of Jerusalem, annexed, settled, and constructed as Israel's capital, all in violation of direct Security Council orders. Other moves carry forward the grander design of separating whatever West Bank enclaves will be left to Palestinian administration from the cultural, commercial, political center of Palestinian life in the former Jerusalem.

It is understandable that Palestinian rights should be marginalized in U.S. policy and discourse. Palestinians have no wealth or power. They offer virtually nothing to U.S. policy concerns; in fact, they have negative value, as a nuisance that stirs up "the Arab street."

Israel, in contrast, is a valuable ally. It is a rich society with a sophisticated, largely militarized high-tech industry. For decades, it has been a highly valued military and strategic ally, particularly since 1967, when it performed a great service to the U.S. and its Saudi ally by destroying the Nasserite "virus," establishing the "special relationship" with Washington in the form that has persisted since. It is also a growing center for U.S. high-tech investment. In fact, high tech and particularly military industries in the two countries are closely linked.

Apart from such elementary considerations of great power politics as these, there are cultural factors that should not be ignored. Christian Zionism in Britain and the U.S. long preceded Jewish Zionism, and has been a significant elite phenomenon with clear policy implications (including the Balfour Declaration, which drew from it). When General Allenby conquered Jerusalem during World War I, he was hailed in the American press as Richard the Lion-Hearted, who had at last won the Crusades and driven the pagans out of the Holy Land.

The next step was for the Chosen People to return to the land promised to them by the Lord. Articulating a common elite view, President Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes described Jewish colonization of Palestine as an achievement "without comparison in the history of the human race." Such attitudes find their place easily within the Providentialist doctrines that have been a strong element in popular and elite culture since the country's origins: the belief that God has a plan for the world and the U.S. is carrying it forward under divine guidance, as articulated by a long list of leading figures.

Moreover, evangelical Christianity is a major popular force in the U.S. Further toward the extremes, End Times evangelical Christianity also has enormous popular outreach, invigorated by the establishment of Israel in 1948, revitalized even more by the conquest of the rest of Palestine in 1967 -- all signs that End Times and the Second Coming are approaching.

These forces have become particularly significant since the Reagan years, as the Republicans have abandoned the pretense of being a political party in the traditional sense, while devoting themselves in virtual lockstep uniformity to servicing a tiny percentage of the super-rich and the corporate sector. However, the small constituency that is primarily served by the reconstructed party cannot provide votes, so they have to turn elsewhere.

The only choice is to mobilize tendencies that have always been present, though rarely as an organized political force: primarily nativists trembling in fear and hatred, and religious elements that are extremists by international standards but not in the U.S. One outcome is reverence for alleged Biblical prophecies, hence not only support for Israel and its conquests and expansion, but passionate love for Israel, another core part of the catechism that must be intoned by Republican candidates -- with Democrats, again, not too far behind.

These factors aside, it should not be forgotten that the "Anglosphere" -- Britain and its offshoots -- consists of settler-colonial societies, which rose on the ashes of indigenous populations, suppressed or virtually exterminated. Past practices must have been basically correct, in the U.S. case even ordained by Divine Providence. Accordingly there is often an intuitive sympathy for the children of Israel when they follow a similar course. But primarily, geostrategic and economic interests prevail, and policy is not graven in stone.

The Iranian "Threat" and the Nuclear Issue

Let us turn finally to the third of the leading issues addressed in the establishment journals cited earlier, the "threat of Iran." Among elites and the political class this is generally taken to be the primary threat to world order -- though not among populations. In Europe, polls show that Israel is regarded as the leading threat to peace. In the MENA countries, that status is shared with the U.S., to the extent that in Egypt, on the eve of the Tahrir Square uprising, 80% felt that the region would be more secure if Iran had nuclear weapons. The same polls found that only 10% regard Iran as a threat -- unlike the ruling dictators, who have their own concerns.

In the United States, before the massive propaganda campaigns of the past few years, a majority of the population agreed with most of the world that, as a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, Iran has a right to carry out

uranium enrichment. And even today, a large majority favors peaceful means for dealing with Iran. There is even strong opposition to military engagement if Iran and Israel are at war. Only a quarter regard Iran as an important concern for the U.S. altogether. But it is not unusual for there to be a gap, often a chasm, dividing public opinion and policy.

Why exactly is Iran regarded as such a colossal threat? The question is rarely discussed, but it is not hard to find a serious answer -- though not, as usual, in the fevered pronouncements. The most authoritative answer is provided by the Pentagon and the intelligence services in their regular reports to Congress on global security. They report that Iran does not pose a military threat. Its military spending is very low even by the standards of the region, minuscule of course in comparison with the U.S.

Iran has little capacity to deploy force. Its strategic doctrines are defensive, designed to deter invasion long enough for diplomacy to set it. If Iran is developing nuclear weapons capability, they report, that would be part of its deterrence strategy. No serious analyst believes that the ruling clerics are eager to see their country and possessions vaporized, the immediate consequence of their coming even close to initiating a nuclear war. And it is hardly necessary to spell out the reasons why any Iranian leadership would be concerned with deterrence, under existing circumstances.

The regime is doubtless a serious threat to much of its own population -- and regrettably, is hardly unique on that score. But the primary threat to the U.S. and Israel is that Iran might deter their free exercise of violence. A further threat is that the Iranians clearly seek to extend their influence to neighboring Iraq and Afghanistan, and beyond as well. Those "illegitimate" acts are called "destabilizing" (or worse). In contrast, forceful imposition of U.S. influence halfway around the world contributes to "stability" and order, in accord with traditional doctrine about who owns the world.

It makes very good sense to try to prevent Iran from joining the nuclear weapons states, including the three that have refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty -- Israel, India, and Pakistan, all of which have been assisted in developing nuclear weapons by the U.S., and are still being assisted by them. It is not impossible to approach that goal by peaceful diplomatic means. One approach, which enjoys overwhelming international support, is to undertake meaningful steps towards establishing a nuclear weapons-free zone in the Middle East, including Iran and Israel (and applying as well to U.S. forces deployed there), better still extending to South Asia.

Support for such efforts is so strong that the Obama administration has been compelled to formally agree, but with reservations: crucially, that Israel's nuclear program must not be placed under the auspices of the International Atomic Energy Association, and that no state (meaning the U.S.) should be required to release information about "Israeli nuclear facilities and activities, including information pertaining to previous nuclear transfers to Israel." Obama also accepts Israel's position that any such proposal must be conditional on a comprehensive peace settlement, which the U.S. and Israel can continue to delay indefinitely.

This survey comes nowhere near being exhaustive, needless to say. Among major topics not addressed is the shift of U.S. military policy towards the Asia-Pacific region, with new additions to the huge military base system underway right now, in Jeju Island off South Korea and Northwest Australia, all elements of the policy of "containment of China." Closely related is the issue of U.S. bases in Okinawa, bitterly opposed by the population for many years, and a continual crisis in U.S.-Tokyo-Okinawa relations.

Revealing how little fundamental assumptions have changed, U.S. strategic analysts describe the result of China's military programs as a "classic 'security dilemma,' whereby military programs and national strategies deemed defensive by their planners are viewed as threatening by the other side," writes Paul Godwin of the Foreign Policy Research Institute. The security dilemma arises over control of the seas off China's coasts. The U.S. regards its policies of controlling these waters as "defensive," while China regards them as threatening; correspondingly, China regards its actions in nearby areas as "defensive" while the U.S. regards them as threatening. No such debate is even imaginable concerning U.S. coastal waters. This "classic security dilemma" makes sense, again, on the assumption that the U.S. has a right to control most of the world, and that U.S. security requires something approaching absolute global control.

While the principles of imperial domination have undergone little change, the capacity to implement them has markedly declined as power has become more broadly distributed in a diversifying world. Consequences are many. It is, however, very important to bear in mind that -- unfortunately -- none lifts the two dark clouds that hover over all consideration of global order: nuclear war and environmental catastrophe, both literally threatening the decent survival of the species.

Quite the contrary. Both threats are ominous, and increasing.

(Noam Chomsky is Institute Professor emeritus in the MIT Department of Linguistics and Philosophy. He is the author of numerous best-selling political works. His latest books are *Making the Future: Occupations, Intervention, Empire, and Resistance*, *The Essential Chomsky* (edited by Anthony Arnone), a collection of his writings on politics and language from the 1950s to the present, *Gaza in Crisis*, with Ilan Pappé, and *Hopes and Prospects*.)

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20120215-01	11:35	SteveB	Examples of Political Stubbornness
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REPUBLICAN STUBBORNNESS

Without studying economics (a 2-bit novelist, Ayn Rand, is their lead theorist) or economic data ("figures can lie", "consider the source" they say), the Right wants to implement (further) an economic theory that has nearly wrecked us—wars, huge deficits, unemployment, "free" trade, deregulation, loss of freedom, unions, and the social safety net, the Housing Bubble, the Crash of 2008, the bail-outs to the banks, outsourcing, privatization, the tarnishing of our image, the rising inequality of income and opportunity, the cheapening and inequality of education, creationism...the list goes on.

DEMOCRATIC STUBBORNNESS

I invite you all to give me examples for either party. These would be fun to publish as they come up, which they seem to do incessantly.

20120215-03	11:47	Pam	Re: Examples of Political Stubbornness (reply to SteveB, above)
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I don't know if you'd call this stubbornness, but here is a list of things I imagine people on the right would say about Democrats:

DEMOCRATIC STUBBORNNESS

They want to legislate what you consume--fat, sugar, cigarettes, not marijuana, calories.

They are godless, secular haters of religion.

They are not patriotic.

They want a welfare/nanny state so individuals won't have to assume responsibility for themselves.

They use bad language.

They think Europe can teach us something.

They want to destroy the nuclear family.

They think the state is more important than the individual.

They think taxes are a way to increase national revenue.

They want to deny parents the right to decide what schools teach their children.

They want to make owning a gun, any gun, illegal.

They want to allow women and their doctors to decide what a woman should do with her own body.

They don't want to legislate morality--quite different from the 1960s when they did want to, by passing civil rights legislation.

I can't think of any more at the moment. Feel free to add to this list.

[20120215-08](#) 15:21 Dennis Re: Examples of Political Stubbornness (reply to SteveB, above)

While studying the data of numerous economists, the Democrats put together thoughtful multiple-point policy statements that bore even their base. No wonder fallacies and lies that appeal to the emotions of the ignorant electorate cause them to lose elections.

[20120215-10](#) 16:23 SteveB Re: Examples of Political Stubbornness (reply to Dennis, above)

Yes, very well said.

[20120215-02](#) 11:36 SteveG "The Long History Of The War Against Contraception" & More

What is going on in Michigan?

"Defense: Feds 'Manipulated' Facts About Militia" by AP

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/defense-feds-manipulated-facts-about-militia>)

"A Partisan Power Play Won't Redeem Bishops" by Gene Lyons, Roosevelt Institute/National Memo

Feb. 15, 2012 (<http://nationalmemo.com/content/partisan-power-play-wont-redeem-bishops>)

"The Long History Of The War Against Contraception" by Ellen Chesler, National Memo

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/long-history-war-against-contraception>)

For those surprised about the recent fervor over Obama's contraception coverage decision, a look at its deep roots.

Republicans for Planned Parenthood last week issued a call for nominations for the 2012 Barry Goldwater award, an annual prize awarded to a Republican legislator who has acted to protect women's health and rights. Past recipients include Maine Senator Olympia Snowe, who this week endorsed President Obama's solution for insuring full coverage of the cost of contraception without exceptions, even for employees of religiously affiliated institutions. And that may tell us all we need to know about why President Obama has the upper hand in a debate over insurance that congressional Tea Partiers have now widened to include anyone who seeks an exemption.

It's a long time ago, but it is worth remembering that conservative avatar Goldwater was in his day an outspoken supporter of women's reproductive freedom — a freethinker who voted his conscience over the protests of Catholic

bishops and all others who tried to claim these matters as questions of conscientious liberty and not sensible social policy. With Goldwater on his side, Obama sees a clear opening for skeptics wary of the extremism that has captured Republican hopefuls in thrall to the fundamentalist base that controls the GOP presidential primary today. Holding firm on family planning — even if it means taking on the Catholic hierarchy and other naysayers by offering a technical fix that would have insurers cover costs instead of the churches themselves — is a calculated political strategy by the Obama campaign, not a blunder as it has been characterized by many high powered pundits, including progressives like Mark Shields of PBS and E.J. Dionne of the *Washington Post*.

Recent public opinion polling on the subject is worth reconsidering. For years, it has been perfectly clear that a substantial majority of Americans see the value of expanding access to contraception and reliable sex education as essential tools to prevent unwanted pregnancy and abortion and to help women balance the competing demands of work and family. But unlike a zealous minority on the other side, these moderates have not necessarily privileged these social concerns over important questions of economics or national security that mattered more to them at election time.

That's what seems to be changing. With his now-famous "nope, zero" response last spring, President Obama simply shut down Republicans in Congress who wanted to defund family planning as part of a deal to reduce the federal deficit. The action elicited a sudden surge in his popularity, especially in the highly contested demographic of women voters between the ages of 30 and 49 who voted for him in 2008 but wound up frustrated by failed promises and disappointing economic policies. Campaign polling has since uncovered a big opening for Obama with this group because they are furious over Republican social extremism. An astonishing 80 percent of them disapproved of congressional efforts to defund Planned Parenthood last spring. Polling among Catholics in response to last week's controversy shows identical patterns, with 57 percent overall supporting the Obama "compromise" to ensure full coverage of contraception, according to reporting by Joe Conason in *The National Memo*, and cross-tabs demonstrating much higher margins of support from Catholic women, Latinos, and independent Catholic voters — all prime Obama election targets.

If the numbers are so persuasive, why then have Republican conservatives strayed so far from the greater tolerance of the Goldwater age? Why have they allowed the family planning issue to tie their candidates up in knots in 2012? The answer is in just how outsized the influence of a minority viewpoint can be on a political party, so long as it represents the base of that party's support.

A bit of history going all the way back to Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal is instructive. Back then, birth control was still illegal in this country, still defined as obscene under federal statutes that remained as a legacy of the Victorian era, even though many states had reformed local laws and were allowing physicians to prescribe contraception to married women with broadly defined "medical" reasons to plan and space their childbearing.

The movement's pioneer, Margaret Sanger, went to Washington during the Great Depression, anticipating that Franklin Roosevelt, whose wife Eleanor was her friend and neighbor in New York, would address the problem and incorporate a public subsidy of contraception for poor women into the safety net the New Deal was constructing. What Sanger failed to anticipate, however, was the force of the opposition this idea would continue to generate from the coalition of religious conservatives, including urban Catholics and rural fundamentalist Protestants who held Roosevelt Democrats captive, much as they have today captured the GOP. It was Catholic priests, and not the still slightly scandalous friend of the First Lady, who wound up having tea at the Roosevelt White House.

The U.S. government would not overcome moral and religious objections until the Supreme Court protected contraceptive use under the privacy doctrine created in 1965 under *Griswold v. Connecticut*. That freed President Lyndon Johnson to incorporate family planning programs into the country's international development programs and into anti-poverty efforts at home. As a Democrat still especially dependent on Catholic votes, however, Johnson only agreed to act once he had the strong bipartisan support of his arch rival Barry Goldwater's endorsement and also the intense loyalty and deft maneuvering of Republican moderates like Robert Packwood of Oregon in the Senate. Packwood, in turn, worked alongside Ohio's Robert Taft, Jr. in the House and a newcomer from Texas by the name of George H. W. Bush. Bush would remain a staunch advocate of reproductive freedom for women until political considerations during the 1980 presidential elections, when he was on the ticket with Ronald Reagan, accounted for one of the most dramatic and cynical public policy reversals in modern American politics.

Reagan had supported California's liberal policies on contraception and abortion as governor, and Bush as Richard Nixon's Ambassador to the United Nations had helped shape the UN's population programs. But Republican operatives in 1980 saw a potential fissure in the traditional New Deal coalition among Catholics uncomfortable with the new legitimacy given to abortion after *Roe v. Wade* and white southern Christians being lured away from the Democrats around the issue of affirmative action and other racial preferences. Opposition to abortion instantly became a GOP litmus test, and both presidential hopefuls officially changed stripes.

Fast forward to 1992 and the election of Bill Clinton as America's first pro-choice president, coupled with the Supreme Court's crafting of a compromise decision in *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* that put some limits on access to abortion but essentially preserved the core privacy doctrine of *Roe v. Wade*. The perceived double threat of these political and judicial developments unleashed a new and even more powerful conservative backlash that took aim not only at abortion, but at contraception and sex education as well.

Exploiting inevitable tensions in the wake of profound social and economic changes occurring across the country as the result of altered gender roles and expectations — changes symbolized and made all the more palpable by Hillary Clinton's activist role as First Lady — conservatives, with the support of powerful right-wing foundations and think tanks, poured millions of dollars into research and propaganda promoting family values and demonizing reproductive freedom, including emotional television ads that ran for years on major media outlets. A relentless stigmatizing of abortion, along with campaigns of intimidation and outright violence against Planned Parenthood and other providers, had a chilling effect on politicians generally shy of social controversy. And Bill Clinton's vulnerability to charges of sexual misconduct left his administration and his party all the more defensive.

Since the welfare reform legislation of 1996, aptly labeled a "Personal Responsibility Act," not only has access to abortion been curtailed, but funds for family planning programs at home and abroad have been capped. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been allocated to the teaching of sexual abstinence, rather than more comprehensive approaches to sex education. Just as tragically, U.S. programs addressing the crisis of HIV/AIDS — admirably expanded during the presidency of George W. Bush — were nonetheless made to counsel abstinence and oppose the use of condoms and other safe sex strategies, leaving women and young people all the more vulnerable to the ravages of the epidemic.

Empirically grounded studies over and over again undermined the efficacy of these approaches, which also flew in the face of mainstream American viewpoints and basic common sense. With Barack Obama's election they have largely been revoked, enflaming the conservative base that put them in place and has lived off the salaries supported by government funding for faith-based social policy.

Even more disheartening to conservative true believers is the promise that the Affordable Care Act will vastly expand access to contraception by providing insurance coverage for oral contraceptives. This guarantee, endorsed by all mainstream health advocates, also includes emergency contraception, popularly known as the morning-after pill, that holds the promise of further reducing unwanted pregnancy and abortion and was meant to offer common ground in an abortion debate long defined by a clash of absolutes. The strong dose of ordinary hormones in emergency contraception act primarily by preventing fertilization, just like daily contraceptive pills, but in rare instances may also disable a fertilized egg from implanting by weakening the uterine lining that it needs for sustenance, causing opponents to vilify it as an abortifacient.

Supporting the Obama policy changes, on the other hand, is a new generation of progressive activists in reproductive health and rights organizations, energized by the intensity of the assaults against them, and now well-armed to educate and activate their own supporters by using traditional grassroots strategies and more sophisticated social networking. No institution has been more important in this effort than Planned Parenthood, with its vast networks of affiliates and supporters in every state, millions more supporters online, and a powerful national political and advocacy operation based in Washington D.C. that has been put to use to great effect in recent months.

The strength of the Planned Parenthood brand, coupled with the organization's demonstrated ability to rally hundreds of thousands of supporters when it is attacked, has helped overcome traditional political reticence on reproductive justice issues. The Planned Parenthood Action Fund is already out with a strong new appeal warning politicians that women are watching. "Enough is enough. Back off on birth control," is the new advocacy mantra.

Mindful of the numbers — and with the added ballast of what now amounts to a daily drumbeat of progressive television talk and comedy that delights in pillorying Republican prudery — Democrats are intensifying their resolve to take on this fight. Two things we can be sure of: Whoever emerges from the bloodbath of the GOP contest will try and backtrack from the birth control extremism of the primary. And Obama supporters, backed up by the advocacy community, will in turn stand ready to pounce on this inevitable flip-flopping.

Both sides may well summon the spirit and words of Barry Goldwater, who cautioned against allowing faith-based extremism to gain control of the Republican Party. "Politics and governing demand compromise," he told John Dean, who reports on the conversation in his 2006 book, *Conservatives Without Conscience*. "But these Christians believe they are acting in the name of God, so they can't and won't compromise. I know. I've tried to deal with them."

(Ellen Chesler is a Senior Fellow at the Roosevelt Institute and author of *Woman of Valor: Margaret Sanger and the Birth Control Movement in America*.)

20120215-04	12:27	Art	Climate Change
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Just finished a pretty good book on global warming, *Six Degrees* by Mark Lynas, that I recommend strongly, especially if you have children and/or grandchildren. It was first published in 2008, so perhaps many of you have already read it. In my opinion it ought to be mandatory reading in every school and if possible for anyone running for political (of course that's assuming they can read) office.

It is written by a climatologist and scientist with all sorts of caveats on models etc, but it also pretty well sums up in readable language where we are heading.

I won't try to repeat the finding but some interesting facts, at least to me.

During the height of the last Ice Age, average earth temperatures were just 6 degrees Celsius cooler than today.

We are currently using a million years of fossil fuel production each year.

At about 2 degrees C increase we reach the tipping point where, a cascading effect begins to occur and at that point we can no longer affect the outcome. Think of ice fields, which reflect sunlight, being drastically reduced. Now the sunlight as energy is absorbed, as opposed to being reflected, melting more water reducing more ice fields. It is at least partially why we are already seeing the impact in the Arctic more than elsewhere.

The earth has seen all this before and so, through science, we know what happens. The only difference this time is we are causing it and it is happening very rapidly.

Scientists believe we are already in the early stages of the 6th mass extinction.

We are already at 1 plus degrees C increase and we have very little time to level off adding more carbon dioxide to the atmosphere. Probably won't happen but there are things we can do.

If we do nothing we will be at 4 degrees plus by 2100 (your grandchildren's time) and humanity is probably finished, although it will be happening much sooner.

All a bit gloomy I admit but bad news doesn't get better with age. Why do we have scientists, if we don't listen to them? Read the book.

Drill baby, drill. (Oops)

20120215-05

14:06

SteveB

Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to SteveG, above) & "\$2.50-a-Gallon-Gas & Energy Independence"

But why take the long view when you can just as easily take the short view? Try it! Come on! You used to be a Republican. Read along with Newt, below. Drill, baby, drill!

I'm forwarding this reply to Art from Newt Gingrich (at least someone on the Right can write, but then, we don't really know if Newt is on the Right or not). I can get Newt to do things like this because, as he says below, he is my "friend". Let's have \$2.50 gas now and screw the future!

"\$2.50-a-Gallon-Gas and Energy Independence" by Newt Gingrich

Dear Fellow Conservative, [Haha. I'm a spy in the House of Newt. -SteveB]

\$2.50-a-gallon gasoline and energy independence: An action plan to make it real America needs three goals in energy:

- Independence from dictatorships so no American President ever again bows to a Saudi king.
- Enough energy that Iranian efforts to disrupt the flow of oil through the Strait of Hormuz have no impact on America.
- Enough production to bring down the cost of gasoline for American motorists.

All three goals can be achieved with an all of the above American energy plan.

During the four years I was Speaker, the average price for a gallon of gasoline was \$1.13. When President Barack Obama took office in January 2009, the average price nationwide was \$1.89 a gallon. Three years into the Obama presidency, the average is \$3.47 a gallon.

Today, prices like those we enjoyed three years ago seem like a fantasy—and under the president's current policies, they are. But, these were prices Americans paid in the relatively recent past. Many Americans used to pay just \$35 to fill up the very same cars that are today costing them over \$60.

While some of the increase in gas prices comes from growing demand, the demand pressures on price can and should be offset by increasing domestic supplies. Yet the Obama administration's ideological refusal to expand American energy production continues to block the development of resources which could lower prices dramatically. As we saw most recently with the administration's rejection of the Keystone XL pipeline, the president is more interested in playing favorites with environmental extremists rather than embracing the "all-of-the-above" strategy that could achieve energy independence and help all Americans now.

The fact that Americans must cope with ballooning gas prices and energy vulnerability, while living in a country with some of the richest untapped energy resources on the planet is an absurdity that can only be accomplished by bad government.

By unleashing the American people from regulations and bureaucracy designed to promote the agenda of radical environmentalists, we can tap our enormous oil and natural gas supplies to drive fuel prices down.

Most Americans have no idea that the United States is sitting on enough technically recoverable oil to power us at current rates of consumption for over 250 years. We are estimated to have 1.4 trillion barrels of oil—or 1.7 trillion, adding in the resources of Canada and Mexico.

That amount of oil, as a report from the Institute for Energy Research recently explained, is "more than the world has used since the first oil well was drilled over 150 years ago in Titusville, Pennsylvania" and 6 ½ times the proved oil reserves of Saudi Arabia.

The true size of the oil supply could be even larger still than these estimates suggest. In many cases, far more oil has been recovered than was predicted to be available when development began. In 1985, for instance, the Minerals Management Service estimated the Gulf of Mexico had nine billion barrels of undiscovered oil. Twenty-seven years later, after many billions of barrels have been pumped, the federal government estimates there are 45 billion undiscovered barrels.

In another example, the estimate of the Bakken formation in North Dakota has jumped an astonishing 2,500 percent since 1995 due to new technology. The Bakken along with other emerging unconventional oil and gas "plays" in Texas, New Mexico, Ohio, West Virginia, Louisiana, California, Colorado, Nebraska, Pennsylvania, New York, and in other states, have allowed the U.S. to begin increasing oil production after 40 years of steady production declines. Unlocked by the new technologies of hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling, the full potential of these new resource plays is yet to be fully comprehended or realized.

Without opening up more areas to drilling, we have no way of knowing how many more Bakken-sized discoveries are waiting for us. But we do know this. The potential to increase American oil and gas supplies dramatically and become energy secure and independent is real. Increasing oil supplies will lower fuel prices significantly. And the biggest thing standing in the way is government obstruction.

A recent analysis by Goldman Sachs projects that the United States could become the world leader in oil production by 2017. But if the President continues his assault on American energy, including his proposals to raise taxes on domestic oil and gas and his own EPA's attempts to regulate hydraulic fracturing, that future will be arbitrarily and unnecessarily upended.

The administration is determined to ban additional development of America's most promising oil and gas resources, such as offshore Alaska in the Beaufort and Chuckchi Seas, and off the East and West Coasts of the lower 48 on the Outer Continental Shelf. Overall, there is an estimated 88.6 billion barrels of oil, but only 2.2 percent of federal offshore land is currently being leased for production, and the president is refusing to allow more.

On land, the administration's obstruction is just as damaging. Among the 30.5 billion barrels of oil located onshore on Federal lands (not including oil shale), 92 percent of them are inaccessible or under restrictions above and beyond standard regulatory and administrative hurdles, according to the most recent assessment by the Bureau of Land Management.

New production from oil and gas resources has come overwhelmingly from private lands, such as the huge increases from oil and gas in shale. These achievements did not come because the government decided to permit more leases, but rather because the lands were privately held. Yet even when the government does not own the land, government can still aid obstruction America's energy potential. The gigantic Monterey shale oil field in California, for instance, which the Energy Information Administration estimates holds 64 percent of the recoverable shale oil in the U.S., has been slowed dramatically by environmentalist lawsuits California's go-it-alone global warming law.

The federal government owns most of the world's oil shale reserves, located in the Green River Basin in Utah, Colorado and Wyoming. This immense source of future oil supply is being held off-limits to leasing by Obama's Bureau of Land Management. Recoverable U.S. oil shale reserves are estimated to approach if not exceed 1 *trillion* barrels of American oil.

A stunningly small percentage of the enormous federal land, which is owned by the American people, is available for energy exploration that could yield new discoveries. Eight-six percent of Nevada is owned by the federal government. That is almost 40 percent the area of Texas. If these lands were properly marketed by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, opening even half this promising acreage to exploration, we'd add an area a fifth the size of Texas for oil and gas prospecting.

What's even more baffling is that these lands are potentially a huge source of revenue for the federal government -- revenue that doesn't involve raising taxes on the American people. Experts in the private-sector royalties industry estimate that implementing commercial standards in federal leasing of oil and gas royalties could bring over \$100 billion into the federal treasury over the next decade. Harold Hamm, who discovered the Bakken formation, recently

[20120215-06](#) 14:46 Pam Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Art & SteveB, above)

The differences are stark. Either we take steps now to end our dependence on fossil fuels or we plunge ahead into the abyss, the bottom of which we cannot begin to see. The Republicans are so duplicitous it wouldn't surprise me to see them do a 180 if (god forbid) they should win the Presidency and Congress. Will they REALLY let us burn, baby, burn?

[20120215-07](#) 14:58 Ben Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above)

Mmmm. Seems to me gasoline hit \$4 under Bush, and did most of its fall after the election results were in. I asked myself at the time if it was a setup for the next election. But, no: that would be too cynical, wouldn't it?

[20120215-09](#) 15:40 Dennis Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Newt Gingrich, above)

from Newt Gingrich:

While some of the increase in gas prices comes from growing demand, the demand pressures on price can and should be offset by increasing domestic supplies.

Dear Newt:

WTF are you talking about? Demand has been down since the recession and there is more domestic drilling and oil and gas production now than ever before. At least that's what *The Energy Report* investment newsletter I get says. Should I ask for a refund on my subscription, Newt?

[20120215-11](#) 17:18 SteveG Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Dennis, above)

Our export of gasoline has increased.

[20120215-12](#) 17:58 Dennis Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to SteveG, above)

"Last year, for the first time ever, fuel became the top export of the United States -- the big refineries shipped 117 million gallons of gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel per day out of our country" according to The Hightower Lowdown. "Refiners refuse to reveal how much they profit from exporting fuel, the more they send overseas the less there is at home, allowing them to jack up their prices*. No surprise then that the Big Five gasoline makers enjoyed record prices** in 2011."

* a record high of \$3.52 a gallon as mentioned by Newt.

** according to today's *NY Times* they made \$137 billion at the same time that they received \$4 billion in taxpayer subsidies.

[20120215-13](#) 18:00 Pam Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above)

Why doesn't someone call Newt out on this? He lies like a rug.

[20120215-15](#) 18:37 Dennis Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to Pam, above)

What's the point, Pam? Newt's pretend facts just put most Repub primary voters in a coma, except for the ones who think he's a frickin' genius.

[20120215-14](#) 18:04 Art Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above)

If by 2030 the Chinese use oil at the same rate as Americans do now, they will need 100 Million barrels of oil a day. Since current world production is only 80 million barrels a day, maybe Newt is right. Not!!!

Sadly, I fear many Americans are so stupid they really don't understand and worse, they don't want to.

[20120215-17](#) 20:08 MathaH Re: Climate Change / Energy (reply to all, above) & "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in \$chools"

"Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in \$chools" by Bill Dedman, MSNBC

Feb. 15, 2012, (<http://openchannel.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/02/15/10415410-leaked-a-plan-to-teach-climate-change-skepticism-in-schools>)

The Heartland Institute says the documents referred to below were obtained through "pretexting," in which a person posing as a board member sent an e-mail asking a staffer to "resend" documents from board meetings. The Institute says one of the documents, a "climate strategy" memo, "is a total fake," and the institute says it has not had a chance to reach its president, who is traveling, to determine whether any of the other documents were altered. See the full statement from Heartland below. The group later said that the president had returned, that one document is definitely faked, and that it would not comment on the rest.

Internal documents have been leaked from the Heartland Institute, a Chicago nonprofit think tank, showing its funding of leading skeptics of global warming and a plan to teach climate change skepticism in schools. An anonymous person leaked the documents to several publications and activists supporting the science of climate change.

"The heart of the climate denial machine relies on huge corporate and foundation funding from U.S. businesses, including Microsoft, Koch Industries, Altria (parent company of Philip Morris) RJR Tobacco and more," reports the DeSmogBlog, which published the documents on Tuesday. The blog opposes what it calls the "climate denial machine." (Disclosure: msnbc.com is a joint venture of Microsoft and NBC Universal.)

The first batch of documents is on DeSmogBlog, and a second batch dealing with fundraising:

<http://www.desmogblog.com/heartland-institute-exposed-internal-documents-unmask-heart-climate-denial-machine>

<http://www.desmogblog.com/heartland-insider-exposes-institute-s-budget-and-strategy>

The documents show a plan to develop a curriculum for teaching about climate change in K-12 schools:

Global Warming Curriculum for K-12 Schools

Many people lament the absence of educational material suitable for K-12 students on global warming that isn't alarmist or overtly political. Heartland has tried to make material available to teachers, but has had only limited success. Principals and teachers are heavily biased toward the alarmist perspective. Moreover, material for classroom use must be carefully written to meet curriculum guidelines, and the amount of time teachers have for supplemental material is steadily shrinking due to the spread of standardized tests in K-12 education.

Dr. David Wojick has presented Heartland a proposal to produce a global warming curriculum or K-12 schools that appears to have great potential for success. Dr. Wojick is a consultant with the Office of Scientific and Technical Information at the U.S. Department of Energy in the area of information and communication science. He has a Ph.D. in the philosophy of science and mathematical logic from the University of Pittsburgh and a B.S. in civil engineering from Carnegie Tech. He has been on the faculty of Carnegie Mellon and the staffs of the U.S. Office of Naval Research and the Naval Research Lab.

Dr. Wojick has conducted extensive research on environmental and science education for the Department of Energy. In the course of this research, he has identified what subjects and concepts teachers must teach, and in what order (year by year), in order to harmonize with national test requirements. He has contacts at virtually all the national organizations involved in producing, certifying, and promoting science curricula.

Dr. Wojick proposes to begin work on "modules" for grades 10-12 on climate change ("whether humans are changing the climate is a major scientific controversy"), climate models ("models are used to explore various hypotheses about how climate works. Their reliability is controversial"), and air pollution ("whether CO2 is a pollutant is controversial. It is the global food supply and natural emissions are 20 times higher than human emissions").

Wojick would produce modules for Grades 7-9 on environmental impact ("environmental impact is often difficult to determine. For example there is a major controversy over whether or not humans are changing the weather"), for Grade 6 on water resources and weather systems, and so on.

We tentatively plan to pay Dr. Wojick \$5,000 per module, about \$25,000 a quarter, starting in the second quarter of 2012, for this work. The Anonymous Donor has pledged the first \$100,000 for this project, and we will circulate a proposal to match and then expand upon that investment.

Here's a copy of the group's fundraising plan, with a list of donors:

[http://www.desmogblog.com/sites/beta.desmogblog.com/files/\(1-15-2012\)%202012%20Fundraising%20Plan.pdf](http://www.desmogblog.com/sites/beta.desmogblog.com/files/(1-15-2012)%202012%20Fundraising%20Plan.pdf)

The documents also show funding of leading voices among the opponents of the idea of global warming: "At the moment, this funding goes primarily to Craig Idso (\$11,600 per month), Fred Singer (\$5,000 per month, plus expenses), Robert Carter (\$1,667 per month), and a number of other individuals, but we will consider expanding it, if funding can be found."

About its funders, the group refers to a single anonymous donor: "Our climate work is attractive to funders, especially our key Anonymous Donor (whose contribution dropped from \$1,664,150 in 2010 to \$979,000 in 2011 - about 20% of our total 2011 revenue). He has promised an increase in 2012..."

Other donors are named: "We will also pursue additional support from the Charles G. Koch Foundation. They returned as a Heartland donor in 2011 with a contribution of \$200,000. We expect to push up their level of support in 2012 and gain access to their network of philanthropists, if our focus continues to align with their interests. Other contributions will be pursued for this work, especially from corporations whose interests are threatened by climate policies."

20120215-16	19:48	MarthaH	Keystone XL Pipeline from Indiana Perspective (to Sen. Richard Lugar) & "Lugar Defends Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying for Keystone XL Pipeline"
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Dear Senator Richard Lugar:

With the below map of the pipeline and the wording of the re-election ad put out for you by the C of C, please explain how jobs are being lost in Indiana???? I am embarrassed for you and disappointed in you for allowing this

misrepresenting to drum up excitement with lies. Please resort to telling the truth. You can't "stand up to Obama about this" as stated--there are no Indiana jobs!

[Unfortunately, the map MarthH emailed didn't make it. I have included one and an article that should shed light on this important issue. –SteveB



["Lugar Defends Taxpayer-Funded Lobbying for Keystone XL Pipeline"](#) by Brian Kanowsky, BrianKanowsky.com

Feb. 6th, 2012, (<http://www.briankanowsky.com/tags/lobbyists/>)

Indiana Senator Richard Lugar responded to Representative Henry Waxman's letter, inquiring into why the state of Indiana was spending taxpayer money to lobby for the Keystone XL Pipeline.

Lugar, who has embraced this right-wing cause du jour as he faces a serious primary challenger, writes that the expense is "fully justified" (PDF), citing Indiana companies that could be hired to work on the project:

On January 18, for example, I visited with women and men working at Endress+Hauser in Greenwood where they manufacture instruments that will be sold to Keystone XL. In South Bend, Hoosiers at Koontz-Wagner Electric build controls for Siemens pumps that will move the oil along the pipeline.

Lugar also cites Caterpillar, who build engines that are used on large trucks, like the ones used in the Alberta oil sand fields, and who has a plant in Lafayette. (In similar news, I fix computers, and some companies in Canada use computers, and those computers could be used to send emails about Keystone XL, which means I should be included in the Keystone XL job numbers.)

A quick search revealed that while Lugar has been repeating these Indiana connections to the Keystone XL Pipeline, he seems to be the only one citing them. I couldn't find a single mention of them that came from any source other than the Senator's office. In fact, the companies he names don't seem to mention the project at all.

Lugar is also quick to trot out the “20,000 private sector jobs” canard, which is the number that has been used by the GOP – but only when they’re not claiming 100,000 jobs, or 250,000 jobs, or even a million jobs.

However, TransCanada – the company that’s actually building the pipeline – has claimed only 13,000 jobs, and a Washington Post investigation using TransCanada’s numbers found that it would be only half of that. In fact, independent researchers have found that Keystone XL could create as few as 50 permanent full-time jobs (PDF). And despite confused media reports, the State Department found “the project would not have a significant impact on long-term employment in the United States”.

[20120215-18](#) 23:01 SteveG “Before Current Birth-Control Fight, Republicans Backed Mandates”

What a difference a few years make.

“Before Current Birth-Control Fight, Republicans Backed Mandates” by Kim Geiger and Noam N. Levey, *LA Times*

Feb. 15, 2012, (<http://www.latimes.com/health/la-na-gop-contraceptives-20120216,0,3392996.story>)

(Republicans are fighting a birth-control rule in President Obama's healthcare law, but several states have enacted contraceptive mandates with the support of GOP lawmakers and governors.)

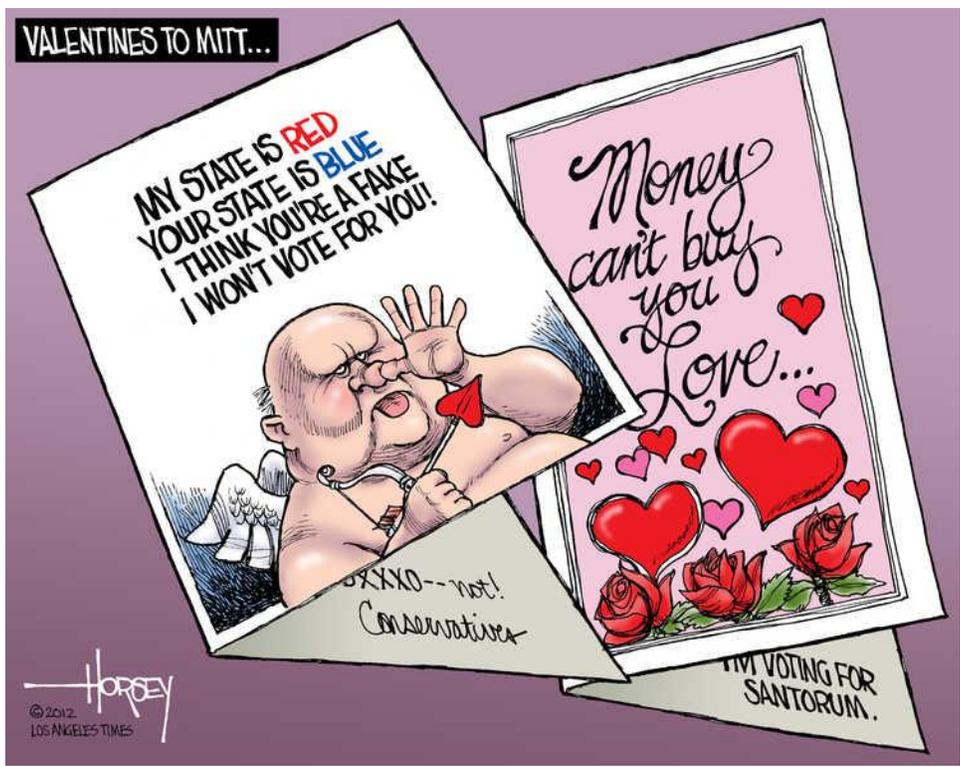
[20120215-19](#) 23:34 SteveG “How Did We Forget About Mutually Assured Destruction?”

“How Did We Forget About Mutually Assured Destruction?” by Tom de Castella, *BBC News Magazine*

Feb. 15, 2012, (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-17026538>)

(Fifty years ago this week the idea of mutually assured nuclear destruction was outlined in a major speech. But how did this frightening concept of the Cold War fade from people's psyches?)





I never thought I could love anything cold-blooded, but this guy...is just the sweetest...

http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/46388892/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/some-spot-color-meet-worlds-tiniest-chameleon/

A juvenile of the tiniest chameleon species ever discovered perches atop a fingertip. (PLoS One)



—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 #76 — FEB. 17, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Past Due: The Mortgage Mess

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 17, 2012)



By now, there is a lot known about the Crash of 2008, the Housing Bubble that led up to it, and the dire effects felt by homeowners across the nation. The history is important if we are to pinpoint causes and solutions.

The Right wants to blame the problem on people of the “lower” classes who bought houses they found they couldn’t afford after they lost their jobs. Then they learned they couldn’t sell them either. Then they were evicted. The problem is obviously the fault of these deadbeats.

And what would the Right’s fix be? Well, they can’t change human nature. So, if we’re deadbeats by nature, that’s just the way it is. Why do they loan us money in the first place?

So the Republican fix is more deregulation, more power to the bankers and robber barons, more of the same “free market economics” that got us into the problem in the first place. If we’d just let those honorable businessmen have free reign, they’d make us all millionaires, by gum!

But, you know what? I think I’m more sickened by the Democrats than by the Republicans on this one? Where was action when it was needed? During President Obama’s first two years in office, when he had a Congressional majority and a mandate from the people?

Regardless, solutions are needed now. Hell, yesterday!

“How to Fix the Mortgage Mess” by Alan Boyce, Glen Hubbard, and Chris Mayer, Politico

Feb. 15, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/72921.html>)

President Barack Obama has highlighted the importance of helping millions of homeowners refinance their mortgages to support the recovery.

This argument was also made in Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke’s recent white paper and repeated by many other economists — including us. All are saying that facilitating refinancing, when the borrower is current, can help the recovery.

While the president’s plan addresses the major constraints on refinancing by government-sponsored enterprises such as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, it also requires legislative action. It was combined with a plan to burden taxpayers with additional risk through the Federal Housing Administration — thus making passage in Congress unlikely.

We believe it’s important to focus on the GSEs [Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac], since their inaction is directly tied to the slow housing recovery.

There is now little private competition in mortgage lending because of the stresses in financial institutions and uncertainty about the mortgage market’s new regulatory framework. The GSEs back more than two-thirds of mortgage originations, while government-backed lenders like FHA and the Department of Veterans Affairs control 25 percent. Though consumer lending in credit cards and autos has picked up, mortgage lending continues to decline.

Against this backdrop, the GSEs are exercising their near-monopoly power in harmful ways: Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae have reduced lending and increased fees. They have continued to sue banks and taken steps to reduce competition in originating mortgages.

The result is not just tighter credit standards for borrowers. The spread between bond rates and retail mortgage rates, typically zero to 25 basis points before the crisis, has spiked to more than 100 basis points since conservatorship. All potential mortgage borrowers are paying a price for Washington’s inaction on the GSEs.

Some economists contend conservatorship imposes a narrow mandate to “preserve and conserve the assets and property of the enterprises.” The Federal Housing Finance Agency and the GSEs have other mandates, which include supporting a “stable, liquid and efficient mortgage market” and operating in a “safe and sound manner.”

But recent transactions at Freddie Mac, along with other practices imposed by the FHFA, have led to an inefficient and less competitive mortgage market while offering a misleading picture of risk.

Under conservatorship, the GSEs are required to shrink their portfolios of mortgages and mortgage-backed securities to reduce taxpayers’ risk. Yet starting in October 2010, Freddie Mac instead began a series of 29 transactions in which it acquired the claims on interest payments on \$18 billion of mortgages, while retaining only \$3 billion of principal. About two-thirds of the underlying mortgages had interest rates of at least 6.5 percent — well above prevailing rates.

Refinancing these mortgages would most benefit consumers but hurt the investor — in this case, Freddie Mac. If consumers could refinance mortgages, Freddie Mac would face big losses: All future interest payments on \$18 billion in mortgages would be wiped out.

Freddie Mac appears to have coordinated these portfolio trades with new upfront lending costs and tighter restrictions on refinancing to profit when consumers are unable to refinance.

In November 2010, for example, Freddie Mac announced it would raise Post Settlement Delivery Fees, which the Fed white paper labeled “difficult to justify” when applied to existing borrowers refinancing their mortgages. The fact that the GSEs can trade securities at the same time that they help control the outcome (refinancing) shows the game is rigged against homeowners.

Freddie Mac appears to have continued to bet against refinancing. Under Harp 2.0 in November 2011, Freddie Mac was more restrictive than Fannie Mae in loosening constraints on refinancing — bolstering its financial position while leaving in place frictions that hamper the mortgage market.

No one has explained why Freddie Mac imposed additional refinancing restrictions in November 2011 if not for portfolio considerations. This month, Freddie Mac announced a new type of bond issuance, Mortgage-Linked Amortizing Notes, which allows the GSE to benefit financially if refinancing does not happen.

None of this should be happening: Through FHFA, the government doesn’t just regulate but manages the GSEs. FHFA allowed GSE executives to earn millions, providing an incentive to earn profits while taking advantage of their privileged position in the system.

Immediate reforms are necessary to make sure the GSEs live up to their mandates and to achieve the crucial goals of phasing out the GSEs and returning private capital and competition to the housing finance system.

FHFA should appoint an independent trustee to wind down existing GSE mortgage-backed securities holdings, consistent with public conservatorship. Managing the mortgage portfolio while controlling lending standards is inconsistent with the GSEs’ mandate to ensure a “stable, efficient and liquid mortgage market.” Removing the portfolio from GSE control will also simplify winding down the GSEs.

Next, it is time to streamline refinancing for all borrowers with GSE-guaranteed mortgages. Taxpayers already hold the default risk on these mortgages, and interest rate reduction would cut this exposure. Responsible borrowers should be the first in line.

GSEs should use a simple standard to determine eligibility to refinance; for example, if a homeowner is current for three months. They should not impose income checks, loan-to-value requirements or new appraisals. They should work with existing parties to resolve issues with second liens and mortgage insurance.

This program should encourage competition for new refinancing business by giving new and existing servicers the same terms.

Under such a program, the GSEs would save tens of billions in credit guarantee costs, because of fewer foreclosures on homeowners who have lower mortgage payments. GSEs should also charge a higher guarantee fee of about 0.35 percent to help cover their costs and any potential losses on their portfolio.

Older loans often had a far lower guarantee fee that did not fully cover the costs of the government guarantee. Our analysis suggests this program would add up to \$50 billion in new profits for the GSEs. The key to generating the new revenue is to implement such a program in scale with as little paperwork and as few frictions as possible.

Other steps are necessary to move toward a system in which the private market will find responsible mortgage lending attractive. The GSEs’ rules should encourage standardization so private lenders can enter. They should sell reinsurance credit guarantees to private loan originators. Such reinsurance could be phased in over time and help

set a fair price for government guarantee fees by providing private-market prices in a market that now has little private participation.

In addition, FHFA and the GSEs should settle litigation and legal claims against lenders and servicers. While taxpayers must be protected, these policies are holding back housing finance — and the recovery.

FHFA should also establish clear rules for adjudicating claims on representations and warranties on newly originated mortgages. An independent arbitrator should administer this process. These steps could help restore confidence in what is now a highly politicized process.

Widespread refinancing alone won't magically fix the housing market or lead to a full recovery. Combined with GSE reform, however, it will very likely begin the process of a more market-oriented future for housing finance and allow the Fed's accommodative monetary policy to help the economy.

Failure to act will most likely perpetuate the status quo — at great cost to homeowners, taxpayers and the economy.

(Alan Boyce is the chief executive officer of the Absalon Project, which markets the Danish Mortgage Solution worldwide. Glenn Hubbard served as the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers during the George W. Bush administration. He is now dean of Columbia Business School. Chris Mayer is the Paul Milstein professor of real estate at Columbia Business School.)

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20120216-01 11:29 Art "Objections of Conscience? Or of Politics?"

Couple of good articles on Republicans [below] and Oil [next]. Is there any more contemptible group in our political history than this current Republican House?

"Objections of Conscience? Or of Politics?" by Dana Milbank, *Washington Post*

Feb. 15, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/objections-of-conscience-or-of-politics/2012/02/15/gIQAwXvbGR_story.html)

You might think that Sen. David Vitter would observe a lifetime moratorium on public moralizing after his phone number was found in the little black book of a prostitution ring's madam.

But there he was in the House TV studio on Wednesday afternoon, informing a bank of cameras about President Obama's inferior conscience, as evidenced by a new rule that requires employers to provide birth-control coverage.

"Never before in the history of the country have Americans been forced to buy a product . . . that is opposed to their core religious beliefs," the Louisiana Republican tut-tutted, sharing the stage with two dozen House members. The administration's subsequent effort to exempt religious organizations "may be good enough for President Obama's conscience," Vitter said, but "it's not good enough for the conscience of millions of Americans."

The continuing contretemps concerning contraception offers a reminder that in Washington, the usual laws of physics don't apply. For some actions, there is a completely disproportionate reaction.

After Obama set off a furor with the initial rule, he retreated on Friday, proposing to shift the birth-control mandate from religious employers to insurers. Although Catholic bishops continued to object, Americans appeared to settle on a consensus: In a new CBS-New York Times poll, 65 percent of voters supported the birth-control mandate (most voters, even most Catholics, also were content to force religious groups to provide the coverage).

But on Wednesday afternoon, Republican lawmakers and Rep. Dan Lipinski (Ill.), a Democrat who opposes abortion, marched before the TV cameras to reject Obama's accommodation of religious groups. "This doesn't solve the problem at all," said Rep. Phil Gingrey (R-Ga.).

Said Lipinski: "Despite the current views out there that this is all settled, this clearly is not settled."

Rep. Jim Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), who recently gained attention for saying the first lady has a "big butt," took a larger view: "The modification the president announced last Friday is probably worse than the original."

But the solution the lawmakers proposed was a bit too convenient. They called for the passage of a bill that was introduced last year, so by definition it wasn't a response to the birth-control rule. As they described it, the legislation would exempt from the health-care law any person who wishes to claim any moral or conscientious objection. In other words, it would be a back-door way to repeal Obamacare.

There was not a huge amount of interest in the lawmakers' theme: The 16 reporters seated at the start of the news conference were outnumbered by the lawmakers onstage. Still, the politicians were careful to get their visual effects right (only five of the 28 were women, but four of them were clustered around the microphone) and they couched their argument in the loftiest terms.

"It is the reason why people came to the United States of America 200-plus years ago," said Rep. Ann Marie Buerkle (R-N.Y.).

To escape birth control?

"Because this country offered religious freedom," Buerkle explained.

Rep. Jean Schmidt (R-Ohio) told the reporters, "I implore all of you to read the First Amendment and memorize it."

Rep. Virginia Foxx (R-N.C.) furthered the appeal to the reporters' shared support for the First Amendment. "I want you to read the quote from Martin Niemoller," she said of the Holocaust-era poet, then began to recite. "They came for the trade unionists and I didn't speak up. They came for the Baptists; I didn't speak up."

Actually, Niemoller mentioned communists but said nothing about Baptists. "I'm paraphrasing," Foxx said.

But if the lawmakers are so concerned about a threat to the Constitution, why don't they challenge the rule in court? "Why should we have to?" replied Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Tex.), who displayed for the cameras a pocket-size Constitution highlighted in yellow.

Well, because the courts are where constitutional matters are resolved. Congress is where political fights are fought — and the conscientious contraception objectors were ready for one.

Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) accused Obama of "a direct, obnoxious, unprecedented government attack on the conscience rights of religious entities." Rep. Peter Roskam (R-Ill.) called it "an incredible provocation" and a bid to "manipulate the conscience of many Americans."

A reporter asked the assembled moralists if they would reject any presidential candidate who mandated that religious groups cover contraception. It was a trap: Mitt Romney left such a law unchallenged when he was governor of Massachusetts.

Onstage, several members began to mutter: "That's not the issue. . . . We're focused on this. . . . Don't try to distract."

Yes, leave the distracting to the lawmakers.

"Iran's Sabre Rattling Shows Energy Crisis Is Still with Us" by Steven Mufson, *Washington Post*

Feb. 15, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/even-as-oil-costs-rise-irrational-exuberance-washes-over-energy-analysis/2012/02/12/gIQAnY93FR_story.html)

(U.S. relies on foreign oil to cover about half its consumption.)

A wave of what former Federal Reserve chairman Alan Greenspan might have called "irrational exuberance" is washing over a great deal of energy analysis these days.

One recent headline trumpeted that "Americans Gaining Energy Independence With U.S. as Top Producer." Another declared "U.S. Nears Milestone: Net Fuel Exporter." The American Petroleum Institute's president, Jack Gerard, says that with policies more friendly to the oil and gas industry "there would be no need to import from any other parts of the world."

But wait. What happened to the energy crisis?

Rising tensions over Iran's saber rattling show that it's still with us. Oil still costs \$100 a barrel or so, even more for the Brent quality crude sold in London, a more widely used benchmark. In inflation-adjusted terms, crude oil prices are higher than they have ever been with the exception of short spikes in late 1979 and mid-2008. Yes, the United States exports some refined petroleum products, but the United States is still an overall net importer of more than 9 million barrels of crude oil and refined products a day — about the same as the oil produced by the world's largest exporter, Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, about 17 million barrels a day of oil still flow through the Strait of Hormuz, a potential choke point that Iran has threatened to close. The United States has retorted that its doctrine of protecting freedom of shipping through that Persian Gulf waterway remains unchanged. Why? Because those supplies account for a fifth of global oil consumption; no other spot remains as vital to world oil prices. A disruption there affects prices everywhere.

There are, to be sure, many reasons for energy experts to feel more sanguine about the U.S. energy future. Domestic oil production is up and on track to go up further because of a boom of drilling in shale rock. Natural gas supplies, thanks to hydraulic fracturing, seem limitless and natural gas prices have plunged to 10-year lows. A lot of jobs have been created, albeit not nearly as many as some oil industry studies claim.

U.S. oil consumption is also reaching a plateau and might start declining, in part because of more fuel-efficient vehicles, rising biofuel production and high future mileage standards set by the Obama administration.

But America's dependence on foreign oil and gas sources has been reduced, not eliminated. The nation imports 15 percent less petroleum than in 2005 — in part because of the recession. But prices have soared; we cannot disentangle ourselves so easily from the global oil supply balance. As a result, in 2011, the United States paid a net of \$326.5 billion for oil imports, accounting for 44 percent of the U.S. trade deficit. The crude oil import bill was the second highest ever, narrowly less than in 2008 and nearly twice as much as it was in 2005.

That drains money from the pockets of American consumers. AAA estimates, for example, that buying gasoline costs the average Virginia household \$428 a month.

A year ago, President Obama set a goal of cutting oil imports by a third.

If U.S. domestic oil output climbs to 7 million barrels a day, as many oil industry people claim it can, that will trim about an eighth off current imports. If we improve automobile fuel efficiency, that will slice just as much or more. But that will take many years as the car fleet gradually turns over. Right now, one in every 10 barrels of oil produced worldwide goes into the gasoline tanks of American passenger vehicles — not counting fuel-guzzling U.S. trucks.

What about the natural gas rush? For all the euphoria about shale gas, the United States is still a net importer of natural gas. Conventional natural gas production is falling, and we still rely on imports from Canada. That will change, perhaps by 2016 or so, according to government and industry estimates. But the fact that it hasn't happened yet is testimony to the fact that sometimes impressions run a bit ahead of reality — to say nothing of environmental concerns about hydraulic fracturing techniques used to tap those gas resources.

One statistic that has been tossed around lately says that the United States in 2011 produced 81 percent of its energy demand. But that number includes U.S. electricity consumption. With the exception of hydropower imports from Canada, the United States has never relied on foreign sources for electricity generation. The country has relied on U.S. coal, U.S. nuclear power and U.S. natural gas. Once upon a time, many utilities and factories used oil, but with the exception of a little bit of oil formerly used by the Hawaii utility company that hasn't been the case since the early 1980s, after the 1979 oil price shock.

The key statistic is oil independence, and the United States still relies on foreign oil to cover about half of U.S. consumption.

Another important change in the global oil picture has been the shift in oil production away from the traditional OPEC countries. Offshore oil fields near Brazil and off the coast of west Africa as well as the tar sands from Canada have already become major sources of U.S. oil imports and could become bigger. Canada is already the largest source of U.S. oil imports, with Saudi Arabia in second but only half as big. The next three biggest sources are Mexico, Venezuela and Nigeria.

What does that mean for geopolitics? It gives the United States a greater interest in the stability and economic policies of those nations. But it doesn't mean that the United States no longer needs to worry about the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and the choke point at the Strait of Hormuz as long as that remains a major trade route. That's why Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta and other administration officials have warned Iran that cutting off traffic through the strait would be crossing a red line.

Not long ago, it was front-page news when the price of oil topped \$100 a barrel. Now it has become commonplace. In midday trading Wednesday, on news of Iran's declaration that it would cut off oil sales to six countries that already placed sanctions on the Tehran regime, the price edged up to \$101.80 a barrel, up \$1.06, for March delivery.

There has been a lot of good news lately for the energy business and for a world that still consumes vast amounts of energy. The ability to tap vast new gas reserves is, as the cliché goes, a game changer, lowering electricity prices and competing with other energy sources. Renewables are making strides too.

But is this great news or just good news? Have we arrived at a point when Americans consume energy in modest enough quantities so as to ease both U.S. dependence on foreign nations and difficult trade-offs between environmental protection and self-reliance?

Until then, make way for the next supertanker.

20120216-03	11:37	Art	Fw: Overpopulation
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Here's a little thought.

[Source of original email unknown. –SteveB]

Imagine an average colony of bacteria, living in Bacterialand. They go off to found a new colony - in a Coke bottle found buried in the sand. They excavate it and make themselves a home. Let's say we start with two intrepid explorers who settled this new colony. Let's say they double their population once each minute. Let's say they start to 11:00 a.m., and by 12 noon their bottle is full and they're out of space and resources.

What time would it be, Bartlett ask, when even the most farsighted bacteria saw an overpopulation problem on the horizon? Certainly not before 11:58, he answers, because at that point the bottle would only be one-quarter full. (Two doublings away from full.) Even at 11:59, it would be only half full and you could just hear the bacteria politicians singing platitudes like: "No need to worry folks! WE HAVE MORE SPACE LEFT IN OUR HOMELAND THAN WE'VE USED IN ALL THE HISTORY OF THIS COLONY!"

20120216-06 12:27 SteveB Re: Overpopulation (reply to Art, above)

Now, that is an excellent thought...thanks, Art.

20120216-04 11:59 Pam Re: Overpopulation (reply to Art, above)

I'd really like to know what a climate change denier would say if you sat him down, looked him in the eye, and showed him all the scientific data. The members of Congress at least have educations and are presumably of average intelligence. Do they really accept the science of antibiotics, immunizations, flights to the moon, and turning oil into energy but reject the science of global warming, or do they simply not care? Are they so apocalyptic that they don't mind seeing the end of the world as we know it? One assumes their position is determined by all those voters who are not educated and do not have average intelligence, and their intent is to capture their votes. WHYYYYY are politicians so duplicitous?

I suppose you've all heard about the insider trading that is perfectly legal for Congressmen. What Martha Stewart got sent to jail for is all in a day's work for the likes of Max Baucus. The Democrats are as guilty here as anybody. We've had corruption in politics before, and ways have been found to combat it. What's going to do it this time?

20120216-07 12:28 SteveG Re: Overpopulation & Stock Act (reply to Pam, above)

The Stock Act did pass, supposedly to stop congressional insider trading.

The non belief of politicians in global warming is, in all probability related back in direct proportion to the amount of donations they or their PAC's or their Super PAC's receive and who the donor is. Coal,, oil companies, electric utilities, etc. have us all under control through their political action.

"Duplicitous" – good word.

20120216-08 12:35 Pam Re: Overpopulation & Stock Act (reply to SteveG, above)

My understanding is that the "stock act" that was passed only requires that "political intelligence operatives," aka inside traders, register so as to ensure "transparency." They'll still be able to buy and sell information, but they'll have to do it publicly. That should put a stop to it, right?

20120216-10 12:41 SteveG Re: Overpopulation & Stock Act (reply to Pam, above)

Of course all bundle in the required legal jargon.

"What is the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge (STOCK) Act?":
<http://insidertrading.procon.org/view.resource.php?resourceID=004520>.

20120216-05 12:24 SteveB Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools"
(reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #75)

Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (Newsletter #75, Feb. 16, 2012)

I guess the "RIGHT-THAT-WOULD-CONTROL-OUR-VERY-THOUGHTS" thought that if they could get creationism into the texts and schools, they could get anything into the curriculum.

Republicans want to teach our students nothing about birth control and everything about how global warming is socialist bunk!

I guess, next, they'll want to introduce textbooks teaching that, as in North Korea, what is important is not for the common man to be happy, fed, employed, or educated; what is important is that the leaders of our great nation continue to be able to live the luxurious life-style to which they are accustomed. We shine in the reflected light of their power, riches, and glory. Can required adulation be far behind? Worship? Now yer talkin'!

What's after that? I'm sure if Rick Santorum has anything to say about it, masturbation will come up again. ^_^ I heard that's what's wrecking the economy and the relationship of the POTUS and the Mrs. POTUS. It's way past time to put a stop to it, even if it is the national pastime. Don't people realize? That's why we're weak! Listen to the Truth of the Right and be strong, America!

End human non-conception now! Truck-in more illegals! We have a population cold war going with China and India and we need more people. We have to beat them. We must be the most populous nation on earth or perish. There's no sperm to waste! No abortion. No birth-control. No wanking.

Of course, when those women have all those babies, they're on their own, right? Their own fault, right? Right???

FLASH FORWARD:...At a high school basketball game in the near future (post-2012): "NMM! NMM! NO! MORE! MASTURBATION! That's our cry! Give me an N..."

20120216-09	12:36	SteveG	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Masturbation is a good means of birth control – sexual satisfaction and no danger of pregnancy, at least a highly diminished chance.

Texas has re-written history in their text books in regards to the Civil War and in Kentucky there is a park that is opening that is based on creationism showing man coexisting with dinosaurs. It cannot be long before text books are written to include creationism and are probably already on the market to home-schoolers – but do not eat the tenderloin.

20120216-12	15:13	Dennis	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Masturbation must be made illegal if you believe that life begins at ejaculation, unless it's inside a vagina. You guys are undoubtedly all murderers according to ultra-right religious wackos.

20120216-13	20:00	Art	Re: "Leaked: A Plan to Teach Climate Change Skepticism in Schools" (reply to all, above)
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I vote we move on and change subjects. I'm just a shy country boy.

20120216-11	13:26	SteveG	Fw: Emily's List Petition: Women Should Be Heard on Birth Control!
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It does not matter if you are conservative, liberal, Republican, Democrat, or independent right is right and wrong is wrong. To have Congressional hearings on birth control and have five men as religious leaders testify is wrong. To have women testify and to have medical doctors included in the testifying process is right. Consider the petition below.

from Emily's List:

Rep. Carolyn Maloney said it best: **"Where are the women?"**

This morning, an all-male panel of religious leaders testified in front of a Congressional committee about birth control coverage. That's right, only men -- who are not doctors, by the way -- were allowed to testify by the GOP leadership about critical women's health coverage. No women.

It's absolutely outrageous. The all-male GOP leadership is calling on all-male religious leaders to decide whether birth control should be fully covered by insurance plans. We cannot let this happen. We cannot stand by while Far Right Republicans once again try to send us back to the Dark Ages.

Stand with EMILY's List now and tell the GOP that women's health decisions should be made by women -- not by anti-choice, anti-woman men.

http://emilyslist.org/action/stand_up_to_anti_woman_forces_in_congress/

After pleading with the committee chairman to hear from a female witness, the Democratic women on the committee -- all of them EMILY's List women -- literally stood up for us and walked out. These are the women who will always have our backs, but we desperately need more of them -- and that's what we're working to do every day at EMILY's List.

It's time to stand up -- right now -- and say that you will not watch quietly while anti-choice, anti-woman legislators and religious leaders work to dismantle everything we've achieved.

Add your voice now! Tell the GOP that women should be the only ones in charge of women's health.

http://emilyslist.org/action/stand_up_to_anti_woman_forces_in_congress/

We have to fight. Right now. Let's do it.

Thank you for all you do.

All the best, Amy K. Dacey, Executive Director

<http://foodie-isms.com/?tag=saltenas>

A Bolivian *salteña*. (Mmmmmmm good!)



—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 #77 — FEB. 20, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

What the GOP Doesn't Want You to Know

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 20, 2012)

Ya, right, Democrats are all just a bunch of socialists. This Republican position will lead to nothing but Democratic victory. Here's a little quote for you, prompted by Rick Santorum's latest tactics. I think this does a great job of summing up the GOP in 2012:

Has the GOP become so intellectually bankrupt, so bereft of tenable principles and viable policies that the "Grand Old Party" must resort to rehashing the 2008 whisper campaign that President Obama is not a Christian? It's trite and vapid and would be outrageous if it just weren't so pitifully absurd. ...reasoned, rational conservative statesmen are growing rarer by the election cycle. More and more GOP politicians are incapable of simply disagreeing fundamentally and intellectually with an opponent and making their cases before the public. Instead, they ground their opposition in innuendo, name-calling, and flagrant lying to drive a false narrative born of suspicion and fear. —Brian Normoyle, Huffington Post

Today's article is thanks to Dennis.

"Why Obama's the Least Socialistic President in Modern History (And That's a Shame)" by Richard (RJ) Eskow, AlterNet

Feb. 18, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/154175/>)

The Republican presidential candidates keep calling Barack Obama a socialist. If they're trying to invoke the Red Menace like Republicans of past campaigns, they're a generation too late. Americans between the ages of 19 and 29 have no memory of the Cold War. Today they have a more positive impression of socialism than they do of capitalism.

The word "socialism" can be applied to a range of economic models, from Cuban collectivism to the Western European social democracies that are the home of some of the world's most successful corporations.

But until this election came along it had never been used to describe someone who expanded the private health insurance system, let a negligent company keep control of the cleanup for an environmental disaster it caused, offered to cut retirement and elder health benefits, and repeatedly insisted that the government should cut costs. This president is less socialistic than most of his predecessors, including many Republicans.

The irony is that socialist-inspired policies are popular with Americans, including many Republicans, even if the label is not. Polls suggest that a more "socialist" Obama would also be a more popular candidate, and the same is true of his opponents.

Socialisms

The word "socialism" is used to describe a spectrum of possible economies ranging from the Scandinavian model, where government involvement co-exists with multinational corporations, to the more communistic Cuban model and the idealistic anarcho-syndicalism of the anti-Franco insurgents in the Spanish Civil War.

The social democracy model emphasizes expanded public rights to social services and a more distributive tax base, but leaves ownership of production in capitalist hands. This form of socialism has had a major influence on the governments and economies of Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Finland. It hasn't interfered with the success of multinational corporations like Mercedes-Benz, Nokia, Deutschebank, Barclays Bank, or Ferrari.

Socialist ideas have a long history in the United States. Socialist and left-leaning parties were the first to propose a number of ideas that are now considered core American ideals, including civil rights, antipoverty programs, Social Security and Medicare.

The Pink Menace

But socialism was once linked with the Soviet Union, America's nuclear foe, which gave it an aura of treachery and danger it no longer possesses.

The Republicans who call Obama a socialist are using a GOP tactic that reached its zenith in Richard Nixon's 1950 Senate victory against Helen Gahagan Douglas. Nixon supporters handed out thousands of "Pink Sheet" flyers that year comparing his opponent's voting record to that of socialist-leaning New York City Representative Vito Marcantonio. Marcantonio ran on the American Labor Party ticket and belonged to several groups that were regarded as "red."

Douglas considered Nixon's actions thuggery, as did a number of other Americans in both parties. She called him as "a young man in a dark shirt," which was an indirect allusion to the fascists the US had been fighting five years before. (Upon hearing her remark, Nixon displayed an odd unfamiliarity with human anatomy. "Why, I'll castrate her!" the future president said. He also described Douglas as "pink right down to her underwear.")

Douglas found it hard to believe these attacks could be effective, and some people think her delay in responding to them cost her the election. But they did, and this set the tone for the next six decades of GOP campaigns.

Newtradamus

Newt Gingrich was the first of the current crop of contenders to attack Obama with the socialist label, as political writer John Nichols reminded me in a recent interview. Gingrich published a book last year titled *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular-Socialist Machine*. Gingrich's publisher called it a "dire warning for America," which is "at risk for its very survival" after electing "the most liberal president ever."

Gingrich reacted to the GOP's 2010 electoral victories in his book by saying, "The American people rejected the secular-Socialist machine that had seized control of the Federal government."

In fact, one of the reasons Republicans really won in 2010 was because they ran a series of very effective ads around a so-called "Seniors' Bill of Rights" whose key proviso was a direct attack on "socialist" Obama's repeated attempts to negotiate entitlement cuts: "No cuts to Medicare to pay for another program," the Republicans declared. "Zero."

Yes, these Republicans were defending one of our country's most socialistic, and most popular programs, while accusing their "socialist" opponent of trying to cut it.

Gingrich's 2011 book waxes triumphant about recent conservative victories in Europe's three largest economies -- Germany, France and Great Britain. Within 18 months those governments' policies had plunged Europe into a deep recessionary spiral. He singles out the British election as a vote to "reverse years of socialist decay through a dramatic, Thatcher-like policy of radically shrinking the public sector, slashing government spending, reducing welfare, and restoring public enterprise."

What he didn't say is that Great Britain is now struggling with setbacks in unemployment, wages and growth, and recently weathered a series of nationwide riots sparked by economic conditions.

Gingrich was firm in his predictions for Obama in 2011. The president, said Gingrich, would embrace "card check" politics for unions and promote cap-and-trade to slow the ongoing destruction of our fragile ecosystem. Gingrich's predictions proved false as Obama quickly abandoned both initiatives.

Nostradamus he isn't. But Gingrich, undeterred by reality, still insists that Obama is imposing a "radical," "secular/socialist state" on the American people.

Red Tide

The socialist theme was quickly picked up by the other GOP candidates. "Obama's socialist policies are bankrupting America," said a Rick Perry TV ad. Michele Bachmann concluded her Iowa campaign by declaring she wouldn't let Obama "implement socialism" in the United States. Rick Santorum accused Obama of not doing enough to fight "militant socialism" around the world (the first draft of his presentation used the phrase "godless socialism"), adding that Obama is a "radical."

Front-runner Mitt Romney was the lone holdout, the only candidate not to label the president with the S-word. But he couldn't hold out forever, especially since both his rivals and the press pressed him about it repeatedly. He tried to avoid the question when he was asked directly whether Obama was a socialist, but finally allowed that the president "takes his political inspiration from Europe and from the socialist democrats in Europe." (Romney pointedly described Europe's "social democrats" as "socialist democrats" for maximum effect.)

And despite this year's lofty declarations against personal attacks, John McCain wasn't above a little red-baiting himself in the final weeks of the 2008 campaign. "At least in Europe the socialist leaders who so admire my opponent are upfront about their objectives," he said then. "They use real numbers and honest language."

The Enemy Within

In time-honored fashion, the red-baiters soon began to turn on one another. Gingrich described Romney as a "Massachusetts moderate" whose campaign was studying "European socialist ideas." And a caller to Rush Limbaugh's program even accused Limbaugh, who is above all else a Republican Party operative, of supporting the "socialist" Romney.

"If you're going to start throwing the 'socialism' term around there," Limbaugh answered indignantly, "I'll tell you, these are times of tumult."

Now he tells us.

Ron Paul's extreme libertarianism makes him, authentically, the least socialistic candidate in the race. Yet Paul was the only candidate who refused to call Obama a socialist. He's a "corporatist," said Paul, an assessment with considerably more evidence to support it.

Obama's Socialist Scorecard

Is Barack Obama a radical socialist, a "corporatist," or something else? A friendly journalist describes him as a "pro-business populist," and that's certainly been the posture he's tried to take. If "thin-skinned business leaders" ignore his rhetoric and "look at his proposals and record," writes Jonathan Alter, "they might be pleasantly surprised." Indeed.

John Nichols is the author of a book titled *The "S" Word: A Short History of an American Tradition ... Socialism*. When asked if Obama is a socialist he laughed and said, "Afraid not."

"In fact," Nichols added, "Obama is one of the most un-socialistic presidents this country's had in the last 150 years."

"When Barack Obama was asked to reform the healthcare system," Nichols said, "he rejected all of the models based on social democratic proposals, as well as their American 'single-payer' equivalent, and instead went for insurance reforms reforms that were initially proposed by the (conservative) Heritage Foundation." (The United States is the only developed nation without a "socialized" healthcare system, and its costs are twice those of many comparable countries.)

"There you see him rejecting social democratic ideas and going for a conservative model."

"Look at the Gulf oil spill," Nichols added, "a real disaster for America and the world. President Obama could have taken the response that Franklin Roosevelt and, I would argue, Dwight D. Eisenhower would have taken. He could have said 'Here's a big corporation that's caused us a huge, disastrous problem, and we cannot trust them to address that problem because of their past and current activities. So we're going to nationalize this problem ... control will be handed over to the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies. Then we're going to assess this corporation for the cost of the cleanup.'"

"That's a solution with a social democratic overlay," said Nichols, "but also one that's very much rooted in the way this country's always done things. Obama didn't do that."

Red Dawn

Ironically, a more "socialistic" agenda could improve Obama's popularity – even among Republicans!

Polls taken during the health reform debate showed that 51 percent of Republican voters wanted a "public option" in the health bill that would allow them to purchase coverage from the "socialist" Medicare system. Even stronger majorities of voters overall supported the public option. But Obama never fought for it, and some reports indicated he had traded it away early on in return for a promise from the for-profit hospital industry that it would not resist the bill aggressively.

Other polls have shown that overwhelming majorities of Republican voters, including Tea Party members, oppose cutting Social Security or Medicare in order to reduce the federal deficit. Yet Obama created a "Deficit Commission" and appointed as its co-chairs two politicians who were publicly in favor of doing just that, and he has continued to offer cuts of that nature as part of a "Grand Bargain" with Republican leaders in Congress. A "millionaire's tax" is also popular among Republican voters, who also joined with other Americans in wanting the government to act more decisively to create jobs.

If the nation were governed by a referendum of Republican voters -- just Republicans -- it would be more "socialistic" than it has been under President Obama. Since these policies are supported even more strongly by Democrats and independents, a more "socialistic" Obama – one who rejected cuts to Medicare and Social Security, fought more aggressively for a "millionaires' tax," pushed a public option, and backed a more aggressive jobs agenda – would be more popular with American voters across the political spectrum.

Red Republicans

It's proven popular with previous presidents from both parties. In fact, based on their policies, most Republican presidents of the last century were more "socialistic" than Barack Obama. Eisenhower built the federal highway system and presided over the IRS when the top marginal tax rate for high earners was 91 percent.

Nixon proposed a minimum guaranteed income for all Americans, which he called a "negative income tax," without any Clinton-era preconditions like "workfare." It would have applied to all families with children, and passed

Congress but failed in the Senate. Nixon also imposed wage and price controls in 1971 to control inflation. These controls, while not considered traditionally "socialistic," were a radical imposition of state control over the private-sector economy.

Even Herbert Hoover, who presided over the Crash of 1929 and is often contrasted with FDR, described himself as a "progressive." He expanded the civil service, proposed a Department of Education and a guaranteed pension for all Americans, enlarged the national park system, ended private oil leases on government land, and formed an antitrust division within the Justice Department.

And, much as it irritates Republicans to be reminded of it, Ronald Reagan raised taxes 11 times.

Obama has proposed a reasonable \$476 billion program of infrastructure repair, but he's avoided the kinds of bold initiatives put forward by his Republican predecessors: No Hoover-like litany of progressive reforms, no major public projects like Eisenhower's highways, no Nixon-style negative income tax. And he certainly hasn't responded to our ongoing economic crisis with any state interventions on the scale of Nixon's wage and price controls.

Socialism's Super Salesmen

All this name-calling may not be helping the GOP, but there may be another surprise beneficiary: Socialism. The once-stigmatized ideology has become more acceptable since the fall of the Iron Curtain. The Pew Research Center reports that 31 percent of Americans have a favorable response to the term, while 61 percent respond negatively. The public's feelings about capitalism soured slightly in 2011, with approval/disapproval shifting from 52/37 to 50/40.

What's much more striking is the fact that, for the first time, more young people think favorably of socialism than they do of capitalism. Forty-nine percent of young people aged 18-29 have a positive view of socialism, while 43 percent see it negatively. Twenty months ago those numbers were reversed, making this a dramatic shift in youth opinion.

Which raises the question: Are today's Republican presidential candidates socialism's best salesmen?

Of course, many factors could be driving young people's improving opinion of socialism. Youth unemployment is at record highs, and they can see that little is being done to change that. The Occupy movement has highlighted the ills of unfettered capitalism. But could they also be watching the comic-opera figures on the GOP debate stage and being drawn to anything that group dislikes?

Nichols thinks so. "When they hear Republican politicians ranting and raving about socialism," he said, "young people may be thinking, 'If these yahoos are against it, it can't be that bad.' At the very least, I think it's opened up a great deal of interest in socialism as an alternative."

Socialism's Return?

Nichols notes that socialist parties were once part of a vigorous American debate and government's role in society. He believes that socialism should re-enter the mainstream and serve the same purpose on the left that libertarianism serves on the right.

There are even places where the two ideologies can collaborate, like civil liberties and foreign policy. As Nichols notes, many of today's mainstream ideas were first articulated by either libertarian or socialist thinkers.

And as Obama has embraced more seemingly "socialist" mainstream ideas – tax structure, or greater infrastructure spending – his popularity has risen.

Whatever happens, one thing's already clear: Love him or not, Barack Obama is no socialist. But socialist-inspired ideas remain as popular – and as American – as ever. That's something politicians in both parties would do well to remember.

(Richard Eskow is a writer, a senior fellow with the Campaign for America's Future, and the host of a weekly radio show, "The Breakdown.")

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20120217-01	10:16	Pam	"The 'Undue Weight' of Truth on Wikipedia"
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Remember Orwell's *1984* and the Ministry of Truth that rewrote history as they went along...

"The 'Undue Weight' of Truth on Wikipedia" by Mark Shaver, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Feb. 12, 2012, (<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Undue-Weight-of-Truth-on/130704/>)

For the past 10 years I've immersed myself in the details of one of the most famous events in American labor history, the Haymarket riot and trial of 1886. Along the way I've written two books and a couple of articles about the episode. In some circles that affords me a presumption of expertise on the subject. Not, however, on Wikipedia.

The bomb thrown during an anarchist rally in Chicago sparked America's first Red Scare, a high-profile show trial, and a worldwide clemency movement for the seven condemned men. Today the martyrs' graves are a national historic site, the location of the bombing is marked by a public sculpture, and the event is recounted in most American history textbooks. Its Wikipedia entry is detailed and elaborate.

A couple of years ago, on a slow day at the office, I decided to experiment with editing one particularly misleading assertion chiseled into the Wikipedia article. The description of the trial stated, "The prosecution, led by Julius Grinnell, did not offer evidence connecting any of the defendants with the bombing. ... "

Coincidentally, that is the claim that initially hooked me on the topic. In 2001 I was teaching a labor-history course, and our textbook contained nearly the same wording that appeared on Wikipedia. One of my students raised her hand: "If the trial went on for six weeks and no evidence was presented, what did they talk about all those days?" I've been working to answer her question ever since.

I have not resolved all the mysteries that surround the bombing, but I have dug deeply enough to be sure that the claim that the trial was bereft of evidence is flatly wrong. One hundred and eighteen witnesses were called to testify, many of them unindicted co-conspirators who detailed secret meetings where plans to attack police stations were mapped out, coded messages were placed in radical newspapers, and bombs were assembled in one of the defendants' rooms.

In what was one of the first uses of forensic chemistry in an American courtroom, the city's foremost chemists showed that the metallurgical profile of a bomb found in one of the anarchists' homes was unlike any commercial metal but was similar in composition to a piece of shrapnel cut from the body of a slain police officer. So overwhelming was the evidence against one of the defendants that his lawyers even admitted that their client spent the afternoon before the Haymarket rally building bombs, arguing that he was acting in self-defense.

So I removed the line about there being "no evidence" and provided a full explanation in Wikipedia's behind-the-scenes editing log. Within minutes my changes were reversed. The explanation: "You must provide reliable sources for your assertions to make changes along these lines to the article."

That was curious, as I had cited the documents that proved my point, including verbatim testimony from the trial published online by the Library of Congress. I also noted one of my own peer-reviewed articles. One of the people who had assumed the role of keeper of this bit of history for Wikipedia quoted the Web site's "undue weight" policy, which states that "articles should not give minority views as much or as detailed a description as more popular views." He then scolded me. "You should not delete information supported by the majority of sources to replace it with a minority view."

The "undue weight" policy posed a problem. Scholars have been publishing the same ideas about the Haymarket case for more than a century. The last published bibliography of titles on the subject has 1,530 entries.

"Explain to me, then, how a 'minority' source with facts on its side would ever appear against a wrong 'majority' one?" I asked the Wiki-gatekeeper. He responded, "You're more than welcome to discuss reliable sources here, that's what the talk page is for. However, you might want to have a quick look at Wikipedia's civility policy."

I tried to edit the page again. Within 10 seconds I was informed that my citations to the primary documents were insufficient, as Wikipedia requires its contributors to rely on secondary sources, or, as my critic informed me, "published books." Another editor cheerfully tutored me in what this means: "Wikipedia is not 'truth,' Wikipedia is 'verifiability' of reliable sources. Hence, if most secondary sources which are taken as reliable happen to repeat a flawed account or description of something, Wikipedia will echo that."

Tempted to win simply through sheer tenacity, I edited the page again. My triumph was even more fleeting than before. Within seconds the page was changed back. The reason: "reverting possible vandalism." Fearing that I would forever have to wear the scarlet letter of Wikipedia vandal, I relented but noted with some consolation that in the wake of my protest, the editors made a slight gesture of reconciliation—they added the word "credible" so that it now read, "The prosecution, led by Julius Grinnell, did not offer credible evidence connecting any of the defendants with the bombing. ... " Though that was still inaccurate, I decided not to attempt to correct the entry again until I could clear the hurdles my anonymous interlocutors had set before me.

So I waited two years, until my book on the trial was published. "Now, at last, I have a proper Wikipedia leg to stand on," I thought as I opened the page and found at least a dozen statements that were factual errors, including some that contradicted their own cited sources. I found myself hesitant to write, eerily aware that the self-deputized protectors of the page were reading over my shoulder, itching to revert my edits and tutor me in Wiki-decorum. I made a small edit, testing the waters.

My improvement lasted five minutes before a Wiki-cop scolded me, "I hope you will familiarize yourself with some of Wikipedia's policies, such as verifiability and undue weight. If all historians save one say that the sky was green in 1888, our policies require that we write 'Most historians write that the sky was green, but one says the sky was blue.' ... As individual editors, we're not in the business of weighing claims, just reporting what reliable sources write."

I guess this gives me a glimmer of hope that someday, perhaps before another century goes by, enough of my fellow scholars will adopt my views that I can change that Wikipedia entry. Until then I will have to continue to shout that the sky was blue.

(Timothy Messer-Kruse is a professor in the School of Cultural and Critical Studies at Bowling Green State University. He is author of *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks*, to be published later this year by the University of Illinois Press.)

20120217-02 21:06 SteveG "Victory: MSNBC Dumps Pat Buchanan"
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Some additional interesting reading with the links at the bottom of the Pat Buchanan piece.

"Victory: MSNBC Dumps Pat Buchanan" by ThinkProgress

Feb 17, 2012, (<http://thinkprogress.org/progress-report/victory-msnbc-dumps-pat-buchanan/>)

(Pat Buchanan's TEN Most Outrageous Statements.)

Sometimes victory comes quickly and sometimes it takes longer. In the case of Pat Buchanan, there's been literally years of organizing by progressives — including like Color of Change, Credo, and Media Matters — to draw attention to and hold him accountable for his racist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic statements.

Here's the rundown on his greatest misses:

1. Wanted to close the borders to protect white dominance. As he wrote in his 2006 book *State of Emergency*: "If we do not get control of our borders, by 2050 Americans of European descent will be a minority in the nation their ancestors created and built."
2. Blamed lower test scores on minorities. In his most recent book *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?*, he blames minorities for dragging down the country's test scores. "[T]he decline in academic test scores here at home and in international competition is likely to continue, as more and more of the children taking those tests will be African-American and Hispanic.
3. Claimed Jerry Sandusky's atrocities are because of "Homosexual marriage." Buchanan appeared on a right-wing radio show on November 15 to make some convoluted comparisons: "Let's take this Penn State thing...these horrors, there's an organization that marches in the gay pride parade in New York called—used to—called the North American Man Boy Love Association, which advocated voluntary sex along the lines of exactly what was going on at Penn State. Many of our political icons have marched in that parade right behind that NAMBLA float [...] This is now, homosexual marriage is now the civil rights cause of the decade."
4. Said the Jewish population in the United States dropped in the 90s because Jews aborted all their babies. Buchanan explains that the decline in the American Jewish population during the 1990s (a decline that a Brandeis study says never occurred), "is a result of the collective decision of Jews themselves. From Betty Friedan to Gloria Steinem in the 1970s to Ruth Bader Ginsburg today, Jewish women have led the battle for abortion rights. The community followed."
5. Asserted Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people including 69 teens in Norway, "may have been right." Buchanan called Breivik a coward, evil, and cold-blooded, and then proceeded to defend his twisted rationale for the killings: "As for a climactic conflict between a once-Christian West and an Islamic world that is growing in numbers and advancing inexorably into Europe for the third time in 14 centuries, on this one, Breivik may be right."
6. Claimed that all great nations punish the gays. In a Human Events column, Buchanan attacked California's 9th Circuit Judge Vaughn Walker after his ruling of Proposition 8 as unconstitutional as a "judicial tyrant," before going on to explain that "through history, all the great religions have condemned homosexuality and all the great nations have proscribed or punished it. None ever placed homosexual liaisons on the same plane as traditional marriage, which is the bedrock institution of any healthy society.
7. Penned "The Affirmative Action Nobel." That's the title of Buchanan's October 13, 2009 column on Townhall.com in which he claims that President Obama's Nobel Prize was simply the result of affirmative action. And the column only got worse from there: "They have reinforced the impression that Obama is someone who is forever being given prizes — Ivy League scholarships, law review editorships, prime-time speaking slots at national conventions — he did not earn."
8. Argued that Poland and the United Kingdom had it coming in World War II. Buchanan seems to suggest in a 2009 column that World War II—and all the atrocities that accompanied it—was really the fault of Poland and Britain, for refusing to engage in diplomacy with Germany. "Why did Warsaw not negotiate with Berlin, which was hinting at an offer of compensatory territory in Slovakia? Because the Poles had a war guarantee from Britain that, should Germany attack, Britain and her empire would come to Poland's rescue."
9. Dabbled in Holocaust denial. Pat Buchanan danced alarmingly close to denying key facts of the Holocaust. In a 1990 column for the New York Post, he defended convicted Nazi war criminal Ivan Demjanjuk (whom he later compared to Jesus Christ) against charges from Holocaust survivors that he was

guilty of murder by accusing the survivors of misremembering all of it: "This so-called 'Holocaust Survivor Syndrome' involves 'group fantasies of martyrdom and heroics.' Reportedly, half of the 20,000 survivor testimonies in Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem are considered 'unreliable,' not to be used in trials[...]The problem is: Diesel engines do not emit enough carbon monoxide to kill anybody."

10. Argued Hitler was an individual of "great courage." That's just one of the quotes that the Anti-Defamation League attributes to Buchanan in their compendium of offensive remarks from Buchanan over the years. In 1977, he qualified his labeling of Hitler as racist and anti-semitic by adding that "he was also an individual of great courage, a soldier's soldier in the Great War, a leader steeped in the history of Europe, who possessed oratorical powers that could awe even those who despised him[...]His genius was an intuitive sense of the mushiness, the character flaws, the weakness masquerading as morality that was in the hearts of the statesmen who stood in his path."

And since Republicans are apparently eager to reignite the divisive culture wars of the past, here's Buchanan's famous 1992 GOP Convention speech on the culture wars — a speech many believe helped cost President George H.W. Bush victory in that year's presidential election. Some of the language may be softer, but 20 years hence we still hear many of the same divisive attacks on progressive values from leading conservatives.

20120217-03	21:18	SteveG	Fw: Dennis Kucinich: A Prayer for America
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from <http://www.DennisKucinich.us>:

10 years ago today, Dennis Kucinich gave his "Prayer for America" Speech....which even after ten years maintains a fresh sense of urgency.

Watch the speech here:

<http://action.kucinich.us/page/m/13310fea/111cc9d0/12dab4d9/1e634931/1489489424/VEsF/>.

Text of Dennis' Prayer for America Speech, February 17, 2002:

I offer these brief remarks today as a prayer for our country, with love of democracy, as a celebration of our country. With love for our country. With hope for our country. With a belief that the light of freedom cannot be extinguished as long as it is inside of us. With a belief that freedom rings resoundingly in a democracy each time we speak freely. With the understanding that freedom stirs the human heart and fear stills it. With the belief that a free people cannot walk in fear and faith at the same time.

With the understanding that there is a deeper truth expressed in the unity of the United States. That implicit in the union of our country is the union of all people. That all people are essentially one. That the world is interconnected not only on the material level of economics, trade, communication, and transportation, but interconnected through human consciousness, through the human heart, through the heart of the world, through the simply expressed impulse and yearning to be and to breathe free.

I offer this prayer for America.

Let us pray that our nation will remember that the unfolding of the promise of democracy in our nation paralleled the striving for civil rights. That is why we must challenge the rationale of the Patriot Act. We must ask why should America put aside guarantees of constitutional justice?

How can we justify in effect canceling the First Amendment and the right of free speech, the right to peaceably assemble?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Fourth Amendment, probable cause, the prohibitions against unreasonable search and seizure?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Fifth Amendment, nullifying due process, and allowing for indefinite incarceration without a trial?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Sixth Amendment, the right to prompt and public trial?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Eighth Amendment which protects against cruel and unusual punishment?

We cannot justify widespread wiretaps and internet surveillance without judicial supervision, let alone with it.

We cannot justify secret searches without a warrant.

We cannot justify giving the Attorney General the ability to designate domestic terror groups.

We cannot justify giving the FBI total access to any type of data which may exist in any system anywhere such as medical records and financial records.

We cannot justify giving the CIA the ability to target people in this country for intelligence surveillance.

We cannot justify a government which takes from the people our right to privacy and then assumes for its own operations a right to total secrecy.

The Attorney General recently covered up a statue of Lady Justice showing her bosom as if to underscore there is no danger of justice exposing herself at this time, before this administration.

Let us pray that our nation's leaders will not be overcome with fear. Because today there is great fear in our great Capitol. And this must be understood before we can ask about the shortcomings of Congress in the current environment.

The great fear began when we had to evacuate the Capitol on September 11.

It continued when we had to leave the Capitol again when a bomb scare occurred as members were pressing the CIA during a secret briefing.

It continued when we abandoned Washington when anthrax, possibly from a government lab, arrived in the mail.

It continued when the Attorney General declared a nationwide terror alert and then the Administration brought the destructive Patriot Bill to the floor of the House.

It continued in the release of the bin Laden tapes at the same time the President was announcing the withdrawal from the ABM treaty.

It remains present in the cordoning off of the Capitol.

It is present in the camouflaged armed national guardsmen who greet members of Congress each day we enter the Capitol campus.

It is present in the labyrinth of concrete barriers through which we must pass each time we go to vote.

The trappings of a state of siege trap us in a state of fear, ill-equipped to deal with the Patriot Games, the Mind Games, the War Games of an unelected President and his unelected Vice President.

Let us pray that our country will stop this war. "To promote the common defense" is one of the formational principles of America.

Our Congress gave the President the ability to respond to the tragedy of September 11. We licensed a response to those who helped bring the terror of September 11th. But we the people and our elected representatives must reserve the right to measure the response, to proportion the response, to challenge the response, and to correct the response.

Because we did not authorize the invasion of Iraq.

We did not authorize the invasion of Iran.

We did not authorize the invasion of North Korea.

We did not authorize the bombing of civilians in Afghanistan.

We did not authorize permanent detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

We did not authorize the withdrawal from the Geneva Convention.

We did not authorize military tribunals suspending due process and habeas corpus.

We did not authorize assassination squads.

We did not authorize the resurrection of COINTELPRO.

We did not authorize the repeal of the Bill of Rights.

We did not authorize the revocation of the Constitution.

We did not authorize national identity cards.

We did not authorize the eye of Big Brother to peer from cameras throughout our cities.

We did not authorize an eye for an eye.

Nor did we ask that the blood of innocent people, who perished on September 11, be avenged with the blood of innocent villagers in Afghanistan.

We did not authorize the administration to wage war anytime, anywhere, anyhow it pleases.

We did not authorize war without end.

We did not authorize a permanent war economy.

Yet we are upon the threshold of a permanent war economy. The President has requested a \$45.6 billion increase in military spending. All defense-related programs will cost close to \$400 billion.

Consider that the Department of Defense has never passed an independent audit.

Consider that the Inspector General has notified Congress that the Pentagon cannot properly account for \$1.2 trillion in transactions.

Consider that in recent years the Dept. of Defense could not match \$22 billion worth of expenditures to the items it purchased, wrote off, as lost, billions of dollars worth of in-transit inventory and stored nearly \$30 billion worth of spare parts it did not need.

Yet the defense budget grows with more money for weapons systems to fight a cold war which ended, weapon systems in search of new enemies to create new wars. This has nothing to do with fighting terror.

This has everything to do with fueling a military industrial machine with the treasure of our nation, risking the future of our nation, risking democracy itself with the militarization of thought which follows the militarization of the budget.

Let us pray for our children. Our children deserve a world without end. Not a war without end. Our children deserve a world free of the terror of hunger, free of the terror of poor health care, free of the terror of homelessness, free of the terror of ignorance, free of the terror of hopelessness, free of the terror of policies which are committed to a world view which is not appropriate for the survival of a free people, not appropriate for the survival of democratic values, not appropriate for the survival of our nation, and not appropriate for the survival of the world.

Let us pray that we have the courage and the will as a people and as a nation to shore ourselves up, to reclaim from the ruins of September 11th our democratic traditions.

Let us declare our love for democracy. Let us declare our intent for peace.

Let us work to make nonviolence an organizing principle in our own society.

Let us recommit ourselves to the slow and painstaking work of statecraft, which sees peace, not war as being inevitable.

Let us work for a world where someday war becomes archaic.

That is the vision which the proposal to create a Department of Peace envisions. Forty-three members of Congress are now cosponsoring the legislation.

Let us work for a world where nuclear disarmament is an imperative. That is why we must begin by insisting on the commitments of the ABM treaty. That is why we must be steadfast for nonproliferation.

Let us work for a world where America can lead the day in banning weapons of mass destruction not only from our land and sea and sky but from outer space itself. That is the vision of HR 3616: A universe free of fear. Where we can look up at God's creation in the stars and imagine infinite wisdom, infinite peace, infinite possibilities, not infinite war, because we are taught that the kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

Let us pray that we have the courage to replace the images of death which haunt us, the layers of images of September 11th, faded into images of patriotism, spliced into images of military mobilization, jump-cut into images of our secular celebrations of the World Series, New Year's Eve, the Superbowl, the Olympics, the strobic flashes which touch our deepest fears, let us replace those images with the work of human relations, reaching out to people, helping our own citizens here at home, lifting the plight of the poor everywhere.

That is the America which has the ability to rally the support of the world.

That is the America which stands not in pursuit of an axis of evil, but which is itself at the axis of hope and faith and peace and freedom. America, America. God shed grace on thee. Crown thy good, America.

Not with weapons of mass destruction. Not with invocations of an axis of evil. Not through breaking international treaties. Not through establishing America as king of a unipolar world. Crown thy good America. America, America. Let us pray for our country. Let us love our country. Let us defend our country not only from the threats without but from the threats within.

Crown thy good, America. Crown thy good with brotherhood, and sisterhood. And crown thy good with compassion and restraint and forbearance and a commitment to peace, to democracy, to economic justice here at home and throughout the world.

Crown thy good, America. Crown thy good America. Crown thy good.

Thank you. –Dennis Kucinich

20120217-04 22:47 SteveG "The 5 Grossest Things You're Eating"

[I guess the author means "tainted". I was thinking of liver, brains, or udders. –SteveB]

"The 5 Grossest Things You're Eating" by David Zinczenko with Matt Goulding, *Men's Health*

Feb. 6, 2012 (<http://health.yahoo.net/experts/eatthis/5-grossest-foods-supermarket>)

1. Grain Products
2. Shrimp
3. Salad Dressing
4. Jelly Beans
5. Mushrooms

20120218-01 14:50 SteveG "Republicans Are Unprotected on Contraception"

"Republicans Are Unprotected on Contraception" by Jonathan Alter, Bloomberg/The National Memo

Feb. 17, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/content/republicans-are-unprotected-contraception>)

During the 1928 presidential campaign, nutty right-wing Protestants claimed that Al Smith, the first Catholic nominated for president by a major party, was planning to extend New York's Holland Tunnel all the way to the Vatican.

Today's tunnel would run from the Vatican to a suburban Pentecostal megachurch.

We learned this week that U.S. Catholics support President Barack Obama's Feb. 10 compromise on contraception in almost identical numbers to the population as a whole. Many of those sticking with the Catholic bishops in opposition are evangelical Protestants.

Historians are rubbing their eyes in wonder that the spiritual and political descendants of Protestants who founded the Know Nothing Party in the 1850s on anti-Papist ideas -- who hassled not just Al Smith but also John F. Kennedy for supposed ties to Rome -- are now embracing Catholics. Rick Santorum was recently greeted at Oral Roberts University by an enthusiastic crowd of 4,000.

Yes, politics makes strange bedfellows, and in this case, the Republicans, by throwing in their lot with the bishops, are using no protection. Like the controversy over the Susan G. Komen for the Cure foundation withdrawing support from Planned Parenthood over its provision of abortion services, this struggle leaves Republicans politically exposed.

At first, the Komen case looked like just another example of anti-abortion activists flexing their muscles against hapless women's health advocates. Then came a furious, highly effective counterassault fueled by liberal social media, a new counterweight to conservative talk radio in defining the terms of debate. The outcome of that flap, in which the Komen foundation reversed itself and apologized, shows that bashing Planned Parenthood may work in Republican primaries but will be poison in the general election.

The demand for "conscience" exemptions from Obamacare for Catholic hospitals, schools and charities (churches were already exempt) also looked good for the Republicans initially. Conservatives thought that they had a chance to revive the "culture wars" -- the wedge-issue appeals to faith and family that have worked so well in the past. For more than a week, Republicans made Obama look like the guy who ordered Joan of Arc burned at the stake.

Their problem is that they never know when to stop. Recall the case of Terri Schiavo, the Florida woman in a persistent vegetative state whose plight led conservative lawmakers to champion federal legislation in 2005 to keep her alive. The measure passed, but public opinion polls afterward showed the law was widely unpopular and a clear case of congressional overreach.

This time conservatives stuck with the argument that the president was abusing religious freedom even when that attack was no longer plausible. By decreeing that insurance companies, not Catholic institutions, will pay for contraceptives in employee health-care plans (as allowed under the Affordable Care Act), the president successfully shifted the subject back to birth control, where he's on solid political footing.

Obama's like a quarterback who calls a bad play and seems trapped in the pocket, then scrambles for big yardage.

The bad play resulted from poor political planning inside the White House, which failed to line up supporters to defend its decision. But it's a little more defensible when you know the context. For months, the pressure seemed to come from the left. The White House learned that 28 states (including Mitt Romney's Massachusetts) already require that health plans under their jurisdiction cover contraceptives. These rules had survived court challenges on religious freedom grounds. In fact, women's groups were threatening lawsuits if Obamacare didn't also require such coverage, and some government lawyers argued that the new law provided no authority for any exemptions for institutions receiving federal money.

Obama's team debated the issue and, contrary to published reports, the discussion didn't break down cleanly along gender lines, with women on one side and Catholic men on the other. When the rule was made public on Jan. 20, White House press secretary Jay Carney faced not a single question about it. Then the regional and religious press embraced the story, and within a week even liberal Catholic columnists like E.J. Dionne and Mark Shields were up in arms.

But the firestorm may prove to be a political blessing. If the president had started on Jan. 20 with the compromise he eventually arrived at on Feb. 10, it would have been a one-day story for health-care policy wonks. Birth control would never have surfaced as a political issue.

Instead contraception is now the elephant in the bedroom -- the issue that no one in the Republican establishment wants to talk about because they know it's a disaster for them.

The Republicans may end up with a nominee, Rick Santorum, who has warned of "the dangers of contraception in this country." He said: "It's not OK because it's a license to do things in the sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be."

This from a candidate who recently said of the president: "He thinks he knows better how to run your lives."

Imagine what Obama would do with that in a debate.

Instead of running away from Santorum, many Republicans are running toward him -- once again, failing to get the memo on when to stop. Senator Scott Brown co-sponsored a bill this week with Senator Roy Blunt that would let any employer with a "moral conviction" (a term left undefined in the legislation) deny access to any health service, including contraception, they personally oppose. This weapon is aimed at Obamacare, but it will probably boomerang on Brown, who is locked in a tight re-election campaign in Massachusetts against Elizabeth Warren.

With all the major candidates this year enjoying seemingly happy marriages, it didn't seem as if sex would figure much in this campaign. Wrong. The independent women who will help determine the election want the government -- and their bosses -- out of their private lives.

The culture wars are over, and the Republicans lost.

(Jonathan Alter is a Bloomberg View columnist and the author of *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*. The opinions expressed are his own.)

20120219-01 18:55 Dennis "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?"

My crap detector is highly suspicious of the conclusions in the following article. Although I do my own taxes using TurboTax, I'm far from being an accountant. Would one of you, Bill perhaps, take a whack at analyzing the credibility of the writer's statements? Do I really only pay 2/3 of what Buffet and Romney pay?

"Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" by Scott Burns, AssetBuilder

Feb. 18, 2012 (http://assetbuilder.com/blogs/scott_burns/) (<http://www.dallasnews.com/business/columnists/scott-burns/20120218-will-the-real-tax-rate-please-stand-up.ece>)

Warren Buffett and Mitt Romney have something in common beyond wealth. Both pay federal income taxes at a 45 percent rate. That's three times the 15 percent rate mentioned by Mr. Buffett and reported in the press. That rate is also higher than the 30 percent "Buffett Rule" that President Obama is touting in the name of fairness.

How can this be? How can Buffett and Romney pay so much more in taxes than we see discussed in the press? Doesn't everyone know that the very rich have the advantage of being able to rent representatives and senators to write the best tax code money can buy?

The answer lies in understanding what economists call "tax incidence"— knowing who really pays a tax. We're going to get to that understanding by starting with a rapidly growing lemonade stand.

If you have a lemonade stand, it is considered a "proprietorship." You're the owner, operator and the person who earns income selling the lemonade. You subtract the costs of doing business from the sales of lemonade and that becomes your earned income. Since it is labor income, it is subject to employment taxes. It is also subject to the broader federal income tax.

But you have a vision. You want to become the Starbucks of lemonade. You open multiple stands. The net income of the business soars. Your new CPA says you need to turn your proprietorship into a corporation. Since you enjoy having a big income, you make it an "S" corporation, a form that allows you to pass all net income through to yourself for tax purposes and, perhaps, a few other shareholders.

That income, like the proprietorship income, will be subject to both the employment tax and the federal income tax. You'll pay at a 12.4 percent rate on the first \$110,100 you earn for the employment tax. (The Medicare tax is an additional 2.9 percent.) As a practical matter, you're earning so much that you leave the employment tax far behind. The only tax that matters is the federal income tax. On that, you pay at a rate as high as 35 percent.

Now suppose Ubiquitous Lemonade grows even larger. What do you do?

You become a "C" corporation, one that is a taxable entity unto itself. As a consequence, you now have to pay the corporate income tax. Whatever your corporation earns, it may be taxed at a rate up to 35 percent. For each \$1 of earnings, the corporation can retain 65 cents after taxes. The corporation can then pay you a dividend out of those 65 cents.

When you get that dividend, it will be subject to a federal income tax rate of 15 percent. Since you are paying a 15 percent tax on 65 cents, \$1 of what used to be your earnings is now down to 55 cents after taxes.

One of the reasons the tax rate on dividends is so low is that economists see this as double taxation. However you look at it, your effective tax rate is 45 percent because that's how much of each earned dollar goes to the government. If President Obama gets his "Buffett Rule," with a minimum tax rate of 30 percent for millionaires, the effective tax rate won't be 30 percent. It will be 55 percent.

Would that kill the economy? Maybe. Maybe not. It certainly wouldn't be friendly to income from capital, so we can expect to see yet more money being invested in other countries. We can also expect more wealthy Americans deciding that Australia, New Zealand or Brazil are better places to live, work and collect dividends. The reality here is that the United States is a high-tax land for everybody.

If you are a typical worker, you probably pay a top income tax rate of 15 percent. You also pay the 15.3 percent employment tax. (If you think you only pay half of that tax, you've been snookered by a smart politician. Stop working and your employer stops paying "his share" of the employment tax.) So your real but disguised tax burden is about 30 percent.

That's two-thirds of what Buffett and Romney pay.

What should our tax rate be? I don't know. But it would help if the politicians started with the right numbers.

[20120219-02](#) 19:44 Art Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)

This might work if Buffet and Romney owned lemonade stands and made all their money just off these stands. Romney pays about 14% and I pay about 30 plus %. Period.

[20120219-03](#) 21:24 Bill Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)

There are some problems with the article, which purports to deal with effective federal tax rates paid by the wealthy—at least as signaled by its lead paragraphs—but which misses the real cause of low effective federal tax rates for many of the very wealthy, which is the capital-gains rate. The writer seems instead to seek to rouse the rabble about double taxation. Finally, however, I'm not sure what the writer seeks to show, save that different rates apply to different levels of income at the individual level and that corporate dividends are taxed at 15 per cent at the individual level. The workings of S corporations vis-à-vis C corporations are well known. Language here and there suggests that the writer believes he is making a dramatic finding as to unfairness or some loophole exploited by the crooked among us, but no such drama or revelation is produced.

What is a false assertion or interpretation is that corporations don't pay half the employment tax, i. e. social security and unemployment taxes. Corporations, whether S or C, are legally obligated to pay their half. [Steve B. and I have had our differences on this; suffice it to say that someone goes to jail if these employment taxes aren't paid, even if the corporation isn't making any money.]

Finally, the writer seems to seek some reason for making smarmy remarks, but there simply is no revelation of conspiracy or proof of dishonesty or delivery of anything novel.

[I have to agree with Bill completely on this one. Maybe the writer is a tax expert, maybe not, but his writing is unfocused and attempts, unsuccessfully, to make big deals out of nothing. Why would he ignore the capital gains, etc. rates? –SteveB]

[20120219-04](#) 21:40 Bill Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Art, above)

As to the source of Romney's and Buffett's wealth, I think I erred in believing capital-gains revenue was the major source. It's more likely dividend revenue, including municipal bonds. But do know that the rate for long term capital-gains revenue maxes out at 15 per cent, the same as that for dividend revenue.

[20120219-06](#) 21:46 Jim Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to all, above)

Mitt's rate is so low because there is a loophole for hedge fund managers that lets them consider everything they make as a capital gains instead of earned income.

20120219-07 21:57 Bill Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Jim, above)

Yes, hedge-fund managers have that outrageous tax preference, but is he able to use it now? And how long has he been out of Bain Capital?

20120219-05 21:43 Jim Video: Adele Trashes Newt Gingrich at the Grammys!

I heard that Adele won a bunch of Grammys although I had not heard any of her songs. This one sounds like she means it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKucBtFwymU&feature=email>

I heard that you'd think it's cool
If the poor kids mopped up the floors at school.
--Adele

20120219-08 22:00 Jim Video: Physics Lesson with a Knitting Needle in Space

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHrBhgwg_Q&feature=youtu.be

20120219-09 22:25 Tom Source for Gadgets/Electronics

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

<http://foodie-isms.com/?tag=saltenas>

Salteñas: Almost the Bolivian National Food (but much competition).



—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.

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #78 — FEB. 21, 2012

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Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra 2012

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 21, 2012)

"I sing the Body electric." (Walt Whitman) — Three Day Celebration of the Flesh in the Streets



New Introduction

Today is Fat Tuesday in New Orleans and the last day of our *Carnaval* here in Santa Cruz. If you are in the U.S., I hope y'all are way down south in one of my very favorite cities for the celebration—N'awlin's, darlin'! In case you aren't, let me tell you just a little about all the strange and wonderful goings-on here in Santa Cruz, Bolivia.

I guess you know that Carnival means "Celebration of the Flesh"? I surmise that must an idea too raw and powerful for the entire U.S., or Mardi Gras would have spread. It's lots of fun. Really! Good Christians, especially, spend the year supposedly denying the flesh. What a force if all that repression exploded all at once. Yet Mardi Gras, Carnival, and *Carnaval* are semi-religious events, triggered into existence by Lent, but almost certainly the continuation (though seasonally displaced) of Pagan fertility festivals much, much older than Christianity.

We seem to be enduring a rebirth of the “culture wars” in America. Even after Rick Santorum goes down...it seems like the pot has been stirred a lot. Unfortunate, but there we are. Actually, it may not be so unfortunate after all, because it plays right into President Obama’s and the Democrats’ hands. A big majority of people support the current status quo, at least, on the so-called “moral” issues. What are the Republicans going to do against the tide of history and the awakening of women and minorities, except destroy themselves? Do they think they are going to change our minds with their lies? Not likely. They and their philosophy of exclusion and inequality failed miserably in the battles of the last 100 years. They will fail again. We are not going to go backwards.

I have no problem with Jesus or any religion or religious figure or their beliefs or their morality or whatever, save one—the belief that our focus in this life should be on some afterlife (sounds like the Egyptians, huh?). I believe this particular element of religion is responsible for much evil in the world, including the condemnation of the flesh which we celebrate with *Carnaval*.

I won’t go into all the details now, because my primary focus today is on the fun, but suffice it to say that if, for instance, a suicide bomber blows himself and 100 innocent people to eternity because he believes his final act is the road to heaven, then we have a problem. If there is a heaven and a belief, the end will always justify the means, will it not? Any means! That is the problem in a nutshell.

Here’s my two cents worth. **No one knows what comes next.** Face it. Belief and faith and hope (I’m a big believer in hope!) have their place, but they are not knowledge. But “I think, therefore, I am.” I know that I exist in what is ostensibly, for all practical purposes, this flesh, however that may actually be manifested in the physical universe. It don’t matter one whit to me. I don’t give a damn. I have somehow been given this incredible gift of life. I like to say that the biggest miracle is to be in here looking out. You know what I mean?

And this life is damned short. You, my dear friends, all know that by now, if we have not always known that. Don Juan says to treat your death as an advisor. What do you think your death would tell you? Think of heaven? Not to me. Death tells me that life is short and eternity is long. If you are Christian, don’t you think that even God might have wanted to taste the flesh and, in Christianity, appears to have been changed by the experience? Jesus enjoyed life in the flesh (until the very end, I guess). I believe he intended to tell us to do the same. We should love this short life in the flesh. Eternity will wait.

There is an incredible *Star Trek* episode where very advanced aliens have shed their flesh and become pure, eternal mind, immortal spirit. They can read minds and enter minds. When the *Enterprise* arrives, the aliens do everything they can to keep the crew there so that they can experience life in the flesh again, even if it is vicarious. Without the flesh, there is no emotion. Imagine! Is that life, or just being a robot or a computer or Mr. Spock? Perhaps we live life in the flesh so God can experience it too? Who knows? If Muslims can imagine virgins and streets of gold (who would need them as a spirit?), then I can imagine a Heaven where the angels sit around reminiscing and dreaming about their lives in the flesh and wishing they could do it again. Thinking that the one lesson they should have learned while on Earth was to love life more and live it to the fullest. *Vive la carne!*

Now, I’m not saying there’s any *carte blanche* on morality, if we don’t concern ourselves so much with “Heaven”. On the contrary, without Heaven, we also give up the most extreme cases of ends justifying the means, so a higher morality, one truer to human nature, could evolve. Do you know what else Walt Whitman said?

The man’s body is sacred, and the woman’s body is sacred;
No matter who it is, it is sacred;
Is it a slave? Is it one of the dull-faced immigrants just landed on the wharf?
Each belongs here or anywhere, just as much as the well-off—just as much as you;
Each has his or her place in the procession.
--Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

Carnaval 2012 Almost Live (written Sun., Feb. 19)

I’m just back from a segment of 2012 *Carnaval* in Santa Cruz, as it exists only Santa Cruz. I’ve been to *Mardi Gras* and Carnival in four Caribbean and two South American counties and I’ve never seen anything like this. *Mardi Gras* at its peak on Fat Tuesday is probably the closest to this of all the pre-Lent events I’ve ever attended, but it’s still a

little tame compared to here. In the eastern part of Bolivia, bordering Brazil, every little town has *Carnaval*. They have a queen, floats, parades, and the celebration must go on for three days. But the granddaddy of all *Carnavals* is left to the capital, Santa Cruz. In the mountainous west, the people from cities and towns all over the *altiplano* gather in Oruro for another huge celebration, much more formal and religious than here in Santa Cruz, though still as drunken and almost as chaotic.

I'm a little drunk, I will admit, but I will do my best to try to describe today's action as close to live as possible.

As I mentioned, there are different what I call segments of *Carnaval*. The big family event is a huge parade with dancing and the crowning of the queen on Saturday night. There are more parades before and after that biggest one, starting two or three weeks before and extending to the end of *Carnaval* on Tuesday night (actually Wednesday morning when the sun comes up). Tonight and for the next two nights there will be a lot of live music, loud music, drink, and dancing. Those three nights are the "adult" segments".

For all of the celebrating, the whole inner city is closed to vehicles. In Santa Cruz, this is a circle one kilometer in diameter, a very big playpen (see map below, we live in the heart of the city just three blocks south of the central plaza). The public part of the entire area, minus certain small "protected" places, is open for just about anything people want to do. The afternoons are the segments sort of for teenagers, though everybody is there, from little kids to little old ladies. Beer and food are sold everywhere, along with certain, shall I say, *Carnaval* equipment. Some streets have a lot more people than others, but most are very crowded. Bands walk around the streets playing, and people dance along behind. Many folks open their houses for parties. Restaurants host parties. The street is the biggest party.



But, as far as I know, only here, the streets also become a battlefield, literally. In the midst of the celebrating and dancing, chaos stalks the innocent and danger lurks around every corner and within almost every doorway. Almost everyone in the city these afternoons is armed and dangerous. Some of the little kids are the worst, some like SWAT team members. I don't think there are any rules, but certain weaponry is sold well in advance of the start of *Carnival* and in the streets during:

1. Big cans of intense white spray foam. It comes out almost like from a foam fire extinguisher. I've invented a little gadget that lets you fire four of these a once, using both hands. Maximum fire power.
2. All manner of squirt guns.
3. Water balloons.
4. All colors of washable (or not) ink, in squirt bottles, and to fill squirt guns.
5. Baby oil and mild grease to cover exposed skin to keep ink, etc. from penetrating.
6. Hats, goggles, and plastic protective clothes, in case you're fussy.
7. The people who live in town have the huge advantage of garden hoses, brought out their front doors.

Retribution

So, every afternoon, a few hundred thousand people are walking around the city trying to defend themselves, get where they're going, have fun, dance, be seen and see people they know, while nailing anyone who seems like they might deserve it. When we got back home, a while ago, I was totally colored red, purple, green, blue, pink, black, etc. I was soaking wet. A shower took off most of the ink, but I will wear the rest like war wounds all week.

I wish I had known about this when I was a teenager, because, obviously, that's who these segments seem to be designed for. I would have loved it. My favorite part is the chance to employ a little strategy and tactics. Anyone with a fair knowledge of these subjects has a big advantage during *Carnaval*. It's very good to have a "squad" of three to five people, and you see many of such groups walking around, looking for trouble. Today it was just Marci and me, but we were still able to raise a little hell. Marci says I act like I'm 12-years-old, but gets a kick out of me, I guess. She even follows orders, somewhat, when we're "deployed".

Most celebrants just direct their fire sort of randomly. Remember, most streets are packed with people. Any passerby is fair game, except babies (usually) and the folks who are working, selling beer, mixed drinks, food, playing in bands, etc. A lot of teenage boys like to squirt the teenage girls, of course. Before we head down each block, I hesitate at the corner, assessing the situation ahead. There will be ambushes from several doorways, families with hoses. Teenagers covered in ink can be dangerous adversaries, though fun. Most people walking around can't be very heavily armed, though there are always surprises. You see many pairs of people lugging around big bags of water balloons. The "battles" have all the strategy of laser tag or, better, paint ball, with the chaos of real warfare.

My goal is to get down each block getting soaked and inked as little as possible, while dishing out as much retribution as I and my squad can. Let me explain what I mean by retribution. Invariably, there is a 12-year-old with a hose near his front door. His family surrounds him, sitting in lawn chairs, drinking and laughing. Everyone in the street gets squirted by the hose. The juvenile delinquent's cousins hurl an occasional water balloon. When I go by, if I'm left alone or the kid is taking fire himself, I'll walk on. But if he's just squiring away and no one is firing back because they're so outgunned, then it's time for a little tactics. I head to the wall on the same side of the street and look back. For some reason, they rarely expect attack except from in front of them, from the street. They don't expect flanking maneuvers. I hug the wall, hide behind pillars and other people, working my way back through the crowd, but just the fewer people on the sidewalk. Then I come out of nowhere, running in from the side or even from behind, maybe with my entire squad from both directions and let them have it in the faces at close range with our foam cans, hoping the shock and awe will allow us to run for cover before getting drenched. Devastating and lots of fun. Retribution. Next year, I'm going to have a special T-shirt made that just says, RETRIBUTION!

Other Fun

Maybe you know that Latin women tend to wear tight, sexy clothes. Cleavages are common with any kind of dress, even the most casual. Let me also mention that the foam cans they sell for *Carnaval* really have a great output. They're from Brazil and cost \$1 each and contain quite a lot of high-volume foam. As you know from your physics, the foam gets very cold when it comes out.

So another of my favorite "strategies" is to completely fill available cleavages at close range with cold foam as the "exposed" ladies walk by. Much fun! Amazingly, I haven't been slapped yet. Quick on mi feet, Mon!

In the mornings, peace, but not normalcy, returns to the city for a while. Workers come out to clean up the mess from the night before. Some people get a little sleep, though loud music can still be heard coming from many places all over town. For three days, people sleep in the mornings, engage in drunken chaos in the afternoon (all good, clean fun), and dance all night. There are many parades and may very big parties.

It gets a little more brutal each day. I really think one day would be enough, but there are three! It's funny, we British tend to under-do things. Think of an Eric Clapton solo. Latins tend to overdo things. Think of Brazilian thong bikinis.

Well, it will soon be time to dance again!







And, of course, the Queen!

[20120220-03](#) 19:39 Art Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

Holy cow!!! I am probably a bit old for that these days but your description makes it sound fun. As a good Protestant Midwest farm boy, I knew nothing about any of this until my senior year in college, when the Citadel Summerall Guards marched in the New Orleans Mardi Gras Parade. The Parade was something, but the night life was something yet again. We used to say "Meet you in the gutter in front of Pat O'Brien's at 2300". Later as young 2nd LT in Germany I went to my first Fasching party in Bavaria. Let's just say the costumes again shocked my young sensitive Midwest soul. Being a Catholic ain't so bad after all.

You are a devil. Have fun!!!

[Bavarians are wilder than Bolivians by far! I love `em! -SteveB]

[20120220-04](#) 20:24 Cândida Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

:D. It seems amazing!!! I wish I were there! eheheh

Big hugs!! And a great *Carnava*!!!

20120220-05 21:46 Bill Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

Viva la Retribucion!

20120220-06 22:30 Ben Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

This is like most awesome. I bet you get worn out after a few hours of this, drunk, or not. I know my few experiences with laser tag left me limp, and very, very sore for almost a week. This sounds like laser tag without the timeouts between games...

20120220-07 23:08 Larry Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

That's great Steve Baker Hemingway. Very colorful etc. [My cousin exaggerates, but I love him. I don't drink nearly as much as Papa Hemingway! -SteveB]

Be careful.

20120220-01 14:02 BrentR Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, above)

From Brent (Feb. 19, 2012, 2:02 pm)—reply to SteveB, above, ref: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra

Glad to hear you are in Bolivia!! How long are you there for? We are in Southern Chile until probably May.

Hope you have fun..... My trick was to load the back of my pickup full of barrels full of water with paint and perfume and what ever else makes for fun gooey messy(usually a little poly plus(drilling additive that makes water like snot!) too, just for extra gooey fun) and a 5 hp Honda pump with a 1 inch hose for distance!!!

20120220-02 17:35 SteveB "Inside Rick Santorum's Head"

"Inside Rick Santorum's Head" by Jim Hightower, Nation of Change

Feb. 20, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/inside-rick-santorum-s-head-1329747965>)

Rick Santorum is the latest darling of the most extreme of the GOP's extremist voters. Here's just an earful of this guy's moral piety.

Let's start where it all starts for us humans: conception. Not only does Santorum insist that life begins at the instant that a sperm contacts an egg, he also wants to preserve the sanctity of sperm itself by outlawing birth control. Yes, every sperm counts. Last October, he warned about "the dangers of contraception in this country...It's not OK. It's a license to do things in a sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be."

Indeed, Ayatollah Rick is a bit obsessed with what you might be doing in your bedroom. The Supreme Court, he asserts, was wrong to rule that we have a right to consensual sex in our homes. "Then you have the right to bigamy," he wails, "the right to polygamy...to incest...adultery...the right to anything." Then comes his punch line: "This right to privacy doesn't exist in my opinion in the United States Constitution."

In a January interview on CNN, the sanctimonious Santorum offered another startling insight into his moral code. When asked what he'd say to his daughter if she had been raped, was pregnant, and was crying for an abortion, he actually said, "the right approach is to accept this horribly created, in the sense of rape...gift of life and accept what God is giving you." He added that his daughter — and presumably yours, too — ought to "make the best out of a bad situation."

So much Rick, so little time. I haven't even gotten to global warming ("no such thing," he says), or his endorsement of the Crusades as being about "core American values," or his comparison of homosexuality to "man-on-dog" sex. But, with the national spotlight now on Santorum, we can count on many more Rickisms to enlighten us.

20120220-08 23:59 SteveB Photo: Carnaval 2012

<http://www.eldeber.com.bo/nota.php?id=120219012239>

Davinia Fernández, 2012 Queen of Carnaval, Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #79 — FEB. 22, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Toward More Egalitarian Health Care

(posted by Pam McRae, Feb. 22, 2012)

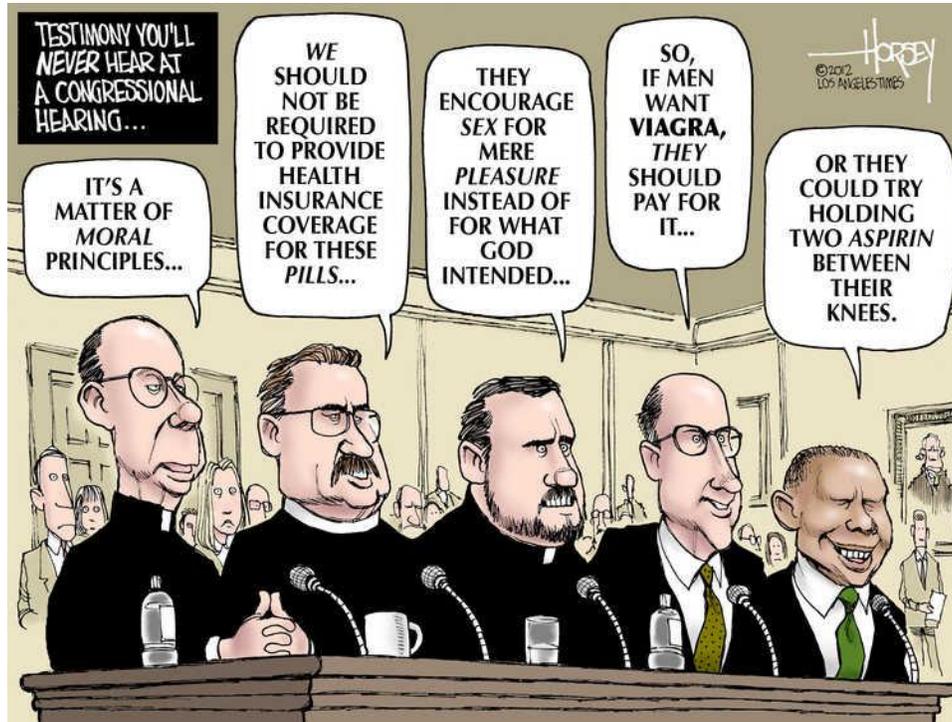
It's been a while since I fulminated about health care in America, so tonight when I heard a piece on NPR about folks struggling without health insurance, I felt that old, familiar tingle of outrage that I have experienced ever since living in Canada back in the 'seventies. You know my mantra is, "universal coverage, single payer." As legal residents, not citizens, in Canada, my family was covered from day one. With two, then three children, this coverage was a godsend. Ever since living under the Canadian system, I have been a strong proponent of comprehensive health care insurance, based on income, not employment. Why does health insurance have to be tied to one's job? Car insurance isn't. Home insurance isn't. Life insurance isn't. People these days turn down jobs because they fear losing coverage, forgo divorce for fear of losing coverage, stay in jobs they hate because they need the coverage. What is the logic in coupling health insurance and employment? If we had one system--or ten regional systems--that covered everyone within a geographic area, based on population, wouldn't that drastically limit the paperwork and bureaucracy that clog the system we have now? Why can't health care be provided much the same way food is? You may not be able to get imported Greek olives in Podunk, Kansas, but you won't starve for lack of basic foodstuffs either. I'm not saying absolutely everyone should get the same high-tech care, but everyone should have access to life-saving and preventive care, no matter where they live or what they do for a living. Will this mean rationing? Perhaps it will. Champagne and caviar are rationed too. But no American should face bankruptcy or death because they can't afford adequate health care. Just as we ensure that people don't starve in our streets or aren't denied an education, so too we should make sure that every resident of the U.S. can see a doctor and fill a prescription without declaring bankruptcy. Other countries have better systems than ours and get better results for less money. Why can't we learn from them instead of braying about how great we are, when the statistics totally contradict that claim? OK, everyone. Let me have it. Give it your best shot. If you can convince me that our system works, I will happily agree with you. And I'm not talking about Obamacare, which is an improvement not a complete fix.

20120221-12 21:21 SteveG Re: Toward More Egalitarian Health Care (reply to Pam, above)
--

Our system does not work.

Just watched a piece on local news about a local cancer center and patients having to wait at times 3 months without their medications because of shortages, doctors/clinics having to trade medications = you know low profit margins are not conducive to good health.

I take 6 medications a day – all generics – none made in the US – India , Thailand, and Israel seem to be the major manufacturers of generics. Keep the mantra alive!



20120221-06 12:25 Pam Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #78)

This is not a response to your assessment of Obama's chances for re-election, rather a comment on the craziness that is Carnaval in your beloved Bolivia. I must be too English, too repressed, too much of an introvert to see the pleasure in being smushed in a noisy crowd with gunk being poured all over me. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I think it's an interesting phenomenon that intensely Christian countries and communities go in for this sort of ribaldry. It speaks to the general heated-upedness of the Latin temperament, I suppose. Those of us with roots in the chilly north take our pleasures more sedately. In Bolivia, you get Carnaval. At Downton Abbey, you get the servants' ball, where the butler dances with the grand dame. We all need a bit of topsy turvey now and then. I just find it interesting the various ways in which various cultures approach letting go of the reins.

[And I left out the erotic parts! It's definitely not for everyone! Especially with guys like me roaming around. ^_^ The Latin temperament really does need a little cooling down at times! –SteveB]

20120221-09 13:26 SteveB Re: Carnaval Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to Pam, above)

And I wish you hadn't told me about the servants' ball and the (gack) butler dancing with, of all people, the grand dame. Now I'm so excited I have goose bumps all over! When will they settle down and get civilized? I'm gonna go take a cold shower, then go hit *Carnaval* some more. That should cool me down! ^_^



Do we really need to be this intrusive except for the tendency of some "leaders" to try to control the whole world?

http://nationalpostnews.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/fo1029_usbases12001.gif

[WOW! Wish I could get the whole thing in the FotM Newsletter, but it's just too big. You owe it to yourself to follow the link and take a look at this monster. -SteveB]

"I Will Defend the 2nd Amendment" by Rick Santorum, Guns & Patriots

Feb. 21, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=49590>)

(Keystone State GOP White House hopeful talks gun rights.)

Coming from Pennsylvania, a state with a rich heritage of hunting and fishing, I understand firsthand the importance of preserving our constitutionally protected rights found in the second Amendment.

I fight to preserve this tradition, and will work to ensure these rights are not infringed upon.

As a Senator, I opposed frivolous lawsuits against the gun industry by supporting legislation, such as the Protection of Lawful Commerce Act that would protect law abiding firearms manufacturers and dealers from frivolous lawsuits attempting to hold them liable for criminal acts of third parties.

I also vehemently opposed the Assault Weapons Ban because I believe that there are more effective ways to stop gun violence, such as stricter enforcement of existing laws, than taking away the rights of law abiding gun owners.

It was with pride that I was the author of legislation to eliminate the requirement that all hunters and fishermen furnish their social security numbers when getting a license. It was estimated that this legislation would help save 16 million hunters and another 24 million fishermen who buy their licenses every year from falling victim to identity theft.

It is also with pride that for my work on behalf of gun owners and sportsmen across the country, I consistently received the highest possible ratings from the National Rifle Association and gun owners groups from around the country.

20120221-04	11:57	SteveB	"Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns"
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It seems Republicans have already lost a lot of support from:

1. Teachers and college students.
2. Retired People who paid for and expect to receive Social Security and Medicare insurance.
3. The millions with mortgages under water.
4. The millions without healthcare insurance.
5. Anyone who earns a wage and noticed the Republicans in Congress wanted badly to raise their taxes, but not those of the rich.
6. Thinking adults.

Now they're p*ssing off the women! (see article below)

Look what and who's left: A giant, nasty, divisive, internal and external GOP war. Rick Santorum. The evangelicals. The militias. The gun clubs. The KKK. Rush Limbaugh. Sarah Palin. Herman Cain. Rick Perry. The rest of the wackos.

Poor GOP...looks like a slam dunk for Barry.

"Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" by Laura Bassett, Huffington Post

Feb. 20, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/20/birth-control-republicans-democrats_n_1289166.html)

Where are the women?

The question, posed by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) to an all-male panel at Thursday's House Oversight Committee hearing on a new birth control coverage requirement, has rapidly turned into a political rallying cry, sparking a viral online campaign and lighting a fire under Democratic campaigns.

It has also put a coda of sorts on a culture war argument that erupted several weeks ago. A debate that began with the straightforward constitutional question of what the government could instruct religious institutions to do with respect to health care coverage has become the most galvanizing political issue for Democrats since the president introduced his jobs act last fall.

A series of incendiary events has thrust the issue of contraception to the forefront of the national discussion in the past few weeks. There was an outcry after Obama introduced the rule, which requires most religiously affiliated employers to cover birth control for their employees. Soon after, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the nation's largest breast cancer charity, cut off funds to Planned Parenthood, which provides affordable cancer screenings and contraception to millions of low-income women, because some of its locations also perform abortions. The ensuing controversy sparked a massive national discussion about the politicization of women's health and coaxed GOP politicians, such as former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, into taking sides.

Just as the Komen controversy died down, Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) introduced an amendment that would have allowed insurers to opt out of covering any form of health care to which they morally objected. This, in itself, was

low hanging fruit for the Democrats. But when House Republicans convened an all-male panel to discuss contraception, and when Foster Friess, a top financial backer of former Sen. Rick Santorum's presidential campaign, said that pregnancies could be prevented by "gals" putting Bayer Aspirin "between their knees," campaign consultants had the type of political imagery that they could only dream of. For Democratic lawmakers, it couldn't have come at a more opportune time, giving them the chance to launch a well-oiled, comprehensive effort to lock in women's votes ahead of the 2012 elections.

EMILY's List, a political action committee dedicated to electing Democratic women to Congress, has launched a multi-pronged effort to rally voters around the birth control issue. The group has sent out multiple fundraising emails and created a new television ad, which features Friess' comment and the image from the all-male Congressional hearing, in order to emphasize the need for more progressive women in leadership roles. Although Jess McIntosh, communications director for EMILY's List, did not reveal the amount of money the group has raised in the past two weeks, she said it's clear that the latest drive for money and supporters has been a huge success.

"We added over 60,000 members in the last couple weeks," McIntosh told The Huffington Post Friday. "We had over 30,000 petition signers just yesterday for a petition about the birth control mandate, which is unusual. We have raised more money for candidates at this point in the cycle than ever before, and we've definitely seen an uptick in also how active these folks are."

Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), who chairs the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, sent a fundraising email and petition drive out to DSCC supporters urging them to oppose both the Blunt amendment and the "aspirin agenda." A petition about the "aspirin agenda" collected over 65,000 signatures in one day. A similar "Where are the women?" petition circulated by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has collected over 250,000 signatures since it went out late Thursday night.

State Democratic parties and individual campaigns have also been able to use the federal birth control controversy to drum up local support. The Virginia Democratic Party, for instance, claims to have raised an unusually high amount of money and saw a "spike in interaction" in the two days following Issa's birth control hearing.

"People kind of came to life about this issue. Across the board, we have seen a considerable uptick in the financial response our people have had to what's going on," said Brian Coy, a spokesperson for the Virginia Democrats. "We've raised thousands of dollars over the last 48 hours over this, which is absolutely not normal, and we've seen a huge uptick in Facebook and Twitter activity."

Maggie Hassan, a Democrat running for governor of New Hampshire, said her campaign has also seen a considerable increase in donations and support since birth control rose to the forefront of the national discussion.

"All the men talking about birth control really is, I think, generating this kind of disbelief, and it's really firing people up," she told HuffPost. "We're beginning to see a lot of discussion about it on our Facebook pages, I get asked about it at house parties, and it's definitely motivating people to give money. Most of us, certainly in my generation -- we all thought this was settled."

Republican campaigns have been much more reluctant to discuss their fundraising efforts or success around the birth control issue. The National Republican Senatorial Committee circulated only one petition about the birth control rule, but left the words "birth control," "contraception," and "women's health" entirely out of it, focusing instead on the issue of religious freedom. The petition had only received 15,000 signatures by Monday afternoon -- a fraction of the DCCC's 250,000.

When asked about fundraising efforts, a staffer at the NRSC said only that it's hard to see how the DSCC's "gender war spin" can be taken seriously when two female GOP Senate candidates, Sarah Steelman in Missouri and Heather Wilson in New Mexico, oppose Obama's birth control rule.

Susan B. Anthony List, the anti-abortion alternative to EMILY's List, said it has been too busy educating people about the contraception mandate to fundraise around it. "We have not fundraised off of it yet, but we do plan to use it in races where we think it will make a difference," said SBA List president Marjorie Dannenfelser. "I think it will work in our direction. It is an underestimation of women that they are going to see this issue as being about

creating barriers to contraception and abortifacients -- that's not what this is. It's about something so much more fundamental: the right of conscience and religious liberty for all people, including women."

The Republican National Committee did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this article.

Whether the Democrats can hold onto their momentum after the uproar over birth control dies down remains to be seen, but it's clear that they see their stance on the issue as crucial for rallying women voters in 2012. Obama relied on the women's vote to win the presidency in 2008, winning ten million more votes from women than men. The unexpected controversy around an issue as fundamental to women's health as birth control is making it easy for Democratic campaigns to fire up those same voters once again.

"The fortunate or unfortunate thing about this attack on women's health is that you don't really need strategies to incense people," said Coy. "The task is just to make sure people know that it's happening."

None of this would have been possible, it seems, had the birth control debate expanded beyond its original focus. At first, it was confined to a very limited question: could the federal government compel religious institutions to include contraception coverage in the health care plans they offered employees?

But questions of religious liberties were soon overshadowed by gender politics on the Hill. First, Blunt (R-Mo.) introduced an amendment to the surface transportation bill that would completely roll back the president's birth control coverage rule and remove all of the non-discrimination protections from the Affordable Care Act. It was done under the auspices of decreasing regulations and boosting the free market. But many said that because the measure would essentially allow any employer or insurer to refuse to cover contraception, maternity care, or any other health care service by claiming a moral objection to it, it carried with it a true threat to women's health care.

Friess' comments later that week caused further problems. Hammering the problematic imagery home even further, Bishop William Lori, the first witness on the House Oversight Committee's all-male panel on religious liberty, spent a full ten minutes comparing birth control to a ham sandwich. "The government recognized that it is absurd for someone to come into a kosher deli and demand a ham sandwich," Lori said of Obama's revised birth control rule, "that it is downright surreal to apply this coercive power when the customer can get the same sandwich cheaply, or even free, just a few doors down."

Women's groups say they are not going to let that kind of rhetoric slide.

"It's a shame and it's appalling and it makes everybody really mad, but it's lucky we have a place to put all that energy," said McIntosh. "We have the luxury of saying, 'Yes, this is terrible, but look at all these great alternatives.' The women in office are on the front lines in this fight. Women like [Sen.] Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and [Sen.] Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) are standing up to the right, and everybody wants to send them more reinforcements."

20120221-05	12:23	SteveG	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Newt is back on the trail with his assertions that Obama is the most dangerous president, Buchanan is on the trail with his book, there is still talk of drafting someone else, there are new millionaires/billionaires throwing their free speech money into the Super PAC's. Remember the Swift Boat ads – they don't have to be true, just a lot of them.

20120221-08	13:20	SteveB	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveG, above)
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They get a ton of mileage out of those Barry issues, don't they?

1. He wasn't born here.
2. Nobody knew him in college.
3. He's a Muslim.

4. He's a socialist.
5. He's dangerous in some way undefined by the likes of Gingrich, Perry, Cain, Bachmann, Santorum, or Palin...all of whom, ironically, would be utterly dangerous because they are either idiots or twisted into pretzels.
6. "Shovel-ready" wasn't shovel-ready.

I worry about the Super-PACs and hate them, but when we get to the election, I think all the poison will come home to roost where we all know it belongs—its source. People are already getting sick of all the attacks, I think.

Lovin' the trip!

20120221-07	12:28	Pam	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
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This election is for sale, and no one is even trying to deny it. It's like Rome before the fall. Crazy beliefs abound, those who aren't decadent are moralistic, and women are occasions of sin once again. Crikey.

20120221-15	22:52	SteveG	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
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In Texas before a woman can have an abortion she has to have a doctor perform a sonogram, listen to the doctor's description of what is seen, is offered to hear the heartbeat, and has to wait another 24 hours. Virginia has a similar law being introduced. Insanity rules when it comes to health care in the US.

20120221-11	20:07	Art	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to all, above)
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I'm sorry. There are 7 Billion people on this planet and we are about to 'expend resource' ourselves (humanity) out of existence. What utter cr*p! Does anyone read beyond 'People' these days? Let's hope SteveB's last bullet [thinking adults] is correct.

20120221-10	17:31	SteveG	"Woman Keeps Hapless Robber as Sex Slave"
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Our "Stupid Is as Stupid Does" Department...



But Repubs don't want Mittens...

Hey, Rush, what do you mean "explain his statement"? How do you "explain" Satan himself, hell-bent on sending America the Great down in flames to you-know-where?

Perhaps Mr. Santorum's Achilles Heel:

"We look at the shape of mainline Protestantism in this country, and it is in shambles. It is gone from the world of Christianity as I see it," Santorum said.

The Evangelicals ain't gonna like that! Maybe Santorum is really a Muslim sent in disguise by, you guessed it, Satan himself! Maybe he's really part of the plot to get President Obama re-elected? Maybe Santorum, gulp, Satan himself?

Nah, forget it. I was just trying to think like a Republican.

"Rush Limbaugh on Santorum and Satan" by Mackenzie Weinger, Politico

Feb. 21, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73137.html>)

(Rush says Rick Santorum will have to explain his 2008 statement.)

Rush Limbaugh said on his radio show Tuesday that Rick Santorum will have to explain his warning that "Satan has his sights on the United States of America."

"It's part of the predictable attempt to impugn Santorum as an absolute religious nut and wacko," Limbaugh said. "But he did say these things and he'll have to have an answer for these things when queried."

The speech Santorum made at Ave Maria University in 2008 in which he said Satan has set his sights on the United States exploded across the Web and headlined the Drudge Report on Tuesday.

"This is a spiritual war. And the Father of Lies has his sights on what you would think the Father of Lies would have his sights on: a good, decent, powerful, influential country — the United States of America. If you were Satan, who would you attack in this day and age," the Republican presidential contender said in August 2008. "He attacks all of us and he attacks all of our institutions."

"Satan is attacking the great institutions of America, using those great vices of pride, vanity and sensuality as the root to attack all of these strong plants that have so deeply rooted in the American tradition," Santorum added.

Limbaugh, who said the focus on Santorum's speech shows that a "double standard does exist," added that the former Pennsylvania senator's comments are "not the kind of stuff you hear a presidential candidate talk about."

"That stuff is out there," Limbaugh said, according to a transcript of the show. "It's headlined on Drudge and the left has it, and Santorum will have to deal with it. He'll have to answer it. I don't know. It's just not the kind of stuff you hear a presidential candidate talk about. It's not ordinary in that sense."

In the speech, Santorum also said Satan was "the most and first successful" in conquering academia, which he said "a long time ago fell."

The next, Santorum said, "was the church."

I knew I couldn't think like a Republican better than a Republican!

So, once again, folks, it's President Obama who's the Muslim!

"Rick Santorum Aide: Obama's 'Radical Islamic Policies'" by Mackenzie Weinger, Politico

Feb. 20, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73084.html>)

(The spokeswoman quickly called MSNBC after the segment to say she misspoke.) [Big deal! –SteveB]

Rick Santorum's spokeswoman Alice Stewart said in a TV interview on Monday that Santorum was referring to President Barack Obama's "radical Islamic policies" when he said the president's agenda was driven by "phony theology" — but then quickly called up MSNBC after the segment aired to say she misspoke.

"There is a type of theological secularism when it comes to the global warmists in this country. That's what he was referring to. He was referring to the president's policies in terms of the radical Islamic policies the president has," Stewart said on "Andrea Mitchell Reports."

Mitchell later said on the air that Stewart phoned the show after the interview to say she had slipped up and said "radical Islamic policies" instead of Obama's "radical environmental policies."

Mitchell noted she had missed Stewart's phrasing of "radical Islamic policies" during the live interview.

"She had repeatedly said during that same interview 'radical environmental policies' and she said she slipped when she apparently said [it]," Mitchell said. "I did not hear it, or I would have caught her on it and tried to get a correction at the moment. I really, frankly, did not hear her use the word Islamic, but the tape tells the tale."

Santorum said in Ohio on Saturday that Obama's agenda is "not about you. It's not about your quality of life. It's not about your jobs. It's about some phony ideal, some phony theology. Oh, not a theology based on the Bible, a different theology, but no less a theology."

Santorum stood by his remarks later, telling reporters he wasn't suggesting Obama is less of a Christian.

"No one's suggesting that," he said. "I'm suggesting, obviously we all know in the Christian church there are a lot of different stripes of Christianity. I'm just saying he's imposing his values on the church and I think that's wrong. ... If the president says he's a Christian, he's a Christian."

Santorum said on Sunday that he was referring to what he described as Obama's radical views on the environment and on Monday, he continued attacking the president's environmental record on the campaign trail.

During a panel discussion on MSNBC on Monday after Stewart's slip of the tongue, The Washington Post's Anne Kornblut said she thought Stewart would apologize for the comment, but that it may not stop conspiracy theorists from grabbing onto her statement.

"I expect we're going to hear more from Alice Stewart apologizing about those remarks. But there will be conspiracy theorists thinking it was some kind of message she was trying to get out or it was really on the mind of the Santorum campaign when they are talking about President Obama," Kornblut said.

<http://www.travelblog.org/>

Poppies and Grape Vines, Sonoma Valley



Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #80 — FEB. 23, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

The Sanctity and Sacredness of Sperm

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 23, 2012)

It feels like we are being driven back to the Dark Ages. Perhaps, as with Pam's Jonathan Swift, a little satire can shed light on the subject. That's what we always hope here around our Friends of the Middle offices, anyway. We love satire and hate hypocrisy.

Unfortunately, at this time in American history, it seems to us that all the satire sits on one side of the aisle, while all the hypocrisy lurks on the other.

If there is any middle ground that has been found in this battle, it is that of President Obama, who seeks to reduce the number of abortions without imposing the stupid government on the rights of women. And, believe me, human rights are more important than gun rights any day of the week. If the pro-life positions of the Right are not hypocritical, then why is their total concern with/against women? What about the death penalty, wars, torture, and men's role in reproduction? And if they oppose government intrusion in areas dominated by men—like guns and money—why not oppose this intrusion on the rights of women? The government will never "know" when life begins. Never! Hypocrisy lives and thrives in the Republican party.

"Georgia Democrats Propose Limitations on Vasectomies for Men" by Jamie Gumbrecht, CNN

Feb. 21, 2012, (<http://news.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/21/georgia-democrats-to-propose-limitations-on-vasectomies-for-men/>)

As members of Georgia's House of Representatives debate whether to prohibit abortions for women more than 20 weeks pregnant, House Democrats introduced their own reproductive rights plan: No more vasectomies that leave "thousands of children ... deprived of birth."

Rep. Yasmin Neal, a Democrat from the Atlanta suburb of Jonesboro, planned on Wednesday to introduce HB 1116, which would prevent men from vasectomies unless needed to avert serious injury or death.

The bill reads: "It is patently unfair that men avoid the rewards of unwanted fatherhood by presuming that their judgment over such matters is more valid than the judgment of the General Assembly. ... It is the purpose of the General Assembly to assert an invasive state interest in the reproductive habits of men in this state and substitute the will of the government over the will of adult men."

"If we legislate women's bodies, it's only fair that we legislate men's," said Neal, who said she wanted to write bill that would generate emotion and conversation the way anti-abortion bills do. "There are too many problems in the state. Why are you under the skirts of women? I'm sure there are other places to be."

Personally, Neal said, she has no qualms with vasectomies.

"But even if it were proposed as a serious issue," she said, "it's still not my place as a woman to tell a man what to do with his body."

The anti-vasectomy bill was a response to a bill that would punish abortions performed after the 20th week of pregnancy with prison sentences between one and 10 years. Georgia law currently prohibits abortion after the second trimester, except to preserve the life and health of the mother. Neal's bill borrows some language directly from the anti-abortion bill.

The anti-abortion bill makes exceptions to avert death or "serious risk of substantial and irreversible physical impairment of a major bodily function" of the mother, but doesn't include "diagnosis or claim of a mental or emotional condition." If an abortion occurs after the 20th week, the bill requires doctors to attempt to deliver a living baby.

Earlier discussions about the bill have been "outstanding," said Rep. Doug McKillip, a Republican from Athens, Georgia, who introduced the anti-abortion bill this month. He said legislators are "drilling down" on questions about when a fetus can feel pain and what exceptions can allow abortions later in pregnancy, and he expects more testimony late this week.

"I'm just disappointed in my colleague, that they would take this opportunity to make light of a very important topic," McKillip said. "I believe this is a serious topic deserving of serious debate. It feels like a poor attempt at humor."

Neal said she's serious about making legislators recognize women's rights to make private decisions about their bodies.

"I hope that through the madness this has caused, it gets him to understand where the woman is coming from," she said. "There are a number of women in other states trying the same plays we're trying here."

Earlier this month, Democratic Oklahoma Sen. Constance Johnson added – then withdrew – a provision to an anti-abortion bill that read "any action in which a man ejaculates or otherwise deposits semen anywhere but in a woman's vagina shall be interpreted and construed as an action against an unborn child." The state Senate passed the bill this month.

In January, as the Virginia state Senate debated a bill that required women to have an ultrasound before an abortion, Democrat Janet Howell attached an amendment that required men to have rectal exams and cardiac stress tests before they could receive prescriptions for erectile dysfunction medication like Viagra. The amendment was rejected in the Senate, 21-19.

CNN affiliate WAVY reported that hundreds gathered this week to protest the ultrasound bill, which is up for a vote in Virginia's House of Delegates, and another that says life begins at conception.

On the Georgia House floor, Neal doesn't anticipate her anti-vasectomy bill will generate much serious debate.

"If it moves anywhere," she said, "that'll be a very interesting day."

[Comment posted by Majav:](#)

I just want to know how far these pro death penalty warmonger men are going to reach up into women's privacy. Will they convict an alcoholic woman who drank so much she miscarried? Will these men be so disgusted by her act of negligence that they will seek the death penalty?

A woman gives life to the child. The state does not give life. If she chooses to end her pregnancy that's strictly her choice too. How she does it should be as medically safe as possible. Making it illegal will compel already vulnerable women to make extremely dangerous choices.

We don't see the state giving life to a child, but we see life taken away by the state as in capital punishment and endless wars.

Why are Republican men so pro-life with unborn babies but so calloused in taking away life with capital punishment and war? Guilty felons? What about innocent young men dying in the military?

Maybe that woman drank so much because her husband and brother were both killed in combat and she couldn't stand to bring another life into a world that worships death and destruction more than decency.

Pro-lifers should also be pacifists and anti-capital punishment. Yet, Catholic Santorum and Catholic Gingrich are staunchly pro gun pro military and pro death penalty- the latter being explicitly forbidden by the Pope.

These men do not have consciences. They read polls and wager their campaigns on the most ignorant, backward, and irrational voters imaginable. After years of this opportunistic kowtowing they actually believe the rubbish that spills from their lips.

[20120222-01](#) 07:15 SteveB Rick Santorum as Depicted by Ron Paul (Who Must Be Satan in Disguise!)



[20120222-02](#) 08:02 MarthaH "Lawmaker: 'Radical' Girl Scouts Out to Destroy 'American Family Values'"

Hoosier idiot...

"Lawmaker: 'Radical' Girl Scouts Out to Destroy 'American Family Values'" by NBC/MSNBC

Feb. 21, 2012, (<http://usnews.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/02/21/10469492-lawmaker-radical-girl-scouts-out-to-destroy-american-family-values>)

(Indiana state Rep. Bob Morris, R-Fort Wayne, accuses the Girl Scouts of celebrating feminists, lesbians and communists.)

There's an agenda behind those cookies the Girl Scouts sell, one bent on promoting communism, lesbianism and subverting "traditional American family values," according to an Indiana lawmaker.

That's the reason Rep. Bob Morris, a Republican representing Fort Wayne, insists he won't go along with a resolution meant to honor the Girl Scouts on the organization's 100th anniversary.

Morris owns a chain of nutrition stores, but it's not the fat and sugar in Girl Scout cookies that have him riled up.

"After talking to some well-informed constituents, I did a small amount of Web-based research, and what I found is disturbing," Morris wrote Saturday to Republican House colleagues in a letter obtained by the *Fort Wayne Journal Gazette*.

Morris alleged that the Girl Scouts of America and the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts "have entered into a close strategic affiliation with Planned Parenthood," which he claimed is trying to "sexualiz(e) young girls through the Girl Scouts."

Even worse, he wrote, only three of the 50 role models promoted by the Girl Scouts have even "a briefly-mentioned religious background."

"All the rest are feminists, lesbians, or Communists," he wrote.

As proof, Morris notes that the "radically pro-abortion" Michelle Obama is honorary president of Girl Scouts of America, which "should give each of us reason to pause before our individual or collective endorsement of the organization."

After learning all this, he wrote, he pulled his two daughters out of the Girl Scouts and instead put them in American Heritage Girls Little Flowers, a parent-run group best described as a center for recovering Girl Scouts.

Michelle Tompkins, a spokeswoman for the Girl Scouts, responded to Morris' assertions by telling NBC station WISE of Fort Wayne, "Not only is Rep. Morris off the mark on his claims, it's also unfortunate in his limited research that he failed to discover that, since 1917, every first lady has served as the honorary leader of Girl Scouts, including Nancy Reagan, Barbara Bush and Laura Bush."

"We believe that leadership is about hearing from all sides of an issue before making up one's mind," Tompkins said. "We only wish we had the chance to speak with the freshman representative before he distributed his letter."

For its part, Planned Parenthood of Indiana called Morris' comments "inflammatory, misleading, woefully inaccurate and harmful," saying he'd insulted not only it but also the Girl Scouts and Obama.

"Planned Parenthood currently has no formal partnership with the Girl Scouts, but supports their mission and recognizes their century of contributions to our society," the organization said in a statement to NBC station WTHR of Indianapolis.

20120222-03	09:11	SteveB	"Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate"
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Obama the Socialist! LOL!

Next, I suppose the socialist, Muslim, illegal, fantastically dangerous President Obama will seize all our property?

"Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate" by AP

Feb. 22, 2012, (<http://www.wopular.com/ap-source-obama-seeks-28-percent-corp-tax-rate-21>)

(WASHINGTON) President Barack Obama is proposing to cut the corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 28 percent and wants an even lower effective rate for manufacturers, a senior administration official says, as the White House lays down an election-year marker in the debate over tax policy.

In turn, corporations would have to give up dozens of loopholes and subsidies that they now enjoy. Corporations with overseas operations would also face a minimum tax on their foreign earnings.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner on Wednesday was to detail aspects of Obama's proposed overhaul of the corporate tax system, a plan the president outlined in general terms in his State of the Union speech last month.

Chances of accomplishing such change in the tax system are slim in a year dominated mostly with presidential and congressional elections. But for Obama, the proposal is part of a larger tax plan that is central to his re-election strategy.

The corporate tax plan dovetails with Obama's call for raising taxes on millionaires and maintaining current rates on individuals making \$200,000 or less.

The 35 percent nominal corporate tax rate is the highest in the world after Japan. But deductions, credits and exemptions allow many corporations to pay taxes at a much lower rate.

Under the framework proposed by the administration, the rate cuts, closed loopholes and the minimum tax on overseas earning would result in no increase to the deficit.

That means that many businesses that slip through loopholes or enjoy subsidies and pay an effective tax rate that is substantially less than the 35 percent corporate tax could end up paying more under Obama's plan. Others, however, would pay less while some would simply benefit from a more simplified system.

The official said the Obama plan aims to help U.S. businesses, especially manufacturers who face strong international competition. Obama's plan would lower the effective rate for manufacturers to 25 percent while emphasizing development of clean energy systems. The administration official spoke on condition of anonymity to describe what the administration will do.

The New York Times first reported details of the plan in its online edition early Wednesday.

Many members of both parties have said they favor overhauling the nation's individual and corporate tax systems, which they complain have rates that are too high and are riddled with too many deductions.

The corporate tax debate has made its way into the presidential contest. Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney has called for a 25 percent rate, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., would cut the corporate tax rate to 12.5 percent, and former Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., would exempt domestic manufacturers from the corporate tax and halve the top rate for other businesses.

While Obama has been promoting various aspects of his economic agenda in personal appearances and speeches, the decision to leave the corporate tax plan to the Treasury Department to unveil signaled its lower priority.

What's more, the administration's framework leaves much for Congress to decide — a deliberate move by the administration to encourage negotiations but which also doesn't subject the plan to detailed scrutiny.

Obama's plan is not as ambitious as a House Republican proposal that would lower the corporate rate to 25 percent.

Still, Obama has said corporate tax rates are too high and has proposed eliminating tax breaks for American companies that move jobs and profits overseas. He also has proposed giving tax breaks to U.S. manufacturers, to

firms that return jobs to this country and to companies that relocate to some communities that have lost big employers.

Geithner told a House committee last week that the administration wants to create more incentives for corporations to invest in the United States.

"We want to bring down the rate, and we think we can, to a level that's closer to the average of that of our major competitors," Geithner told the House Ways and Means Committee.

White House economic adviser Gene Sperling has advocated a minimum tax on global profits. Currently many corporations do not invest overseas profits in the United States to avoid the 35 percent tax rate.

(Associated Press writer Alan Fram contributed to this report.)

20120222-05	13:07	SteveBA	Re: "Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate" (reply to SteveB, above)
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I'm afraid you're like the frog who kept being immersed into increasingly hotter water, so he never felt the "change".....he died just the same.

[Kinda like what I say about global warming. -SteveB]

20120222-17	19:57	SteveB	Re: "Obama Seeks 28 Percent Corporate Tax Rate" (reply to SteveBA, above)
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Ah...just like my hot tub. I love it!

"Republicans who claim that Obama in his first term was the most socialist president they can imagine clearly don't have much imagination." -- Geoffrey Kabaservice

(<http://www.tnr.com/article/politics/100893/barry-goldwater-santorum-republican-establishment-hidden-conservative-majority>)

20120222-04	09:30	SteveB	From the Right: Is President Obama a Christian?
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PLEASE! Can we just STOP being IDIOTS and leave this BS behind??? It is so very offensive, people!!!

I always thought that if any man told a Christian that he was a Christian too, well, that was the end of it. Perhaps if the answer is not believed, perhaps it is the inquirer who is not Christian...

"One step removed from accusing people of witchcraft."

from Politico's forum: The Arena, Feb. 22, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/arena/>)

Erika Lovley (Moderator): Evangelist Franklin Graham yesterday called President Obama's religious views into question, stating he does not know if Obama is a Christian. "[Obama] has said he's a Christian, so I just have to assume that he is," Graham said on MSNBC's "Morning Joe." However, Graham was much more concrete about Rick Santorum's religious views. "I think so," Graham said when asked if he believes Santorum is a Christian. "His values are so clear on moral issues. No question about it... I think he's a man of faith." Are Graham's comments a sign that religious voters are questioning Obama's faith? Or will the comments lose steam before the election?

John Anzalone (Democratic consultant, Anzalone Liszt Research): As a Christian I was appalled by this interview. I truly felt like I was listening to a modern day Pharisee. I always loved watching Billy Graham preach on TV to those big outdoor stadiums. He was a man of God, but more importantly he taught a theology of love, unlike the Christianity that is spewed by the like of Franklin and other modern day political-preachers. At the end of the day, each person has their own relationship with God and there is no room for judgment from the likes of Franklin Graham or anyone else.

Timothy Stoltzfus Jost (Law Professor at the Washington and Lee University): Some Americans have become deeply confused as to what it means to be a Christian. It is not the same as being a conservative Republican. If people would actually pay any attention to what Jesus Christ said and taught and the way he lived, they would notice that President Obama comes a lot closer to those teachings and that way of life than many of his opponents. He leads an exemplary personal and family life. He cares deeply about the poor and oppressed and about justice and righteousness. Although he does not, unlike some of his opponents, try to impose his religious beliefs on others, he often refers to his Christian beliefs and to Christian teachings. These attacks do, of course, cater to a certain element of the American electorate, but I suspect, or at least hope, that most Americans are going to tire of self-righteousness and religious bigotry by the fall election, and will vote on the basis of the issues that matter to them rather than on what some people think about other's religious beliefs. And of course, in the end, if one believes the teachings of the Bible, God, and not Franklin Graham, will judge and a lot of people are going to be surprised.

Victor Kamber (Vice President, American Income Life Insurance): Anti-Obama people will use anything to discredit him. Although Graham may think he is God, he is not. No man can judge what is in another man's heart and soul. Having been raised in a fundamentalist Christian home by a minister, I have seen all types. All professed to be Christian regardless of their words, actions or deeds. Those so called Christians that wish to hate Obama will never believe what he says whether it be about health, the economy, foreign policy or his beliefs and faith. I question people like this man who is giving the Graham name a bad one.

Steve Murphy (Democratic consultant; Managing Partner at Murphy Vogel Askew Reilly): Questioning a political candidate's religion is despicable. It has no place in civilized discourse. **It is one step removed from accusing people of witchcraft and such.** Frankly, President Obama's religious beliefs are none of this blasphemous bozo's business. Who but God makes that judgement?

20120222-10	17:42 Art	From the Right: Extremism Illustrated
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I don't know about the rest of you, but I believe very little that I read on the Internet, even the news articles. What I do enjoy, however, is reading the reader comments posted below the articles. I thought I'd share a few of those with all from time to time. The below is a sample. Shows you the intellect and depth of thinking we are up against.

posted on February 21, 2012 at 10:15pm

President Obama has been absolutely diabolical in his agenda to take guns away from Americans. How? He hasn't even mentioned it, that's how. He is concealing his true agenda and betrayed himself by remaining silent (like Scott Walker did about his anti-union views during his election). Once elected for a second term (and of course he will be) we all know what will happen. Rush Limbaugh knows, the NRA knows and all gun owners know what President Obama is thinking, because they have special powers to perceive his unspoken thoughts.

Let's be honest here. If President Obama wins the general election again (assuming there is an election!), he will become absolute dictator, a communist dictator, a socialist and totalitarian dictator, and a Marxist dictator to boot. All of 'em at once. And, once that's done, ban arms. No, not arms like legs, but firearms. No more elections, no nothin'.

Of course a few of the brave, those who have stored food and water, and bought gold and seeds for crops to feed themselves and their families will fight back. It will be hard at first, but thank to seeds which provide valuable

tomatoes, potatoes (did I spell that right?) and squash, and freeze dried food and guns, the tide will turn. The gun wielding patriots will block by block, city by city, gradually take back America! And reestablish a Democracy. Or a Republic. Or whatever we're taking back.

[20120222-18](#) 20:09 SteveG Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art, above)

Thanks, Art. It has been a rough couple of days and I needed a good laugh.

I know a couple of people like this, oh wait a minute – they live in Tennessee – do they still count?

[20120222-11](#) 17:59 SteveB Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art, above)

This one is precious, Art. I wish we could get that guy into our little discussion here. It would be a lot like bottom fishing. "Or whatever we're taking back." LOL.

What a great time this guy will have with his gun and gold and seeds when civilization collapses and millions or billions of people die horrible deaths. Ah, what great fun that will be! Maybe he'll even get to shoot a few liberals, maybe even some media types. Aren't the violence and slaughter this dude's secret goals?

There won't be any pesky taxes or government regulation and intrusion then! No Obamacare! No dangerous education! Just the law and guns in the hands of lunatics.

Thanks to seeds!

That Diabolical Obama!

This is what gets dredged to the surface and encouraged by media and politicians who live by hatred.

[20120222-12](#) 18:17 Ben Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art & SteveB, above)

Freeze-dried guns?

[20120222-13](#) 18:31 Dennis Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Art & SteveB, above)

I hate to disillusion you guys, but I think Mr. Diabolical is actually Mr. Facetious. Yes, surely he jests. You've been had!

[20120222-14](#) 18:53 Art Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above)

I dunno. I found at least a dozen more in the same vein in reponse to an NRA article. I think it's real. I even know a few like this bozo.

[20120222-23](#) 23:28 SteveG Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above)

Half jest/half real.

[20120222-16](#) 19:26 SteveB Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above) & Replay: Bob the Bigot

Maybe...but do you think this below is in jest? Dennis, do you remember our old friend, Bob? Surely, the reality makes any ruse pale by comparison. What I said stands!

From: Bob (Nov. 16., 2008):

Hey SteveB, Dennis, and all my new friends!

Sorry, all, I have not been in touch for awhile. It has been because as I told you before I live in the Congo, and I don't know how much news you have seen, but here all the n*ggers are killing each other and with any luck maybe they will kill 50% or more, well we could only be so lucky!!! Anyway just goes to show you and just wait soon all the n*ggers will be in tribal warfare in the good ole USA soon.

Well you guys did it congratulations!!!

Actually I heard the other day Obama came out and admitted that he was not going to be able to fix the economy like he had promised, but he does still think he will be able to n*gger-rig it!!!

But really we need to thank all of you for voting for Obama. However, I look at my fellow conservatives! There they go, glumly shuffling along, depressed by the election aftermath. But not me!!!! I'm virtually euphoric.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not thrilled with America's flirtation with neo-socialism. But there's a massive silver lining in those magical clouds that lofted Barack Obama to the Presidency. For today, without a shred of intellectually legitimate opposition, I can loudly proclaim to America: The Era of White Guilt is over.

This seemingly impossible event occurred because the vast majority of white Americans didn't give a fluff about skin color, and enthusiastically pulled the voting lever for a black man. Not just any black man. A very liberal black man who spent his early career racehustling banks, praying in a racist church for 20 years, and actively worked with America hating domestic terrorists. Wow! Some resume! Yet they made Barack Obama their leader. Therefore, as of Nov. 4th, 2008, white guilt is dead.

For over a century, the millstone of white guilt hung around our necks, retribution for slave-owning predecessors. In the 60s, American liberals began yanking that millstone while sticking a fork in the eye of black Americans, exacerbating the racial divide to extort a socialist solution. But if a black man can become President, exactly what significant barrier is left? The election of Barack Obama absolutely destroys the entire validation of liberal white guilt. The dragon is hereby slain.

So today, I'm feeling a little "uppity," if you will. From this day forward, my tolerance level for having my skin color hustled is now exactly ZERO. And it's time to clean house. No more Reverend Wright's "God Damn America," Al Sharpton's Church of Perpetual Victimization, or Jesse Jackson's rainbow racism. Cornell West? You're a fraud. Go home. All those "black studies" programs that taught kids to hate whitey? You must now thank Whitey. And I want that on the final.

Congressional Black Caucus? Irrelevant. Maxine Waters? Shut up. ACORN? Outlawed. Black Panthers? Go home and pet your kitty. Black separatists? Find another nation that offers better dreams. Go ahead. I'm waiting.

Gangsta rappers? Start praising America. Begin with the Pledge of Allegiance. And please, no more ebonics. Speak English, and who knows where you might end up? Oh, yeah, pull up your pants. Your underwear is showing. You look stupid.

Black Fraternities? Seek diversity. Race Card? It's now the joker. Miss Black America? Get in line with all the other lovely ladies. Reparations? Paid.

To those Eurosnots who forged entire careers hating America? I'm still waiting for the first black French President.

And let me offer an equal opportunity whupping. I've always despised lazy white people. Now, I can talk smack about lazy black people. You're poor because you quit school, did drugs, had three kids with three different fathers, and refuse to work. So when you plop your Colt 45-swilling, Oprah watchin' butt on the couch and complain "Da Man is keepin' me down!!!" allow me to inform you: Da Man is now black. You have no excuses.

No more quotas. No more handouts. No more stealing my money because someone's great-great-great-great grandparents suffered actual pain and misery at the hands of people I have no relation to, and personally revile.

It's time to toss that massive, obsolete race-hustle machine upon the heap of the other stupid 60s ideas. Drag it over there, by wife swapping, next to dope-smoking. Plenty of room right between free love and cop-killing. Careful, don't trip on streaking. There ya go, don't be gentle. Just dump it. Wash your hands. It's filthy.

In fact, Obama's ascension created a gargantuan irony. How can you sell class envy and American unfairness when you and your black wife went to Ivy League schools, got high paying jobs, became millionaires, bought a mansion, and got elected President? How unfair is that??? Now, Like a delicious O'Henry tale, Obama's spread-the-wealth campaign rendered itself moot by it's own victory! America is officially a meritocracy. Obama's election has validated American conservatism!

So, listen carefully ... "Wham!!!"

That's the sound of my foot kicking the door shut on the era of white guilt. The rites have been muttered, the carcass lowered, dirt shoveled, and tombstone erected. White guilt is dead and buried.

However, despite my glee, there's apparently one small, rabid bastion of American racism remaining. Black Americans voted 96% for Barack Obama. Hmmm. In a color-blind world, shouldn't that be 50-50? Tonight, every black person should ask forgiveness for their apparent racism and prejudice towards white people. Maybe it's time to start spreading that guilt around.

While the technician is more important than the technology it is good to remember that a 9mm might expand but a .45 won't shrink.

All the loving best to you stupid n*gger-rag head loving mother f*ckers, and when you are all eating dirt cookies and everybody is living like Africans don't go blaming the Republicans like you stupid f*cks always do!!!!

PS: Black Hurricanes.....

Well, it appears our African-American friends have found yet something else to be p*ssed about. A black congresswoman (this would be Sheila Jackson Lee, of Houston), reportedly complained that the names of hurricanes are all Caucasian sounding names.

She would prefer some names that reflect African-American culture such as Chamiqua, Tanisha, Woeisha, Shaqueal, and Jamal. I am NOT making this up! She would also like the weather reports to be broad cast in 'language' that street people can understand because one of the problems that happened in New Orleans was that black people couldn't understand the seriousness of the situation, due to the racially biased language of the weather report.

I guess if the weather person says that the winds are going to blow at 140+ MPH, thats too hard to understand. I can hear it now: A weatherman in New Orleans says... Wazzup, mutha-fukkas! Hehr-icane Chamiqua be headin' fo' yo a*s like Leroy on a crotch rocket! B*tch be a category fo'! So, turn off dem chitlins, grab yo' chirren, leave yo crib, and head fo' de nearest FEMA office fo yo FREE sh*t!

Wow. Is this for real? This Bob person has some serious issues. When someone has this much anger, I always suspect something terrible in his background and/or childhood. "Normal" people are not so hateful. It must be very hard to live with so much turmoil in your head.

20120222-06	14:17	Dennis	Re: "Rush Limbaugh on Santorum & Satan" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #79)
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from SteveB:

Perhaps Mr. Santorum's Achilles Heel:

"We look at the shape of mainline Protestantism in this country, and it is in shambles. It is gone from the world of Christianity as I see it," Santorum said.

Dear SteveB,

Mullah Rick Sanitarium wouldn't know Christianity if Jesus slapped him upside the head with it.

I believe Jesus would agree that the problem with Christian fundamentalists is they know none of the fundamentals.

20120222-07	14:36	Pam	Re: "Rush Limbaugh on Santorum & Satan" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #79)
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We might as well be hunting witches, the way the fundies (Santorum et. al.) go after what they consider heretics. It's the same mentality. It never ceases to amaze me that some people believe they, and they alone, know the truth. If Santorum had been born into a different family, he'd hold different beliefs today.

I'm so very sick of candidates bragging about how righteous they are, as if you can't be a good person without being the right kind of Christian. When is the world going to come to its senses and realize that NO ONE knows the truth about the meaning of the cosmos?

20120222-08	15:47	SteveB	"Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?"
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Public education in the crosshairs...

I guess they figure that if they can return us to ignorance, shutter the dreaded "liberal media" and "liberal universities"... maybe Republicans would be able to win more elections. LOL --SteveB

"Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?" by Timothy Noah, *The New Republic*

Feb. 20, 2012, (<http://www.tnr.com/blog/timothy-noah/100911/santorum-who-needs-public-education>)

At a weekend appearance in Ohio, Rick Santorum said this about public education, according to the *New York Times*:

[T]he idea that the federal government should be running schools, *frankly much less that the state government should be running schools* [italics mine], is anachronistic. It goes back to the time of industrialization of America when people came off the farms where they did home-school or have the little neighborhood school, and into these big factories, so we built equal factories called public schools. And while those factories as we all know in Ohio and Pennsylvania have fundamentally changed, the factory school has not.

Where to begin? The idea that the government should be running schools goes back to the nation's founding. Its principal advocate was Thomas Jefferson, who proposed (in Notes on the State of Virginia) that every child be entitled to three years of schooling free of charge (after that, parents had to pay). Horace Mann acted and expanded on Jefferson's idea starting in the 1830s through his energetic advocacy of publicly-funded education. Mann was appalled by the quality of the "little neighborhood schools" that Santorum rhapsodizes about and he fought to raise standards for the teaching profession and to abolish religious sectarianism from public schools. Prior to the 20th century more than 90 percent of American teenagers didn't go to high school, and whatever "home schooling" they received on the farm was typically limited to learning how to tend animals and plant and harvest crops. Young people were lucky to have a parent who could even read the Bible; as late as 1870 fully 20 percent of the adult U.S. population couldn't read or write. Even if a farmer or his wife were literate, where was he or she supposed to find the time to teach the children much of anything? Education was, by and large, a luxury for the rich.

The spread of government-funded high schools during the first half of the 20th century, far from violating some pastoral ideal of the little red schoolhouse, made it possible for the first time for most Americans to receive any kind of education at all. With electrification and the rise of other technologies, a high school education became essential not only to holding many factory jobs but also, with the rise of new agricultural techniques, to managing a farm. America's emergence as the world's richest and most powerful nation would have been impossible without the spread of government-funded, government-regulated education to raise the skill levels of its workers. To pine for the days before public education became a practical reality is to pine for an America held back by mass ignorance and mass illiteracy. Santorum might as well say he's opposed to knowledge itself. It's absolutely stupefying that a major presidential candidate would evangelize against education in this fashion.

[20120222-09](#) 16:28 Dennis Re: "Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?" (reply to SteveB, above)

Ironically, Ron Paul is now running an ad in Michigan criticizing Mullah Rick Sanitarium as a fake conservative who voted when he was in the Senate to double the funding of the Department of Education, as well as for funding Planned Parenthood. But that was then, as Romney would no doubt agree.

[20120222-15](#) 19:44 Art A Huge, Incredibly Wonderful Listing of Debunked Lies!

Another one to keep handy: <http://factcheck.org/hot-topics/>.

[20120222-21](#) 22:42 SteveG Racism, Church & State

Cannot believe some of the crap that comes out of right wingers mouths these days. I bad mouthed W and threatened to move out of country, but nothing like what is being said about Obama. Rodgers, black guy I met at some of the Occupy meetings, thinks it is all racial and the country wasn't ready for a black president.

Back in the 80's I used to refer to K Mart mentality, but it has gone way beyond that.

I remember saying the pledge of allegiance in school, but I have no memory of religious talk/teachings – was there? I know when I first started working with disabilities we would use church rooms and would take down all of the religious pictures, etc. before we used the room and then put them all back before Sunday school.

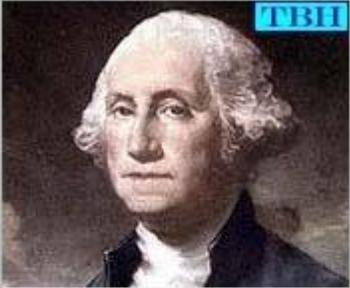
[20120222-22](#) 23:05 SteveB Re: Racism, Church & State (reply to SteveG, above)

I think your friend is right about the racism and have started saying so openly myself. Whenever I get to destroy the cr*p they put out, I'm determined to point out the racism and hate. That's really what the Right is all about. Racism and exclusion. And include at least the poor with the people of color in those being denied.

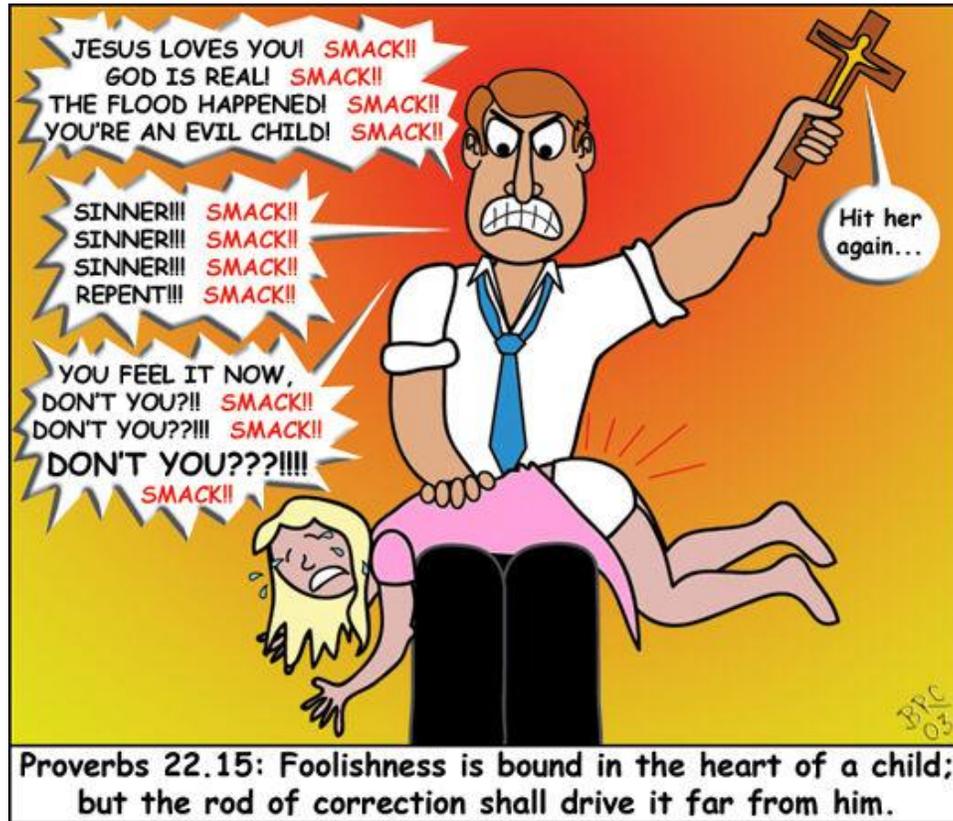
And notice what cowards they are! Where are those who thought they would brow beat us with lies and name calling into becoming right wingers? They have never presented one logical argument. It's only greed and hate. Only emotion. So rationality and logic don't apply.

I am sickened, but all the more determined to tell the truth and fight, however I can.

[20120222-19](#) 20:36 SteveG Which of These Two people Is a Liar?

	
"I will never apologize for fearlessly defending the Judeo-Christian values on which this nation was founded." Jerry Falwell	"The United States is in no sense founded upon the Christian religion." George Washington
Which of these two people is a liar?	

http://fundamentalistfunhouse.blogspot.com/2007_06_03_archive.html



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #81 — FEB. 24, 2012

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

The Worst Pop Singer of All Time?

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 24, 2012)

We present this article as part of our continuing effort to bring you the unvarnished truth in all realms, even art. Today we delve into one of the greatest mysteries of all—why are some things “good” and others “bad” and how do we discern and define the difference? Is beauty simply “in the eye of the beholder” or is there more to it than that, something more objective?

Regardless of your opinion on our unfortunate example case, I think you’ll enjoy digging into this territory with us. Why is good good and bad bad and some cr*p just downright awful?

What do you think, dear reader?

“The Worst Pop Singer Ever” by Ron Rosenbaum, Slate

Jan. 23, 2009, (http://www.slate.com/articles/life/the_spectator/2009/01/the_worst_pop_singer_ever.single.html)

(Why, exactly, is Billy Joel so bad?)

This may seem an odd moment to bring up the subject of Billy Joel. But the recent death of the painter Andrew Wyeth revived a long-standing debate over whether his art is respectable or merely sentimental schlock. (Say it: good or bad?) It got me to thinking about the question of value in art and whether there are any absolute standards for judging it. It indicates the question is still alive, not relegated to irrelevance by relativism.

And then I picked up *The Art Instinct*, a new book by Denis Dutton, the curator of the Arts & Letters Daily Web site. The book strives valiantly to find a basis for judging the value of art from the perspective of evolutionary psychology; in it, Dutton argues that a certain kind of artistic talent offered a competitive advantage in the Darwinian struggle for survival.

Which brings me to Billy Joel—the Andrew Wyeth of contemporary pop music—and the continuing *irritation* I feel whenever I hear his tunes, whether in the original or in the multitude of elevator-Muzak versions. It is a kind of mystery: Why does his music make my skin crawl in a way that other bad music doesn't? Why is it that so many of us feel it is possible to say Billy Joel is—well—just *bad*, a blight upon pop music, a plague upon the airwaves more contagious than West Nile virus, a dire threat to the peacefulness of any given elevator ride, not rock 'n' roll but schlock 'n' roll?

I'm reluctant to pick on Billy Joel. He's been subject to withering contempt from hipster types for so long that it no longer seems worth the time. Still, the mystery persists: How can he be so bad and yet so popular for so long? He's still *there*. You can't defend yourself with anti-B.J. shields around your brain. He still takes up the space, takes up A&R advances that would otherwise support a score of unrecognized but genuinely talented artists, singers, and songwriters, with his loathsomely insipid simulacrum of rock.

Besides, some people still take Billy seriously. Just the other day I was reading my old friend Jeff Jarvis' BuzzMachine blog, and Jarvis (the Billy Joel of blog theorists) was attacking the *Times'* David Carr. (Talk about an uneven fight.) Carr was speculating about whether newspapers could survive if they adopted the economic model of iTunes. Attempting a snotty put-down of this idea, Jarvis let slip that he's a Joel fan: As an example somehow of his iTunes counter-theory, he wrote: "If I can't get *Allentown*, the original, I'm not likely to settle for a cover." Only the hard-core B.J. for Jeff! ("Allentown" is a particularly shameless selection on Jarvis' part, since it's one of B.J.'s "concern" songs, featuring the plight of laid-off workers, and Jarvis virtually does a *sack dance* of self-congratulatory joy every time he reports on print-media workers getting the ax.)

Plus, there's always the chance we'll see another of those "career re-evaluation" essays that places like the *New York Times* Sunday "Arts & Leisure" section are fond of running about the Barry Manilows of the world. The kind of piece in which we'd discover that Billy's actually "gritty," "unfairly marginalized" by hipsters; that his work is profoundly expressive of late-20th-century alienation ("Captain Jack"); that his hackneyed, misogynist hymns to love are actually filled with sophisticated erotic angst; that his "distillations of disillusion," to use the patois of such pieces, over the artist's role ("Piano Man," "The Entertainer," "Say Goodbye to Hollywood," etc.) are in fact "preternaturally self-conscious," not just shallow, Holden Caulfield-esque denunciations of "phonies," but mentionable in the same breath as works by great artists.

This must be prevented! No career re-evaluations please! No false contrarian rehabilitations! He *was* terrible, he *is* terrible, he always *will be* terrible. Anodyne, sappy, superficial, derivative, fraudulently rebellious. Joel's famous song "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me"? Please. It never *was* rock 'n' roll. Billy Joel's music elevates self-aggrandizing self-pity and contempt for others into its own new and awful genre: "Mock-Rock."

And the badness of really bad art is, I believe, always worth affirming, since it allows us to praise—and to examine why we praise—"good" or "great" art.

Therefore, I decided to make a serious effort to identify the consistent qualities across Joel's "body of work" (it almost hurts to write that) that make it so meretricious, so fraudulent, so pitifully bad. And so, risking humiliation and embarrassment, I ventured to the Barnes & Noble music section and bought a four-disc set of B.J.'s "Greatest Hits," one of which was a full disc of his musings about art and music. I must admit that I also bought a copy of an album I already had—*Return of the Grievous Angel*, covers of Gram Parsons songs by the likes of the Cowboy Junkies and Gillian Welch, whose "Hickory Wind" is just ravishing—so the cashier might think the B.J. box was merely a gift, maybe for someone with no musical taste. Yes, reader. I couldn't bear the sneer, even for your benefit.

And I think I've done it! I think I've identified the qualities in B.J.'s work that distinguish his badness from other kinds of badness: **It exhibits unearned contempt.** Both a self-righteous contempt for others and the self-approbation and self-congratulation that is contempt's backside, so to speak. Most frequently a contempt for the supposed phoniness or inauthenticity of other people as opposed to the rock-solid authenticity of our B.J.

I'm not saying, by the way, that contempt can't make for great art. Dylan's "Positively 4th Street," for example, is one of the most contemptuous songs ever written, but it redeems itself through the joyfulness of its black-humored eloquence and wit. And Springsteen lost something when he lost his contempt and became a love-for-the-common-people would-be Woody Guthrie.

But let's go through the "greatest hits" chronologically and see how this "contempt thesis" works out.

First let's take "Piano Man." You can hear Joel's contempt, both for the losers at the bar he's left behind in his stellar schlock stardom and for the "entertainer-loser" (the proto-B.J.) who plays for them. Even the self-contempt he imputes to the "piano man" rings false.

"Captain Jack": Loser dresses up in poseur clothes and masturbates and shoots up heroin and is an all-around phony in the eyes of the songwriter who is so, so superior to him.

"The Entertainer": Entertainers are phonies! Except exquisitely self-aware entertainers like B.J., who let you in on this secret.

(Compare The Band's beautiful, subtle tribute to Dylan's entertainer insecurities in "Stage Fright." I love the line in that song, "he got caught in the spotlight": such a haunting image of a shy entertainer.)

"Say Goodbye to Hollywood." Hollywood is phony! Who knew? God, doesn't B.J. ever get tired of showing us how phony the phonies of this phony world are? Could someone let B.J. know he's phoning it in with all this phoniness at this point? Isn't there something, well, a bit phony about his hysteria over phoniness?

He can't even celebrate his "New York State of Mind" without displaying his oh-so-rebellious contempt for "the movie stars in their fancy cars and their limousines." You think Billy Joel has really never ridden in a limo?

"The Stranger": This is B.J. lifting that great Beatles line about Eleanor Rigby "wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door."* You should see the heavy-handed mask featured on the expensive two-disc "legacy" reissue of "The Stranger" album. So deep! Yes, B.J., you've nailed it: We're all phonies hiding our true faces! Everyone wears a mask! Who woulda known it without B.J. to tell us?

"Scenes From an Italian Restaurant": I can't stand it, but at least this is one of B.J.'s tributes to "the little people" that—although it's annoying and clichéd to the max—doesn't completely hold its characters in contempt.

"Anthony's Song"—straight up contempt for lower-middle-class aspirations. B.J.'s down with the authentic stuff in life. This is the one with the line about the "heart attack-ack-ack" where he attack-ack-acks people who work two jobs so they can "trade in their Chevy for a Cadillac"-ack-ack, something B.J. would never do. No phony "movin' up" for him!

"Only the Good Die Young": Contempt for the Catholic religion. I know: It's spirited if anti-spiritual, but, still ... I've heard some Catholic girls opine on its most famous line ("Catholic girls start much too late"), and they ain't buyin' it. B.J. is no James Joyce.

"She's Always a Woman": First, has there ever been a more blatant—or blatantly inept—case of attempted artistic theft than "She's Always a Woman"? It's such a lame imitation of Bob Dylan's "Just Like a Woman." (B.J.'s woman "hides like a child" where Dylan's "breaks just like a little girl.") B.J.'s woman also: is prone to "casual lies," "steals like a thief," "takes care of herself," and "carelessly cuts you and laughs ..." Poor B.J., recycling every misogynist cliché in the book.

At this point, reader, perhaps you have some questions for me about this tirade? Fair enough.

What right do you have to criticize such a popular artist? Aren't you just being elitist?

No, you don't understand: Billy's from my 'hood, mid-Long Island—Hicksville, to be precise (I'm from Bay Shore)—so I'm sensitive to his abuse of our common roots. Once I wrote something about the curse of being from the Guyland. In it I said something heartfelt: New Jersey may have a rep as a toxic dump for mob victims to fester in, but at least it brought forth Bruce Springsteen. The ultimate Guyland humiliation is to be repped to the world by Billy Joel. So I feel entitled to be cruel—may I continue?

OK. But isn't there anything you like?

Fair question. I've always liked "The Longest Time" and "An Innocent Man." May I get back to the contemptible crap?

OK, but focus.

Well, I really can't stand the "man of the people" stuff. Like "Allentown" and "The Downeaster 'Alexa.'" Yeah, he's a real working man, that B.J. Sure, other artists strike that pose, but somehow with B.J. the strain of his pretension is just too much to bear.

What else? What if you had to choose one song as the epitome of B.J. badness?

OK, I think it would have to be "It's Still Rock and Roll to Me."

Why?

It shows how completely, totally clueless Billy Joel is. It suggests he wrote it because he thought people regarded him as an outmoded relic because he doesn't wear the right hip-signifier clothes. That it's a matter of his wide ties vs. New Wave skinny ties, that it's because his car doesn't have white-wall tires or because he doesn't dress "like a Beau Brummell" or hang out with the right crowd or look like Elvis Costello.

He thinks people can't stand him because he *dresses* wrong or doesn't look right.

Billy Joel, they can't stand you because *of your music*; because of your stupid, smug attitude; because of the way you ripped off your betters to produce music that rarely reaches the level even of mediocrity. You could dress completely au courant and people would still loathe your lame lyrics.

It's not that they dislike anything *exterior* about you. They dislike you because of who you really are inside. They dislike you for being you. At a certain point, consistent, aggressive badness justifies profound hostility. They hate you just the way you are.

[20120223-01](#) 07:27 SteveB The November Whuppin'

Republicans honestly don't think the "Family Values" party is headed in the wrong direction? Honestly?

What happened to the "economy" as an issue? LOL!

And already the big LIES about President Obama being responsible for world oil demand. Won't work. The real blame belongs on "Free" Trade.

There's gonna be a whuppin' come November. Mark my words.

[20120223-02](#) 08:54 SteveG "'Super PAC' Leaders Profit from Lack of Oversight"

From SteveG (Feb. 23, 2012, 8:54 am)—Little Oversight of Super PACs

Supreme Court doing its part to create jobs?

"'Super PAC' Leaders Profit from Lack of Oversight" by Melanie Mason and Matea Gold, *LA Times*

Feb. 22, 2012, (<http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/nation/la-na-superpac-spending-20120223,0,2670939.story>)

(WASHINGTON) The Red White and Blue Fund, a "super PAC" backing the presidential bid of Republican Rick Santorum, paid more than half a million dollars last month to a newly formed direct mail firm.

The owner of that company?

None other than Nick Ryan, a former Santorum aide — and founder of the Red White and Blue Fund.

Ryan's dual roles spotlight how political operatives behind the super PACs can take advantage of the mammoth donations streaming into the funds and the lack of oversight. Of the \$1.5 million that the Red White and Blue Fund spent last month, a third — \$570,000 — went to Global Intermediate.

The connection between Ryan and Global Intermediate, which Ryan established two months ago, is not apparent in corporate and political filings.

Much of the focus on super PACs has been on their ability to raise unlimited sums from a cadre of super-rich donors. Less attention has been paid to how they use their money — and the fact that they do not have to contend with the same kind of internal scrutiny as the candidates and political parties they support.

"People who are raising the money are paying themselves with these funds. I don't think that's appropriate," said Dale Emmons, president of the American Assn. of Political Consultants, which is studying the impact of super PACs on the industry.

"I don't know where the check and balance is, and I have serious concerns about that," added Emmons, a Democratic political strategist based in Kentucky.

Winning Our Future, a group backing former House Speaker Newt Gingrich that has been buoyed by \$11 million in donations from casino mogul Sheldon Adelson and his family, paid its president, Becky Burkett, \$206,000 in January for executive management and fundraising services, according to campaign finance reports filed this week. Gregg Phillips, the Austin-based consultant who serves as the super PAC's managing director, got \$90,000.

Winning Our Future spokesman Rick Tyler said the super PAC pays its staff for "fundraising successes." Tyler said the payments Burkett and Phillips received in January included compensation for work they did in November and December, before the super PAC was launched on Dec 13. He said their salaries were determined by the super PAC's "senior leadership" — which consists of himself, Burkett and Phillips.

Paul Begala, a former Clinton White House aide, made \$200,000 in the last eight months working as the senior advisor to Priorities USA Action, a super PAC backing President Obama. The group has struggled to raise as much as its Republican counterparts, bringing in just under \$59,000 in January and \$4.4 million overall.

Begala said his compensation reflects his exclusive work overseeing the group's strategy, polling and fundraising. He said he did not get a percentage of advertising buys, as many consultants do.

"It's right in line with what I've always charged for campaign work," he said, adding: "We're accountable to our donors, most importantly — the people who are funding us, who are very savvy people."

Since a series of federal court decisions in 2010 led to the creation of super PACs, 330 have been formed, according to the Federal Election Commission. That has meant a bonanza for political consultants and media firms who are free to determine how to expend the war chests. So far, super PACs have spent \$51 million on the presidential campaign, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Art Hackney, a GOP strategist based in Alaska, said most super PACs were careful about how they spent their funds.

"There may be people who take advantage of this system, or any system, but by and large it is self-correcting," said Hackney, who produces advertising for American Crossroads, the Republican super PAC formed in part by Karl Rove.

Several of the major super PACs are being financed by contributions from just a few wealthy donors — as is the case with the Red White and Blue Fund. The pro-Santorum group has raised \$2.8 million, largely from investor Foster Friess and energy executive William J. Doré, who each put in \$1 million.

A large share of that money appears to have gone back to super PAC founder Ryan, a veteran of congressional campaigns in Iowa, through Global Intermediate.

The company got more than \$500,000 for direct mail and phone banks in January, as well as nearly \$60,000 for "strategic and communications consulting," according to FEC filings.

Global Intermediate did not incorporate until mid-December, when it filed paperwork in Delaware through a third-party incorporation service, shielding the identity of the firm's agent. The group's bare-bones website, whose domain was registered on Feb. 13, does not list the name of the firm's principals. The mailing address listed for Global Intermediate on the super PAC's FEC filings turned out to be the location of a UPS store in downtown Washington.

Ryan did not respond to requests for comment.

Red White and Blue Fund spokesman Stuart Roy, when asked about the firm on Tuesday, first said he had "no idea" how to contact Global Intermediate.

On Wednesday afternoon, he acknowledged in an e-mail that the company was run by Ryan, saying it was "no big mystery, they have done our phones and mail programs in multiple states (very effectively, I might add)."

Friess, in an email from northern Peru, where he is on an anniversary trip with his wife, wrote that he has never met Ryan but that he "sounds like an honest guy."

20120223-03	11:08	Beth	Re: "Santorum: Who Needs Public Education?" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #80)
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I guess they figure that if they can return us to ignorance, shutter the dreaded "liberal media" and "liberal universities"... maybe Republicans would be able to win more elections. LOL --SteveB

I absolutely agree. There is something sinister about this bias against public education and the whole "charter school" movement. Every child in this country has a right to a free education. The United States cannot possibly maintain its place in the world and our standard of living without an educated population. That said, this is not the only scary thing that Rick Santorum says.

20120223-04	11:12	Art	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #80)
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I kinda liked the weather report: "fo' de nearest FEMA office fo yo FREE sh*t!"

20120223-10	15:31	Dennis	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #80)
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Yes, Wacko Bob was for real. I exchanged a few e-mails with him and he was one seriously disturbed dude. Since we haven't heard from him in over three years, I can only hope he was devoured by Congolese Driver Ants:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pM2U9Vqy6oQ>.

20120223-36	23:35	SteveB	Re: From the Right: Extremism Illustrated (reply to Dennis, above)
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I was kinda hoping the "n*ggers" got him!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jgdyhe0OZXw&feature=related>

20120223-05 11:35 Pam Is This Too Radical? War in Iran/Syria?

I'm beginning to feel the hairs on the back of my neck prickling, just the way they did before the second Iraq war. For the moment, at least, we don't have a reckless President who has personal reasons for involving us in another war, but the kind of talk swirling around about Iran makes me nervous. Israel makes me nervous, and Syria makes me absolutely crazy. But to stick with Iran: what would happen if, instead of imposing sanctions, we provided strategic, abundant aid? Kill 'em with kindness. Embarrass them into cooperating. Give them no excuse for belligerence. Iran's raison d'etre is hatred of The Great Satan (I wonder if it's the same as Santorum's?); all their problems are directly our fault. What if we were demonstrably no threat? Isn't there something we have that they need, the way we need their oil? I know from past experience how often foreign aid goes astray. Despite our best intentions, the lion's share always goes to the top elites and the army. But wouldn't it be better to buy them off than blast them to smithereens? We need to think of something quick, because the techniques and strategies of war are changing. Computers and unmanned drones are going to carve up the 21st century. I think Rumsfeld was a jackass, but he might have been onto something with his faith in the technology of war. This seems to me to open up a whole new world of risk: not mass casualties but targeted removal of key players, ie. scientists and powerful political leaders. We've already set the stage in Afghanistan and with the killing of bin Laden. I'd like to know what you think about this, Art. Are we inching toward war with Iran? And what does the future of warfare hold for us?

20120223-06 12:06 Art Re: Is This Too Radical? War in Iran/Syria? (reply to Pam, above)

Well your senses are still pretty good.

Syria is a non factor in my opinion. They will continue to beat each other up but the real issue there is Alawites vs. the Sunnis. In the end the Sunnis will win since they are about 75% of the population. It really won't matter much to us.

Iran is another story and it is more Iran/Israel that worries me. Interesting idea about buying them off, as that is what we already do in Saudi and elsewhere in the region. That was part of my job in a prior life. Frankly I don't know how you can "buy off" Iran today. All of their problems are internal and tied up in religious hypocrisy and not sure how you get inside that.

Had lunch the other day with an Israeli friend and we discussed current situation at some length. We both pretty much agreed that there is no way out and probably best to do nothing. Practically I do not think Israel can conventionally bomb Iran's nuclear program out, similar to what they did to Iraq, what 30 years ago. Iran is too far away, sites are dug in, protected and scattered and cannot be done with one or two air raids. If they try, all they will do is piss them off and then invite retaliation. A nuclear strike is an option but that sets off a whole new world and even then they may not get them all. The flashback in any case will be tremendous. So I guess, let Iran get nuclear power. Worst case? If they are stupid enough to try something they know they will receive 20 bombs for every one they throw. Iran will become a wasteland overnight, maybe not a bad thing but still a horrible waste.

More likely if Iran does get Nukes. they will bluster and posture etc. etc, and the world will become a bit more dangerous place but in the end that is all. Remember Pakistan has Nukes as does North Korea (talk about wackos) and we are still surviving.

You are right also, war is changing and Rumsfeld was still a jacka*s. Take a currently outrageously expensive carrier battle group, and yet one \$5000 missile can sink the carrier in a flash. Good investment??

20120223-07 12:40 SteveB Re: Is This Too Radical? War in Iran/Syria? (reply to Pam, above)

Well. Even Martians love Earth girls and American women. We have a lot of hot, good looking illegal aliens. Maybe they'd like to go to Iran and make peace?

More seriously, you have a good idea, but I think it's too late for them to trust us. Maybe if we withdrew all American troops in the world back to the U.S....I mean, we would still have the aircraft carriers, planes, missiles, satellites, drones, etc. If somebody sinks one of our carriers, it would mean all-out war in either case.

I think America would be safer and more trustworthy with no troops on foreign soil. Period. Not even in Canada, which I would love to occupy.

War with Iran = the river of oil becomes a trickle. Do you think the American people would stand for that, when they can't even stand \$3-\$4/gal. gasoline? What would they think of \$10? \$20? \$50? Oil fields are easy to bomb, tough to rebuild.

What can a rooster like the U.S. do except talk tough? And, like during the cold war, if we just wait long enough, these foul Arab governments will fall. The lives lost in Viet Nam could almost certainly have been avoided, Iraq certainly; perhaps we won't make the same mistake thrice.

We need a President who won't do anything rash, and I think we have him.

Unfortunately, that laughingstock of the entire world, George Bush, didn't leave us many good options, did he?

[20120223-09](#) 13:57 SteveB Fw: Secret Gingrich Letter Revealed

You might recall that John Hinckley was a seriously deranged young man who shot President Reagan in the early 1980s. Hinckley was absolutely obsessed with movie star Jodie Foster, extremely jealous, and in his twisted mind, loved Jodie Foster to the point that to make himself well-known to her, he attempted to assassinate President Reagan. There is speculation Hinckley may soon be released as having been rehabilitated. Consequently, you may appreciate the following letter from Newt Gingrich that the staff at the mental facility, treating Hinckley, reports to have intercepted this past weekend:

To: John Hinckley
From: Newt and Callista Gingrich

Dear Mr. Hinkley,

My wife and I wanted to drop you a short note to tell you how pleased we are with the great strides you are making in your recovery. In our fine country's spirit of understanding and forgiveness, we want you to know there is a non-partisan consensus of compassion and forgiveness throughout the government.

My wife Callista and I want you to know that no grudge is borne against you for shooting President Reagan. We, above all, are aware of how the mental stress and pain could have driven you to such an act of desperation. We are confident that you will soon make a complete recovery and return to your family to join the world again as a healthy and productive young man.

Best Wishes, Newt and Callista Gingrich

PS: While you have been incarcerated, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum have been banging Jodie Foster like a screen door in a tornado. Just thought you should know.

[20120223-08](#) 13:26 SteveG Fw: Wolf PAC Action: Attend a Wolf-PAC Meeting in Your Area!

Wolf PAC is advocating a CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION to be started in every state possible. It is even BETTER THAN AN AMENDMENT to overturn Citizens United vs. the FEC. The Convention takes the issue away from ordinary politics and gives it greater importance.

[I think the Constitutional Convention is very necessary, but it won't exactly be better than a Constitutional Amendment, because that is exactly what the Convention would produce, if successful—one or more Constitutional Amendments. The Convention is our best hope of actually producing one or more very necessary Amendments (see past FotM Newsletters & Archive). –SteveB]

from Wolf-PAC:

Thank you so much for supporting Wolf-PAC in the fight to protect our democracy from being sold to the highest bidder. Right now local Wolf-PAC councils are forming all across the nation and if our vital mission is going to succeed we will need your help joining them and starting your own.

On the weekend of March 3rd we are asking our members to meet up with fellow Wolf-PAC volunteers to form Wolf-PAC councils. To find a meeting near you or to host your own please visit the Wolf-PAC Events Calendar. Event host will be provided with the materials and training that they need to organize a successful event. If you do not see an event near you please set one up.

Thanks again for supporting Wolf-PAC. We are fighting an implacable foe and we need all the help we can get. Remember to sign up today for a Wolf-PAC meeting and if there is not one near you, please host your own! We are counting on you.

Wolf-PAC — We're Coming!

P.S. One of the best ways you can help support Wolf-PAC is by spreading the word. Please reach out to your friends and neighbors through Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, and word of mouth to encourage them to sign up as volunteers and supporters at Wolf-PAC.com.

Wolf-PAC, <http://www.wolf-pac.com/>, 6230 Wilshire Blvd, Box #140, Los Angeles, CA 90048

[20120223-11](#)

16:15

SteveG

"The Republican Brain: Why Even Educated Conservatives Deny Science — & Reality"

[Also submitted at 4:22 by Dennis and at 4:46 by SteveB—perhaps a measure of worth. SteveG beat us to it. -- SteveB

"The Republican Brain: Why Even Educated Conservatives Deny Science — and Reality" by Chris Mooney, AlterNet

Feb. 22, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/154252/>)

(This essay is adapted from Chris Mooney's forthcoming book, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality*, due out in April from Wiley.)

I can still remember when I first realized how naïve I was in thinking—hoping—that laying out the "facts" would suffice to change politicized minds, and especially Republican ones. It was a typically wonkish, liberal revelation: One based on statistics and data. Only this time, the data were showing, rather awkwardly, that people ignore data and evidence—and often, knowledge and education only make the problem worse.

Someone had sent me a 2008 Pew report documenting the intense partisan divide in the U.S. over the reality of global warming.. It's a divide that, maddeningly for scientists, has shown a paradoxical tendency to widen even as the basic facts about global warming have become more firmly established.

Those facts are these: Humans, since the industrial revolution, have been burning more and more fossil fuels to power their societies, and this has led to a steady accumulation of greenhouse gases, and especially carbon dioxide, in the atmosphere. At this point, very simple physics takes over, and you are pretty much doomed, by what scientists refer to as the “radiative” properties of carbon dioxide molecules (which trap infrared heat radiation that would otherwise escape to space), to have a warming planet. Since about 1995, scientists have not only confirmed that this warming is taking place, but have also grown confident that it has, like the gun in a murder mystery, our fingerprint on it. Natural fluctuations, although they exist, can’t explain what we’re seeing. The only reasonable verdict is that humans did it, in the atmosphere, with their cars and their smokestacks.

Such is what is known to science—what is true (no matter what Rick Santorum might say). But the Pew data showed that humans aren’t as predictable as carbon dioxide molecules. Despite a growing scientific consensus about global warming, as of 2008 Democrats and Republicans had cleaved over the facts stated above, like a divorcing couple. One side bought into them, one side didn’t—and if anything, knowledge and intelligence seemed to be worsening matters.

Buried in the Pew report was a little chart showing the relationship between one’s political party affiliation, one’s acceptance that humans are causing global warming, and one’s level of education. And here’s the mind-blowing surprise: For Republicans, having a college degree didn’t appear to make one any more open to what scientists have to say. On the contrary, better-educated Republicans were *more skeptical* of modern climate science than their less educated brethren. Only 19 percent of college-educated Republicans agreed that the planet is warming due to human actions, versus 31 percent of non-college-educated Republicans.

For Democrats and Independents, the opposite was the case. More education correlated with being more accepting of climate science—among Democrats, dramatically so. The difference in acceptance between more and less educated Democrats was 23 percentage points.

This was my first encounter with what I now like to call the “smart idiots” effect: The fact that politically sophisticated or knowledgeable people are often more biased, and less persuadable, than the ignorant. It’s a reality that generates endless frustration for many scientists—and indeed, for many well-educated, reasonable people.

And most of all, for many liberals.

Let’s face it: We liberals and progressives are absolutely outraged by partisan misinformation. Lies about “death panels.” People seriously thinking that President Obama is a Muslim, not born in the United States. Climate-change denial. Debt ceiling denial. These things drive us crazy, in large part because we can’t comprehend how such intellectual abominations could possibly exist.

And not only are we enraged by lies and misinformation; we want to refute them—to argue, argue, argue about why we’re right and Republicans are wrong. Indeed, we often act as though right-wing misinformation’s defeat is nigh, if we could only make people wiser and more educated (just like us) and get them the medicine that is correct information.

No less than President Obama’s science adviser John Holdren (a man whom I greatly admire, but disagree with in this instance) has stated, when asked how to get Republicans in Congress to accept our mainstream scientific understanding of climate change, that it’s an “education problem.”

But the facts, the scientific data, say otherwise.

Indeed, the rapidly growing social scientific literature on the resistance to global warming says so pretty unequivocally. Again and again, Republicans or conservatives who say they know more about the topic, or are more educated, are shown to be more in denial, and often more sure of themselves as well—and are confident they don’t need any more information on the issue.

Tea Party members appear to be the worst of all. In a recent survey by Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, they rejected the science of global warming even more strongly than average Republicans did. For instance, considerably more Tea Party members than Republicans incorrectly thought there was a lot of scientific

disagreement about global warming (69 percent to 56 percent). Most strikingly, the Tea Party members were very sure of themselves—they considered themselves “very well-informed” about global warming and were more likely than other groups to say they “do not need any more information” to make up their minds on the issue.

But it’s not just global warming where the “smart idiot” effect occurs. It also emerges on nonscientific but factually contested issues, like the claim that President Obama is a Muslim. Belief in this falsehood actually increased *more* among better-educated Republicans from 2009 to 2010 than it did among less-educated Republicans, according to research by George Washington University political scientist John Sides.

The same effect has also been captured in relation to the myth that the healthcare reform bill empowered government “death panels.” According to research by Dartmouth political scientist Brendan Nyhan, Republicans who thought they knew more about the Obama healthcare plan were “paradoxically more likely to endorse the misperception than those who did not.” Well-informed Democrats were the opposite—quite certain there were no “death panels” in the bill.

The Democrats also happened to be right, by the way.

The idealistic, liberal, Enlightenment notion that knowledge will save us, or unite us, was even put to a scientific test last year—and it failed badly.

Yale researcher Dan Kahan and his colleagues set out to study the relationship between political views, scientific knowledge or reasoning abilities, and opinions on contested scientific issues like global warming. In their study, more than 1,500 randomly selected Americans were asked about their political worldviews and their opinions about how dangerous global warming and nuclear power are. But that’s not all: They were also asked standard questions to determine their degree of scientific literacy (e.g., “Antibiotics kill viruses as well as bacteria—true or false?”) as well as their numeracy or capacity for mathematical reasoning (e.g., “If Person A’s chance of getting a disease is 1 in 100 in 10 years, and person B’s risk is double that of A, what is B’s risk?”).

The result was stunning and alarming. The standard view that knowing more science, or being better at mathematical reasoning, ought to make you more accepting of mainstream climate science simply crashed and burned.

Instead, here was the result. If you were already part of a cultural group predisposed to distrust climate science—e.g., a political conservative or “hierarchical-individualist”—then more science knowledge and more skill in mathematical reasoning tended to make you even more dismissive. Precisely the opposite happened with the other group—“egalitarian-communitarians” or liberals—who tended to worry *more* as they knew more science and math. The result was that, overall, more scientific literacy and mathematical ability led to greater political polarization over climate change—which, of course, is precisely what we see in the polls.

So much for education serving as an antidote to politically biased reasoning.

What accounts for the “smart idiot” effect?

For one thing, well-informed or well-educated conservatives probably consume more conservative news and opinion, such as by watching Fox News. Thus, they are more likely to know what they’re supposed to think about the issues—what people like them think—and to be familiar with the arguments or reasons for holding these views. If challenged, they can then recall and reiterate these arguments. They’ve made them a part of their identities, a part of their brains, and in doing so, they’ve drawn a strong emotional connection between certain “facts” or claims, and their deeply held political values. And they’re ready to *argue*.

What this suggests, critically, is that sophisticated conservatives may be very different from unsophisticated or less-informed ones. Paradoxically, we would expect *less* informed conservatives to be *easier* to persuade, and *more* responsive to new and challenging information.

In fact, there is even research suggesting that the most rigid and inflexible breed of conservatives—so-called authoritarians—do not really become their ideological selves until they actually learn something about politics first. A

kind of “authoritarian activation” needs to occur, and it happens through the development of political “expertise.” Consuming a lot of political information seems to help authoritarians *feel* who they are—whereupon they become more accepting of inequality, more dogmatically traditionalist, and more resistant to change.

So now the big question: Are liberals also “smart idiots”?

There’s no doubt that more knowledge—or more political engagement—can produce more bias on either side of the aisle. That’s because it forges a stronger bond between our emotions and identities on the one hand, and a particular body of facts on the other.

But there are also reason to think that, with liberals, there is something else going on. Liberals, to quote George Lakoff, subscribe to a view that might be dubbed “Old Enlightenment reason.” They really do seem to like facts; it seems to be part of who they are. And fascinatingly, in Kahan’s study liberals did *not* act like smart idiots when the question posed was about the safety of nuclear power.

Nuclear power is a classic test case for liberal biases—kind of the flipside of the global warming issue—for the following reason. It’s well known that liberals tend to start out distrustful of nuclear energy: There’s a long history of this on the left. But this impulse puts them at odds with the views of the scientific community on the matter (scientists tend to think nuclear power risks are overblown, especially in light of the dangers of other energy sources, like coal).

So are liberals “smart idiots” on nukes? Not in Kahan’s study. As members of the “egalitarian communitarian” group in the study—people with more liberal values--knew more science and math, they did not become more worried, overall, about the risks of nuclear power. Rather, they moved in the *opposite direction* from where these initial impulses would have taken them. They become less worried—and, I might add, closer to the opinion of the scientific community on the matter.

You may or may not support nuclear power personally, but let’s face it: This is not the “smart idiot” effect. It looks a lot more like open-mindedness.

What does all of this mean?

First, these findings are just one small slice an emerging body of science on liberal and conservative psychological differences, which I discuss in detail in my forthcoming book. An overall result is definitely that liberals tend to be more flexible and open to new ideas—so that’s a possible factor lying behind these data. In fact, recent evidence suggests that wanting to explore the world and try new things, as opposed to viewing the world as threatening, may subtly push people towards liberal ideologies (and vice versa).

Politically and strategically, meanwhile, the evidence presented here leaves liberals and progressives in a rather awkward situation. We like evidence—but evidence also suggests that politics doesn’t work in the way we want it to work, or think it should. We may be the children of the Enlightenment—convinced that you need good facts to make good policies—but that doesn’t mean this is equally true for all of humanity, or that it is as true of our political opponents as it is of us.

Nevertheless, this knowledge ought to be welcomed, for it offers a learning opportunity and, frankly, a better way of understanding politics and our opponents alike. For instance, it can help us see through the scientific-sounding arguments of someone like Rick Santorum, who has been talking a lot about climate science lately—if only in order to bash it.

On global warming, Santorum definitely has an argument, and he has “facts” to cite. And he is obviously intelligent and capable—but not, apparently, able to see past his ideological biases. Santorum’s argument ultimately comes down to a dismissal of climate science and climate scientists, and even the embrace of a conspiracy theory, one in which the scientists of the world are conspiring to subvert economic growth (yeah, right).

Viewing all this as an ideologically defensive maneuver not only explains a lot, it helps us realize that refuting Santorum probably serves little purpose. He’d just come up with another argument and response, probably even

cleverer than the last, and certainly just as appealing to his audience. We'd be much better concentrating our energies elsewhere, where people are more persuadable.

A more scientific understanding of persuasion, then, should not be seen as threatening. It's actually an opportunity to do better—to be more effective and politically successful.

Indeed, if we believe in evidence then we should also welcome the evidence showing its limited power to persuade—especially in politicized areas where deep emotions are involved. Before you start off your next argument with a fact, then, first think about what the facts say about that strategy. If you're a liberal who is emotionally wedded to the idea that rationality wins the day—well, then, it's high time to listen to reason.

(Chris Mooney is the author of four books, including *The Republican War on Science* (2005). His next book, *The Republican Brain: The Science of Why They Deny Science—and Reality*, is due out in April.)

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[20120223-12](#) 16:22 Dennis Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveG, above)

Don't argue, they're in denial.

[20120223-14](#) 16:46 SteveB Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveG, above)

This article is another one of those rare "important pieces of the puzzle"—the mystery we grapple with here at FotM—"What the hell is the Right thinking?"

This is too good not to get out there as clearly and as far as possible. Here's hoping!

MUST READING! ESPECIALLY FOR REPUBLICANS WHO HAVE ALREADY MADE UP THEIR MINDS. ^-^

[20120223-16](#) 16:56 Art Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveB, above)

I agree, great stuff. Sometimes I feel a little like the guy in the robe with a beard on the corner waving the sign, THE END IS NEAR!!

Trouble is, it is. We need to pass this along.

[20120223-17](#) 17:51 Phil Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to all, above)

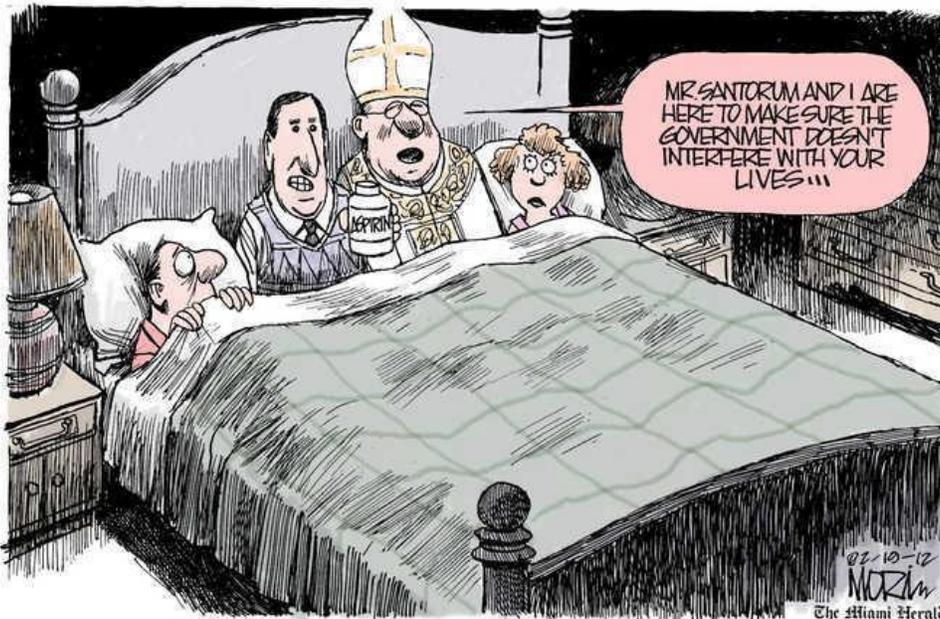
I was following along pretty much in agreement with the author, thinking he had his facts together until I ran into his statement that Santorum was "obviously intelligent and capable". That's when he lost all credibility with me.

[20120223-18](#) 17:55 SteveG Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to Phil, above)

I agree about Santorum, trouble is, compared to the other viable Repubs still in the running, all of them may be smart with education but all are absolutely crazy. You can look into the DSM IV or whatever book psychiatrists are using and find a medical label to place on each of them.

[20120223-19](#) 17:56 Dennis Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to Phil, above) & Cartoon: Santorum in Bed with the Pope

Hey Phil, Sanitarium's a friend of the Pope:



[20120223-21](#) 18:13 Pam Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to all, above) & Rick Santorum

There just has to be something in Santorum's past that would explain his bizarre beliefs. What kind of family did he come from?

[20120223-24](#) 18:21 SteveG Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Pam, above)

<http://santorumexposed.com/>

<http://www.biography.com/people/rick-santorum-20688005>

[20120223-27](#) 18:30 SteveB Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Pam, above)

There must be something. It's so weird that a Catholic would actually care about religion and be evangelical. The polls seem to show that something like 7% of Catholics come out of church believing what the Church tells them.

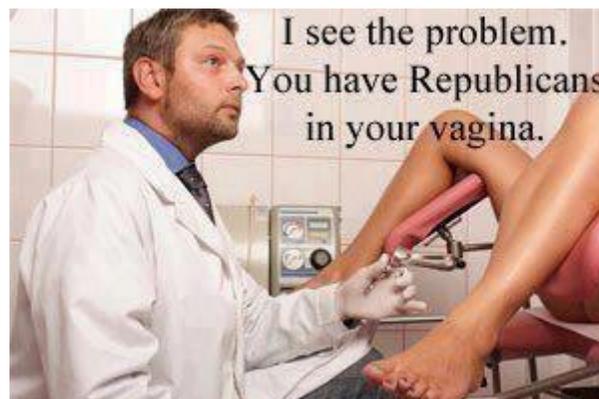
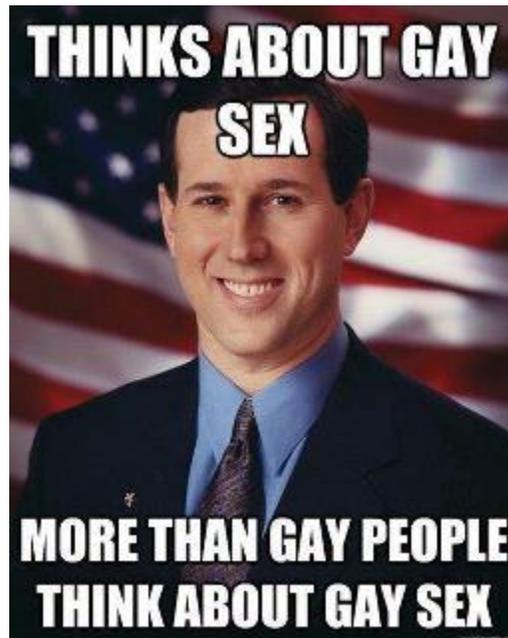
People in Latin America love the Church, love the Pope, and love God, Mary, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, all the Saints, and all the statues of all of the above, and an awfully lot of them lead exemplary, truly Christian lives. But they believe and don't believe what they want of the Church's teachings and think celibacy is the stupidest thing since dinosaurs. They might go to Mass, but they don't get carried away. Yet, for some reason, they get picked-off by evangelical missionaries who come down here like ducks in a row.

Could that have happened to Santorum without him changing churches? Was he beaten like that little girl in the cartoon in today's Newsletter? I sure hope we don't have to start feeling sorry for him.

[20120223-30](#) 18:41 Pam Re: Rick Santorum (reply to all, above)

His background sounds pretty normal so far. I wonder if his parents are as conservative as he is. Maybe he's rebelling against their comparative liberalism. There's something cramped and fearful about social conservatives. I can understand fiscal conservatism; it at least is rational. But the intense desire to dictate what other people do in their personal lives bespeaks some sort of pathology to my way of thinking. If you don't believe in gay marriage, don't marry a gay person. If you go to church, fine, but don't condemn those who don't. I'm really trying to get a handle on this. WHY is Santorum such a busybody?

[20120223-31](#) 19:22 Dennis Re: Rick Santorum (reply to all, above)



[20120223-32](#) 20:02 Art Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Pam, above)

This is the problem with you liberals. You always try to figure out where they went astray. Sometimes you just have to shoot the Mother@#^!!*!!!

[20120223-33](#) 20:31 Pam Re: Rick Santorum (reply to Art, above)

That is so funny. I think you have a point, Art.

"Revealed: Romney's Top Funders Made Billions on Auto Bail-Out" by Greg Palast, NationofChange

Feb. 23, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/revealed-romney-s-top-funders-made-billions-auto-bail-out-1330019614>)

Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney called the federal government's 2009 bail-out of the auto industry, "nothing more than crony capitalism, Obama style... a reward for his big donors to his campaign." In fact, the biggest rewards --- a windfall of more than two billion dollars care of U.S. taxpayers ---- went to Romney's two top contributors.

John Paulson of Paulson & Co and Paul Singer of Elliott International, known on Wall Street as "vulture" investors, have each written checks for one million dollars to Restore Our Future, the Super PAC supporting Romney's candidacy.

Gov. Romney last week asserted that the Obama Administration's support for General Motors was a, "payoff for the auto workers union." However, union workers in GM's former auto parts division, Delphi, the unit taken over by Romney's funders, did not fair so well. The speculators eliminated every single union job from the parts factories once manned by 25,200 UAW members.

The two hedge fund operators turned a breathtaking three-thousand percent profit on a relatively negligible investment by using hardball tactics against the U.S. Treasury and their own employees.

Under the control of the speculators, Delphi, which had 45 plants in the U.S. and Canada, is now reduced to just four factories with only 1,500 hourly workers, none of them UAW members, despite the union agreeing to cut contract wages by two thirds.

It wasn't supposed to be quite so bad. The Obama Administration and GM had arranged for a private equity investor to provide half a billion dollars in new capital for Delphi, but that would have cut the pay-out to Singer and Paulson. The speculators blocked the Obama-GM plan, taking the entire government bail-out hostage. Even the *Wall Street Journal's* "Dealmaker" column was outraged, accusing Paul Singer of treating the auto company, "like a third world country."

But it worked. Singer and Paulson got what they demanded. Using U.S. Treasury funds:

- GM agreed to pay off \$1.1 billion of Delphi's debts.
- Forgave \$2.15 billion owed GM by Delphi (which had been spun off as an independent company).
- Pumped \$1.75 billion into Delphi operations.
- Took over four money-losing plants that the speculators didn't want.

If those plants had been closed, GM factories would have shut down cold for lack of parts.

Then there was the big one: The U.S. government agreed to take over \$6.2 billion in pension benefits due Delphi workers under U.S. labor law.

Governor Romney, while opposing the bail-out of GM, accused Obama of eliminating the pensions of 21,000 non-union employees at Delphi. In fact, it was Romney's funders who wiped out 100% of the pensions and health care accounts of Delphi salaried retirees.

Paulson and Singer paid an average of about 67 cents a share for Delphi. In November, 2011, Paulson sold a chunk of his holdings for \$22 a share. Paulson's gain totals a billion and a half dollars (\$1,499,499,000), and Singer gained nearly a billion (\$899,751,000) — thirty-two times their investment.

One-hundred percent of this gain for the Paulson and Singer hedge funds is accounted for by taxpayer bail-out support.

But, unlike the government loans and worker concessions given to GM, the U.S. Treasury and workers get nothing in return from Delphi.

From GM, the U.S. Treasury got warrants for common stock (similar to options) that have already produced billions in profit.

And Delphi? It's doing well for Paulson and Singer. GM and Chrysler, still in business by the grace of the U.S. Treasury, remain Delphi's main customers, buying parts now made almost entirely in China and other cheap-labor nations.

And exactly who are Paulson and Singer?

Billionaire John Paulson became the first man in history to earn over \$3 billion in a single year — not for his hedge fund, but for himself, personally. At the core of this huge payday was a 2007 scheme by which, via Goldman Sachs, he sold "insurance" on subprime mortgage loans. According to a lawsuit filed by the Securities Exchange Commission, Goldman defrauded European banks by pretending that Paulson was investing in the insurance. In fact, Paulson was, secretly, the beneficiary of the insurance, reaping billions when the mortgage market collapsed.

Goldman paid half a billion dollars in civil fines for the fraud. While the SEC states that Paulson knowingly participated in the scheme, he was not fined and denies he defrauded the banks.

Multi-billionaire Singer is known as Wall Street's toughest "vulture" speculator. Vulture fund financial attacks on the world's poorest nations have been effectively outlawed in much of Europe and excoriated by human rights groups, conduct Britain's former Prime Minister Gordon Brown described as, "morally outrageous."

20120223-15	16:53	GaryF	Wacky Newt's Brilliant Robot Bartender
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A guy goes into a bar in Georgia where there's a robot bartender.

The robot says, "What will you have?" The guy says, "Whiskey."

"The robot brings back his drink and says to the man, "What's your IQ?" The guy says, "168."

The robot then proceeds to talk about physics, space exploration and medical technology.

The guy leaves, but he is curious, so he goes back into the bar.

The robot bartender says, "What will you have?" The guy says, "Whiskey."

Again, the robot brings the man his drink and says, "What's your IQ?" The guy says, "100."

The robot then starts to talk about NASCAR, Budweiser, the Braves, and Bulldogs.

The guy leaves, but finds it very interesting, so he thinks he will try it one more time.

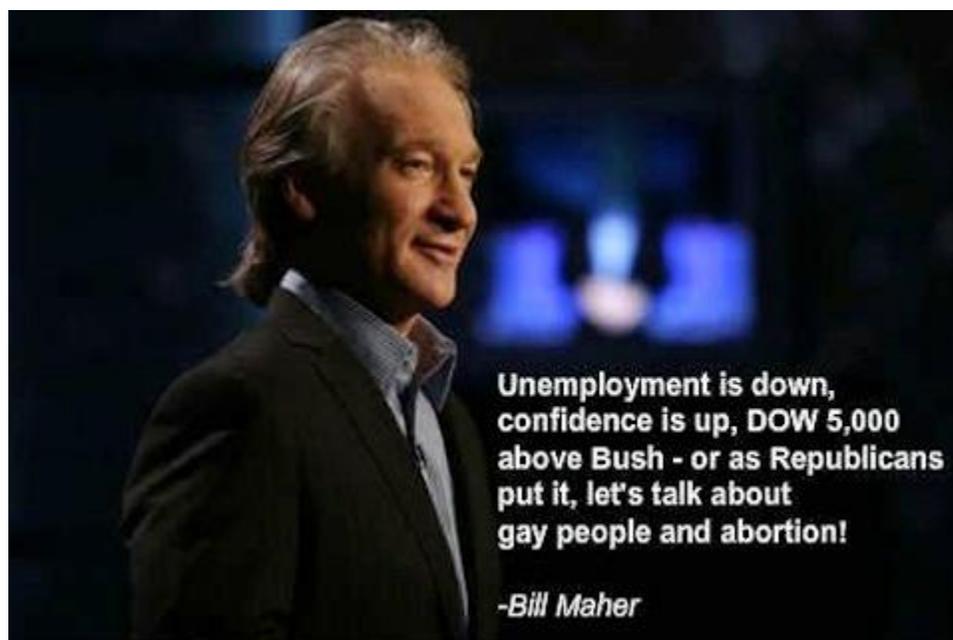
He goes back into the bar.

The robot says, "What will you have?" The guy says, "Whiskey," and the robot brings him his whiskey.

The robot then says, "What's your IQ?" The guy says, "Uh, about 50."

The robot leans in real close and says, "So...what are we going to do about them damned liberals?"

20120223-22 18:16 SteveG Quote: Bill Maher on Republicans



20120223-23 18:17 SteveB Re: Quote: Bill Maher on Republicans (reply to SteveG, above)

THIS IS PURE BRILLIANCE! AND SO, SO TRUE, HUH?

20120223-25 18:27 SteveG Re: Quote: Bill Maher on Republicans (reply to SteveB, above)

If you can't fight the truth, change the subject and lie.

20120223-20 18:12 SteveG "California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" & Photo: Carnival

This one is for SteveB [Thanks, SteveG! -SteveB]:



This one is for Pam:

"California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" by Chad Terhune, *LA Times*

Feb. 23, 2012, (<http://www.latimes.com/business/la-fi-0223-health-insurance-rate-hikes-20120223,0,7634380.story>)

(The proposed premium hikes for hundreds of thousands of California consumers with individual coverage would outpace the cost of overall medical care, which has risen just 3.6% in the last year.)

California's largest health insurers are raising average rates by about 8% to 14% for hundreds of thousands of consumers with individual coverage, outpacing the costs of overall medical care.

The cost of goods and services associated with medical care grew just 3.6% over the last 12 months nationally, government figures show. But insurance premiums have kept climbing at a faster pace in California.

Insurers defended their rate hikes, saying they are based on their claims experience with the customers they insure and not just the broader rate of medical inflation. They also say that healthier members dropped out of the individual market as premiums rose and the economy worsened in recent years, leaving behind a group of policyholders who have higher average costs.

"We will continue to examine the fundamental issues at the heart of rising healthcare costs, including the prevention of chronic disease, increasing the quality of care and reducing unnecessary health expenses," said Darrel Ng, spokesman for Anthem Blue Cross, the state's largest for-profit health insurer.

Consumer advocates and others are skeptical, however, questioning whether insurers are doing enough to hold down costs. These latest increases follow years of 20% to 30% rate hikes for families that are at the center of a looming fight between the insurance industry and its critics over a proposed ballot measure seeking tougher rate regulation.

"Consumers should be outraged that premiums continue to grow faster than underlying costs," said Gerald Kominski, director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research. "There's help on the horizon for millions of Californians from health reform, but things may get worse before they get better."

Anthem has proposed raising premiums 9.6% to 13.8% on average, effective May 1 or July 1, for about 700,000 individual policyholders and their family members. The rate increases are under review by state officials.

Nonprofit Kaiser Permanente increased premiums 9% on average for nearly 300,000 customers last month.

Blue Shield of California, also a nonprofit, is boosting average rates by 7.9% for 265,000 members and by 8.9% for 56,000 members, both effective March 1.

Insurers in California must submit proposed rate hikes for review to determine whether they meet certain state requirements, but state officials don't have the authority to reject rate hikes for being unreasonable. But regulators have been challenging insurers' arithmetic in calculating rates.

Officials at the Department of Managed Health Care persuaded Blue Shield to lower a proposed 14.8% increase to the 8.9% boost. The agency said it disagreed with Blue Shield's projection for future medical expenses. The California Department of Insurance convinced Aetna, based in Hartford, Conn., to lower a 13.7% increase to 9.3% for 50,000 members last month.

"Many of the health insurance carriers have projected significant increases in medical costs and utilization, but those projections have not been borne out by experience," said Janice Rocco, the insurance department's deputy commissioner for health policy. "Therefore the rate is higher than it needs to be."

Rocco said some consumers may receive rebates in August. That would occur based on an upcoming state review of 2011 claims to determine whether insurers met a new federal requirement for spending at least 80% of premiums on medical care for individual policies.

Tom Epstein, a spokesman for Blue Shield, said the company consented to the change in its rates sought by managed health care officials because "we want to keep medical care more affordable for our members." In its filings to regulators, Blue Shield said "the cost of hospital services, physician services and prescription drug coverage for our individual members continues to rise."

In recent years, the rising cost of medical care and rate hikes for health insurance have been a major political issue that prompted congressional approval of President Obama's healthcare overhaul, much of which takes effect in 2014, and calls in California for tougher state regulation of health premiums.

Anthem tried to raise rates by up to 39% in 2010, sparking national outrage and helping Obama win support for his healthcare overhaul. The Woodland Hills company, a unit of WellPoint Inc., was forced to back down and accepted maximum rate increases of 20%. Last year, Anthem raised premiums 9% to 16% on average for individual policyholders.

Starting in October 2010, Blue Shield raised premiums by 23% to 35% on average for about 325,000 policyholders, a result of two separate rate hikes that spanned two years. Blue Shield also began issuing credits to customers if its net income exceeded 2% of revenue. The company said it returned about \$450 million to individual policyholders last year as a result, which reduced members' rates by about 7%.

Kerry Abukhalaf, a 37-year-old who owns a small technology services firm with her husband in Alameda, has seen her family's Blue Shield premiums more than double in the last three years to \$544 per month. Her latest increase of 9% "is especially hard for ourselves and others we know due to the hard economy right now," she said. "I feel like my family is being penalized for doing the responsible thing and having insurance."

Last month, Blue Shield notified Tom and Dana Richardson, who run a pool-cleaning business in San Diego, that their premium would rise 15% to \$1,905 per month. The Richardsons chose to nearly triple their deductible to \$11,000 from \$4,000 to cut their monthly premium to \$1,090.

"It's like a kick in the teeth," said Tom Richardson, who's 63. His wife turns 60 next month. Because of their age and medical history, he said, they can't find a cheaper policy.

These increases would affect many of the 2.2 million Californians who buy individual policies, but not the majority of working Californians who are insured through employer group plans.

Businesses and employees covered by group health insurance are seeing premiums rise too. Nationwide, the annual premium for family coverage through an employer increased 9% last year, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

The proposed ballot measure would give the California insurance department the same authority to approve or reject health insurance rate increases that the department now has over property and auto policies. Consumer Watchdog, the Santa Monica group that championed California's Proposition 103 in 1988 that enacted rate controls on auto insurance, is leading the drive to get 505,000 valid signatures by May 1 to qualify the ballot measure for the November election.

Consumer groups have failed to win approval for similar measures in the state Legislature the last five years, encountering intense opposition from the insurance industry and other medical groups.

"In California, nobody can say no to an insurance company, and we're paying the price for it with rate hikes every year," said Doug Heller, executive director of Consumer Watchdog.

The insurance industry says the ballot initiative is unnecessary because health reform has brought extra scrutiny to premiums and company practices.

"Rate regulation might sound appealing," said Steve Shivinsky, a spokesman for Blue Shield. But "it will layer in another complex bureaucratic level of rate review that will gum up the system."

20120223-26

18:28

Pam

Re: "California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" (reply to SteveG, above)

Aaaaaaargh!! Healthy people opt out of health insurance because the premiums are too high, leaving the oldest, sickest, poorest folks to burden the system, and the well-off get stuck paying exorbitant rates. Everyone loses. To have an affordable system, everyone must be part of it--sick and well, young and old. The individual mandate is simply a bandaid on an open wound. Let's do it the way we do Social Security (and the way the Canadians do it): deduct a percentage of every family's income. What you pay would be based on what you earn. Automatic. Everyone covered. Create a supplemental system for the unemployed that would be equivalent to the average family's coverage. When you begin a job, you fill out paperwork for Social Security. Just add health coverage et voila! I know the insurance companies will squawk, but so do the real estate agents, the contractors, and the auto workers who have been squeezed by a shifting work environment. Big money owns this country. We are as corrupt as any banana republic, and I'm not especially sanguine about the possibility of change. Someone, please, tell me I'm wrong.

20120223-29

18:37

SteveB

Re: "California Health Insurers to Raise Average Rates 8% to 14%" (reply to Pam, above)

Since we've been talking about religious subjects a lot lately, I'll just say this in response to all Pam says:

AMEN! HALLELUJAH and PRAISE THE LORD!!!! YES, YES, YES!

"AND THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE."

(If you simply care to listen to it.)

20120223-28

18:32

Dennis

"Arizona Debate: Conservative Chickens Come Home to Roost"

This one will cheer Pam up. There is justice in the world. See below for an entertaining read:

"Arizona Debate: Conservative Chickens Come Home to Roost" by Matt Taibbi, *The Rolling Stone*

Feb. 23, 2012, (<http://www.rollingstone.com/politics/blogs/taibblog/arizona-debate-conservative-chickens-come-home-to-roost-20120223>)

How about that race for the Republican nomination? Was last night's debate crazy, or what?

Throughout this entire process, the spectacle of these clowns thrashing each other and continually seizing and then fumbling frontrunner status has left me with an oddly reassuring feeling, one that I haven't quite been able to put my finger on. In my younger days I would have just assumed it was regular old *Schadenfreude* at the sight of people like Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich suffering, but this isn't like that – it's something different than the pleasure of watching A-Rod strike out in the playoffs.

No, it was while watching the debates last night that it finally hit me: This is justice. What we have here are chickens coming home to roost. It's as if all of the American public's bad habits and perverse obsessions are all coming back to haunt Republican voters in this race: The lack of attention span, the constant demand for instant gratification, the abject hunger for negativity, the utter lack of backbone or constancy (we change our loyalties at the drop of a hat, all it takes is a clever TV ad): these things are all major factors in the spiraling Republican disaster.

Most importantly, though, the conservative passion for divisive, partisan, bomb-tossing politics is threatening to permanently cripple the Republican party. They long ago became more about pointing fingers than about ideology, and it's finally ruining them.

Oh, sure, your average conservative will insist his belief system is based upon a passion for the free market and limited government, but that's mostly a cover story. Instead, the vast team-building exercise that has driven the broadcasts of people like Rush and Hannity and the talking heads on Fox for decades now has really been a kind of ongoing Quest for Orthodoxy, in which the team members congregate in front of the TV and the radio and share in the warm feeling of pointing the finger at people who aren't as American as they are, who lack their family values, who don't share their All-American work ethic.

The finger-pointing game is a fun one to play, but it's a little like drugs – you have to keep taking bigger and bigger doses in order to get the same high.

So it starts with a bunch of these people huddling together and saying to themselves, "We're the real good Americans; our problems are caused by all those other people out there who don't share our values." At that stage the real turn-on for the followers is the recognition that there are other like-minded people out there, and they don't need blood orgies and war cries to keep the faith strong – bake sales and church retreats will do.

So they form their local Moral Majority outfits, and they put Ronald Reagan in office, and they sit and wait for the world to revert back to how they remember things used to be, a world where there was one breadwinner in the family, and no teen pregnancy or crime or poor people, and immigrants worked hard and didn't ask for welfare and had the decency to speak English – a world that never existed in reality, of course, but they're waiting for a return to it nonetheless.

Think Ron Paul in the South Carolina debate, when he said that in the '60s, "there was nobody out in the street suffering with no medical care." Paul also recalled that after World War II, 10 million soldiers came home and prospered without any kind of government aid at all – all they needed was a massive cut to the federal budget, and those soldiers just surfed on the resultant wave of economic progress.

"You know what the government did? They cut the budget by 60 percent," he said. "And everybody went back to work again, you didn't need any special programs."

Right – it wasn't like they needed a G.I. Bill or anything. After all, people were different back then: They didn't want or need welfare, or a health care program, or any of those things. At least, that's not the way Paul remembered it.

That's all the early conservative movement was. It was just a heartfelt request that we go back to the good old days of America as these people remembered or imagined it. Of course, the problem was, we couldn't go back, not just because more than half the population (particularly the nonwhite, non-straight, non-male segment of the population) desperately didn't *want* to go back, but also because that America never existed and was therefore impossible to recreate.

And when we didn't go back to the good old days, this crowd got frustrated, and suddenly the message stopped being heartfelt and it got an edge to it.

The message went from, "We're the real Americans; the others are the problem," to, "We're the last line of defense; we hate those other people and they're our enemies." Now it wasn't just that the rest of us weren't getting with the program: Now we were also saboteurs, secretly or perhaps even openly conspiring with America's enemies to prevent her return to the long-desired Days of Glory.

Now, why would us saboteurs do that? Out of jealousy (we resented their faith and their family closeness), out of spite, and because we have gonads instead of morals. In the Clinton years and the early Bush years we started to hear a lot of this stuff, that the people conservatives described as "liberals" were not, as we are in fact, normal people who believe in marriage and family and love their children just as much as conservatives do, but perverts who subscribe to a sort of religion of hedonism.

"Liberals' only remaining big issue is abortion because of their beloved sexual revolution," was the way Ann Coulter put it. "That's their cause – spreading anarchy and polymorphous perversity. Abortion permits that."

So they fought back, and a whole generation of more strident conservative politicians rose to fight the enemy at home, who conveniently during the '90s lived in the White House and occasionally practiced polymorphous perversity there.

Then conservatives managed to elect to the White House a man who was not only a fundamentalist Christian, but a confirmed anti-intellectual who never even thought about visiting Europe until, as president, he was forced to – the perfect champion of all Real Americans!

Surely, things would change now. But they didn't. Life continued to move drearily into a new and scary future, Spanish-speaking people continued to roll over the border in droves, queers paraded around in public and even demanded the right to be married, and America not only didn't go back to the good old days of the single-breadwinner family, but jobs in general dried up and you were lucky if Mom and Dad weren't both working two jobs.

During this time we went to war against the Islamic terrorists responsible for 9/11 by invading an unrelated secular Middle Eastern dictatorship. When people on the other side protested, the rhetoric became even more hysterical. Now those of us outside the circle of Real Americans were not just enemies, but in league with mass-murdering terrorists. In fact, that slowly became the definition of a "liberal" on a lot of these programs – a terrorist.

Sean Hannity's bestseller during this time, for Christ's sake, was subtitled, *Defeating terrorism, despotism, and liberalism*. "He is doing the work of what all people who want big government always do, and that is commit terrorist acts," said Glenn Beck years ago, comparing liberals to Norwegian mass murderer Anders Breivik.

And when the unthinkable happened, and a black American with a Muslim-sounding name assumed the throne in the White House, now, suddenly, we started to hear that liberals were not only in league with terrorists, but somehow *worse* than terrorists.

"Terrorism? Yes. That's not the big battle," said Minnesota Republican congressional candidate Allan Quist a few years ago. "The big battle is in D.C. with the radicals. They aren't liberals. They are radicals. Obama, Pelosi, Walz: They're not liberals, they're radicals. They are destroying our country."

In *Spinal Tap* terms, the rhetoric by the time Obama got elected already had gone well past eleven. It was at thirteen, fifteen, twenty Our tight little core of Real Americans by then had, over a series of decades, decided pretty much the entire rest of the world was shit. Europe we know about. The Middle East? Let's "carpet bomb it until they can't build a transistor radio," as Ann Coulter put it. Africa was full of black terrorists with AIDS, and Asia, too, was a good place to point a finger or two ("I want to go to war with China," is how Rick Santorum put it).

Here at home, all liberals, gays, Hispanic immigrants, atheists, Hollywood actors and/or musicians with political opinions, members of the media, members of congress, TSA officials, animal-lovers, union workers, state employees with pensions, Occupiers and other assorted unorthodox types had already long ago been rolled into the enemies list.

Given the continued troubles and the continued failure to return to good old American values, who else could possibly be to blame? Where else could they possibly point the finger?

There was only one possible answer, and we're seeing it playing out in this race: *At themselves!* And I don't mean they pointed the finger "at themselves" in the psychologically healthy, self-examining, self-doubting sort of way. Instead, I mean they pointed "at themselves" in the sense of, "There are traitors in our ranks. They must be ferreted out and destroyed!"

This is the last stage in any paranoid illness. You start by suspecting that somebody out there is out to get you; in the end, you're sure that even the people who love you the most under your own roof, your own doctors, your

parents, your wife and your children, they're in on the plot. To quote Matt Damon in the almost-underrated spy film *The Good Shepherd*, they became convinced that there's "a stranger in the house."

This is where the Republican Party is now. They've run out of foreign enemies to point fingers at. They've already maxed out the rhetoric against us orgiastic, anarchy-loving pansexual liberal terrorists. The only possible remaining explanation for their troubles is that *their own leaders* have failed them. There is a stranger in the house!

This current race for the presidential nomination has therefore devolved into a kind of Freudian Agatha Christie story, in which the disturbed and highly paranoid voter base by turns tests the orthodoxy of each candidate, trying to figure out which one is the spy, which one is really Barack Obama bin Laden-Marx under the candidate mask!

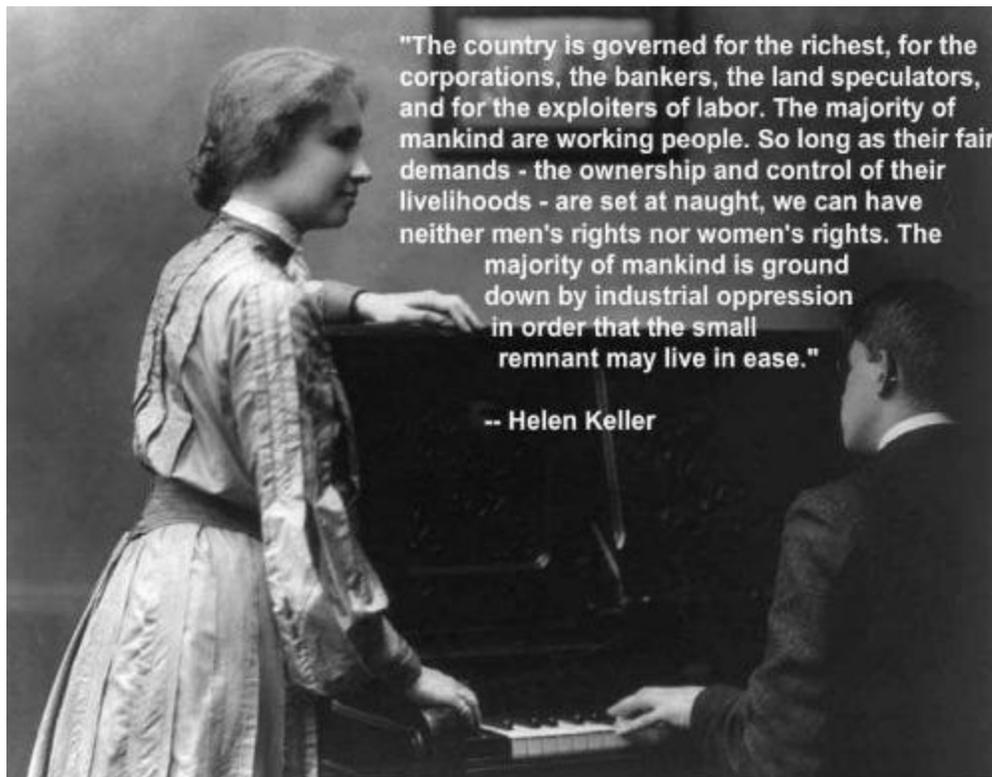
We expected this when Mitt Romney, a man who foolishly once created a functioning health care program in Massachusetts, was the front-runner. We knew he was going to have to defend his *bona fides* against the priesthood ("I'm not convinced," sneered the sideline-sitting conservative Mme. Defarge, Sarah Palin), that he would have a rough go of it at the CPAC conference, and so on.

But it's gotten so ridiculous that even Santorum, as paranoid and hysterical a finger-pointing politician as this country has ever seen, a man who once insisted with a straight face that there is no such thing as a liberal Christian – he's now being put through the Electric Conservative Paranoia Acid Test, and failing!

"He is a fake," Ron Paul said at the Michigan debate last night, to assorted hoots and cheers. And Santorum, instead of turning around and laying into Paul, immediately panicked and rubbed his arm as if to say, "See? I'm made of the right stuff," and said, "I'm real, Ron, I'm real." These candidates are behaving like Stalinist officials in the late thirties, each one afraid to be the first to stop applauding.

These people have run out of others to blame, run out of bystanders to suspect, run out of decent family people to dismiss as Godless, sex-crazed perverts. They're turning the gun on themselves now. It might be justice, or it might just be sad. Whatever it is, it's remarkable to watch.

20120223-34 22:30 SteveG Quote: Helen Keller on Rich and Poor



"Florida Congressman Upset at Obama for \$70 Fill-Up of His Hummer" by Justin Hyde, Motoramic

Feb. 23, 2012, (<http://autos.yahoo.com/blogs/motoramic/florida-congressman-upset-obama-70-fill-hummer-215636787.html>)

U.S. Rep. Allen West, a Florida Republican, has never been any great fan of President Barack Obama, but took to Facebook today to answer the question of what, if anything, he could praise about the president. His answer included a complaint that thanks to rising gas prices, it now costs \$70 to fill up his 2008 Hummer H3. Is it really a good idea to use your Hummer to argue gas prices are too high?

Here's the complete statement from Rep. West that's drawing some attention:

People have asked me before is there any area where I could praise President Obama? Certainly, he has an impeccable penchant for understanding the power of the bully pulpit. President Obama is also very adept at promulgating deceptive language masquerading as policy, actually just insidious political gimmickry. This "tax policy" is an example as well as today's speech on his "energy policy" shall be. Here is the bottom line, last night it took 70 dollars to fill the tank of my 2008 H3 Hummer, what is it costing you? What does it cost the President to fill his gas tank?

Saying gas costs too much based on your H3 -- which sports an average fuel economy of 16 to 18 mpg -- seems akin to arguing Americans have grown too fat at the drive-through window of a Carl Jr.'s. Yet West and other drivers can't be blamed for the current run-up; it's not American demand for gasoline causing its prices to rise, but rather demand from China, Latin America and worries over Iran's actions near the Strait of Hormuz. Last year, fossil fuels were America's biggest export -- partly because of the economic recession and the shift toward vehicles that get 40 mpg instead of 16.

Rep. West may need to brace his pocketbook; that H3 will need \$90 to fill if prices hit \$4 a gallon, as most experts suspect they will soon. Or he could switch into something a little more economical; there's nothing quite as obnoxious as the Hummer on sale, but switching to, say, the 2-liter turbo Ford Explorer would save him at least \$1,400 a year in gas -- and maybe some aggravation.

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



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

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Is Today the Eve of Destruction or Resolution?

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 27, 2012)

And you tell me
Over and over and over again, my friend,
Ah, you don't believe
We're on the eve of destruction.
—Barry McGuire ("Eve of Destruction")

The Michigan Primary tomorrow will prove to be a pivotal contest in the race of Mr. Zero against Mr. God. I believe, thankfully, one of them should start to go away. Logically, that would be Rick Santorum, but logic does not seem to be playing much of a part in the 2012 Republican Primaries. Emotion and panic rule because pretty much everybody sees the writing on the wall to one degree or another—the GOP is in big trouble with crazy candidates in a crucial year.

Both Romney and Santorum seem to be doing their best to lose and go home. In Michigan, where there is so much unemployment and misery, Romney brags about how many Cadillacs he owns and his lavish, bicoastal life-style. Santorum whines about how President Obama is not a Christian, and how the separation of church and state makes him puke. Huge proportions of their own party dislike one or the other of them. It appears more and more like the GOP has fielded a bunch of prospects who can't win the election. I guess the real candidates, the 2016 candidates, decided a long time ago that they couldn't beat President Obama this year, or why wouldn't they have thrown their poison into the ring too?

Thus do the Republican candidates and the Obama recovery cause President Obama's approval ratings to rise. If this keeps up (And why wouldn't it? Romney and Santorum are both losers.), Obamacracy will rule for at least another four years. Maybe after that we can find a way to make him dictator of the new socialist state—Obamamerica!

Change the Republicans can count on! Bye-bye Tea Party! Now, when can we get started on this wealth redistribution? LOL!

"The Lost Party" by John Heilemann, *New York Magazine*

Feb. 25, 2012, (<http://nymag.com/news/features/gop-primary-heilemann-2012-3/>)

(The strangest primary season in memory reveals a GOP that's tearing itself apart.)

On a biting, brittle mid-February morning 30 miles north of Detroit, Rick Santorum plants his flag in a patch of turf as politically fertile as exists in these United States. For three decades, Macomb County, Michigan, has been both a bellwether and a battleground, as its fabled Reagan Democrats first abandoned the party of Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, and Mike Dukakis, then gradually drifted back in support of Bill Clinton, Al Gore, and Barack Obama. Today in Macomb, the action is as much on the Republican as the Democratic side, with the county GOP riven by a split between mainstream and tea-party cadres. And yet in demographic terms, Macomb remains Macomb: overwhelmingly white and mostly non-college-educated, heavily Catholic and staunchly socially conservative, economically anti-globalist and culturally anti-swell.

All of which is to say that when Santorum takes the podium to address a Michigan Faith & Freedom Coalition rally in Shelby Charter Township, the 1,500 souls he sees before him are his kind of people—and soon enough he is speaking their language. To explain how America has always differed from other nations, Santorum invokes the Almighty: "We believe ... we are children of a loving God." To elucidate the evils of Obamacare, Dodd-Frank, and cap-and-trade, he inveighs against liberal elites: "They want to control you, because like the kings of old, they believe they know better than you." To highlight what's at stake in 2012, he unfurls a grand (and entirely *farkakte*) historical flourish: "This decision will be starker than at any time since the election of 1860"—you know, the one featuring Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas on the eve of the Civil War.

But before the nation faces that decision, Michigan has its own to make: between him and Mitt Romney in the Republican primary that takes place on February 28. "Do you want somebody who can go up against Barack Obama, take him on the big issues ... or do you want someone who can just manage Washington a little bit better?" Santorum asks, as the audience rises cheering to its feet. "That's your choice. What does Michigan have to say?"

What Michiganders are telling pollsters is that their affections are split evenly between the two men, despite Romney's status as the scion of one of the Wolverine State's great political families. In Ohio, arguably the most important of ten states with primaries or caucuses on Super Tuesday, March 6, two recent surveys found Santorum holding a wide lead there, and the Gallup national tracking poll put him ahead of Romney by eight points as of February 24. Taken together, all this more than makes clear that Santorum has emerged as the dominant conservative alternative to Romney. It illustrates a shift in momentum so pronounced that, unless Romney takes Michigan and fares strongly on Super Tuesday, his ascension to his party's nomination will be in serious jeopardy, as the calls for a late-entering white-knight candidate escalate—and odds of an up-for-grabs Republican convention rise. "Right now, I'd say they're one in five," says one of the GOP's grandest grandees. "If Romney doesn't put this thing away by Super Tuesday, I'd say they're closer to 50-50."

That Mitt Romney finds himself so imperiled by Rick Santorum—Rick Santorum!—is just the latest in a series of jaw-dropping developments in what has been the most volatile, unpredictable, and just plain wackadoodle Republican-nomination contest ever. Part of the explanation lies in Romney's lameness as a candidate, in Santorum's strength, and in the sudden efflorescence of social issues in what was supposed to be an all-economy-all-the-time affair. But even more important have been the seismic changes within the Republican Party. "Compared to 2008, all the candidates are way to the right of John McCain," says longtime conservative activist Jeff Bell. "The fact that Romney is running with basically the same views as then but is seen as too moderate tells you that the base has moved rightward and doesn't simply want a conservative candidate—it wants a *very* conservative one."

The transfiguration of the GOP isn't only about ideology, however. It is also about demography and temperament, as the party has grown whiter, less well schooled, more blue-collar, and more hair-curlingly populist. The result has been a party divided along the lines of culture and class: Establishment versus grassroots, secular versus religious, upscale versus downscale, highfalutin versus hoi polloi. And with those divisions have arisen the competing electoral coalitions—shirts versus skins, regulars versus red-hots—represented by Romney and Santorum, which are now increasingly likely to duke it out all spring.

Few Republicans greet that prospect sanguinely, though some argue that it will do little to hamper the party's capacity to defeat Obama in the fall. "It's reminiscent of the contest between Obama and Clinton," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell recently opined. "[That] didn't seem to have done [Democrats] any harm in the general election, and I don't think this contest is going to do us any harm, either."

Yet the Democratic tussle in 2008, which featured two undisputed heavyweights with few ideological discrepancies between them, may be an exception that proves the rule. Certainly Republican history suggests as much: Think of 1964 and the scrap between the forces aligned with Barry Goldwater and Nelson Rockefeller, or 1976, between backers of Gerald Ford and Ronald Reagan. On both occasions, the result was identical: a party disunited, a nominee debilitated, a general election down the crapper.

With such precedents in mind, many Republicans are already looking past 2012. If either Romney or Santorum gains the nomination and then falls before Obama, flubbing an election that just months ago seemed eminently winnable, it will unleash a GOP apocalypse on November 7—followed by an epic struggle between the regulars and red-hots to refashion the party. And make no mistake: A loss is what the GOP's political class now expects. "Six months before this thing got going, every Republican I know was saying, 'We're gonna win, we're gonna beat Obama,'" says former Reagan strategist Ed Rollins. "Now even those who've endorsed Romney say, 'My God, what a f*cking mess.'"

Should Romney ultimately fail to become the Republican standard-bearer, history will record with precision the day the wheels came off the wagon—January 19. Until that morning, his march to the nomination was proceeding even more smoothly than he and his advisers had hoped. The apparent eight-vote win in Iowa. The landslide in New Hampshire. And then the double-digit leads in South Carolina polling, positioning him to pull off a historic early-state trifecta. But in the space of a few hours, Romney was serially (and surreally) battered by unwelcome events: three tracking polls putting him behind Gingrich for the first time in 2012; word from Iowa that his victory there was being snatched away and handed to Santorum; Rick Perry's exit from the race and endorsement of Gingrich; and Newt's masterly mau-mauing of CNN's John King at a debate in Charleston over a (foolish, inartful, walking-blithely-into-a-buzzsaw) question about accusations by Gingrich's second wife that he'd sought an "open marriage."

By the next morning, it was evident that Romney was on his way to defeat in South Carolina, though few would have forecast the scale of the drubbing to come. In truth, any expectations Romney would win there were always overblown. His long-standing weakness with Evangelical voters was always likely to make him a hard sell to an electorate in which nearly two thirds self-identify as born-again. And that, in turn, led Team Romney to devote few resources to the state. "They had no real structure in South Carolina—none, nada," says Jon Huntsman's former chief strategist, John Weaver. "They ended up with a few figurehead endorsements and some late hires, but they had nothing on the ground."

But South Carolina also laid bare weaknesses in Romney's candidacy, some already well known, others brand spanking new—and devastating to the core rationale behind his campaign. All through 2011, Romney had focused laserlike on the economy, arguing that his private-sector background made him best suited to tackle Obama on the election's central issue. Sure, Romney inspired little passion in the Republican base; but his rivals were clueless, cartoonish, or crackers, and with the GOP intent above all on ousting the incumbent, the presumption was that Romney's combination of experience and presidential bearing would conquer all. "The Romney folks faced a fork in the road between the electable route and the ideological route," says the manager of a previous Republican presidential campaign. "And they decided to go all-in on electability."

Romney and his people never expected, however, to be confronted in the Republican phase of the race with a raft of challenges related to the legitimacy of his wealth. But first on his record at Bain Capital and then on his tax returns, that is what occurred. With Gingrich and Perry sounding more like commenters on Daily Kos than Republicans, Romney coughed up a remarkable collection of gaffes: from his fear of pink slips to his enjoyment of firing people to his "not very much" in speaker's fees (when they totaled \$374,327 last year).

For many Republicans, Romney's maladroitness in addressing the issues at hand was worrisome, to put it mildly. Here he was handing Obama's people a blooper reel that would let them paint him as a hybrid of Gordon Gekko and Thurston Howell III. "Republicans were saying, 'This is the guy who's gonna be carrying the ball for our side, defending the private sector?'" Rollins says incredulously. "Warren Buffett would kick his a*s in a debate, let alone Obama."

Nor were Romney's rehearsed turns on the hustings appreciably better. From Iowa through New Hampshire, his campaign events had been progressively pared back and whittled down. By the time he reached South Carolina,

they had achieved a certain purity—the purity of the null set. The climactic moment in them came when Romney would recite (and offer attendant textual analysis that would make Stanley Fish beat his head against a wall) the lyrics of “America the Beautiful.” Even staunch Romney allies were abashed by this sadly persistent, and persistently sad, rhetorical trope. “I have never seen anything more ridiculous or belittling,” a prominent Romney fund-raiser says.

Gingrich, by contrast, was on fire in South Carolina, and not just at the debates. His final event on the night before the primary, a rally aboard the USS *Yorktown* aircraft carrier in Charleston Harbor, included an encounter with a heckler who shouted out, “When will you release your ethics report?”—from a congressional investigation of Gingrich in the nineties.

Gingrich replied with a spontaneity and forcefulness as foreign to Romney as Urdu. “Actually, if you’d do a little research instead of shouting mindlessly, you’d discover the entire thing is available online in the Thomas system”—the online congressional database Gingrich brought into existence as Speaker of the House in 1995—“and you can print it out,” he fired back. “I think it is 900 pages. When you get done reading it, let me know if there are any questions.” The crowd cheered loudly and then Gingrich delivered the coup de grâce: “I assume you’re for the candidate who’s afraid to release his income taxes.”

But Gingrich wasn’t merely a superior performer to Romney on the stump. With his hot-eyed imprecations against Obama, his race-freighted mugging of Fox News’s Juan Williams at the debate in Myrtle Beach, his unbridled (if theatrical and hypocritical) enmity toward the media and East Coast elites more broadly, and his relentless ideological attacks on his rival as a timid “Massachusetts moderate,” he was far more deeply in sync with the raging id of the party’s ascendant populist wing.

The coalescence of the various elements of that wing around Gingrich accounted for the 40 to 28 percent pistol-whipping he administered to Romney on Primary Day—and marked the sharpening of the shirts-skins schism that would play out from then on. According to the exit polls, Gingrich captured 45 percent (to Romney’s 21) of Evangelical voters, 48 percent (to 21) of strong tea-party supporters, and 47 percent (to 22) of non-college graduates. Romney, meanwhile, held his own with the groups making up what the journalist Ron Brownstein has dubbed the GOP’s “managerial wing”—richer, better-educated, less godly, more pragmatic voters. One trouble for Romney was that this assemblage constitutes less than half his party now. But even more disconcerting was that he lost badly to Gingrich among South Carolinians who said that the most crucial candidate quality was the ability to beat Obama—which suggested not simply that ideology trumped electability but that for many Republicans, hard-core conservative ideology was *tantamount* to electability.

Thus did Romney find himself facing his first existential peril. The influential conservative blogger Erik Erickson, on the grounds that South Carolina represented less an embrace of Gingrich than a grassroots rejection of the front-runner, his themeless pudding of a campaign, and the Establishment support of it, encouraged Romney to “refine his message, not sharpen his knives” as the race moved to Florida. But that suggestion would be rejected—with huge consequences for Gingrich, Romney, and even Santorum.

An hour or so after the Republican debate in Jacksonville on January 26, Romney’s chief strategist, Stuart Stevens, was in the spin room employing his iPad as a weapon. Stevens asked if I knew how many times Gingrich was mentioned in Reagan’s memoir. Calling up the text onscreen and searching the document, he revealed the answer: zero. Stevens then asked the same about a different memoir—Jack Abramoff’s. Here the number of mentions was larger: thirteen. Stevens asked, “What does that tell you?” I ventured, “That Newt is full of sh*t?” Stevens: “You said it, buddy.”

Stevens’s parlor trick was a minor, albeit delightful, element of the two-front assault waged by Team Romney on Gingrich in Florida: strafing him from the air with negative ads and badgering him on the ground, which involved not only working the press but sending operatives to Gingrich’s every event to offer instant rebuttals. One objective here was to refute Gingrich’s claims to being at once instrumental to the Reagan Revolution and a Washington outsider; another was to rattle him, to pi*s him off, to get inside his head.

Together with two stellar debate showings by Romney, the anti-Newt incursion accomplished all that and more, driving Gingrich to fits of defensive distraction, undisguised irritation, and an in toto effort in Florida that was every

bit as feeble as his South Carolina bid had been robust. And in its indiscipline, lassitude, and wackiness—how many news cycles did he squander on that freaking lunar colony?—it made manifest why he was never a plausible Republican nominee. But while Gingrich today seems an afterthought, his role in shaping the contours of the contest cannot be overstated.

“Of all the candidates, he has had the biggest impact,” says Steve Schmidt, McCain’s 2008 chief strategist. “By making the case he made against Romney, Gingrich did a significant amount of damage to him, both in the primary and in the general, if Romney does become the nominee.”

The damage Schmidt is talking about in the latter case revolves around independent voters. By pressing Romney on Bain and his tax returns, Gingrich helped create the context for his rival’s errors. “The toughest thing in a campaign is when there’s synergy between your opponents’ attacks on the left and right,” Schmidt explains. “The same criticisms of Romney being made by Democrats are being echoed by his Republican challengers. And when criticism becomes ecumenical, that really impacts independent voters.”

And how. An NBC News–*Wall Street Journal* poll in late January found Romney’s unfavorability rating among independents had risen twenty points, from 22 to 42 percent, over the previous two months. “It’s not as though they have said Bain has disqualified him or that he can’t be trusted because of his taxes, but this has created a gulf between him and the average voter,” one of the pollsters behind the survey, Peter Hart, told the *Washington Post*. “Bain and the taxes just reinforce the sense that this person is in a different world.”

Every presidential candidate faces a trade-off between maintaining his viability with independents and catering to his party’s base. The difficulty for Romney is that, even as his appeal to the middle has sharply waned, the lack of enthusiasm for him on the right has remained acute. Even in Florida, where Romney’s fourteen-point victory was broad and sweeping, he was beaten soundly by Gingrich among very conservative voters and strong tea-party adherents.

To a large extent, Romney’s concurrent problems with conservatives and independents are of his own making. His campaign’s incineration of Gingrich in Florida, though perhaps necessary and certainly skillful, also contributed mightily to alienating the center while doing nothing to remedy his main malady in the eyes of conservatives: the absence of a positive message that resonates with them, coupled with a tic-like tendency to commit unforced errors that exacerbate their doubts that he is one of their own. Crystallizing this phenomenon was an episode that took place the morning after Florida, when, on CNN, Romney disgorged another gem: “I’m in this race because I care about Americans. I’m not concerned about the very poor. We have a safety net there. If it needs repair, I’ll fix it.”

With these few short sentences in what should have been a moment of triumph for him, Romney managed to send the wrong message to an array of factions. To independent voters, “I’m not concerned about the very poor” sounds callous. To conservative intellectuals and activists, talk about fixing the safety net—as opposed to pursuing policies that enable the poor to free themselves from government dependency—is rank apostasy. And to congressional Republicans, the comment reflected a glaring lack of familiarity with the party’s anti-poverty positions. “Electeds were flabbergasted,” says a veteran K Street player. “Even moderate Republican members, if they’ve been here for more than four months, get dipped in the empowerment agenda.”

A week later, Romney attempted to repair part of the damage with his speech at the annual Conservative Political Action Conference—and promptly put his foot in it again. In an address in which he employed the word *conservative* or some variation of it 24 times, as if trying to prove he is a member of the tribe through sheer incantation, his use of the adverb *severely* to express the depth of his conviction raised eyebrows inside and outside the hall. “The most retarded thing I have ever heard a Republican candidate say” was the verdict of one strategist with ample experience in GOP presidential campaigns.

At CPAC in 2008, Romney had used the convocation to announce he was dropping out of the race, as the party was rallying around McCain despite long-held suspicions of him among movement conservatives. Four years later, the rightward drift of the GOP and its shirts-skins fractiousness meant that Romney was still struggling to close the deal. His problems doing so were more, well, severe than his vocabulary—for by then Santorum had achieved liftoff and was streaking across the Republican sky.

The launching pad for Santorum was the trio of states that held contests on February 7: Colorado, Minnesota, and Missouri. His sweep of all three was unexpected to everyone but him—Santorum is a confident man—and reflected a grievous miscalculation on the part of Team Romney, which only barely played in Colorado and ignored the other two. “The idiocy to do that with all of the resources they have; there’s no limit to their money,” Rollins says. “It’s that kind of arrogance: ‘We won Florida; it’s over.’ That was four years ago. That’s not this time. This time it’s trench warfare all the way, and somebody’s gonna keep rising up, and it’s now Santorum.”

For many Democrats, the idea of Santorum elevating beyond the level of a punch line is all but inconceivable. The extremeness of the former Pennsylvania senator’s views on social issues—from the out-front homophobia that led him to compare gay sex to “man-on-child, man-on-dog, or whatever the case may be,” to his adamant opposition to contraception and abortion even in cases of rape or incest—have long made him the subject of scorn and ridicule on the left, in the center, and on the Internet. (Even with his newfound fame, the first result of a Google search for his name is spreading santorum.com, a site dealing with “frothy” matters too coarse to discuss in a family magazine, and also in this one.)

But in a Republican-nomination contest, these views are not necessarily liabilities, and are even assets in some quarters—which doesn’t mean Santorum is without vulnerabilities in the context of his party. On spending, earmarks, and labor relations, he is by no means pure in conservative terms. He has been embroiled in ethics issues and is a bone-deep creature of the Beltway. Then there is his personality: “In the Senate as well as his home state, Santorum often struck people as arrogant and headstrong, preachy and judgmental,” writes Byron York in the *Washington Examiner*. Or, as a Republican lobbyist puts it to me, “When he was in the Senate, he was probably the most friendless guy there.”

That the Romney campaign will hit Santorum hard on virtually all this (and more) is a given; indeed, it already is, holding regular conference calls with surrogates to attack him, outspending him by three to one on TV ads in Michigan (if the super-pacs on each side are included in the totals). “The Romney campaign has realized there’s nothing it can do to communicate Romney’s record in a way that moves the needle, so their focus is on disqualifying Santorum as a plausible nominee and authentic conservative,” says a top GOP operative. “Can Santorum survive the onslaught? Gingrich certainly couldn’t.”

Santorum may be a different story, however—less erratic, less prone to light himself on fire, less saddled with XXXL baggage. “Santorum is a much more sympathetic character than Gingrich,” says the Evangelical leader Richard Land. “If a guy has 57 percent negatives, you can carpet-bomb him with impunity. But if Romney comes out swinging for Santorum, people are going to get angry. It’s a lot harder to demonize him than Gingrich.”

If Santorum can weather the welter of attacks, his combination of governing and ideological bona fides might make him Romney’s *bête noire*. “The one thing Romney had to avoid that’s a mortal threat to him was an ideological contest with someone who has the credentials to be commander-in-chief,” says Schmidt. “And Santorum, as a three-term member of Congress and two-term senator, clears that hurdle, especially running against a one-term governor. That’s why the race is more wide open now than at any other point before—because Romney is dealing for the first time with a plausible nominee in the eyes of Republican voters, where it’s absolutely impossible to get around his right flank.”

Nowhere is this more true than on social issues, naturally. Whatever risks it might pose in the general election, the controversy over contraceptives, the Catholic Church, and the Obama administration has been an unalloyed blessing for Santorum in the Republican-nomination fight. Popping up unexpectedly, it has shifted what the political sharpies call the “issue matrix” in an awkward direction for Romney and a comfortable one for Santorum, and is likely to help the latter further solidify his already firm hold over a voting bloc with which his rival is notably weak.

Evangelicals and other devout voters are, to be sure, Santorum’s most ardent supporters within the grassroots coalition. He has also demonstrated considerable traction with tea-party supporters, carrying the largest proportion of them in Iowa (29 percent) against four far-right foes. But equally crucial is the non-college-educated, blue-collar vote, which accounts for more than half the electorate in Michigan, as well as Super Tuesday states such as Ohio, Oklahoma, and Tennessee. So far in 2012, Santorum has not done consistently well with this cohort. But between his policy focus on reviving American manufacturing, a biography that includes growing up in Western Pennsylvania

steel country and a coal-miner grandfather, and a Joe Six-Pack-meets-Mister Rogers demeanor, he seems well positioned to make inroads here.

If Santorum can consolidate the support of these groups as Gingrich did momentarily in South Carolina, the battle between him and his amalgam of red-hots and Romney and his army of regulars will be pitched—and, depending on what happens on Tuesday in Michigan, maybe bloody and protracted.

The day before Santorum's speech in Macomb County, Romney delivers a talk of his own right next door in Oakland County, at the Greater Farmington–Livonia Chamber of Commerce Lunch. Oakland couldn't be more different from Macomb: affluent, professional, well educated, and reasonably diverse. The Romney crowd reflects the divergence, decked out in suits and ties where Santorum's crowd was all sweatshirts and baggy jeans. The event begins with Michigan governor Rick Snyder bestowing his endorsement on Romney. Beaming and amped up, Romney begins with a paean that reads like a parody—and instantly goes viral:

"I was born and raised here. I love this state. It seems right here. Trees are the right height. I like seeing the lakes. I love the lakes. There's something very special here. The Great Lakes, but also all the little inland lakes that dot the parts of Michigan. I love cars. I grew up totally in love with cars. It used to be, in the fifties and sixties, if you showed me one square foot of almost any part of a car, I could tell you what brand it was, the model, and so forth. Now, with all the Japanese cars, I'm not quite so good at it. But I still know the American cars pretty well and drive a Mustang. I love cars. I love American cars. And long may they rule the world, let me tell ya."

In his TV ads as well as on the stump, Romney has been slapping the favorite-son card on the table like a drunk at a game of strip poker, and is leaning hard on the state GOP Establishment to help him win the hand. "Regardless of the polls that show Santorum with a lead, it's still Romney's to lose," says consultant and former state-party executive director Greg McNeilly. "He has massive organizational strength Santorum can't match." Bill Ballenger, editor of *Inside Michigan Politics* newsletter, agrees: "Romney has a list of endorsements as long as both your arms. He's raised far more money here than any other candidate, including Barack Obama. Santorum is a total cipher. He's an unknown. And he has not done anything here."

But the savviest political players in the state also allow that, as McNeilly puts it, "the race is in flux in a way that defies conventional wisdom," that anti-Establishment sentiments are running high in the state, and therefore Santorum might just pull off an upset. And while Eric Ferhnstrom, Romney's spokesman, insists the primary is not a must-win for his boss, others close to the candidate admit that losing, in the words of one of them, would be "absolutely, completely f*cking horrible."

The reality is that even winning Michigan (and Arizona the same day) may not be enough to rescue Romney from the rough. "Every money guy I know thinks Romney can't win a general election," says a respected Washington player and presidential-campaign veteran. "Our guys on Capitol Hill are moving into survival-of-the-fittest, only-worrying-about-themselves mode. They think the damage to Romney may be done and may be irreversible—and now he might not even be the nominee. So Romney not only has to win Michigan and Arizona, but he has to have a resounding knockout on Super Tuesday or he's gonna be in real, real trouble."

Yet the likelihood of Romney delivering a KO, or even a TKO, on Super Tuesday is slight. According to University of Virginia political scientist Larry Sabato, at least five of the ten states with contests on March 6—Georgia, Ohio, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Virginia—have electorates in which more than 40 percent of voters are Evangelical. That presents a significant hurdle to Romney and advantage to Santorum, provided he emerges from Michigan with either a win or a narrow enough loss that his momentum isn't utterly halted. True, Santorum isn't on the ballot in Virginia. But also true is that Alaska, Idaho, and North Dakota, for which there is no data available on the size of the born-again contingent, are all caucus states in which religious conservatives (and tea-partyers) are thick on the ground.

None of which suggests that Santorum, even if he wins in Michigan, is much better positioned to deal a death blow to Romney on Super Tuesday. "I still am a believer that you've gotta have some kind of an organization, some kind of resources, beyond living off a super-pac, to go all the way," says Rollins. "I can't imagine Santorum just all of a sudden putting it together and racing to the finish line. So my sense is Super Tuesday may be a day that gets split up. And, I mean, Romney's not gonna quit. He's spent six years of his life running for this thing, and he will have

delegates. And it's not like if he drops out all the Establishment are gonna jump on Santorum. They're all gonna basically say Santorum can't win."

This kind of thinking is increasingly widespread among Republicans. And it is giving rise to ever-louder (though still private) calls for a Romney-Santorum alternative to enter the race after Super Tuesday. Last week, Politico reported that Indiana governor Mitch Daniels and New Jersey governor Chris Christie have been subject to mounting entreaties by GOP leaders to dive in. And so, I am reliably told, have Wisconsin congressman Paul Ryan and Jeb Bush.

Logistically speaking, the white-knight scenario is a stretch, but nothing like as fantastical as it sounds. After Super Tuesday, there are still seven states—five voting on June 5, including winner-take-all monsters California and New Jersey—where it is possible to get on the ballot. And if a stud Republican were to put himself forward, as a "tippy-top Republican" told Politico's Mike Allen, "he would suck all the oxygen out of the race. People wouldn't even give a sh*t who won on these other dates in March that are after Super Tuesday. I mean, seriously, who would care? It would all be about a new savior."

Even if such a savior won all five states, he would be far away from the 1,145 delegates necessary to secure the nomination. But given the proportional nature of many of the contests in March, April, and May, there's a decent chance no one else would obtain that number, either. Meaning Republicans would be staring down the barrel of a brokered or contested convention in Tampa this summer.

Could it happen? Yes, it could, especially if, not to beat a dead equine, Romney loses Michigan on Tuesday. But will it happen? Don't hold your breath, particularly since none of the putative white knights evince the slightest interest in putting themselves in the near-suicidal position of having to assemble and fund a general-election campaign on the fly with only 67 days left between the convention and November 6. And while a contested convention—at which the existing candidates all arrive in Tampa shy of 1,145 and the nomination is settled through backroom dealing—is more conceivable, the likeliest outcome of that would be the eventual coronation of Romney or Santorum. (Sigh.)

The question is, what will happen then—not just to them but to their party?

For Democrats, the answer is easy, reflexive, and comforting: Barack Obama wins. And at this moment, they have reasons to think so—starting with the historical precedents suggesting that the Romney-Santorum death match and the intraparty tensions it represents will undermine the eventual nominee. "Goldwater hurt Nixon in 1960, Rockefeller hurt Goldwater in 1964, and Reagan hurt Ford in 1976," says historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. "When splits become open in the party, it's never a good thing."

Then there is the current polling. The RealClearPolitics average of public surveys pitting the president head-to-head against Romney gives Obama a 4.8 percent lead, and 6.1 percent against Santorum. (Against Gingrich, the gap widens to 13.7 percent.)

Not one of the president's presiding reelection gurus—David Axelrod, David Plouffe, Jim Messina—believes that, come November, their margin of victory will be as big as even the smallest of those numbers. All along, they have been operating from the assumption that the Republican base will be riled up and ready to turn out in droves on Election Day. That Richard Land is right when he asserts that, for all the lack of enthusiasm for the extant crop of candidates, no one should ever "underestimate the ability of President Obama to rally conservatives to vote against him." That, given the still fragile state of the nation's recovery, the high percentage of voters who continue to regard the country as on the wrong track, and the possibility that Iran or Europe might throw the world a nasty curveball in the months ahead, 2012 will be a closer-run election than 2008. That, in other words, it's still perfectly conceivable that Obama might lose this thing.

If that happens, the implications for the Republican Party will be straightforward: It will be reshaped in the image of whichever of the candidates becomes president-elect. A Romney victory would signal the resurgence of the regulars, while one by Santorum would usher in an era of red-hot regnancy.

But if Obama prevails, precisely the opposite dynamic is likely to kick in: a period of bitter recriminations followed by a reformation (or counterreformation) of the GOP. This, please recall, was what many Republicans were counting

on to happen in the wake of their party's loss of the White House and seats in the House and Senate in 2008. Instead, Republicans seized on a strategy of relentless opposition to Obama, which proved politically effective in 2010 but left the party as bereft of new ideas, a constructive agenda, or a coherent governing philosophy as before. With Obama having looked beatable months ago, a botched bid to oust him—especially if coupled with a failure to take over the Senate—would usher in a full-blown Republican conflagration, followed by an effort to rise from the ashes by doing the opposite of what caused the meltdown of 2012.

What that would mean for the GOP would differ wildly depending on which of the two current front-runners, along with the coalition that elevated him to the nomination, is blamed for the debacle. "If Romney is the nominee and he loses in November, I think we'll see a resurgence of the charismatic populist right," says Robert Alan Goldberg, a history professor at the University of Utah and author of a biography of Barry Goldwater. "Not only will [the grassroots wing] say that Romney led Republicans down the road to defeat, but that the whole type of conservatism he represents is doomed."

Goldberg points out that this is what happened in 1976, when the party stuck with Ford over Reagan, was beaten by Carter, and went on to embrace the Gipper's brand of movement conservatism four years later. So who does Goldberg think might be ascendant in the aftermath of a Romney licking? "Sarah Palin," he replies. "She's an outsider, she has no Washington or Wall Street baggage, she's electric—and she's waiting, because if Romney doesn't win, she will be welcomed in."

But if it's Santorum who is the standard-bearer and then he suffers an epic loss, a different analogy will be apt: Goldwater in 1964. (And, given the degree of the challenges Santorum would face in attracting female voters, epic it might well be.) As Kearns Goodwin points out, the rejection of the Arizona senator's ideology and policies led the GOP to turn back in 1968 to Nixon, "a much more moderate figure, despite the incredible corruption of his time in office." For Republicans after 2012, a similar repudiation of the populist, culture-warrior coalition that is fueling Santorum's surge would open the door to the many talented party leaders—Daniels, Christie, Bush, Ryan, Bobby Jindal—waiting in the wings for 2016, each offering the possibility of refashioning the GOP into a serious and forward-thinking enterprise.

Only the most mindless of ideologues reject the truism that America would be best served by the presence of two credible governing parties instead of the situation that currently obtains. A Santorum nomination would be seen by many liberals as a scary and retrograde proposition. And no doubt it would make for a wild ride, with enough talk of Satan, abortifacients, and sweater vests to drive any sane man bonkers. But in the long run, it might do a world of good, compelling Republicans to return to their senses—and forge ahead into the 21st century. Which is why all people of common sense and goodwill might consider, in the days ahead, adopting a slogan that may strike them as odd, perverse, or even demented: Go, Rick, go.

(Additional reporting by Clint Rainey.)

20120224-01	12:44	Pam	"Senator Santorum's Planet"
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Saw this on newyorker.com and thought you'd like to see it. I wish I'd written this.

"Senator Santorum's Planet" posted by James Wood, *The New Yorker* "Daily Comment"

Feb. 24, 2012, (<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/comment/2012/02/senator-santorums-planet.html>)

If Rick Santorum is so staunch a Catholic, why does he often sound such a Protestant, not to say puritanical, note? His remarks about how President Obama's world view is just "some phony theology" have received a lot of attention but too little examination. It turned out that Santorum was talking, in general terms, about "radical environmentalists," and using environmentalism as a synecdoche for everything he abominates in secular progressive politics. "This idea that man is here to serve the earth as opposed to husband its resources and be good stewards of the earth" is, he maintained on CBS's "Face the Nation," "a phony ideal. I don't believe that's what

we're here to do. That man is here to use the resources and use them wisely, to care for the earth, to be a steward of the earth. But we're not here to serve the earth. The earth is not the objective. Man is the objective, and I think a lot of radical environmentalists have it upside-down." That kind of ideology, he complained, "elevates the earth above man."

Put aside theology for a moment. Just intellectually, there are many peculiarities here. According to Santorum, environmentalists and leftists believe in serving the earth, while proper Christians "should have dominion over it, and should be good stewards of it." The distinction Santorum is working here is between a very narrow definition of service as idol-worship (in which the earth becomes our fetish), and stewardship as responsible husbandry. He means, in effect: "Secularists have made a false idol of the earth, whereas God is the only true object of worship." (And note that he can make this point only by taking the cherished Christian term "service" and casting secular dirt on it.) There may indeed be radical outliers in contemporary ecology for whom the survival of man is subservient to the survival of the world. But for most people anxious about the fate of the environment, service and stewardship would seem to go together. Note, too, that all this talk about making man the objective sounds quite like the supposed heresy of rational humanism. If you took away the theological context of Santorum's screed, you would have a program for secular politics: Since we are here to serve man, then we should start getting busy with projects of political salvation, like universal health care, environmental protection, the alleviation of poverty, and so on.

Of course, it is not possible to put theology aside. I know the theological weight of that word, "steward." When I was a boy, my mother, in the grip of her Scottish evangelical Protestantism, used to chide me for my untidy bedroom, adding that, as a Christian, it was an example of "poor stewardship." Everything is the Lord's, and our brief role on earth is merely to husband it in a right way, a way that gives the Lord His due. Christianity, with its emphasis on the afterlife, has always had a tendency to derogate earthly living as a kind of spectral vanity. And the early Christians, who like St. Paul were convinced that Jesus' return, and thus the end of the known world, was imminent, had particular reason to treat life as a ghostly antechamber to the joys of eternity. There is a sharp difference between the other-worldly asceticism of Christianity and the life-filled practicality of Biblical Judaism, which has a vague or non-existent notion of the afterlife. It was this asceticism, among other irritants, that caused Nietzsche to accuse Christianity of turning life upside-down—of privileging sickness over health, weakness over strength, the life to come over the life here. "Christianity was, from the beginning, essentially and fundamentally, nausea and disgust with life, merely concealed behind, masked by, dressed up as, faith in 'another' or 'better' life," he wrote in *The Birth of Tragedy*. As the secularist might see it, Santorum is the one who has got things upside-down.

The curious aspect of this apocalyptic asceticism is that it is more obviously associated with Protestantism and Puritanism than with the Catholic Church. Growing up, I was always struck by the relatively relaxed worldliness of Catholics. Their priests were officially barred from sex, but they enjoyed good food and wine, told dirty jokes, lived in the world, and so on. Catholics seemed to lay the emphasis on forgiveness rather than Calvinist damnation; the whole delicious mystery of the confessional bespoke a customary accommodation with the temptations and consolations of secular life. Historically, Protestantism came about, in part, as a reaction to such Catholic relaxation. And a major theme of Protestantism—more sharply focused through the lens of Puritanism—became the image of life as a kind of shadow of the true life above; of our time on earth as a pilgrimage toward the heavenly kingdom. It is there in the works of John Hooper (c. 1500-1555), considered the father of English Puritanism, when he writes that we must "see, know and understand the vanities of this world, the shortness and misery of this life, and the treasures of the life to come." It is there in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and omnipresent in Jonathan Edwards's work, notably in "The Christian Pilgrim," when he writes that the enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied:

To go to heaven, fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodation here. Fathers and mothers, husbands and wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows; but God is the substance.

Melville, brought up in the Dutch Reformed Calvinist faith, plays around with this kind of theology in *Moby-Dick*, when he has Captain Ahab claim that all visible objects are but "pasteboard masks." Santorum may claim, as he did in 2008, that "mainline Protestantism in this country ... is gone from the world of Christianity, as I see it," but, with his attacks on "Satan" and "sensuality," and his apocalyptic or even post-millennial Christianity, he often sounds like an eighteenth-century American Puritan.

Hence a particular impatience with the values of environmental conservation. For the apocalyptic Christian, sights set firmly on heavenly life, the earth might indeed be a finite and transitory thing, what William Blake wonderfully called a "mundane egg." Man is what needs to be protected, because each of us is a soul, whose eternal fate is up for grabs.

So when Santorum says that we must be good stewards of the earth, there is religious zealotry behind the sweet words. He is proposing, in effect, that the earth is dispensable but that our souls are not; that we will all outlive the earth, whether in heaven or hell. The point is not that he is elevating man above the earth; it is that he is separating man and earth. If President Obama really does elevate earth over man (accepting Santorum's absurd premise for a moment), then at least he believes in keeping man and earth together. Santorum's brand of elevation involves severing man from man's earthly existence, which is why it is coherent only within a theological eschatology (a theology of the last days). And he may well believe that man cannot actually destroy the earth through such violence as global warming, for the perfectly orthodox theological reason that the earth will come to an end (or be renewed) only when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead. In other words, global warming can't exist because it is not in God's providential plan: the Lord will decide when the earth expires. This is Santorum's "theology," phony or otherwise.

“They claim to be super-patriots, but they would destroy every liberty guaranteed by the Constitution. They demand free enterprise, but are the spokesmen for monopoly and vested interest. Their final objective toward which all their deceit is directed is to capture political power so that, using the power of the state and the power of the market simultaneously, they may keep the common man in eternal subjection.”

**- Vice President
Henry Wallace
Speaking of
American Fascists**

RepublicanDirtyTricks.com



Interesting. I never really thought that much about Billy Joel and his music. I don't want to offend anyone, but I feel the same way about Bruce Springsteen. You can't have that much money and be "real." It doesn't help that he is the favorite of our governor Chris Christie, who is not my favorite. To give Bruce credit, he refused to play for Christie's inauguration.

I like that, Beth. I agree with you. Though slightly better than Billy Joel, I've always found most of the Boss's music to be rather phony and imitative. Very young, he was a little better. Give me the Blues, middle-era Stones, Little Feat, Led Zeppelin, and Bob Marley.

20120224-04	13:29	Phil	Video: IED (Improvised Explosive Device) in Iraq
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Price of gasoline too high? Maybe we should send some more young men and women overseas to help stabilize other regions. And to help them achieve a democratic society of course.

YOU MIGHT FIND THIS INTERESTING -- IRAQ IED

Amazing and horrible!

(Nov. 3, 2007) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_PsyfHhEx4&oref=http%3A%2F%2F8l0l0l315l1607l2-5.1l6l0&has_verified=1

Keep your eye on the slow moving truck on the top left corner coming down the road towards you. It looks like he is going slow to allow the military truck behind him to pass, and when it is along side...THIS is the type of explosion that our troops are dealing with, not the puny kind you see on television or the movies.

Pass this on... so people know and will understand better what an IED really is.

20120224-05	13:36	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: Attend 99% Spring training!
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from MoveOn.org:

Last year, massive nonviolent direct action transformed America—from the protests for workers' rights in Madison that took over the state capitol for nearly a month, to the 1,000 people who performed civil disobedience at the White House to stop the Keystone XL pipeline, to Occupy Wall Street, we changed the political debate.

But still, millions of jobs have been destroyed, millions of homes foreclosed on, and an unconscionable number of children live in poverty. We have to do more to fix America, and we all know it. That's why people from across the 99% movement are preparing to take action this spring in bigger numbers than ever before to fight for change.

To prepare for the 99% Spring, groups from every corner of our movement are joining forces to do something that's never been tried before. During the week of April 9-15, across America, we will bring 100,000 people together for an unprecedented national movement-wide training on what happened to our economy, on the history of peaceful direct action, and how—following in the footsteps of Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.—we can take direct action this spring to challenge corporate power, end tax giveaways to the 1%, fight the influence of money in politics, and more.

Yes! I'm interested in hosting or attending a training during the week of April 9-15:

http://civic.moveon.org/event/events/create.html?rc=mo&id=36118-20195165-NXck%3D6x&action_id=268.

Anyone can host a training—you can host just a handful of people in your living room or you can find a local community center, place of worship, campus, or public space and put together a larger event. We'll follow up with all the details and provide the support and guidance you'll need to coordinate an event and we'll help you connect and collaborate with other local 99% Spring volunteers and groups.

The heroes who took action for the 99% last year from Madison to Occupy Wall Street have now joined our shared American history of everyday people standing up to demand justice, freedom, and dignity. From the seamstress in

Alabama who launched a bus boycott to the women in New York who dreamed they could one day speak with an equal voice to the mother who spoke up in Love Canal to stop the poisoning of her community, the power of nonviolent direct action has been essential in the great movements for social change in our country and around the world.

Right now our country needs a whole lot more of that spirit, because we need change on that scale again. The 99% Spring is our chance to step into the great tradition of creating lasting systemic change through nonviolent direct action—but it will only work if a huge number of us prepare ourselves and join in.

Thanks for all you do. —Lenore, Robin, Elena, Ryan, and the rest of the team

20120224-06 14:06 Dennis "Revealed: Romney's Top Funders Made Billions on Auto Bail-Out"

Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney called the federal government's 2009 bail-out of the auto industry, "nothing more than crony capitalism, Obama style... a reward for his big donors to his campaign."

In fact, the biggest rewards – a windfall of more than two billion dollars care of U.S. taxpayers — went to Romney's two top contributors according to a shocking new report.

"Revealed: Romney's Top Funders Made Billions on Auto Bail-Out" by Greg Palast, NationofChange

Feb. 23, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/revealed-romney-s-top-funders-made-billions-auto-bail-out-1330019614>)

Republican Presidential candidate Mitt Romney called the federal government's 2009 bail-out of the auto industry, "nothing more than crony capitalism, Obama style... a reward for his big donors to his campaign." In fact, the biggest rewards – a windfall of more than two billion dollars care of U.S. taxpayers — went to Romney's two top contributors.

John Paulson of Paulson & Co and Paul Singer of Elliott International, known on Wall Street as "vulture" investors, have each written checks for one million dollars to Restore Our Future, the Super PAC supporting Romney's candidacy.

The two hedge fund operators turned a breathtaking three-thousand percent profit on a relatively negligible investment by using hardball tactics against the U.S. Treasury and their own employees.

Gov. Romney last week asserted that the Obama Administration's support for General Motors was a, "payoff for the auto workers union." However, union workers in GM's former auto parts division, Delphi, the unit taken over by Romney's funders, did not fair so well. The speculators eliminated every single union job from the parts factories once manned by 25,200 UAW members.

Under the control of the speculators, Delphi, which had 45 plants in the U.S. and Canada, is now reduced to just four factories with only 1,500 hourly workers, none of them UAW members, despite the union agreeing to cut contract wages by two thirds.

It wasn't supposed to be quite so bad. The Obama Administration and GM had arranged for a private equity investor to provide half a billion dollars in new capital for Delphi, but that would have cut the pay-out to Singer and Paulson. The speculators blocked the Obama-GM plan, taking the entire government bail-out hostage. Even the Wall Street Journal's Dealmaker column was outraged, accusing Paul Singer of treating the auto company, "like a third world country."

But it worked. Singer and Paulson got what they demanded. Using U.S. Treasury funds:

- GM agreed to pay off \$1.1 billion of Delphi's debts,

- Forgave \$2.15 billion owed GM by Delphi (which had been spun off as an independent company)
- Pumped \$1.75 billion into Delphi operations, and
- Took over four money-losing plants that the speculators didn't want.

If those plants had been closed, GM factories would have shut down cold for lack of parts.

Then there was the big one: The U.S. government agreed to take over \$6.2 billion in pension benefits due Delphi workers under U.S. labor law.

Governor Romney, while opposing the bail-out of GM, accused Obama of eliminating the pensions of 21,000 non-union employees at Delphi. In fact, it was Romney's funders who wiped out 100% of the pensions and health care accounts of Delphi salaried retirees.

Paulson and Singer paid an average of about 67 cents a share for Delphi. In November, 2011, Paulson sold a chunk of his holdings for \$22 a share. Paulson's gain totals a billion and a half dollars (\$1,499,499,000), and Singer gained nearly a billion (\$899,751,000) — thirty-two times their investment.

One-hundred percent of this gain for the Paulson and Singer hedge funds is accounted for by taxpayer bail-out support.

But, unlike the government loans and worker concessions given to GM, the U.S. Treasury and workers get nothing in return from Delphi.

From GM, the U.S. Treasury got warrants for common stock (similar to options) that have already produced billions in profit.

And Delphi? It's doing well for Paulson and Singer. GM and Chrysler, still in business by the grace of the U.S. Treasury, remain Delphi's main customers, buying parts now made almost entirely in China and other cheap-labor nations.

And exactly who are Paulson and Singer?

Billionaire John Paulson became the first man in history to earn over \$3 billion in a single year — not for his hedge fund, but for himself, personally. At the core of this huge payday was a 2007 scheme by which, via Goldman Sachs, he sold "insurance" on subprime mortgage loans. According to a lawsuit filed by the Securities Exchange Commission, Goldman defrauded European banks by pretending that Paulson was investing in the insurance. In fact, Paulson was, secretly, the beneficiary of the insurance, reaping billions when the mortgage market collapsed.

Goldman paid half a billion dollars in civil fines for the fraud. While the SEC states that Paulson knowingly participated in the scheme, he was not fined and denies he defrauded the banks.

Multi-billionaire Singer is known as Wall Street's toughest "vulture" speculator. Vulture fund financial attacks on the world's poorest nations have been effectively outlawed in much of Europe and excoriated by human rights groups, conduct Britain's former Prime Minister Gordon Brown described as, "morally outrageous."

(Greg Palast has been investigating vulture speculator Paul Singer for BBC Television "Newsnight" and Britain's *Guardian* for five years. The investigative reporter is author of *Vultures' Picnic: In Pursuit of Petroleum Pigs, Power Pirates and High-Finance Carnivores* and the *New York Times* bestseller, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*.)

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Stupidest op-ed of all time?

"Let Detroit Go Bankrupt" by Mitt Romney, *The New York Times*

Nov. 18, 2008, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/11/19/opinion/19romney.html>)

If General Motors, Ford and Chrysler get the bailout that their chief executives asked for yesterday, you can kiss the American automotive industry goodbye. It won't go overnight, but its demise will be virtually guaranteed.

Without that bailout, Detroit will need to drastically restructure itself. With it, the automakers will stay the course — the suicidal course of declining market shares, insurmountable labor and retiree burdens, technology atrophy, product inferiority and never-ending job losses. Detroit needs a turnaround, not a check.

I love cars, American cars. I was born in Detroit, the son of an auto chief executive. In 1954, my dad, George Romney, was tapped to run American Motors when its president suddenly died. The company itself was on life support — banks were threatening to deal it a death blow. The stock collapsed. I watched Dad work to turn the company around — and years later at business school, they were still talking about it. From the lessons of that turnaround, and from my own experiences, I have several prescriptions for Detroit's automakers.

First, their huge disadvantage in costs relative to foreign brands must be eliminated. That means new labor agreements to align pay and benefits to match those of workers at competitors like BMW, Honda, Nissan and Toyota. Furthermore, retiree benefits must be reduced so that the total burden per auto for domestic makers is not higher than that of foreign producers.

That extra burden is estimated to be more than \$2,000 per car. Think what that means: Ford, for example, needs to cut \$2,000 worth of features and quality out of its Taurus to compete with Toyota's Avalon. Of course the Avalon feels like a better product — it has \$2,000 more put into it. Considering this disadvantage, Detroit has done a remarkable job of designing and engineering its cars. But if this cost penalty persists, any bailout will only delay the inevitable.

Second, management as is must go. New faces should be recruited from unrelated industries — from companies widely respected for excellence in marketing, innovation, creativity and labor relations.

The new management must work with labor leaders to see that the enmity between labor and management comes to an end. This division is a holdover from the early years of the last century, when unions brought workers job security and better wages and benefits. But as Walter Reuther, the former head of the United Automobile Workers, said to my father, "Getting more and more pay for less and less work is a dead-end street."

You don't have to look far for industries with unions that went down that road. Companies in the 21st century cannot perpetuate the destructive labor relations of the 20th. This will mean a new direction for the U.A.W., profit sharing or stock grants to all employees and a change in Big Three management culture.

The need for collaboration will mean accepting sanity in salaries and perks. At American Motors, my dad cut his pay and that of his executive team, he bought stock in the company, and he went out to factories to talk to workers directly. Get rid of the planes, the executive dining rooms — all the symbols that breed resentment among the hundreds of thousands who will also be sacrificing to keep the companies afloat.

Investments must be made for the future. No more focus on quarterly earnings or the kind of short-term stock appreciation that means quick riches for executives with options. Manage with an eye on cash flow, balance sheets and long-term appreciation. Invest in truly competitive products and innovative technologies — especially fuel-saving designs — that may not arrive for years. Starving research and development is like eating the seed corn.

Just as important to the future of American carmakers is the sales force. When sales are down, you don't want to lose the only people who can get them to grow. So don't fire the best dealers, and don't crush them with new financial or performance demands they can't meet.

It is not wrong to ask for government help, but the automakers should come up with a win-win proposition. I believe the federal government should invest substantially more in basic research — on new energy sources, fuel-economy technology, materials science and the like — that will ultimately benefit the automotive industry, along with many others. I believe Washington should raise energy research spending to \$20 billion a year, from the \$4 billion that is spent today. The research could be done at universities, at research labs and even through public-private collaboration. The federal government should also rectify the imbedded tax penalties that favor foreign carmakers.

But don't ask Washington to give shareholders and bondholders a free pass — they bet on management and they lost.

The American auto industry is vital to our national interest as an employer and as a hub for manufacturing. A managed bankruptcy may be the only path to the fundamental restructuring the industry needs. It would permit the companies to shed excess labor, pension and real estate costs. The federal government should provide guarantees for post-bankruptcy financing and assure car buyers that their warranties are not at risk.

In a managed bankruptcy, the federal government would propel newly competitive and viable automakers, rather than seal their fate with a bailout check.

(Mitt Romney, the former governor of Massachusetts, was a candidate for this year's Republican presidential nomination.)

20120224-07	14:41	SteveB	From the Right: "Fridays with Erick Erickson, 02.24.12"
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President Obama's magic fuel...

"Fridays with Erick Erickson, 02.24.12" by Erick Erickson, Daily Events

Feb. 24, 2012, (<http://hoaxandchange.blogspot.com/2012/02/erickson-malkin-obamas-magic-fuel.html>)

If America could put in their cars what Barack Obama has been shoveling lately, we could fuel the 21st century. After campaigning in 2008 claiming his policies would bring down the price of gas, Barack Obama now says there really is not anything he can do. He also claims Republicans are licking their lips over higher gas prices.

Well, if they are not, they should. It is Barack Obama's fault. His policies have led to this moment, and it is not like the president and his advisers have been hiding from this.

Back in the mid-nineties, Republicans wanted to expand American domestic drilling. The Democrats blocked it, claiming it would take 10 years to see any results. 10 years later, the Republican Party tried again, and again the Democrats claimed it would take 10 years to see the results. 10 years later we have record high gas prices for this time of year.

In North Dakota, surprise, surprise, there is an oil drilling boom. People are back to work and making six figure salaries in areas that were desolate just a few years ago. The Obama administration can't stop the drilling because it is on private land. The Obama administration has, however, stopped drilling on public land.

For all of Barack Obama's talk about wanting to experiment with new energies and get people in battery powered clown cars of the future, all we need to do is go back to Jan. 20, 2011. President Obama's Energy Secretary, Stephen Chu, publicly said he wanted to "figure out how to boost the price of gasoline to the levels in Europe." At the time, gas in Europe was \$7 to \$8 per gallon.

President Obama may be publicly lamenting the high price of gasoline, but privately he and his administration have championed the high cost of fuel to force Americans to change their behavior and get out of cars. Hopefully, come November, Americans will get him out of office.

[I say, let's preserve our American treasure in the ground as long as possible and use everybody else's oil first. That's smart conservative politics, not this Republican drill, drill, drill mantra! –SteveB]

20120224-08	16:20	Pam	Video: 99 Problems / W.H. Auden's "Musee Des Beaux Arts"
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I thought you might enjoy this video: <http://vimeo.com/3463398>.

20120224-09	17:01	SteveG	"Super PACs & Montana vs. the Supreme Court"
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Take a read through – very interesting, especially Montana suing the U.S. Supreme Court based on a 1912 state law.

"Super PACs and Montana vs. the Supreme Court" by Adam Smith, Public Campaign Action Fund

Feb. 22, 2012, (<http://campaignmoney.org/press-room/2012/02/22/memo-super-pacs-and-montana-vs-supreme-court>)

I'm against very wealthy people attempting to or influencing elections, but as long as it's doable I'm going to do it. —Sheldon Adelson

The financing of the Republican presidential nomination fight is increasingly in the hands of a small number of wealthy Americans. That's the findings in from a trio of news stories from the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and *USA Today* this morning.

New York Times: "About two dozen individuals, couples or corporations have given \$1 million or more to Republican super PACs this year, an exclusive club empowered by the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision and other rulings..."

Washington Post: "Although many of these mega-donors have long participated in politics, none were able to wield the kind of influence now possible under loosened campaign finance regulations, which allow super PACs and other outside groups to spend unlimited amounts on political races."

USA Today: "Five wealthy people...have donated nearly \$1 of every \$4 flowing to the super PACs raising unlimited money in this year's presidential race, a *USA Today* analysis shows."

What we see is a result of two major factors.

First, the Supreme Court's deregulatory zeal, cloaked in First Amendment protections, has done to our elections what Wall Street interests and previous congresses did to our financial and housing markets. This Wild West of politics was fueled by several court decisions, including the notorious *Citizens United* decision and the less-well known *SpeechNow* case that accelerated the creation of Super PACs.

Second, despite the rhetoric of the Republican presidential candidates, government isn't the problem; it's the prize. The current crop of big donors representing hedge funds, casinos, and other big interests understand this. They are pouring their money into the presidential race to further a government that works primarily for them, not for everyday Americans.

Some pundits are saying that super PACs have made our elections fairer—giving candidates like Rick Santorum and Newt Gingrich the ability to compete against the establishment. That’s only true, of course, if you have a millionaire donor at your disposal. We need more Main Street Americans in politics—not more billionaires.

Presidential candidates should support and push Congress to update the presidential public financing system and pass legislation like the Fair Elections Now Act, which would allow House and Senate candidates to run a competitive race for office by collecting small contributions from people back home.

Last week, the Supreme Court issued a stay on a Montana State Supreme Court decision regarding corporate money in politics. At issue was a 1912 state law banning direct corporate expenditures in state races called the Corrupt Practices Act. A corporation called American Tradition Partners sued the state, but the Montana Supreme Court upheld the law. The state’s Attorney General, Steve Bullock, said he’d enforce the statute even though it was an apparent conflict with the *Citizens United* decision.

On Friday, the Supreme Court said that the law could not be enforced and agreed to review briefings from both sides in the case. In an unusual move, two justices concurred with the stay but issued a statement asking the court to take up the case in order to revisit *Citizens United*.

As noted election lawyer Rick Hasen wrote in Slate, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg “like many Americans, appears concerned with the rise of super PACs and the disturbing role money is playing in the 2012 campaign season since the Supreme Court’s controversial decision in *Citizens United v. FEC*.” Arguments could be scheduled for late spring or in the Court’s fall term.

The additional backdrop, of course, is political. Montanans are already bracing for up to \$30 million in political spending by candidates and outside groups in one of the years marquee Senate contests pitting incumbent Senator Jon Tester (D) against incumbent Representative Denny Rehberg (R). The Attorney General, a Democrat, is running for Governor, and will likely become a target for his leadership on money-in-politics. Lastly, a ballot measure may appear on the November ballot asking voters to instruct Congress to adopt a constitutional amendment to address out of control political money.

Consider one increasingly likely scenario: in the midst of a nasty, negative campaign season featuring one of the most expensive Senate races in the country, voters could send a message to Washington they want an end to it, just as the Supreme Court, itself responsible for the mess, takes up a case to do away with, or restore, Montana’s century old Corrupt Practices Act.

20120224-10	17:04	SteveG	“Mississippians Are Ready for Comprehensive Sex Education”
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“Mississippians Are Ready for Comprehensive Sex Education” by Eric Thomas Weber, *Science Progress*

Feb. 14, 2012, (<http://scienceprogress.org/2012/02/mississippians-are-ready-for-comprehensive-sex-education/>)

(Social science and public opinion polls agree.)

Mississippi will surprise you. A recent Gallup poll found it to be the “most conservative state,” yet Mississippi’s voters rejected the personhood initiative in late 2011. But another development about reproductive health in Mississippi has gone largely unnoticed and deserves a closer look.

In December 2011, the Center for Mississippi Health Policy released a report titled “What Do Mississippi Parents Think about Sex-Related Education in Public Schools?” I expected to see a strong reluctance to have comprehensive sex education in public schools. The common political ideology suggests that educating children about sex is a parent’s responsibility, not that of the government.

The related inclination is to think that demonstrating condom use will only teach students that having sex before marriage is acceptable. Such judgments ignore the facts. A 20-year study published in the Jan., 2007 issue of *Public Health Reports* shows that premarital sex has been the norm since at least 1940. The study published in 2007

shows that of thousands of subjects surveyed, 95 percent of respondents between the ages of 15 and 44 had engaged in premarital sex. Plus, 75 percent of respondents had done so by the age of 20. These developments are not recent. The study showed in fact that "the number of Americans having premarital sex hasn't changed much since the 1940s," as Jennifer Warner put it for WebMD.

The 2011 Mississippi survey on sex education showed surprising results. Mississippi parents are overwhelmingly in favor of age-appropriate, comprehensive sex education. Marie Barnard, who is a parent of public school kids in Oxford, Mississippi and the assistant dean of applied sciences at the University of Mississippi, believes that "it is [clearly] a minority of parents" who oppose comprehensive sex education in the public schools, but "they are very passionate about their beliefs and are active in influencing their local school boards." So it seems that despite the great popularity of comprehensive sex education, a vocal minority is in control.

Sex education is an important topic in Mississippi. We have some of the highest rates of teen pregnancy and poverty, aggravated by some of the lowest rates of educational attainment in the country. Each of these factors can spur the others. A young woman in a school with inadequate sex education is more likely to become pregnant than one with comprehensive sex education. If she becomes pregnant, she is much more likely not to complete school. Having a child, furthermore, will limit her ability to work full time, diminishing the already low income she will earn if she does not complete high school.

The common refrain we hear from politicians in Mississippi is that there is only one sure way not to become pregnant, which is to abstain from having sex. Beyond the fact that 75 percent of Americans have sex before the age of 20, the crucial fact is that scholars have offered conclusive evidence showing that comprehensive sex education is "the most effective approach to reducing STDs and pregnancy." This statement was the conclusion of a 2010 Rutgers study published in the *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*.

At the same time it is worth noting that abstinence-only sex education is effective for some limited groups. According to a Rutgers news release about the 2010 study, an "abstinence-only program helped sixth and seventh graders delay high-risk sexual behaviors up to two years after the initial intervention." But "nearly a quarter of these sixth and seventh graders had already had sex by the time they became a part of [the] study." The study highlighted an underappreciated lesson: "Sex education is not about teaching one topic to one age group and that's it. It has to start at the earliest ages, build upon and reinforce the previous knowledge and skills learned, and evolve as students get older and become more likely to start having sex."

In Mississippi the state passed House Bill 999 in 2011, which requires that all schools in Mississippi adopt a sex education policy by the end of June, 2012. Mississippi First, a nonpartisan nonprofit advocating for effective, data-driven policy in the state, strongly urges "comprehensive or 'abstinence-plus' education—because it works," following the clearly established lessons learned in countless studies.

Unfortunately, the Mississippi law allows school districts to choose between abstinence-only and abstinence-plus sex education. So some school districts will choose a more comprehensive form of sex education from which objecting families could opt out of the lessons beyond abstinence for their children. But others will teach abstinence-only education, offering no options for those who want comprehensive programs. Even those abstinence-plus districts, however, "shall not include instruction and demonstrations on the application and use of condoms," according to the law. Advocates for comprehensive sex education such as the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States argue that "there are many youth who still need to learn how to prevent errors in [condom] use." Nevertheless, the Mississippi law against such instruction is clear.

Barnard heard a parent opposed to comprehensive sex education claim that "his disagreement with abstinence-plus was based on his religious beliefs." She responded that "Our children deserve a comprehensive, factually accurate, nonjudgmental education that is not based on a few individuals' personal religious beliefs, but on scientifically validated educational programs." The comprehensive approach with an opt-out mechanism would respect both views, but some districts will not choose it.

One might expect Mississippians to be generally opposed to comprehensive sex education, given the legislation that passed, but Barnard is right. The Dec., 2011 study from the Mississippi Health Policy Center undercuts the common misconception.

First, 92 percent of the 3,600 parents responding were in favor of some form of sex education, which refers either to abstinence-only or abstinence-plus education. Abstinence-only would exclude, among other things, education about the use of contraceptives. The surprising result of the study, however, was that 89.8 percent of survey respondents said that they either "strongly support" (78.4 percent) or "somewhat support" (11.4 percent) education about birth control methods. The total opposition to the teaching of birth control methods came from fewer than 8 percent of respondents.

Despite the overwhelming support for education about birth control, some Mississippi students will be stuck with their school district's decision to teach abstinence-only sex education. This is a serious problem. The approach taken has been to deny some kids education, rather than to offer it with an opt-out policy approach.

Even the most controversial element of sex education in Mississippi, particularly the classroom demonstration of proper condom use, was in fact supported by a large majority of Mississippians. While 15.2 percent of respondents "strongly oppose" and 7.1 percent "somewhat oppose" classroom demonstrations of condom usage, 53.9 percent "strongly support" it and 17.2 percent "somewhat support" it. That means overall that 71.1 percent of respondents support in-class condom demonstrations, which the state's sex education law wholly forbids for all schools.

The Center for Mississippi Health Policy's Dec., 2011 study shows that Mississippians are misunderstood and poorly represented. It is now up to school districts to choose the more effective approach to sex education—abstinence-plus forms instead of abstinence-only curricula. Perhaps in the next few years the legislature will have the courage to require that all schools provide comprehensive sex education—including condom use—while offering parents the choice to opt out of portions for their own children as they see fit.

(Dr. Eric Thomas Weber is assistant professor of public policy leadership at the University of Mississippi, freelance columnist for *The Clarion Ledger* of Jackson, Mississippi, and author of three books, including the forthcoming *Democracy and Leadership* (2012). Visit his website at EricThomasWeber.org.)

20120224-11	17:07	SteveG	Fw: One.org Petition: Stop Bullying by Big Oil!
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from: One.org:

Right now, oil company lobbyists are trying to kill the best parts of a law that would put an end to secret deals with foreign governments. If big oil wins, that means billions of dollars put into the pockets of corrupt leaders, rather than life-saving programs to help pull the world's poorest people out of poverty.

Tell the Securities and Exchange Commission we can't be bullied by big oil. It's time to put an end to these closed door deals once and for all.

<http://www.one.org/us/actnow/>

20120224-12	17:11	SteveG	Fw: MoxyVote Petition: Make Chevron Clean-Up the Rain Forest!
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from [MoxyVote](http://MoxyVote.org):

Open oil wells in the rainforest?

Over the past 8 years, Chevron has been faced with a lawsuit seeking to hold the company accountable for the alleged impact of its oil drilling in the Ecuador rainforest. While Chevron has not operated in the area for the last 22 years, citizens and community members report that Chevron's presence is still felt and deep scars still remain. Read more from [The Financial Times](http://TheFinancialTimes.com).

Texaco Oil, now owned by Chevron, operated oil drilling facilities in Ecuador from 1964 until 1990. According to alleged reports, the company neglected environmental safety precautions to the extent that "the oil infrastructure

developed and operated by Texaco had utterly inadequate environmental controls...consequently Texaco dumped 18 billion gallons of toxic wastewater directly into the region's rivers."

<http://www.moxyvote.com/TakeAction/>

20120224-14 19:21 Art Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #81)

Many of my friends have expressed surprise as to how I seem to have changed my political views and wonder why. So do I. As I think about it, it seems to me it is at least partially because I read a lot more political stuff now and look closer at things. For instance, I have been generally aware of climate change for sometime but now I have had time to really look at it. Once the facts are laid out, the course seems clear to me but I confess I am frustrated why so many continue to see another road. The below explains at least a little how this can happen. Some may take offense but it is worth a read.

In a recent conversation with a long time very conservative acquaintance the subject of climate change came up. I recommended he read 'Six Degrees' by Lynas. His response is "Well, I'll look at it but I don't want to hear any crap about carbon dioxide in the atmosphere". My reply was, "If 97% of climate scientists say that's a problem, why would you say that?"

This article maybe tells me why.

20120225-02 07:13 SteveB Re: "The Republican Brain..." (reply to Art, above)

Art, I do love this article.

I too have a confession to make. I was once an unreformed Republican conservative.

I still think the government is not the solution to everything. It's just that the solution to everything involves, first, building a government that works for everyone, not just the rich few. That is what you and I discovered is happening in this country that we love.

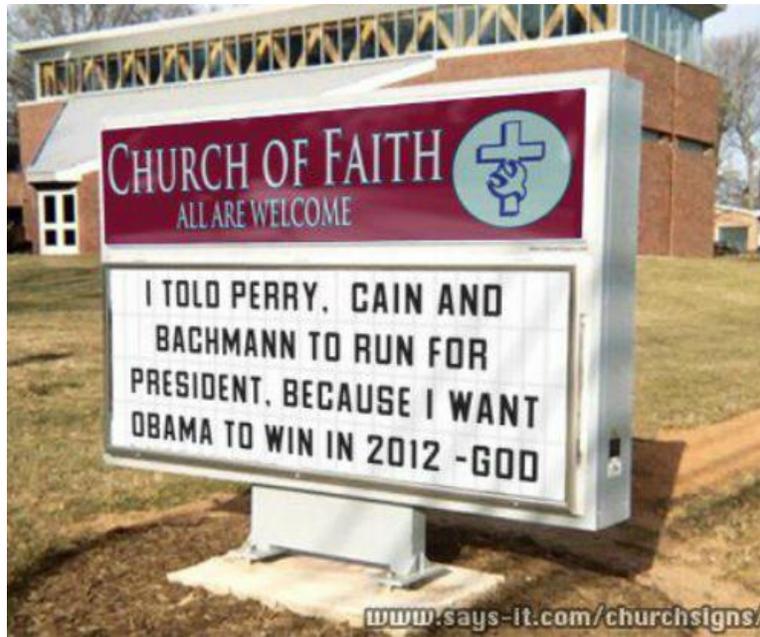
And even recently, working on the Archive, I have found that I was more conservative and less radical when the whole thing started back in 2007, not that long ago. In fact, I have been embarrassed enough by a couple of my sentences to edit them out. This, even though I'm trying to be as true as possible to the original.

Like you, I think, I've always been a logical person. I was a boy scientist. An engineer. Then I studied and read and observed what was happening in America and the world, much as you describe. I think our friend, Dennis, also radicalized me somewhat by bombarding me with Altnet articles and brainwashing me. ^_^

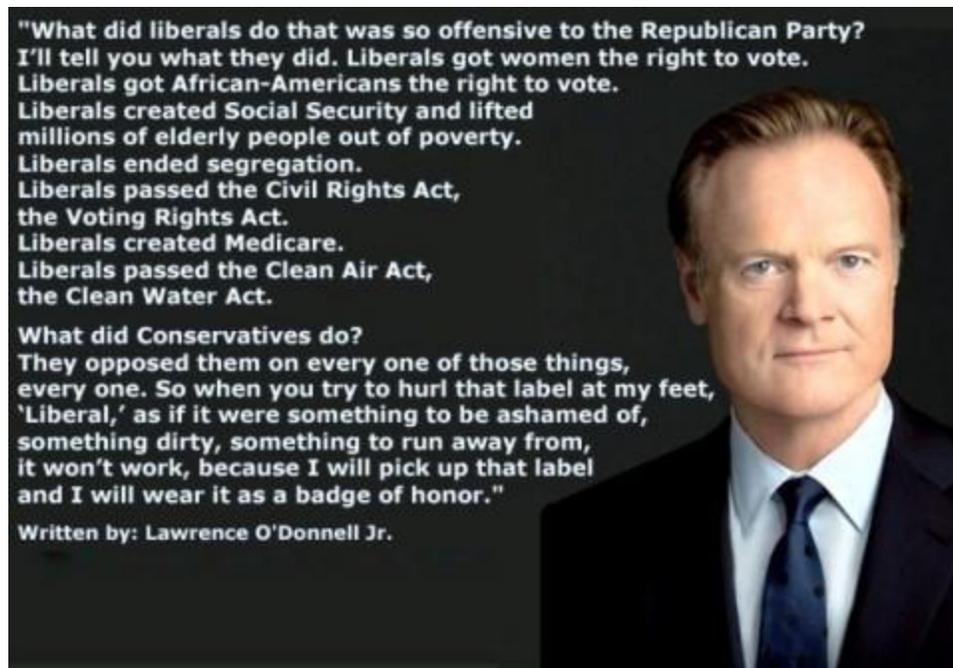
Now I'm a seething left-wing radical and loving it. Go figure! Haha

No matter what some of your friends may think, Art, I congratulate you. I wish more smart people would use their brains instead of whatever else they are using. Unfortunately, they are lost and I feel compelled to try to save them. I guess I'm an evangelical seething left-wing radical.

Just kidding about the radical part. I'm still more truly conservative than most people when it comes to government intrusion on morality, but not when it comes to fun!



Also submitted by MarthaH (Feb. 25, 2012, 8:08 pm): "This was in the script that O'Donnell wrote for the 'Live Debate' episode of The West Wing in 2005, and it's so perfect for these times."



[Good one. AMEN, brother! –SteveB]

What is there left to say?

20120225-01	01:21	Ben	EarthRoamer RV
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I think y'all will find this interesting. Be sure to do a slide show of one of the used ones...

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

20120225-04	08:58	SteveB	"R0mney Speech Falls Flat in Detroit"
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From the party mired in antiquity...

"R0mney Speech Falls Flat in Detroit" by Cameron Joseph, *The Hill*

Feb. 24, 2012, (<http://thehill.com/blogs/ballot-box/gop-presidential-primary/212493-romney-speech-falls-flat-in-detroit>)

Mitt Romney spoke to several empty seats Friday in Detroit, in a speech that offered Democrats more fodder for their attacks and failed to deliver the major economic address his campaign promised.

Television cameras showed rows of empty chairs as Romney rehashed many of the policies and quips he'd used in previous speeches, made a few jokes that appeared to fall flat with the audience and said that his wife, Ann, drives "a couple of Cadillacs," which will likely give Democrats more ammunition for their depiction of him as rich and out of touch.

The former Massachusetts governor also repeated a line that has been the butt of jokes by late-night comedians — that Michigan has good-sized trees.

"This feels good, being back in Michigan," he said. "The trees are the right height. The streets are just right."

Romney then listed the various cars he and his wife own.

"I drive a Mustang and Chevy pickup truck," he said. "Ann drives a couple of Cadillacs, actually. I used to have a Dodge truck, so I used to have all three [Detroit manufacturers] covered."

Polls show Romney is back in the lead in his home state of Michigan, which is considered a must-win for him. The primary is Tuesday.

His speech was held at Detroit's massive Ford Field, which holds tens of thousands of people, but only 1,000 or so attended. The campaign and the Detroit Economic Club, which hosted the event, sought to make the stadium look more full by putting the audience in one end zone of the football field and putting the cameras directly behind them.

But cameras showed empty chairs, and the Democratic National Committee blasted out photos that compared the crowd at Romney's speech to the filled stadiums where then-candidate Barack Obama had campaign rallies in 2008.

Comment posted by The Blunt Ugly Truth:

Mitt "Flip Flop" Romney is a piece of excrement. The reason the crowd was so un-enthusiastic and falling asleep was because the greasy-haired, flip-flopping douchebag didn't fill the stadium with Mormons, bible-bangers, people from the Deep South, people with a severe case of ODS (Obama Derangement Syndrome), uneducated

housewives, and people sucking on the government teat...otherwise known as the "GOP base." Empty stadium. Quite fitting for an empty suit with empty ideas.

[20120225-05](#) 09:15 SteveB Video: Rick Santorum and His Party

This great "Daily Show" video says it all about the Republican philosophy and candidates. Hilarious, but undeniably true!

<http://www.thedailyshow.com/watch/thu-february-23-2012/indecision-2012---rick-santorum-s-conservative-rhetoric>

[20120225-07](#) 09:42 Pam Re: Video: Rick Santorum and His Party (reply to SteveB, above)

I would be totally insane if it weren't for Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert.

[20120225-06](#) 09:18 SteveB 2012 Republican Primaries & Platforms (to GaryC)

GaryC, you say you're a social liberal. You must be absolutely horrified, then, by what you see in the Republican Party?

Or you don't find the monster that's been created scary as hell?

[20120225-09](#) 12:00 SteveG Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell President Obama: 55 Wall St. Investigators Aren't Enough!

from CREDO Action:

A month ago, President Obama announced during the State of the Union speech the creation of a new financial crimes task force to investigate the crimes and misdeeds that led to the economic collapse and "hold accountable those who broke the law."

Yet, despite the enormity of the issue, its direct impact on millions of Americans and the widespread nature of crimes and wrongdoing, the new financial crime unit has been given a paltry 55 staff members to undertake this enormous task.

This contrasts to the approximately 1,000 FBI agents and dozens of federal prosecutors who were assigned to prosecute cases related to the much smaller savings and loan scandal of the '80s, or the 100 FBI agents tasked with investigating the Enron scandal³, which involved just one company and caused none of the economy-wide damage we've seen since the collapse of the housing bubble.

Tell President Obama: 55 investigators are not enough. We need 20 times more staffing to launch a real investigation into Wall Street's crimes. Click here to sign the petition:

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/fraud_task_force/.

[20120225-11](#) 13:12 Pam Re: Tell President Obama: 55 Wall St. Investigators Aren't Enough! (reply to SteveG, above)

I like Obama, and I'm going to vote for him again, but I have to say I find his record on exposing criminal behavior in high places lacking. The only way to clean things up is to expose the whole sorry mess--whatever it might be--to the light, something the Obama administration has been taking pains not to do. I am left to conclude that he and/or his advisers believe the fallout would be too great if the whole truth were known. It's as if the upper

echelon has decided to protect its own, no matter what. Truth and justice are apparently not a top priority. We need a new Woodward and Bernstein to blow the lid off. Those two had the advantage of being well-educated, well-spoken, and "respectable" looking, unlike Michael Moore and Julian Assange, both of whom seem a slight bit deranged. Fox News has been doing a number on the American public for years now. I wish more people were listening to the likes of Rachael Maddow, who is not hysterical and speaks the truth. Unless there is a G. Gordon Liddy and his crew to be dragged into the public square, my guess is that any investigation of financial wrongdoing will drag on so slowly and so eternally that the original impetus will be forgotten. It doesn't take long for the public mind to go numb.

20120225-10	12:30	FotM	The Federal Birth Control 'Mandate' (FotM group discussion)
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[I am presenting the entire thread to facilitate understanding the new posts concerning this important subject. – SteveB]

Mary (Feb. 6): Regardless of your political persuasion or position on birth control, it's imperative that you familiarize yourself with the latest federal birth control mandate. It is an unprecedented attack on religious liberty, a fundamental freedom protected by the first amendment. For an administration that believes in "choice", how can it justify forcing this on groups if it's against their moral beliefs??

mgobble01 (Feb. 8): I didn't understand it to be a mandate, it is just going to be mandatory for insurance companies to cover birth control IF a woman chooses to use it.

Carol (Feb. 9): Anything that is mandatory is a mandate. PPACA is forcing Christian & Catholic organizations who oppose abortifacient forms of birth control or sterilization to offer and to pay for what their consciences object to. For our government to put Catholics and others with similar convictions in the position of obeying their convictions or dropping health care coverage for their employees (and pay large fines), is a tremendous power grab. Where will this end? Will they someday require Jews and Muslims to serve pork in their restaurants? Will they required the Amish to serve in the military and kill against their consciences? Will they require Christian or Catholic adoption services to place children in homosexual households? (oh, wait....they're already doing this one). When will they start requiring doctors to perform abortions or to kill their terminally ill patients? This is a very slippery slope. Birth control is ultimately not the issue. This is a violent infringement to religious freedom and our First Amendment rights. If you want birth-control, just go down to the pharmacy and buy it yourself.

Pam (Feb. 10): Catholic taxes for contraception--a violation of religious liberty or the price of living in a democracy? Many of us would prefer our taxes not be used to prosecute wars or subsidize corn farmers or prop up dictators, but we pay them. Why should being a Catholic carry more weight than being a Quaker? The whole contraception brou-ha-ha is more politics as usual, which is to say, ridiculous.

Dennis (Feb. 10): Why is this not religion dictating public policy? What gives Catholic bishops the authority to discriminate against employees of a hospital serving the general public? Is this not the religious tyranny that the separation of church and state is intended to prevent? The above nonsense about Jews, Muslims, and pork dictates is just a red herring. Christians and Catholics can believe any narrow minded thing they want in their churches, but when they provide commercial services to the public, they can't determine what services to provide according to their own religious biases. I suppose you might believe it was a government power grab to require a member of the KKK who owned a restaurant to refuse service to blacks a couple of generations ago. That was the slippery slope argument then.

Carol (Feb. 11): This isn't public policy. These are not government-run hospitals, they are faith-based charities, hospitals and schools. Any of their employees are welcome to get different jobs that have more inclusive health insurance that suits their personal desires. This is not discrimination against employees. They won't pay for their cigarettes either; have a problem with that? I would go to jail before paying for someone else's morning-after pill. It completely violates my conscience, and it is absolutely ridiculous to assign me to the same category as the KKK (talk about red herring & nonsense!). Racism is evil, and so is abortion. I am completely against both. You have the tyranny exactly backwards. The "separation of church and state" phrase comes from a personal & private letter between President Thomas Jefferson and the Baptist Association of Danbury, Connecticut, shortly after he became

president. Mr. Jefferson wrote the letter in the context of not allowing the government's restriction or interference in religious practices. He and the Founders believed and wrote extensively that the First Amendment was written to prevent the federal establishment of a national denomination and to keep them from trying to regulate or restrict religious expression (which unfortunately is what is going on now). As for this new "concession" the Obama administration issued today, it is just more politics. So now religious employers won't have to pay for abortion pills, sterilization and contraception, but their insurance companies will. Hmmm. Who pays for the insurance policy? The cost will still be theirs, because of course, the insurance companies will simply raise their premiums. If you want your birth control paid for, just don't get a job at a Catholic hospital. People switch jobs to get greater benefits all the time.

Dennis (Feb. 11): Wrong. The insurance companies will absorb the cost of contraception gladly. It is cheaper for them than paying for unintended pregnancies and deliveries.

Carol (Feb. 11): Doubt it. Insurance companies see their overhead go up, and they raise rates. They don't sit there and calculate how much they're "saving" by not paying for deliveries. No businesses absorb increased costs "gladly."

Dennis (Feb. 11): If you don't think insurance companies calculate every last penny of costs, then you must be some kind of naive libertarian.

Carol (Feb. 12): What's really naive is to think that people don't use birth control if their insurance companies don't pay for it.

Dennis (Feb. 12): I was once a social worker in inner city Detroit. I am not naive about this. Maybe you should get out of your self-righteous religious shell and find out about the real world.

Carol (Feb. 13): Dennis, I almost responded to you several times, but have hesitated because I am rather baffled by your name-calling below. You know nothing about me or how much I know about the world. I have lived all over the United States, and abroad. I have done community service in gang-infested inner-city Los Angeles, and traveled to 35+ countries on pretty much most of the continents (haven't quite made it to Antarctica yet). It was rather interesting last night as I had a good friend from Michigan visit who's a social worker and very familiar with inner city Detroit. We had a great discussion, but she did not tell me anything I wasn't already aware of. My statement below is true and I stand by it. Anyone can go into Planned Parenthood and get as much free birth control that they want, especially in inner city Detroit! Try to watch the ad hominem attacks in the future. They add nothing to your argument. I read your article by Mr. Kristof, and of course he got his information from the Guttmacher Institute (non-partisan - HA!) The cost of birth control is NOT "the backdrop for the uproar over President Obama's requirement that Catholic universities and hospitals include birth control in their health insurance plans...." as Mr. Kristof states. This is about government control and King George is removing more and more of our freedoms. What's next? After our government requires Christian businesses to go against their faith/conscience by purchasing abortifacient forms of birth control and sterilizations for their employees, then it could be to provide/pay for abortions. Our president, when he was a state senator for Illinois, voted against allowing nurses to hold a dying babies from botched abortions TWICE. Where's all his compassion for poor helpless people there???? Or do you not consider an alive and independently breathing newborn (not even necessarily premature) a person deserving of medical care? I can barely stomach that. As Sen. Jim DeMint stated, the "contraception controversy is only the beginning of Obamacare's tyrannical reach into our personal lives." Honestly, I can't think of a bigger infringement on our religious liberties in the history of our country. It saddens me greatly.

Mary (Feb 25): Steve, could you put THIS in your newsletter w/o editing? I have Carol's permission. Their "exchange" is interesting. Sad to say, Dennis's remarks to Carol, are similar to other comments I've read in "Friends of the Middle(?)" ????. i.e. Very closed minded - Republicans are all bad, and Dems have all the answers. "Like a parachute, the mind works best when open!" Thanks!

SteveB (Feb. 25): Mary, Thank you, Carol, and Dennis for this. Happy to publish and discuss it. We hope to hear more from you and Carol. It's such an important issue, no matter which side you're on, lives are at stake. BUT...we edit nothing, except perhaps to correct a little spelling and punctuation, though we even try to leave that alone as

much as humanly possible. What is the impetus of your accusation, please? Did you find something "edited"? And I wish it weren't the case, but to be left of Republicans in 2012 still leaves a huge amount of territory right of the middle. In other words, very many reasonable, practical, moral people find themselves far left of Republicans. That's just the way it is. Check the numbers. After all, this is still a democracy. Majority rules. I believe in that, myself, heart and soul. That's what America is founded upon, right or wrong. (As to the issues at hand—reproductive matters—our nation seems tragically split down the middle at this time.) I have a lot of faith. I believe that, in the end, we are all brothers (and sisters) and we all want the same things for our children and grandchildren. I believe that we will find that we really agree on many things, despite the wedges driven by those who would control us.

Pam (Feb. 25): Very interesting, as you say, SteveB.

May I weigh in? Several things occur to me, in no particular order. First, all of us pay taxes that are used for things we may disagree with. Quakers wouldn't want their money spent on weapons of war. Orthodox Jews wouldn't want their money used for subsidies to farmers who raise hogs. Most religions have prohibitions of one kind or another (yet another aspect of religion that baffles me), but we'd be tied up in knots if we attempted to accommodate each and every one, and if we don't accommodate all, then where's the logic in supporting some?

Second, I don't believe the anti-birth-controllers are really exercised about women's reproductive rights. This brou-ha-ha is about religion, and the zealots have come out of the closet swinging. Birth control is a no brainer. Preventing pregnancy is no more heinous than a thirteen-year old in the bathroom with a jar of mayonnaise. About abortion I'm more understanding. I am pro-choice but not pro-abortion. I do believe a human fetus is a human life. What else could it be, a tadpole? This is such a problematic subject, I would urge erring on the side of individual choice. A woman should be able to decide for herself which is more intolerable to her: ending her child's life or spending her remaining years coping with a disaster. No one enjoys abortion, but only the woman and her doctor are close enough to the situation to know what is the right course to take. That said, I don't think people should be forced to act against their conscience. A Catholic doctor who doesn't want to perform abortions shouldn't be forced to. The problem is when some folks want to decide what other folks must do, and it works both ways. It isn't feasible to tease out the tax revenue used for defense or oil subsidies; it is easy to allow a physician to opt out of performing procedures he is uncomfortable with. If only people could see that their "opponents" feel as deeply as they do, then perhaps both sides could leave each other alone. If you don't believe in birth control, don't use it. If you don't believe in divorce, don't have one. What others do is none of your business.

Like it or not, there are very few absolutes. Mature individuals and societies take circumstances into account and make exceptions to rules when they are warranted. Thou shalt not kill--unless a maniac is after your wife with an ax. Thou shalt not steal--unless your child is starving under a bridge. We all make exceptions to moral precepts all the time, but they're usually small and we barely notice them. No one has a right to determine what others' exceptions should be; that's what they do in North Korea.

The Republican Presidential debates have demonstrated abundantly just how intensely all the candidates want to dictate morals, behavior, religious belief, and sexual behavior. Each one of them is saying, "Do as I say, or you are a bad, bad person." A couple using birth control is not evil. A woman with a seriously deformed fetus who chooses abortion is not evil. A Christian is not evil. An atheist is not evil. Judge not, lest ye be judged. America has become a snarling, nasty, bitter place, more concerned with how terrible everyone ELSE is than how it might address its own failings. We sit and listen to the candidates lie to us, know they're lying, and react as if they mirrored the truth. When you live in a looking-glass world, nothing appears as it really is, and appearances can be deceiving.

20120225-12	13:22	SteveG	"No Bailouts for Romney's Intellectual Bankruptcy"
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"No Bailouts for Romney's Intellectual Bankruptcy" by Jonathan Alter, The National Memo

Feb. 25, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/content/no-bailouts-romneys-intellectual-bankruptcy>)

By all accounts, Mitt Romney is a smart businessman with a sophisticated understanding of how economies work. So why is he so tied up in knots over basic questions of government spending in a recession and the limits of the free market?

Because he's running for president in a party that has lost its economic common sense, its political bearings and probably Michigan's electoral votes.

Here's the Republican candidate off-script (the best way to find out what's in his head) at a town hall meeting Tuesday in Shelby Township, Michigan: "If you just cut, if all you're thinking about doing is cutting spending, why, as you cut spending you'll slow down the economy, so you have to at the same time create pro-growth tax policies."

This is a classic example of a "Kinsley gaffe" (named for my Bloomberg View colleague Michael Kinsley), which is when a politician accidentally says something that's true but politically inconvenient.

Sure enough, Andy Roth, vice president for government affairs at the fiscally conservative Club for Growth, called Romney's comments "hogwash." Roth said the statement "confirms yet again that Romney is not a limited government conservative. The idea that balancing the budget would not help the economy is crazy. If we balanced the budget tomorrow on spending cuts alone, it would be fantastic for the economy."

Oh, really? If we balanced the budget by immediately cutting \$1.3 trillion in spending, as some Tea Party adherents advocate, unemployment would surge. Spending cuts (mostly through entitlement reform) are critical in the medium and long term, but they're harmful when the economy is weak. If you don't believe Romney or me on this point, ask any economics professor who isn't a crackpot.

After Romney's gaffe, a campaign spokesman undertook damage control with a tortured statement that amounted to saying that Romney supports the House Republican "Cut and Grow" economic policy. This is the one that shuns all "investment" as a Democratic codeword for spending (thereby repudiating 150 years of Republican support for infrastructure investments) and says that the route to economic growth is through tax cuts.

A preview of Romney's tax plan making its debut Friday in a speech in Detroit suggests that "Romneynomics" would in effect transfer wealth from the poor and the future old (through draconian cuts in Medicaid and Medicare) to the wealthy (through more tax cuts at the upper end). You may recall that President George W. Bush tried a variant of this with his 2001 tax cuts and the result was the weakest decade of job growth since the 1930s.

Romney is trapped in a "theology" (to use Rick Santorum's word in a different context) that he knows is completely inadequate for addressing our economic problems.

We first glimpsed that trap during the 2008-09 economic crisis. Like many in his party, Romney supported the Troubled Asset Relief Program for banks but opposed the portion of TARP devoted to the auto industry. He was sure the auto bailouts would fail and thus he was safe in writing his now famous "Let Detroit Go Bankrupt" op-ed article in the *New York Times*.

In fairness to Romney, that piece was written in November 2008, when clueless automakers were asking for money from the outgoing Bush administration with no strings attached. (They got \$17.4 billion and flushed it down the same old rat holes.) Romney wrote that government guarantees for warranties and post-bankruptcy financing would be acceptable and these eventually became part of the Obama deal.

Even so, the premise of that piece, which endorsed a "managed bankruptcy" without direct federal money, was itself Intellectually bankrupt. It assumed that the car companies would find new investors after reorganization. But the firm Romney co-founded, Bain Capital LLC, was among many potential creditors that refused to touch any deal involving auto companies. The billions necessary to keep General Motors Co. (GM) and Chrysler alive weren't available from any place but the government. When CNN moderator John King made this point during Wednesday's debate among Republican candidates, Romney tried to ignore it.

Romney's approach was popular among many Republicans, who hypocritically argued that the rules of free market capitalism could be suspended to bail out bankers but not workers. Sure, hundreds of thousands of people working for auto companies or their suppliers would lose their jobs, but that was just part of capitalism's "creative destruction."

This selective approach to conservative principles -- not Romney's opposition to the auto bailouts -- is what put Romney in trouble with primary voters in Michigan, where Santorum's consistency in opposing all bailouts has won him conservative support.

Santorum tried to use that consistency to his advantage in Wednesday's debate. Like so much else about his performance, he failed. Could it be that free market fundamentalists have been consistently wrong for three years? They are the "little minds" Ralph Waldo Emerson had in mind when he savaged the "hobgoblin" of "foolish consistency."

Every so often, history renders a clear verdict. However noxious and debatable the particulars, the TARP bank bailouts averted a global run on American banks and a depression. They helped to stabilize the global economy. Almost all of the money has been paid back.

The auto bailouts? The reduction in Michigan's unemployment rate from 14.1 percent in 2009 to 9.3 percent today isn't a matter of opinion or differing economic philosophy. It's a happy reality that should make any open-minded conservative acknowledge that dogmatic adherence to abstract principles usually ends badly.

Romney's core problem is that he doesn't have the courage of his pragmatic impulses. If he did, he'd stick with his view that cutting spending sharply in the short term is a bad idea, and that in extremely rare circumstances we must hold our noses, put principles aside and let Washington prop up vital industries.

Of course he can't say that, which means that winning Michigan is all but out of reach for him or any other Republican candidate this fall.

(Jonathan Alter is a "Bloomberg View" columnist and the author of *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*. The opinions expressed are his own.)

Comments

posted by Howz1:

I call Romney a Rubric cube because of the many sides he shows during elections. Against the liberal lion, Ted Kennedy he was publically a moderate to progressive governor who just championed health care reform. Now faced with a party that has shifted dramatically to the right and wants a conservative purist test given to every candidate, Romney goes against his own common economic sense to please the masses. The problem with the masses is, as a Canadian study just showed that the Tea Party members are of lesser intelligence, can't really comprehend the depth of the issues, and are easily manipulated, to repeat jargon(cut cut) and slogans (Obama care is bad). Romney, would probably have had more success running against Obama in the Democratic primary where he could have been the moderate on social issues that he was(pro choice) and slightly to the right of center on Economic issues like Clinton was.

posted by concernedusa7:

REPUBLICAN IDEALISM IS PROPAGANDA! The Obama Administration inherited a disastrous financial program leading the USA & World into a Second Republican Caused Depression. In order to rescue the USA & World from a Second Depression it was absolutely essential that the USA Financial Conglomerate be saved from total collapse. The Obama Administration was forced to and Wisely chose to shore up the USA Financial Conglomerate with USA Government Funds. That intelligent action saved the USA & World from a devastating Second Republican Depression and brought the USA & World to the Great Republican Recession, which slowed the financial collapse and is leading to a slow but steady recovery from deaths door, Thank you Obama Administration! Every Hair

Brained Idea the Republicans have put forth would throw the USA & World into a horrible Economic Collapse, Depression. I would also add that the Ideologue Republicans have tried to block every necessary measure that has been put forth to insure the Economic Recovery of the USA & World. The Republicans believe that destroying Collective Bargaining, Eliminating all programs that assist the poor and elderly, eliminating any and all abortions, as well as Cutting All Taxes on the Super Wealthiest of the Wealthy, doing away with Public Education, doing away with Health Coverage will bring the USA & World out of the Great Republican Recession, this Ideology lacks any Intelligence!

posted by Independent1:

I'd just like to point out that the deficit's charged to Bush aren't 5 trillion they're 10 trillion. The worst president the U.S. has ever seen runs the country into the ground and by magic the deficits needed to fix the mess he creates are suppose to stop when he runs out office??? Sorry friend...George is responsible for every bit of the deficits that Obama is having to run up to fix HIS disaster. Just because on some fake books they end the counting when he walks out the door, I'm sorry but it doesn't work that way. Besides, he negotiated a lot of the fixes that drove up the deficit by trillions that didn't take effect until he skipped out. Not only are Republicans these days completely bereft of common sense, they can't even learn from their own mistakes. They've had a lot of practice in creating recessions by their idiot notion that you can stimulate the economy via tax and budget cuts...every attempt they've tried in doing this has failed. But again, no common sense, no learning even from your mistakes.

20120225-13 16:49 Pam "Rick Santorum's Hypocrisy on Higher Education?"
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Yet one more sign of America's anti-intellectualism. I am sick and tired of people criticizing college professors for being "liberal." That's as stupid and reductive as calling all conservatives "idiots." (Yes, I have been known to do that, but always intending hyperbole.)

"Rick Santorum's Hypocrisy on Higher Education?" by Michael Falcone, ABC OTUS News

Feb 25, 2012, (June 6, 2012 — no longer available online)

(TROY, Mich.) At a campaign event in this Detroit suburb on Saturday, Rick Santorum called President Obama a "snob" for wanting all Americans to go to college.

But according to an archived page of Rick Santorum's 2006 Senate campaign website, Santorum said he was "committed to ensuring the every Pennsylvanian has access to higher education."

It's also unclear exactly what comments of Obama's Santorum was referring to.

Obama has said that "higher education cannot be a luxury; it is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford." And according to the White House, the president wants "every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training."

ABC has reached out to the Santorum campaign for clarification.

At an Americans For Prosperity forum in Troy on Saturday, Santorum was making the pitch that he is the best candidate for working-class Americans and noting the importance of reviving the country's manufacturing sector, as he often does.

He began his "snob" riff by saying: "Not all folks are gifted in the same way," he said.

"President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob!" Santorum said to loud applause. "There are good, decent men and women who go out and work hard every day and put their skills to test that aren't taught by some liberal college professor."

Santorum said Obama doesn't just want Americans to go to college, "he wants to remake you into his image. I want to create jobs so people can remake their children into their image not his."

Saturday was also not the first time Santorum has accused the president of "snobbery" on the issue of higher education. He did so as far back as January.

[Remember, Hitler also attacked higher education. –SteveB]

20120225-14	19:29	SteveG	"Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" & "What Happens If the Keystone XL Pipeline Isn't Built?"
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Interesting article on the proposed Trans Canada Keystone XL pipeline, with the Canadian company threatening to use eminent domain in Nebraska.

"Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" by Guy Raz and Brent Baughman, NPR

Feb. 25, 2012, (<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/25/147413520/ranchers-land-becomes-ground-zero-in-energy-fight>)

(Part one of a two-part series on the Keystone XL pipeline.)

Gas prices are spiking once again; the cost of a gallon of regular unleaded is about 12 percent higher than it was a year ago. But winter typically isn't the time for a rise in gas prices. Demand for gasoline is at a 14-year low and domestic oil production is at an eight-year high.

Some analysts link the increase in gas prices to the tensions in Iran and speculators on Wall Street. Others point to policy decisions limiting drilling in environmentally sensitive areas, as well as President Obama's decision to deny a permit for a massive oil pipeline called Keystone XL.

The proposed pipeline would travel 1,800 miles from Alberta, Canada, all the way down to the Gulf Coast. The controversy over its impact — environmentally, politically and economically — makes it prime election issue.

A Proposal Turns Controversial

TransCanada, the company behind the proposal, already operates a massive pipeline that has been pumping crude oil from Canadian tar sands. The pipeline ends in the small town of Cushing, Okla., where the oil is stored in massive tanks scattered across the town.

When you've got an 8.3 percent unemployment rate in America and we're trying to have energy independence, to me this was a no-brainer.

Canada has the potential to produce more than six times the amount of oil it now makes. Because the existing pipeline ends in Oklahoma, however, Canada can't deliver the oil to refineries on the Gulf Coast and, from there, to the lucrative global oil market. The Keystone XL was supposed to help resolve that issue.

When TransCanada proposed running the XL pipeline through the Sandhills of Nebraska, a delicate ecosystem, it hit a snag. All pipelines — even the most advanced like TransCanada's — eventually leak, and a few years ago, cattle ranchers said they were concerned the new pipeline would destroy the Ogallala aquifer. The Ogallala is one of the largest aquifers in America, and a primary water source for farmers and ranchers in seven states who raise cattle, wheat and corn.

Nebraska's Republican governor initially sided with the ranchers. Last August, he wrote a letter to President Obama, asking him to deny TransCanada a permit to build Keystone XL.

"When I wrote that letter, we were trying to get their attention to say look, we don't want it to go through the Sandhills," Gov. Dave Heineman says. "Probably the only option at that time was to deny the permit."

Heineman says if the Keystone XL could bypass the Sandhills, it could be an opportunity for both his state and the country.

"When you've got an 8.3 percent unemployment rate in America and we're trying to have energy independence, to me this was a no-brainer. We should have moved forward with the project," he says.

Supporters of the pipeline argue more oil from Canada means the U.S. would rely less on oil from places like Venezuela and Saudi Arabia.

TransCanada says the pipeline would create 20,000 direct jobs and thousands more related ones. (Opponents dispute those figures.)

A Rancher Fights Back

Rancher Randy Thompson is fighting to keep the Keystone XL pipeline from being built in Nebraska. Because of his vocal opposition to the pipeline, Randy Thompson has become a symbol in the state. There are signs all across Nebraska that feature his face and read, "I Stand With Randy."

Four years ago, Thompson was contacted by an agency representing TransCanada that said the pipeline could cross his land.

"He just said ... we're wondering if we could have permission to come on and do some surveying," Thompson says.

TransCanada wanted Thompson and other affected landowners to sign over the rights to parts of their land in order to build the pipeline.

Thompson was offered \$9,000. But he wasn't interested.

In 2010, TransCanada sent a letter to his 92-year-old mother, who co-owned the land with him. The gist of the letter was if they refused to cooperate, Keystone would use eminent domain to acquire an easement.

Thompson was stunned that a foreign company could potentially take over his land. But Robert Jones, TransCanada's vice president, says the company was following normal procedure.

"The Keystone pipeline system was under construction in 2010 and we were absolutely considering the precedent in the past, anticipating a presidential permit shortly," Jones says.

Thompson and other ranchers thought the tone of the letters was unnecessarily aggressive, but the letters had the opposite effect on other landowners.

"I had a neighbor told me, said, these guys are way too big," Thompson says. "There's no need to fight them. Just as well sign and get it over with. So he signed the easement right away."

Getting Personal

Four years ago, Sue Luebbe stood on the hood of the truck and pointed a rifle at a helicopter that was surveying her land for TransCanada.

Luebbe says she worries the pipeline would ruin her land. She lives right in the heart of the Sandhills. The water table on her land is so close to the surface, you need to dig down only two feet to hit the aquifer.

One afternoon four years ago, she noticed a helicopter hovering over her land. Inside the cockpit were two surveyors working on behalf of TransCanada.

The chopper terrified Luebbe's cattle, causing a stampede that sent them into a barbed-wire fence. Luebbe got on the hood of her pickup truck and pointed a rifle at the helicopter.

"I saw both of them and I also gave them some sign language. They kind of understood," she says. "So they took off as fast as they could."

She says she refused an \$18,000 offer from TransCanada to build the pipeline on her land. Like Thompson, she's joined Bold Nebraska, a group that's made it its mission to stop the Keystone XL.

The Battle Continues

TransCanada says it will submit a new proposal to the U.S. government next year. The proposed route, the company says, won't go through the Sandhills.

But now, Thompson and other ranchers are convinced the whole enterprise is bad for the environment and a raw deal for Nebraska.

Thompson says remembering his parents' perseverance through the Great Depression and droughts drive him. If they were able to survive those hard times, he says, he can get through this.

"I know what my folks went through to get a piece of ground. And these sons of bitches come along and they tell me we're going to take this land away from you whether you want us to or not," he says, "and they got a fight on their hands."

Heineman says he's sympathetic, but only to a point.

"The fact of the matter is we're still going to be using coal and oil for a long period of time. Hey, I'm a supporter that we need to move to cleaner coal technology and those things," he says, "but it is not going to happen overnight."

"What Happens If the Keystone XL Pipeline Isn't Built?" by Guy Raz and Brent Baughman, NPR

February 26, 2012, (<http://www.npr.org/2012/02/26/147451538/what-happens-if-the-keystone-xl-pipeline-isnt-built>)

(Part two of a two-part series on the Keystone XL pipeline.)

Gas isn't like a rare bottle of wine that fetches a high price just because it's rare. But at the same time, no one can agree what drives gas prices. Demand for gasoline in the U.S. is at its lowest point in more than a decade; domestic oil production is at an eight-year high.

There's no simple explanation for why most people are spending \$3.60 for a gallon of regular, unleaded gas. But many critics of President Obama's energy policy point to one possible reason: The U.S. isn't fully tapping into the potential supply from Canada and, specifically, a place called the Athabasca Tar Sands in Alberta.

Some are looking to a controversial proposal as a solution: the Keystone XL pipeline.

Pushing for Domestic Energy

There are consequences if the Keystone XL isn't built, but there are also issues if it never becomes a reality.

"If Canada can't produce this oil, we'll have higher oil prices than we otherwise would," says Michael Levi, senior fellow for energy at the Council on Foreign Relations.

Late last month, Obama rejected a plan by Calgary-based TransCanada to build a pipeline that would cross seven states and transport up to 700,000 barrels of Canadian oil a day to refineries on the Gulf Coast.

"The Keystone XL pipeline helps make sure that this resource can be developed if it's economically needed," Levy says. "And so that's good for the U.S. economy."

Obama doesn't necessarily oppose the pipeline, but he denied TransCanada the permit to build it because he argued there wasn't enough time to study its environmental impact. The company plans to file a new proposal next year.

A New Oil Boom

At the center of the Keystone XL debate is Cushing, Okla, the pipeline crossroads of the world. There are miles of giant white oil tanks across the town.

Cushing might be one of those rare places in the U.S. where the economic recession seems to have passed. Business is booming. It's so good that Pete Schwiering, chief operating officer of an oil storage company called Rose Rock Midstream, is adding a few new tanks on his tank farm. Each tank is capable of storing 250,000 barrels of oil.

Soon, Schwiering's tank farm will be capable of storing 2 million barrels a day, about 10 percent of all the oil consumed in America in a single day.

"I've been in this business 42 years and I've never seen activity out there on the production side like what's happening right now," he says.

There is so much oil coming into Cushing that there's actually a glut, which translates into big business for the storage companies. But what might be good for people like Schwiering is bad for pipeline companies like TransCanada. There are lots of incoming pipelines, but not enough outgoing ones.

Some of the oil moves to refineries in the Midwest where it's turned into gasoline. But it's not happening fast enough and now, there's a bottleneck in Cushing.

The Case for Jobs

The Keystone pipeline starts in Alberta, travels almost 2,000 miles and ends in Cushing. It was completed last year, but can only handle the flow of half a million barrels of oil a day from the Tar Sands in Alberta, which make up the second-largest proven oil reserve in the world.

Now, Canada wants to send more than twice that amount down to the Gulf Coast refineries where it can potentially be traded on the lucrative global oil market. In order to do that, TransCanada wants to build a second pipeline, known as Keystone XL, which Obama rejected last month. TransCanada's argument for building it is twofold, says Robert Jones, the company's vice president.

He says it'll create thousands of jobs, a figure disputed by other independent analysts. The second point, Jones says, is that it puts the U.S. in charge of its own energy production.

"When you look at the premise of the project and why the project was created—which is to serve the public and the public interest — it is solely that the U.S. is less dependent on foreign sources of oil from Venezuela or OPEC," says Jones, referring to the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, a bloc of the world's top oil-producing nations.

It's a compelling argument. If only the U.S. could buy more oil from Canada, it wouldn't have to buy as much from potentially hostile countries in the Middle East, Africa and Latin America.

But TransCanada is a pipeline company, not an oil company. There's no guarantee that once refined on the Gulf Coast, that oil would stay in the U.S. If oil companies can make more money selling it overseas, then it just comes down to business.

Safety Concerns

Then there's the issue with Canadian crude oil. It's heavy.

The difference between Canadian Tar Sands oil and Oklahoma light sweet crude is like the difference between Coca-Cola and cake batter. So to make it easier for Canadian oil to flow thousands of miles south to Cushing, it has to be mixed with chemicals to thin out.

"They won't tell us what's in the oil to make it flow," says Randy Thompson, a Nebraskan cattle rancher who's opposed Keystone XL.

He's successfully spearheaded a campaign to halt the construction of Keystone XL through the ecologically sensitive Sandhills of Nebraska that lie atop one of America's largest underground aquifers.

"We know they're toxic chemicals. So this is a severe concern for a lot of us people out here," Thompson says. "A lot of us people out here, we gotta drink this water. Be nice to know what the hell they're pumping through it."

TransCanada claims that its proposed Keystone XL line will be the safest of its kind ever built.

"I believe we can absolutely build pipelines with new technology that are getting closer and closer to being leak free," Jones says.

Just Beginning of the Debate

But for many environmental activists, the heart of the debate isn't about the Keystone XL pipeline. It's about the source of the oil it would carry.

Last year, James Hansen, a NASA scientist, wrote that if the Alberta Tar Sands continue to be mined for oil, it's "game over for the climate."

Longtime environmental activist Bill McKibben agrees.

"Keystone XL will be by far the biggest push in terms of plumbing those tar sands, building the infrastructure to fully exploit them," says McKibben, who led a demonstration of anti-Keystone XL protesters in front of the White House last November.

In order to get crude oil from the tar sands, it needs to be heated up. Scientists estimate that process produces up to 80 percent more atmospheric carbon than traditional drilling in places like Saudi Arabia and Oklahoma.

McKibben sees this progress as a sign to keep the oil in the ground.

"Sooner or later, hopefully sooner, we have to start getting off fossil fuel. And this is a very good place to start. We need to keep carbon out of the atmosphere," McKibben says. "That's the bottom line."

McKibben and other opponents of Keystone XL say they believe that if they can prevent its construction, it could dramatically slow down the mining at the Canadian Tar Sands.

The arguments raised by the two sides are based on different sets of facts: lots of jobs vs. a few; lower gas prices vs. higher ones; an environmental catastrophe vs. the realities of human consumption. What is clear, though, is that both sides are determined to win.

[20120225-15](#) 20:18 Jim Re: "Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" (reply to SteveG, above)

Why should a private foreign company have any right of eminent domain in the US?

Or is it that they are that confident that they have bought the politicians?

[20120225-16](#) 20:29 Dennis Re: "Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" (reply to Jim & SteveG, above)

Unfortunately, not all Canadians are nice, eh?



[20120225-17](#) 21:55 SteveG Re: "Ranchers' Land Becomes Ground Zero in Energy Fight" (reply to Jim, above)

I think the second one. According to the Supreme Court money is free speech and they did not specify what country the money has to come from.

[20120225-18](#) 21:56 Jim "Bradley Manning, Solitary Confinement & Occupy 4 Prisoners"

Solitary confinement as torture... Check out the USA's record on solitary.

"Bradley Manning, Solitary Confinement and Occupy 4 Prisoners" by Bill Quigley, NationofChange

Feb. 25, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/bradley-manning-solitary-confinement-and-occupy-4-prisoners-1330180938>)

Today US Army Private Bradley Manning is to be formally charged with numerous crimes at Fort Meade, Maryland. Manning, who was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize by members of the Icelandic Parliament, is charged with releasing hundreds of thousands of documents exposing secrets of the US government to the whistleblower website Wikileaks. These documents exposed lies, corruption and crimes by the US and other countries. The Bradley Manning defense team points out accurately that much of what was published by Wikileaks was either not actually secret or should not have been secret.

The Manning prosecution is a tragic miscarriage of justice. US officials are highly embarrassed by what Manning exposed and are shooting the messenger. As Glen Greenwald, the terrific Salon writer, has observed, President Obama has prosecuted more whistleblowers for espionage than all other presidents combined.

One of the most outrageous parts of the treatment of Bradley Manning is that the US kept him in illegal and torturous solitary confinement conditions for months at the Quantico Marine base in Virginia. Keeping Manning in solitary confinement sparked challenges from many groups including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Center for Constitutional Rights, the ACLU and the New York Times.

Human rights' advocates rightly point out that solitary confinement is designed to break down people mentally. Because of that, prolonged solitary confinement is internationally recognized as a form of torture. The conditions and practices of isolation are in violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN Convention against Torture, and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination.

Medical experts say that after 60 days in solitary peoples' mental state begins to break down. That means a person will start to experience panic, anxiety, confusion, headaches, heart palpitations, sleep problems, withdrawal, anger, depression, despair, and over-sensitivity. Over time this can lead to severe psychiatric trauma and harms like psychosis, distortion of reality, hallucinations, mass anxiety and acute confusion. Essentially, the mind disintegrates.

That is why the United Nations special rapporteur on torture sought to investigate Manning's solitary confinement and reprimanded the US when the Army would not let him have an unmonitored visit.

History will likely judge Manning as heroic as it has Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked the Pentagon Papers.

It is important to realize that tens of thousands of other people besides Manning are held in solitary confinement in the US today and every day. Experts estimate a minimum of 20,000 people are held in solitary in supermax prisons alone, not counting thousands of others in state and local prisons who are also held in solitary confinement. And solitary confinement is often forced on Muslim prisoners, even pre-trial people who are assumed innocent, under federal Special Administrative Measures.

In 1995, the U.N. Human Rights Committee stated that isolation conditions in certain U.S. maximum security prisons were incompatible with international standards. In 1996, the U.N. special rapporteur on torture reported on cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment in U.S. supermax prisons. In 2000, the U.N. Committee on Torture roundly condemned the United States for its treatment of prisoners, citing supermax prisons. In May 2006, the same committee concluded that the United States should "review the regimen imposed on detainees in supermax prisons, in particular, the practice of prolonged isolation."

John McCain said his two years in solitary confinement were torture. "It crushes your spirit and weakens your resistance effectively than any other form of mistreatment." The reaction of McCain and many other victims of isolation torture were described in an excellent 2009 New Yorker article on isolation by Atul Gawande. Gawande concluded that prolonged isolation is objectively horrifying, intrinsically cruel, and more widespread in the U.S. than any country in the world.

This week hundreds of members of the Occupy movement merged forces with people advocating for human rights for prisoners in demonstrations in California, New York, Ohio, and Washington DC. They call themselves Occupy 4 Prisoners. Activists are working to create a social movement for serious and fundamental changes in the US criminal system.

One of the major complaints of prisoner human rights activists is the abuse of solitary confinement in prisons across the US. Prison activist Mumia Abu-Jamal said justice demands the end of solitary, "It means the abolition of solitary confinement, for it is no more than modern-day torture chambers for the poor." Pelican Bay State Prison in California, the site of a hunger strike by hundreds of prisoners last year, holds over 1000 inmates in solitary confinement, some as long as 20 years.

At the Occupy Prisoners rally outside San Quentin prison, the three American hikers who were held for a year in Iran told of the psychological impact of 14 months of solitary confinement. Sarah Shourd said the time without human contact drove her to beat the walls of her cell until her knuckles bled.

When Manning was held in solitary he was kept in his cell 23 hours a day for months at a time. The US government tortured him to send a message to others who might consider blowing the whistle on US secrets. At the same time, tens of thousands of others in the US are being held in their cells 23 hours a day for months, even years at a time. That torture is also sending a message.

20120225-19 22:00 SteveG Fw: Change.org Petition: Save LGBT Lives in Uganda!
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From SteveG (Feb. 25, 2012, 10:00 pm)—Change.org Petition: Save LGBT Lives?

from Change.org:

Citibank and Barclays could save the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people in Uganda.

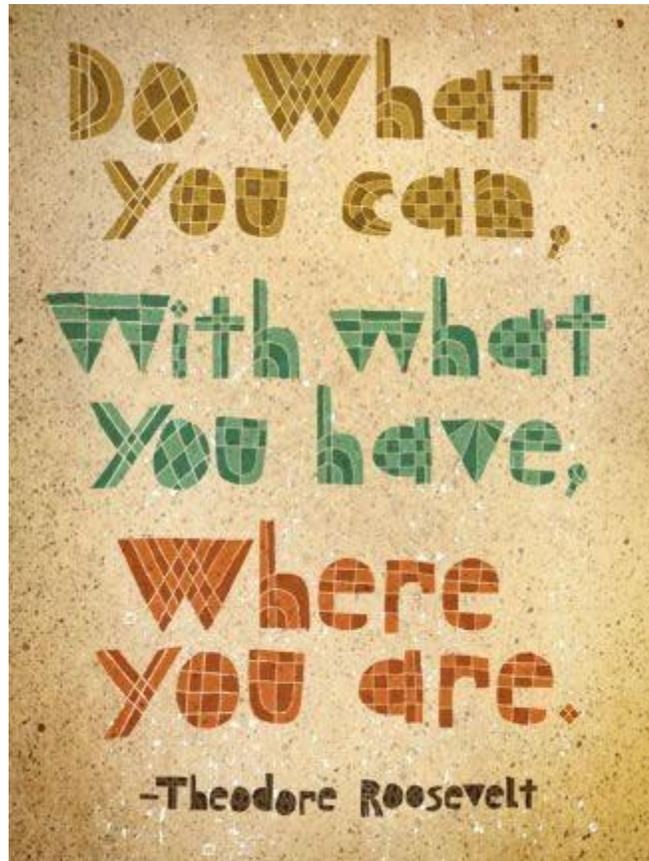
The Ugandan legislature could vote any day on a so-called "Kill the Gays" bill that could result in legalizing the death penalty for any LGBT person in the country. But Citibank and Barclays together have hundreds of millions of dollars invested in Uganda and wield significant influence in the country, just as banking lobbyists wield influence with Congress in the US. If Citibank and Barclays speak out against the "Kill the Gays" bill, Ugandan legislators will take notice in a hurry.

Collin Burton is a Citibank customer -- he's also gay. Collin started a petition on Change.org asking Citibank and Barclays to speak out against the "Kill the Gays" bill. Click here to sign Collin's petition right now.

http://www.change.org/petitions/citibank-and-barclays-condemn-ugandas-kill-the-gays-bill?utm_medium=email&utm_source=action_alert

Citibank and Barclays are both big supporters of LGBT rights for their own employees, yet they invest money with a government that is threatening to execute LGBT people. "I expect Citibank and Barclays to live up to the values of equality and fairness, not just list them on their websites," Collin says.

If Citibank and Barclays speak out against the "Kill the Gays" bill, Ugandan legislators will see that they are risking the business relationships that keep their government afloat.



"Virginia Safety Joseph Williams Is on a Hunger Strike for University Workers" by Graham Watson, Virginiasports.com

Feb. 24, 2012, (<http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/ncaaf-dr-saturday/virginia-safety-joseph-williams-hunger-strike-university-workers-173337610.html>)

Rarely do we see student-athletes, football players, get involved in political matters that affect the universities where they play. We're not talking about student government, but the politics that happen within the university, disputes between workers or teachers and administration.

Virginia safety Joseph Williams is changing that.

For the past eight days, Williams, a junior walk-on who has played in two games during his career, has been on a hunger strike "to protest the economic and social injustices perpetrated by the UVA administration against the vast majority of the University's service-sector employees."

Williams, a political and social thought major, wrote an eloquent and poignant essay about why he was participating in the hunger strike with the Living Wage Campaign.

Our University seeks to distinguish itself as a caring community and prides itself on traditions of honor and student self-governance. However, in our "caring community," hundreds of contract employees may make as little as \$7.25/hour while six out of the top ten highest paid state employees in Virginia hold administrative positions at the University. Many employees, mostly women and African Americans, do not receive enough pay for their basic necessities to exist in Charlottesville, where the cost of living is nearly 10% higher than the national average. This

extreme inequality has disturbed and disillusioned students for decades, many of whom have tried to grapple with issues of race, class, and poverty in and out of the classroom.

It's not often that you read this kind of political discourse by such a young man, and let's be honest, a football player. But Williams is not your ordinary student-athlete. He graduated from Dominion (Sterling, Va.) High when he was 16. In his essay he notes that he was one of four children supported by a single mother and that he lived in 30 different places, including many homeless shelters, which gave him a profound appreciation for socioeconomic challenges.

He walked on at Virginia at age 17 and has been refining his knowledge of politics ever since.

He does not say how long he plans to stay on strike, but as of Thursday, 18 students were involved in the cause. It's interesting, and even somewhat refreshing, to see a student-athlete go to the extremes for what he believes.

20120226-02	06:28	SteveB	"Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell's Wisdom"
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"Virginia Governor Bob McDonnell's Wisdom" posted by Ex-Rep. Artur Davis (Former Congressman (D-Ala.); Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School's Institute of Politics), The Arena Open Mike

Feb. 25, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/arena/>)

The skeptics will say that Gov. Bob McDonnell, the Virginia Republican who is openly interested in being vice president, had no choice but to switch positions on a bill requiring vaginal ultrasounds for women seeking abortions. Letting such a controversial mandate become law would have undoubtedly compromised his national appeal and undercut his party in the commonwealth this November.

But politics aside, McDonnell's change of heart is instructive for conservative politicians navigating the culture wars. First, McDonnell deserves credit for avoiding the usual rhetorical dodge. Rather than deflect the substance by basing his opposition on defects in the law-making process (think Haley Barbour criticizing Mississippi's personhood amendment on the ground that it didn't clear the regular pathway for complex legislation), McDonnell straightforwardly calls the ultrasound bill what it is: an "invasive procedure by the state without [the patient's] consent." When a conservative criticizes an act of unmitigated big government intervention, he shouldn't have to mince words.

Second, McDonnell, an unabashedly pro-life politician, didn't cave in to the idea that abortion politics requires politicians to cling to the extreme of their respective views. If that sounds intuitive enough, it is actually a departure from the way the right and left typically engages the issue. Liberals and the pro-choice lobby recoil from even the sanest limits on abortion access on the theory that they are a slippery slope, and weaken the principle of reproductive rights. Conservative politicians generally believe a pro-life culture requires every potential hurdle to be placed in the way of an abortion. It's a zeal that easily leaps from waiting periods and strict licensing rules for abortion clinics to outright psychological compulsion, which is what the ultrasound requirement really is.

It's no surprise that individuals who believe abortion is murder endorse any tool, no matter how harsh, to inconvenience it or discourage it. That's the necessary lot of pro-life activists who are fighting around the edges of a Supreme Court precedent that in their view sanctions killing. It's also a tempting time for social conservatives to forego compromise. They are galvanized because they despise the trend of government declaring selected portions of church doctrine a dead letter (the contraception fight, Illinois' hard line on Catholic adoption agencies who oppose gay relationships) and they catch the whiff of condescension in the mainstream media toward faith.

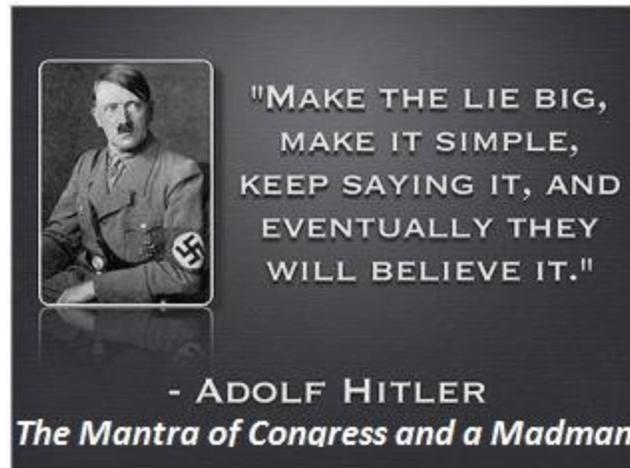
But Bob McDonnell just showed a grasp for this truth: building a pro-life majority in a closely divided state requires uniting the true believers who see nothing but moral clarity with an ambivalent center that believes abortion is more irresponsible than homicidal. That McDonnell made that nod to reality isn't "mushy moderation", or selling out the fruits of a legislative majority: it's a recognition that leadership and activism have different imperatives.

The fact is that in a country turning left on most social issues, pro-life politics is stronger than it's been in decades — Gallup says about half the country opposes the legality of abortions, and the number who favor making the practice rare and hard to get approaches a super majority. One undeniable reason is that technology is simultaneously exposing the violent details of abortion and the vitality of an unborn fetus. The science is making abortion on demand look more hard-hearted than ever to young, college educated women, whose opinions on the issue have shifted dramatically in the last decade. What a huge error it would be to squander those gains by pushing the same women to the other side of the argument.

20120226-04	08:13	SteveB	Throw the Bums Out — Un-Elect Congress! & Quote: Hitler on the Big Lie
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Marching from Spokane, WA to Washington, DC, starting Apr. 1, 2012.

<http://www.ttbo.org/>



20120226-05	12:39	Pam	"What If We Treated Doctors the Way We Treat Teachers?"
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"What If We Treated Doctors the Way We Treat Teachers?" by Shaun Johnson, Huffington Post

Jan. 24, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/shaun-johnson/treating-doctors-like-teachers_b_812096.html?ref=email_share)

(Shaun Johnson is assistant professor of elementary education, Towson University.)

A good friend and colleague who is now in Chicago first gifted me with this parable. It's been in my thoughts lately as my wife pursues her medical degree. In fact, she and I have talked about this at length, and when making comparisons between how physicians and teachers are treated, she is just as astounded.

Parallels are occasionally noted between medical training and education, especially the capstone clinical experiences present in both professions. Let us pretend that physicians of all specialties were held to similar measures of accountability and enveloped with the same kinds of discourses that we see in education reform debates. What might that look like, and how would the general public, in addition to doctors, feel about that?

It would not take a skilled social scientist to observe that, despite exceptional achievements in treating disease and diagnostic technologies, for example, the medical profession is failing. It has failed in its tasks to disseminate good information about health, quash misconceptions, fight corporations and health lobbies that keep people sick, and prevent high rates of obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, particularly in low-income populations. What do we do about this? Well, I have a few proposals listed in no particular order:

- We must begin to hold all physicians accountable, regardless of specialization, to certain quantifiable measures of health, namely cholesterol levels, blood pressure, weight, and BMI. All patients assigned to a physician must meet specific annual minimum standards of health. Bad doctors will be those who do not meet their patients' annual minimums, and they may be subject to certain penalties if the health scores of their patients do not improve in a reasonable amount of time.
- It will be mandatory for the Department of Health and Human Services, as well as all of the major governing bodies in medicine, to set a goal for reaching universal health and well-being in the United States. That is, a target year will be identified in which every person will achieve the ideal values in cholesterol, blood pressure, and BMI. Future targets may include assessments of mental health. A specific interval of time will also be determined to assess all patients for these values. Although pharmaceuticals may be used to stabilize or improve health outcomes, the patient must not be on any medications at the time of assessment unless approved by an official of the administrative body of the national health assessments.
- Quantifiable variables will be utilized to evaluate all practices and hospitals. All of this information will be made public. Additionally, medical schools will be evaluated based on the quantifiable health of patients in the care of their graduates. Medical schools will subsequently be ranked based on the health outcomes of their graduates' patients regardless of specialty. Given more advanced statistical models, these numbers could ultimately be used to assess the impact of pre-medical programs at the undergraduate level.
- In certain high needs areas, such as family practice, emergency medicine, or in practices in low income areas, alternative routes to being licensed will be provided. Moreover, data will determine what skills are necessary to impart in the curriculum of such programs. For instance, if a certain community prevails in specific medical conditions over others, then time will not be wasted covering rare conditions so that alternative programs can operate expeditiously.
- Barriers to participation will be lowered in certain instances, in the form of direct subsidies or significant tax exemptions, for the opening of small hospitals or short-term care centers by private organizations or motivated members of the community.
- Any hospital or practice is subject to a turnaround plan if minimum health requirements are not met. Should the facility not meet those requirements of minimum annual health, the entire staff will be terminated and reconstituted with more competent practitioners. Moreover, staff may be required to enroll in continuing medical education in advanced and remedial level re-licensing courses, including basic physics, chemistry, and biology.
- In addition to in- or out-of-network information and basic demographics, an online data warehouse will be established that will provide all health data and outcomes for every licensed physician in the United States, regardless of specialty. The individual physician's education, license information, and health outcomes of patients will be listed. Should in-network physicians be deemed unfit for local health care consumers, the Federal government, with matching funds by health providers, will offer subsidies for consumers to see other practitioners.
- Finally, a certain percentage of any and all physicians' patients will be assigned to them, care of those who qualify will be fully covered by providers. This will ensure adequate racial, income, and overall demographic diversity of clientele. The annual minimum health outcome data of these patients will also be included in the physician's overall quality.

Did I miss any? What if we indeed held doctors and other professionals to the same bloat and condescension that we currently hold teachers? I can predict some of the responses that physicians might make: "We can't control what our patients do or eat outside of our offices to maintain minimum levels of health. Also, these variables -- BMI, cholesterol, blood pressure -- are limited and don't adequately measure a healthy person. And one other thing, you can't expect us to be evaluated based on all patients equally, regardless of family history, poverty, and other complications." As an educator, my sentiments exactly!

20120226-07	17:44	SteveB	Re: "What If We Treated Doctors the Way We Treat Teachers?" (reply to Pam, above)
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I love this article! It should be mandatory reading for all educators! And, actually, I really wouldn't mind something being done about doctors. I would love to see the apoplexy in the AMA if any of these measures were actually proposed, yet teachers are expected to deal with the impossible daily, hourly, or on the minute.

20120225-03	07:41	SteveB	Re: Hoosier Post Office (reply to SteveG, below)
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From SteveB (Feb. 25, 2012, 7:41 am)—reply to SteveG, below, ref: Hoosier Post Offices; Public Education

There were three particular public buildings, besides schools, which I loved so very much when we were growing up.

One was the courthouse, where old war veterans sat around (I'm not sure why) and loved to tell me their war stories if I sat next to them. They taught me a lot about war and life. In junior high, at lunch time, when they let us out of school for an hour without supervision (dumb, huh?), we would go out onto the high balconies and shoot our pea shooters at random passersby below.

The public library was a marvel! People were very quiet and respectful. We were like a club, I thought. All those magazines and newspapers! I love magazines to this day, even though they're dying. I still remember the first time I ever ventured from the children's section, when I was 8 or 10, and went back into the adult books standing on tall shelves behind the librarian's desk. I was in heaven. I swore I would read them all someday.

The post office was the third. I always thought it was the friendliest place in town. This was the headquarters, sort of, of my high school mail order business.

I loved the way all three places smelled! Each different and unique. The last time I was in Greencastle, I went to the post office just to smell it. It still smelled exactly the same, and all those old memories came rushing back into my head.

I love the USPS and hope Congress will not destroy it. We can easily live without Saturday delivery. The Post Office can easily live without the ridiculous pension requirements.

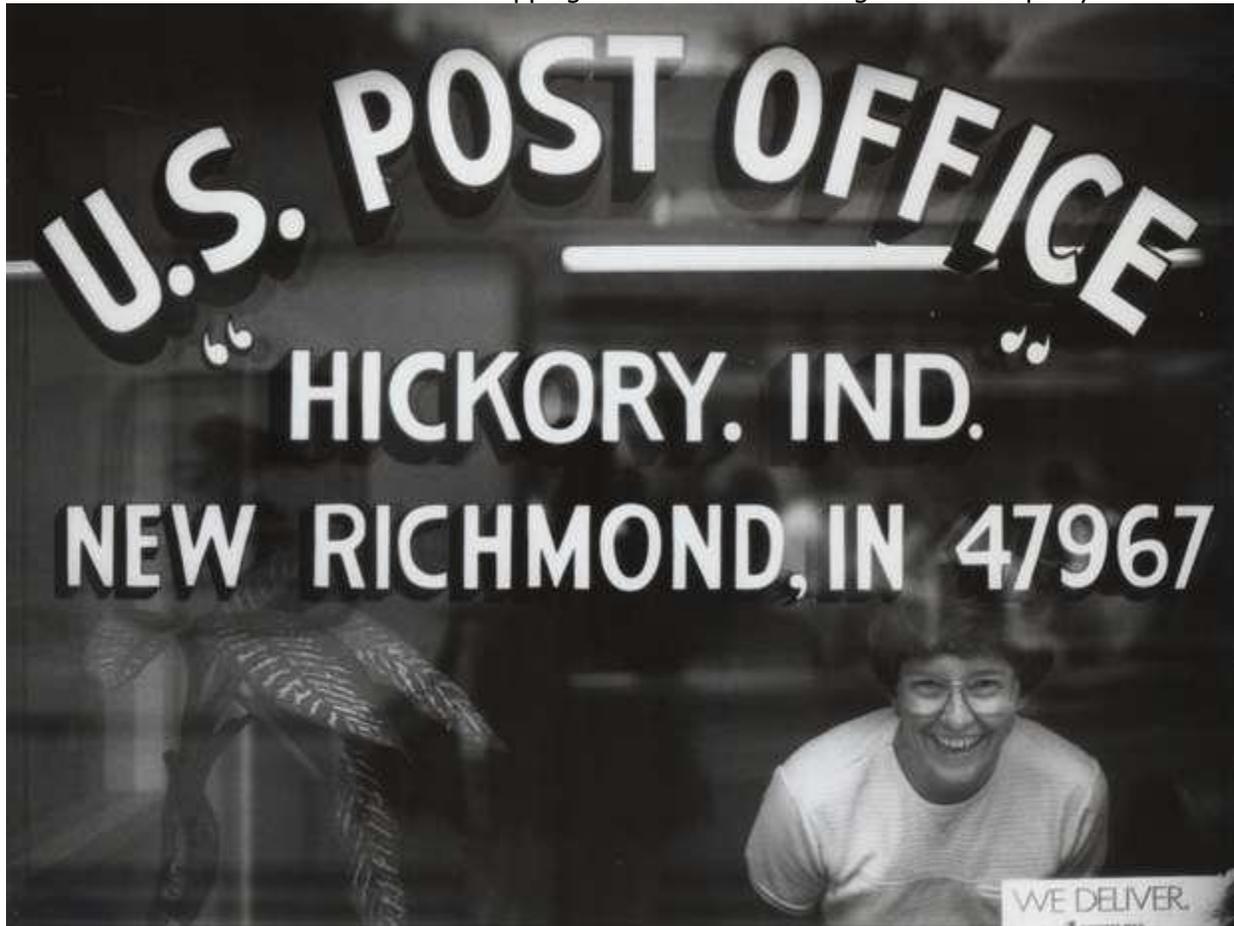
But America cannot survive as the country we know without public schools for nearly all and public mail for all. These are part of our freedoms and our rights, yet our stupid Constitution does not recognize them as such, or really consider them as much of anything. That is wrong! God certainly did NOT write the Constitution, no matter what the Right says. A similar chorus of lies is probably what has resulted in our thinking God, himself, wrote the Bible. Next, I suppose He is going to write an anti-abortion bill?

20120225-08	09:41	Pam	Re: Hoosier Post Office (reply to SteveB, above & SteveG, below)
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We are lucky to have grown up in small-town, rural America, the land, as I remember it, of no extremes. Unless you were black, that is. How insulated we were! And how safe. I was happy there as a child, but the older I got the more eager I was to leave. My almost next stop was New York City, and I thought I'd moved from the edge of the universe to the very center. I couldn't wait to leave there either. I remember going through various phases in my teen years, from super-preppy sorority girl to cigarette-smoking, long-haired hippie. Neither really fit. It's poetic justice or fitting or ironic or something that I have fetched up here in Friends of the Middle, the place I was searching for all along. As the Greeks would say, Nothing too much. Know Thyself. I know everyone makes fun of poor old Polonius, but I've always thought he gave good advice. To Thine Own Self Be True.

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Save-our-Hickory-Post-Office/263891410322693?sk=wall&filter=12>

Small Post Offices on the Chopping Block Because of Congressional Stupidity



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

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #83 — FEB. 28, 2012

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

SECRET: Why the Republican Party Is in Trouble

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 28, 2012)

I guess, in the view of Republicans, they would be much better off in 2012 if they had simply:

1. Never been slave owners.
2. Stopped illegal immigration.
3. Found better Presidential candidates.

What more can I say?

"2012 or Never" by Jonathan Chait, *New York Magazine*

Feb. 26, 2012, (<http://nymag.com/news/features/gop-primary-chait-2012-3/>)

(Republicans are worried this election could be their last chance to stop history. This is fear talking. But not paranoia.)

Of the various expressions of right-wing hysteria that have flowered over the past three years—goldbuggery, birtherism, death panels at home and imaginary apology tours by President Obama abroad—perhaps the strain that has taken deepest root within mainstream Republican circles is the terror that the achievements of the Obama administration may be irreversible, and that the time remaining to stop permanent nightfall is dwindling away.

"America is approaching a 'tipping point' beyond which the Nation will be unable to change course," announces the dark, old-timey preamble to Paul Ryan's "The Roadmap Plan," a statement of fiscal principles that shaped the budget outline approved last spring by 98 percent of the House Republican caucus. Rick Santorum warns his audiences, "We are reaching a tipping point, folks, when those who pay are the minority and those who receive are the majority." Even such a sober figure as Mitt Romney regularly says things like "We are only inches away from no longer being a free economy," and that this election "could be our last chance."

The Republican Party is in the grips of many fever dreams. But this is not one of them. To be sure, the apocalyptic ideological analysis—that "freedom" is incompatible with Clinton-era tax rates and Massachusetts-style health care—is pure crazy. But the panicked *strategic* analysis, and the sense of urgency it gives rise to, is actually quite sound. The modern GOP—the party of Nixon, Reagan, and both Bushes—is staring down its own demographic extinction. Right-wing warnings of impending tyranny express, in hyperbolic form, well-grounded dread: that conservative America will soon come to be dominated, in a semi-permanent fashion, by an ascendant Democratic coalition hostile

to its outlook and interests. And this impending doom has colored the party's frantic, fearful response to the Obama presidency.

The GOP has reason to be scared. Obama's election was the vindication of a prediction made several years before by journalist John Judis and political scientist Ruy Teixeira in their 2002 book, *The Emerging Democratic Majority*. Despite the fact that George W. Bush then occupied the White House, Judis and Teixeira argued that demographic and political trends were converging in such a way as to form a natural-majority coalition for Democrats.

The Republican Party had increasingly found itself confined to white voters, especially those lacking a college degree and rural whites who, as Obama awkwardly put it in 2008, tend to "cling to guns or religion." Meanwhile, the Democrats had increased their standing among whites with graduate degrees, particularly the growing share of secular whites, and remained dominant among racial minorities. As a whole, Judis and Teixeira noted, the electorate was growing both somewhat better educated and dramatically less white, making every successive election less favorable for the GOP. And the trends were even more striking in some key swing states. Judis and Teixeira highlighted Colorado, Nevada, and Arizona, with skyrocketing Latino populations, and Virginia and North Carolina, with their influx of college-educated whites, as the most fertile grounds for the expanding Democratic base.

Obama's victory carried out the blueprint. Campaign reporters cast the election as a triumph of Obama's inspirational message and cutting-edge organization, but above all his sweeping win reflected simple demography. Every year, the nonwhite proportion of the electorate grows by about half a percentage point—meaning that in every presidential election, the minority share of the vote increases by 2 percent, a huge amount in a closely divided country. One measure of how thoroughly the electorate had changed by the time of Obama's election was that, if college-educated whites, working-class whites, and minorities had cast the same proportion of the votes in 1988 as they did in 2008, Michael Dukakis would have, just barely, won. By 2020—just eight years away—nonwhite voters should rise from a quarter of the 2008 electorate to one third. In 30 years, nonwhites will outnumber whites.

Now, there are two points to keep in mind about the emerging Democratic majority. The first is that no coalition is permanent. One party can build a majority, but eventually the minority learns to adapt to an altered landscape, and parity returns. In 1969, Kevin Phillips, then an obscure Nixon-administration staffer, wrote *The Emerging Republican Majority*, arguing that Republicans could undo FDR's New Deal coalition by exploiting urban strife, the unpopularity of welfare, and the civil-rights struggle to pull blue-collar whites into a new conservative bloc. The result was the modern GOP. Bill Clinton appropriated some elements of this conservative coalition by rehabilitating his party's image on welfare and crime (though he had a little help from Ross Perot, too). But it wasn't until Obama was elected that a Democratic president could claim to be the leader of a true majority party.

The second point is that short-term shocks, like war, recession, or scandal, can exert a far more powerful influence than a long-term trend: The Watergate scandal, for instance, interrupted the Republican majority at its zenith, helping elect a huge raft of Democratic congressmen in 1974, followed two years later by Jimmy Carter.

But the dominant fact of the new Democratic majority is that it has begun to overturn the racial dynamics that have governed American politics for five decades. Whatever its abstract intellectual roots, conservatism has since at least the sixties drawn its political strength by appealing to heartland identity politics. In 1985, Stanley Greenberg, then a political scientist, immersed himself in Macomb County, a blue-collar Detroit suburb where whites had abandoned the Democratic Party in droves. He found that the Reagan Democrats there understood politics almost entirely in racial terms, translating any Democratic appeal to economic justice as taking their money to subsidize the black underclass. And it didn't end with the Reagan era. Piles of recent studies have found that voters often conflate "social" and "economic" issues. What social scientists delicately call "ethnocentrism" and "racial resentment" and "ingroup solidarity" are defining attributes of conservative voting behavior, and help organize a familiar if not necessarily rational coalition of ideological interests. Doctrines like neoconservative foreign policy, supply-side economics, and climate skepticism may bear little connection to each other at the level of abstract thought. But boiled down to political sound bites and served up to the voters, they blend into an indistinguishable stew of racial, religious, cultural, and nationalistic identity.

Obama's election dramatized the degree to which this long-standing political dynamic had been flipped on its head. In the aftermath of George McGovern's 1972 defeat, neoconservative intellectual Jeane Kirkpatrick disdainfully

identified his voters as “intellectuals enamored with righteousness and possibility, college students, for whom perfectionism is an occupational hazard; portions of the upper classes freed from concern with economic self-interest,” and so on, curiously neglecting to include racial minorities. All of them were, in essence, people who heard a term like “real American” and understood that in some way it did not apply to them. Today, cosmopolitan liberals may still feel like an embattled sect—they certainly describe their political fights in those terms—but time has transformed their rump minority into a collective majority. As conservative strategists will tell you, there are now more of “them” than “us.” What’s more, the disparity will continue to grow indefinitely. Obama actually lost the over-45-year-old vote in 2008, gaining his entire victory margin from younger voters—more racially diverse, better educated, less religious, and more socially and economically liberal.

Portents of this future were surely rendered all the more vivid by the startling reality that the man presiding over the new majority just happened to be, himself, young, urban, hip, and black. When jubilant supporters of Obama gathered in Grant Park on Election Night in 2008, Republicans saw a glimpse of their own political mortality. And a galvanizing picture of just what their new rulers would look like.

In the cold calculus of game theory, the expected response to this state of affairs would be to accommodate yourself to the growing strength of the opposing coalition—to persuade pockets of voters on the Democratic margins they might be better served by Republicans. Yet the psychology of decline does not always operate in a straightforward, rational way. A strategy of managing slow decay is unpleasant, and history is replete with instances of leaders who persuaded themselves of the opposite of the obvious conclusion. Rather than adjust themselves to their slowly weakening position, they chose instead to stage a decisive confrontation. If the terms of the fight grow more unfavorable with every passing year, well, all the more reason to have the fight sooner. This was the thought process of the antebellum southern states, sizing up the growing population and industrial might of the North. It was the thinking of the leaders of Austria-Hungary, watching their empire deteriorate and deciding they needed a decisive war with Serbia to save themselves.

At varying levels of conscious and subconscious thought, this is also the reasoning that has driven Republicans in the Obama era. Surveying the landscape, they have concluded that they must strike quickly and decisively at the opposition before all hope is lost.

Arthur Brooks, the president of the conservative American Enterprise Institute and a high-profile presence on the Republican intellectual scene, wrote a 2010 book titled *The Battle*, urging conservatives to treat the struggle for economic libertarianism as a “culture war” between capitalism and socialism, in which compromise was impossible. Time was running short, Brooks pleaded in apocalyptic tones. The “real core” of what he called Obama’s socialistic supporters was voters under 30. “It is the future of our country,” he wrote. “And this group has exhibited a frightening openness to statism in the age of Obama.”

The same panic courses through a new tome by James DeMint, who has made himself probably the most influential member of the Senate by relentlessly pushing his colleagues to the right and organizing primary challenges to snuff out any hint of moderation among his co-partisans. DeMint’s book, titled *Now or Never*, paints a haunting picture: “Republican supporters will continue to decrease every year as more Americans become dependent on the government. Dependent voters will naturally elect even big-government progressives who will continue to smother economic growth and spend America deeper into debt. The 2012 election may be the last opportunity for Republicans.”

That apocalyptic rhetoric is just as common among voters as among conservative eggheads and party elites. Theda Skocpol, a Harvard sociologist, conducted a detailed study of tea-party activists and discovered that they saw themselves beset by parasitic Democrats. “Along with illegal immigrants,” she wrote, “low-income Americans and young people loom large as illegitimate consumers of public benefits and services.”

It’s easy for liberals to dismiss these fears as simple racism—and surely racism, to some degree, sways the tea party. But it is not just conservative white people who react fearfully when they see themselves outnumbered by an influx of people unlike themselves. Minorities do it. White hipsters do it. Recall the embarrassing spectacle of liberal panic, in the aftermath of George W. Bush’s reelection, when Kerry voters believed their country had been taken over by gay-bashing Evangelical Christians.

That the struggles over the economic policies of the last few years have taken on the style of a culture war should come as no surprise, since conservatives believe Obama has pulled together an ascendant coalition of voters intent on expropriating their money. Paul Ryan, the House Republican budget chairman, has, like many Republicans, cast the fight as pitting “makers” against “takers,” with the latter in danger of irrevocably gaining the upper hand. “The tipping point represents two dangers,” he announced in a speech at the American Enterprise Institute, “first, long-term economic decline as the number of makers diminishes [and] the number of takers grows ... Second, gradual moral-political decline as dependency and passivity weaken the nation’s character.”

Of course, both parties make use of end-times rhetoric, especially in election season. What’s novel about the current spate of Republican millennialism is that it’s not a mere rhetorical device to rally the faithful, nor even simply an expression of free-floating terror, but the premise of an electoral strategy.

In that light, the most surprising response to the election of 2008 is what did not happen. Following Obama’s win, all sorts of loose talk concerning the Republican predicament filled the air. How would the party recast itself? Where would it move left, how would it find common ground with Obama, what new constituencies would it court?

The most widely agreed-upon component of any such undertaking was a concerted effort to win back the Hispanic vote. It seemed like a pure political no-brainer, a vital outreach to an exploding electoral segment that could conceivably be weaned from its Democratic leanings, as had previous generations of Irish and Italian immigrants, without altering the party’s general right-wing thrust on other issues. George W. Bush had tried to cobble together a comprehensive immigration-reform policy only to see it collapse underneath a conservative grassroots revolt, and John McCain, who had initially co-sponsored a bill in the Senate, had to withdraw his support for it in his pursuit of the 2008 nomination.

In the wake of his defeat, strategists like Karl Rove and Mike Murphy urged the GOP to abandon its stubborn opposition to reform. Instead, incredibly, the party adopted a more hawkish position, with Republicans in Congress rejecting even quarter-loaf compromises like the Dream Act and state-level officials like Jan Brewer launching new restrictionist crusades. This was, as Thomas Edsall writes in *The Age of Austerity*, “a major gamble that the GOP can continue to win as a white party despite the growing strength of the minority vote.”

None of this is to say that Republicans ignored the rising tide of younger and browner voters that swamped them at the polls in 2008. Instead they set about keeping as many of them from the polls as possible. The bulk of the campaign has taken the form of throwing up an endless series of tedious bureaucratic impediments to voting in many states—ending same-day voter registration, imposing onerous requirements upon voter-registration drives, and upon voters themselves. “Voting liberal, that’s what kids do,” overshared William O’Brien, the New Hampshire House speaker, who had supported a bill to prohibit college students from voting from their school addresses. What can these desperate, rearguard tactics accomplish? They can make the electorate a bit older, whiter, and less poor. They can, perhaps, buy the Republicans some time.

And to what end? The Republicans’ most audacious choice is the hyperaggressive position they’ve adopted against Obama to sabotage his chances for a second term. Frustrated liberals, assessing the methods of the Republicans in Congress, see a devious brilliance at work in the GOP strategy of legislative obstruction. And indeed, Republicans very skillfully ground the legislative gears to a halt for months on end, weakening or killing large chunks of Obama’s agenda, and nurturing public discontent with Washington that they rode to a sweeping victory in 2010. At the same time, their inability to waver from desperate, all-or-nothing opposition often meant conservatives willingly suffered policy defeats for perceived political gain, and failed to minimize the scale of those defeats.

Take the fight over health-care reform. Yes, Republicans played the politics about as well as possible. But it was their hard line on compromise allowed the bill to pass: The Democrats only managed to cobble together 60 votes to pass it in the Senate because conservatives drove Arlen Specter out of the GOP, forcing him to switch to the Democratic Party. Without him, Democrats never could have broken a filibuster. When Scott Brown surprisingly won the 2010 race to fill Ted Kennedy’s Senate seat, Democrats were utterly despondent, and many proposed abandoning comprehensive health-care reform to cut a deal for some meager expansion of children’s health insurance. But Republicans refused to offer even an olive branch. Presented with a choice between passing the comprehensive bill they had spent a year cobbling together or collapsing in total ignominious defeat, the Democrats passed the bill.

Last summer, Obama was again desperate to reach compromise, this time on legislation to reduce the budget deficit, which had come to dominate the political agenda and symbolize, in the eyes of Establishment opinion, Obama's failure to fulfill his campaign goal of winning bipartisan cooperation. In extended closed-door negotiations, Obama offered Republicans hundreds of billions of dollars in spending cuts and a permanent extension of Bush-era tax rates in return for just \$800 billion in higher revenue over a decade. This was less than half the new revenue proposed by the Bowles-Simpson deficit commission. Republicans spurned this deal, too.

Instead the party has bet everything on 2012, preferring a Hail Mary strategy to the slow march of legislative progress. That is the basis of the House Republicans' otherwise inexplicable choice to vote last spring for a sweeping budget plan that would lock in low taxes, slash spending, and transform Medicare into private vouchers—none of which was popular with voters. Majority parties are known to hold unpopular votes occasionally, but holding an unpopular vote that Republicans knew full well stood zero chance of enactment (with Obama casting a certain veto) broke new ground in the realm of foolhardiness.

The way to make sense of that foolhardiness is that the party has decided to bet everything on its one "last chance." Not the last chance for the Republican Party to win power—there will be many of those, and over time it will surely learn to compete for nonwhite voters—but its last chance to exercise power in its current form, as a party of anti-government fundamentalism powered by sublimated white Christian identity politics. (And the last chance to stop the policy steamroller of the new Democratic majority.) And whatever rhetorical concessions to moderates and independents the eventual Republican nominee may be tempted to make in the fall, he'll find himself fairly boxed in by everything he's already done this winter to please that base.

Will the gamble work? Grim though the long-term demography may be, it became apparent to Republicans almost immediately after Obama took office that political fate had handed them an impossibly lucky opportunity. Democrats had come to power almost concurrently with the deepest economic crisis in 80 years, and Republicans quickly seized the tactical advantage, in an effort to leverage the crisis to rewrite their own political fortunes. The Lesser Depression could be an economic Watergate, the Republicans understood, an exogenous political shock that would, at least temporarily, overwhelm any deeper trend, and possibly afford the party a chance to permanently associate the Democrats with the painful aftermath of the crisis.

During the last midterm elections, the strategy succeeded brilliantly. Republicans moved further right and won a gigantic victory. In the 2010 electorate, the proportion of voters under 30 fell by roughly a third, while the proportion of voters over 65 years old rose by a similar amount—the white share, too. In the long run, though, the GOP has done nothing at all to rehabilitate its deep unpopularity with the public as a whole, and has only further poisoned its standing with Hispanics. But by forswearing compromise, it opened the door to a single shot. The Republicans have gained the House and stand poised to win control of the Senate. If they can claw out a presidential win and hold on to Congress, they will have a glorious two-year window to restore the America they knew and loved, to lock in transformational change, or at least to wrench the status quo so far rightward that it will take Democrats a generation to wrench it back. The cost of any foregone legislative compromises on health care or the deficit would be trivial compared to the enormous gains available to a party in control of all three federal branches.

On the other hand, if they lose their bid to unseat Obama, they will have mortgaged their future for nothing at all. And over the last several months, it has appeared increasingly likely that the party's great all-or-nothing bet may land, ultimately, on nothing. In which case, the Republicans will have turned an unfavorable outlook into a truly bleak one in a fit of panic. The deepest effect of Obama's election upon the Republicans' psyche has been to make them truly fear, for the first time since before Ronald Reagan, that the future is against them.

"Mr. Bumble vs. Mr. Scary" by Roger Simon, Politico

Feb. 28, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73346.html>)

Is it possible to stumble and bumble your way to a presidential nomination?

Certainly. And Mitt Romney is determined to prove it.

Romney's verbal gaffes are plentiful. And often hilarious. If you really wanted to make the case that they show how "out of touch" Romney is with the average American, I wouldn't dispute it.

I would say only that all these guys running for president are out of touch. Even though most brag about their humble beginnings, all now lead lives of privilege and comfort and come in contact with average Americans only when their water heaters give out. (And their spouses usually handle that.)

Sure they grip and grin on the rope lines with average Americans, but that lasts for about 2 seconds or however long it takes somebody to snap a cellphone picture.

If these guys did not live in a bubble before they entered politics, they certainly live in one now. And they have large staffs whose job it is to keep the candidate away from the public (and press) as much as possible unless the situation is highly controlled.

Still, Romney manages to screw up.

In December, at one of the innumerable Republican debates, Rick Perry accused Romney of having changed his position on something or other. Perry had about as much chance of getting the Republican nomination as getting Texas to secede from the Union and naming him king, but he got Romney's goat nonetheless.

Romney angrily stuck out his hand and said, "Rick, I'll tell you what, 10,000 bucks? \$10,000 bet?"

Grand, Mitt. Just grand. Remind everybody that \$10,000 is chump change to you.

And who can forget Romney telling us that "corporations are people" or that he made "not very much" money in speaking fees in a year in which he made \$374,000 in speaking fees. He wasn't lying. It's just that \$374,000 wasn't very much to him.

Politico's Reid J. Epstein has assembled a delicious list of all these gaffes that is worth wandering through.

What it shows is a man totally sincere in his isolation from average Americans. Except for his blue jeans — which one comic says that he wears over his suit pants — Romney doesn't pretend to be average. He is a highly successful businessman, and he is proud of it.

So when he recently listed some of the American-nameplate cars he has owned — a Ford, a Chevy, a Dodge — it was only natural that he include his wife's vehicles. "Ann drives a couple of Cadillacs, actually," he said.

Actually, she doesn't do so simultaneously. One is at their La Jolla, Calif., home and one is at their Belmont, Mass., home.

But Romney is a car lover and so he goes down to the Daytona International Speedway on Sunday, and he gets asked if he is a NASCAR fan — note to Romney team: At least try to prep the guy for the obvious questions — and Romney replies honestly.

"Not as closely as some of the most ardent fans," Romney says. "But I have some great friends that are NASCAR team owners."

Doh! Just in case you were wondering, it costs about \$15 million a year to maintain a NASCAR team, which allows you to buy really nice blue jeans and rub elbows with Mitt at country clubs.

But even with all this, Romney has one great thing going for him: Rick Santorum.

Rick Santorum doesn't flub. He speaks from his deeply held convictions. Some of which are very scary.

Speaking in Troy, Mich., on Saturday, Santorum said, "President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob."

Had Santorum gone on to say that not everyone in America wants to go to college and that there is nothing shameful about manual labor, he may have had a point.

But that's not all Santorum was saying. He added that he doesn't want kids to go to college because if they do they are going to be "taught by some liberal college professor trying to indoctrinate them."

Then on ABC's "This Week with George Stephanopoulos," Santorum opened up like he was on a psychiatrist's couch.

"You talk to most kids who go to college who are conservatives, and you are singled out, you are ridiculed, you are — I can tell you personally," Santorum said. "I went through a process where I was docked for my conservative views. This is sort of a regular routine. You know the statistic ... that 62 percent of kids who enter college with some sort of faith commitment leave without it. This is not a neutral setting."

I am not entirely sure what Santorum was venting about or what Satanic ritual he was made to undergo in college — paddling? beer pong? — but it obviously affected him deeply.

So much so that he left college convinced that the First Amendment was not only hooey, but stomach-turning. Literally.

Santorum says that John F. Kennedy's famous 1960 speech stating there should be an "absolute separation" of church and state in America "makes me throw up and it should make every American."

Santorum went on: "I don't believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute. The idea that the church can have no influence or no involvement in the operation of the state is absolutely antithetical to the objectives and vision of our country."

That is not a flub or a gaffe or an off-the-cuff remark. That is what Rick Santorum deeply believes and, moreover, what he believes "every American" should believe.

So you listen to Santorum. And you listen to Romney. And it sort of makes you not care how many Cadillacs Romney owns.

(Roger Simon is POLITICO's chief political columnist.)

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20120227-03	18:32	SteveB	"Santorum: Separation of Church and State 'Makes Me Want to Throw Up'"
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Here the religious nuts come, if you let `em.

I guess Republicans don't mind if women are controlled, but now they want to control your nuts! LOL!

The Constitution and history mean nothing to these fruitcakes!

"Santorum: Separation of Church and State 'Makes Me Want to Throw Up'" by Alana Horowitz, Huffington Post

Feb. 26, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/26/santorum-church-and-state_n_1302246.html)

Rick Santorum on Sunday took on separation of church and state.

"I don't believe in an America where the separation of church and state are absolute," he told 'This Week' host George Stephanopoulos. "The idea that the church can have no influence or no involvement in the operation of the state is absolutely antithetical to the objectives and vision of our country...to say that people of faith have no role in the public square? You bet that makes me want to throw up."

The GOP candidate was responding to comments he made last October. He had said that he "almost threw up" after reading JFK's 1960 speech in which he declared his commitment to the separation of church and state.

Santorum also on Sunday told Meet The Press host David Gregory that separation of church and state was "not the founders' vision."

The GOP candidate has been doubling down on religious rhetoric in an effort to court evangelical voters ahead of Super Tuesday. Last week, he questioned Obama's spiritual beliefs.

"[Obama believes in] some phony ideal, some phony theology ... not a theology based on the Bible, a different theology," he said.

[Rick, you make me want to puke! –SteveB]

20120227-04	18:55	SteveB	"Mitt Romney's Budget in About 150 Words" & "Mitt Romney's Budget in Less Than 15 Words" (ROMNEY WILL BALANCE THE BUDGET ON THE BACKS OF POOR PEOPLE, THE END.)
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A LOSING STRATEGY:

"Mitt Romney's Budget in About 150 Words" by Ezra Klein, *Washington Post*

Feb. 25, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/mitt-romneys-budget-in-less-than-150-words/2011/08/25/gIQATzJRaR_blog.html)

Let's try to make this as simple as possible. Money comes into the federal government through taxes and bonds. The vast majority of it is then spent on old-people programs, poor-people programs, and defense.

Mitt Romney is promising that taxes will go down, defense spending will go up, and old-people programs won't change for this generation of retirees. So three of his four options for deficit reduction — taxes, old-people programs, and defense — are now either contributing to the deficit or are off-limits for the next decade.

Romney is also promising that he will pay for his tax cuts, pay for his defense spending, and reduce total federal spending by more than \$6 trillion over the next 10 years. But the only big pot of money left to him is poor-people programs. So, by simple process of elimination, poor-people programs will have to be cut dramatically. There's no other way to make those numbers work.

"Mitt Romney's Budget in Less Than 15 Words" by Jason Linkins, Huffington Post

Feb. 26, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/26/tv-soundoff-sunday-talkin_n_1302165.html?ref=elections-2012)

ROMNEY WILL BALANCE THE BUDGET ON THE BACKS OF POOR PEOPLE, THE END.

20120227-05	19:07	SteveG	"My Take: Stop Sugarcoating the Bible"
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Take a read:

["My Take: Stop Sugarcoating the Bible" by Steven James, CNN](#)

Feb. 25, 2012, (http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/25/my-take-stop-sugarcoating-the-bible/?hpt=hp_c2)

(Editor's note: Steven James is the author of more than 30 books, including *Flirting with the Forbidden*, which explores forgiveness.)

The Bible is a gritty book. Very raw. Very real. It deals with people just like us, just as needy and screwed up as we are, encountering a God who would rather die than spend eternity without them.

Yet despite that, it seems like Christians are uncomfortable with how earthy the Bible really is. They feel the need to tidy up God.

For example, look in any modern translation of Isaiah 64:6, and you'll find that, to a holy God, even our most righteous acts are like "filthy rags." The original language doesn't say "filthy rags"; it says "menstrual rags." But that sounds a little too crass, so let's just call them filthy instead.

And let's not talk so much about Jesus being naked on the cross, and let's pretend Paul said that he considered his good deeds "a pile of garbage" in Philippians 3:8 rather than a pile of crap, as the Greek would more accurately be translated.

And let's definitely not mention the six times in the Old Testament that the Jewish writers referred to Gentile men as those who "pisseth against the wall." (At least the King James Version got that one right.)

The point?

God's message was not meant to be run through some arbitrary, holier-than-thou politeness filter. He intended the Bible to speak to people where they're at, caught up in the stark reality of life on a fractured planet.

Dozens of Psalms are complaints and heart-wrenching cries of despair to God, not holy-sounding, reverently worded soliloquies. Take Psalm 77:1-3: "I cry out to God; yes, I shout. Oh, that God would listen to me! When I was in deep trouble, I searched for the Lord. All night long I prayed, with hands lifted toward heaven, but my soul was not comforted. I think of God, and I moan, overwhelmed with longing for his help" (New Living Translation).

And rather than shy away from difficult and painful topics, the Old Testament includes vivid descriptions of murder, cannibalism, witchcraft, dismemberment, torture, rape, idolatry, erotic sex and animal sacrifice. According to St. Paul, those stories were written as examples and warnings for us (1 Corinthians 10:11). So obviously they were meant to be retold without editing out all the things we don't consider nice or agreeable.

I believe that Scripture includes such graphic material to show how far we, as a race, have fallen and how far God was willing to come to rescue us from ourselves.

God is much more interested in honesty than pietism.

And that's what he gives us throughout Scripture, telling the stories of people who struggled with the same issues, questions and temptations we face today.

Peter struggled with doubt, and we hear all about it.

Elijah dealt with depression; Naomi raged with bitterness against God; Hannah struggled for years under the burden of her unanswered prayers.

David had an affair and then arranged to have his lover's husband killed. Noah was a drunk, Abraham a liar, Moses a murderer. Job came to a place where he found it necessary to make a covenant with his eyes not to lust after young girls (Job 31:1).

It's easy to make "Bible heroes" (as Protestants might say) or "saints" (as Catholics might refer to them) out to be bigger than life, immune from the temptations that everyone faces.

I find it encouraging that Jesus never came across as pietistic. In fact, he was never accused of being too religious; instead he partied so much that he was accused of being a drunkard and a glutton (Matthew 11:19).

Jesus never said, "The Kingdom of God is like a church service that goes on and on forever and never ends." He said the kingdom was like a homecoming celebration, a wedding, a party, a feast to which all are invited.

This idea was too radical for the religious leaders of his day. They were more concerned about etiquette, manners, traditions and religious rituals than about partying with Jesus. And that's why they missed out.

That's why we miss out.

According to Jesus, the truly spiritual life is one marked by freedom rather than compulsion (John 8:36), love rather than ritual (Mark 12:30-33) and peace rather than guilt (John 14:27). Jesus saves us from the dry, dusty duties of religion and frees us to cut loose and celebrate.

I don't believe we'll ever recognize our need for the light until we've seen the depth of the darkness. So God wasn't afraid to get down and dirty with us about life and temptation and forgiveness. And grace.

Only when the Bible seems relevant to us (which it is), only when the characters seem real to us (which they were), only then will the message of redemption become personal for us (which it was always meant to be).

We don't need to edit God. We need to let him be the author of our new lives.

20120227-06	20:37	Jim	"The Great Carbon Bubble: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry Fights So Hard"
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[Where's the snow, my dear children and grandchildren? –SteveB]

Look at the lack of snow and cloud and remember the years you have seen before and read the article about the real reason the oil companies are spending so much to deny climate change.

"The Great Carbon Bubble: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry Fights So Hard" by Bill McKibben, TomDispatch

Feb. 7, 2012, (<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2012/02/07-2>)



"The U.S. and Canada are virtually snow-free and cloud-free, which is extremely rare for a January day. The lack of snow in the mountains of the Western U.S. is particularly unusual. I doubt one could find a January day this cloud-free with so little snow on the ground throughout the entire satellite record, going back to the early 1960s." (Photo: Creative Commons / NASA Goddard)

If we could see the world with a particularly illuminating set of spectacles, one of its most prominent features at the moment would be a giant carbon bubble, whose bursting someday will make the housing bubble of 2007 look like a lark. As yet -- as we shall see -- it's unfortunately largely invisible to us."The U.S. and Canada are virtually snow-free and cloud-free, which is extremely rare for a January day. The lack of snow in the mountains of the Western U.S. is particularly unusual. I doubt one could find a January day this cloud-free with so little snow on the ground throughout the entire satellite record, going back to the early 1960s." (Photo: Creative Commons / NASA Goddard)

In compensation, though, we have some truly beautiful images made possible by new technology. Last month, for instance, NASA updated the most iconic photograph in our civilization's gallery: "Blue Marble," originally taken from Apollo 17 in 1972. The spectacular new high-def image shows a picture of the Americas on January 4th, a good day for snapping photos because there weren't many clouds.

It was also a good day because of the striking way it could demonstrate to us just how much the planet has changed in 40 years. As Jeff Masters, the web's most widely read meteorologist, explains, "The U.S. and Canada are virtually snow-free and cloud-free, which is extremely rare for a January day. The lack of snow in the mountains of the Western U.S. is particularly unusual. I doubt one could find a January day this cloud-free with so little snow on the ground throughout the entire satellite record, going back to the early 1960s."

In fact, it's likely that the week that photo was taken will prove "the driest first week in recorded U.S. history." Indeed, it followed on 2011, which showed the greatest weather extremes in our history -- 56% of the country was either in drought or flood, which was no surprise since "climate change science predicts wet areas will tend to get wetter and dry areas will tend to get drier." Indeed, the nation suffered 14 weather disasters each causing \$1 billion or more in damage last year. (The old record was nine.) Masters again: "Watching the weather over the past two years has been like watching a famous baseball hitter on steroids."

In the face of such data -- statistics that you can duplicate for almost every region of the planet -- you'd think we'd already be in an all-out effort to do something about climate change. Instead, we're witnessing an all-out effort to... deny there's a problem.

Our GOP presidential candidates are working hard to make sure no one thinks they'd appease chemistry and physics. At the last Republican debate in Florida, Rick Santorum insisted that he should be the nominee because he'd caught on earlier than Newt or Mitt to the global warming "hoax."

Most of the media pays remarkably little attention to what's happening. Coverage of global warming has dipped 40% over the last two years. When, say, there's a rare outbreak of January tornadoes, TV anchors politely discuss "extreme weather," but climate change is the disaster that dare not speak its name.

And when they do break their silence, some of our elite organs are happy to indulge in outright denial. Last month, for instance, the *Wall Street Journal* published an op-ed by "16 scientists and engineers" headlined "No Need to Panic About Global Warming." The article was easily debunked. It was nothing but a mash-up of long-since-disproved arguments by people who turned out mostly not to be climate scientists at all, quoting other scientists who immediately said their actual work showed just the opposite.

It's no secret where this denialism comes from: the fossil fuel industry pays for it. (Of the 16 authors of the *Journal* article, for instance, five had had ties to Exxon.) Writers from Ross Gelbspan to Naomi Oreskes have made this case with such overwhelming power that no one even really tries denying it any more. The open question is why the industry persists in denial in the face of an endless body of fact showing climate change is the greatest danger we've ever faced.

Why doesn't it fold the way the tobacco industry eventually did? Why doesn't it invest its riches in things like solar panels and so profit handsomely from the next generation of energy? As it happens, the answer is more interesting than you might think.

Part of it is simple enough: the giant energy companies are making so much money right now that they can't stop gorging themselves. ExxonMobil, year after year, pulls in more money than any company in history. Chevron's not far behind. Everyone in the business is swimming in money.

Still, they could theoretically invest all that cash in new clean technology or research and development for the same. As it happens, though, they've got a deeper problem, one that's become clear only in the last few years. Put briefly: *their value is largely based on fossil-fuel reserves that won't be burned if we ever take global warming seriously.*

When I talked about a carbon bubble at the beginning of this essay, this is what I meant. Here are some of the relevant numbers, courtesy of the Capital Institute: we're already seeing widespread climate disruption, but if we want to avoid utter, civilization-shaking disaster, many scientists have pointed to a two-degree rise in global temperatures as the most we could possibly deal with.

If we spew 565 gigatons more carbon into the atmosphere, we'll quite possibly go right past that reddest of red lines. But the oil companies, private and state-owned, have current reserves on the books equivalent to 2,795 gigatons -- five times more than we can ever safely burn. **It has to stay in the ground.**

Put another way, in ecological terms it would be extremely prudent to *write off \$20 trillion worth* of those reserves. In economic terms, of course, it would be a disaster, first and foremost for shareholders and executives of companies like ExxonMobil (and people in places like Venezuela).

If you run an oil company, this sort of write-off is the disastrous future staring you in the face as soon as climate change is taken as seriously as it should be, and that's far scarier than drought and flood. It's why you'll do anything -- including fund an endless campaigns of lies -- to avoid coming to terms with its reality. So instead, we simply charge ahead. To take just one example, last month the boss of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Thomas Donohue, called for burning all the country's newly discovered coal, gas, and oil -- believed to be 1,800 gigatons worth of carbon from our nation alone.

What he and the rest of the energy-industrial elite are denying, in other words, is that the business models at the center of our economy are in the deepest possible conflict with physics and chemistry. The carbon bubble that looms over our world needs to be deflated soon. As with our fiscal crisis, failure to do so will cause enormous pain -

- pain, in fact, almost beyond imagining. After all, if you think banks are too big to fail, consider the climate as a whole and imagine the nature of the bailout that would face us when that bubble finally bursts.

Unfortunately, it won't burst by itself -- not in time, anyway. The fossil-fuel companies, with their heavily funded denialism and their record campaign contributions, have been able to keep at bay even the tamest efforts at reining in carbon emissions. With each passing day, they're leveraging us deeper into an unpayable carbon debt -- and with each passing day, they're raking in unimaginable returns. ExxonMobil last week reported its 2011 profits at \$41 billion, the second highest of all time. Do you wonder who owns the record? That would be ExxonMobil in 2008 at \$45 billion.

Telling the truth about climate change would require pulling away the biggest punchbowl in history, right when the party is in full swing. That's why the fight is so pitched. That's why those of us battling for the future need to raise our game. And it's why that view from the satellites, however beautiful from a distance, is likely to become ever harder to recognize as our home planet.

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(Bill McKibben is Schumann Distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College and co-founder of 350.org. His most recent book is *Earth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*.)

20120227-08	23:43	Phil	Fw: Wisdom from an Old Jewish Man
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[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

A female CNN journalist heard about a very old Jewish man who had been going to the Western Wall to pray, twice a day, every day, for a long, long time.

So she went to check it out. She went to the Western Wall and there he was, walking slowly up to the holy site.

She watched him pray and after about 45 minutes, when he turned to leave, using a cane and moving very slowly, she approached him for an interview.

"Pardon me, sir, I'm Rebecca B. Smith from CNN. What's your name?"

"Morris Feinberg," he replied.

"Sir, how long have you been coming to the Western Wall and praying?"

"For about 60 years."

"60 years! That's amazing! What do you pray for?"

"I pray for peace between the Christians, Jews and the Muslims."

"I pray for all the wars and all the hatred to stop."

"I pray for all our children to grow up safely as responsible adults and to love their fellow man."

"I pray that politicians tell us the truth and put the interests of the people ahead of their own interests."

"How do you feel after doing this for 60 years?"

"Like I'm talking to a f*cking wall."

Republican deficit expansion? How surprising!

Remember all the hullabaloo last summer about the deficit and how the nation was on the edge of ruin but the new Republican House would save us all. Remember also how Bonehead said during the 2010 election run up that the Republicans would immediately cut \$100B in spending but when pressed couldn't say just where from. (It never happened!)

Lost in all the critical issue of the day such as contraception, forcing steel instruments up the unwilling vaginas of women, who is more Christian or believe the correct way and my favorite, the right to buy as many hand guns per day as I want, is the more mundane issue of finance. As I have followed the Republican nominees' financial plans, both have proposed tax cuts for everyone and especially the rich, which they are among. I wondered just how this was going to work in view of the deficit issue. Did that just go away? Below is a nice short summary of where our two beloved potential leaders will take us.

Huhhhh?

"How the GOP Would Expand the Deficit" by *The Washington Post* Editorial Board

Feb. 26, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-the-gop-would-expand-the-deficit/2012/02/24/gIQAFqeUcR_story.html)

(Mr. Romney and Mr. Santorum court financial danger.)

At a time of record debts and deficits, the two leading Republican presidential candidates are proposing a path on taxes and spending likely to add trillions more. That's the sobering conclusion of the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget (CRFB), whose board includes six Republican former lawmakers with expertise in budget issues, three Republican former heads of the Congressional Budget Office, and two former Office of Management and Budget directors under Republican presidents.

Last month, we examined former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney's reckless tax plan, which, according to calculations by the Urban Institute-Brookings Institution Tax Policy Center, would drain another \$180 billion from the treasury in 2015 alone. The CRFB estimated the 10-year cost of the original Romney tax plan at \$1.3 trillion. By the end of the 10-year window, the debt would be a dangerous 86 percent of the gross domestic product.

But last week Mr. Romney upped the tax-cutting ante, promising, in addition to the previous grab bag of tax goodies, a 20 percent across-the-board cut in marginal rates and repeal of the alternative minimum tax. The Tax Policy Center estimated that the 20 percent rate cut would cost about \$150 billion in 2015 alone. The Romney campaign said that the rate change wouldn't add to the deficit because it would generate unspecified economic growth and be accompanied by spending cuts and elimination or cutbacks of deductions. Okay, which ones? On that question, the campaign was decidedly unspecific — understandably so, because its math doesn't add up. Until he is more specific about what sacred cows he would tackle — employer-sponsored health care? — Mr. Romney's plan cannot be taken as a fiscally responsible proposal.

Then again, he looks reasonable by comparison with former Pennsylvania senator Rick Santorum, who envisions a tax cut costing an eye-popping \$6 trillion over 10 years — above and beyond the \$4 trillion cost of extending the George W. Bush tax cuts. Mr. Santorum would flatten the tax code, collapsing today's six brackets into two: 10 percent and 28 percent. Those in the 10 percent bracket would pay no taxes on capital gains and dividends; those in the 28 percent bracket would pay a 12 percent rate. He would triple the exemption for dependent children and cut the corporate tax rate in half — except for manufacturers, who would pay nothing.

How to do this without blowing a huge hole in the budget? Mr. Santorum outlines some \$2.2 trillion in specific policies, such as shifting Medicare to a premium support system, transforming social programs into block grants to states and capping their growth, and cutting other domestic spending. Then he offers up the biggest magic asterisk

of all time, cutting another \$5 trillion within five years, details not provided. Wisely discounting that gauzy promise, the CRFB projects that under its intermediate scenario Mr. Santorum's policies would increase deficits by \$4.5 trillion through 2021, bringing the debt to a scary 107 percent of the economy.

The campaign debate needs to move from pie-in-the-sky promises. Promising additional tax cuts may win votes, but these proposals are unaffordable and dangerous.

20120227-02 16:09 SteveB "Hoyer Not Sold on Tapping Oil Reserve"

"Speculation in the oil markets, not a shortage of supply, is driving the recent spike in gas price."

Speculation in commodities could be stopped immediately by simple rules requiring the buyer of all futures contracts to actually take delivery of the product or face a stiff penalty.

This way, only true buyers would be in the market. The way it now stands, prices in these markets are kept artificially high by non-buyers. These markets are a little like a Christie's auction in which many bidders are just bidding up the price with no intention to buy.

Rampant speculation, especially in fuels and precious metals, must be stopped.

Then we should tax gasoline to bring the pump price for gasoline up to \$6-\$8/gallon so we can encourage electric cars and alternative fuels.

1% of this money should be redistributed to me.

"Hoyer Not Sold on Tapping Oil Reserve" by Seung Min Kim, Politico

Feb. 27, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/on-congress/>)

House Minority Whip Steny Hoyer isn't so sure tapping the Strategic Petroleum Reserve to help ease rising gas prices is a good idea.

Despite calls from lawmakers in his own party to open up the reserve, the Maryland Democrat said he's skeptical that doing so would lower prices at the pump much. **Speculation in the oil markets, not a shortage of supply, is driving the recent spike in gas price**, Hoyer added.

"Historically, I have been reticent about using the [Strategic Petroleum Reserve] in what I believe to be non-emergency times," Hoyer said Monday morning. "Emergency times are when supply is disrupted. Very frankly, supply is not getting disrupted and [there are] no lines at the gas tanks at anywhere in the country, as far as I know."

Three House Democrats – Vermont Rep. Peter Welch, Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro and Massachusetts Rep. Ed Markey – last week urged President Barack Obama to open up the SPR, which holds roughly 700 million barrels of oil.

"Releasing even a small fraction of that oil could once again have a significant impact on speculation in the market place and on prices," the lawmakers wrote in the letter. "It would also stand as a reminder to markets that the United States is ready to employ an aggressive and effective SPR drawdown policy if needed."

Hoyer acknowledged that it is "very difficult" for Congress to act immediately to lower gas prices and that lawmakers are in ongoing discussions about how to do so, including tapping the SPR. Gas is currently averaging \$3.70 per gallon, according to AAA.

Of course we have to tax foreign profits, otherwise there will continue to be less and less investment in America.

"Corporate Tax: Next Battle for the White House" by David Saleh Rauf, Politico

Feb. 27, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73353.html>)

President Barack Obama's top financial wizards face an uphill climb on Capitol Hill in the coming weeks when they pitch the administration's vision for revamping the corporate Tax Code — particularly on a provision that would tax all foreign earnings.

A House GOP memo drafted late last week shows how Republican budget writers plan to poke holes in the president's blueprint. Topping the list: the proposal to tax overseas earnings by multinational firms at a "minimum rate" regardless of whether they bring that money back home.

The GOP memo questions why the administration opted for a "worldwide system of taxation that double-taxes American employers and puts our workers at a competitive disadvantage in the global economy," according to a copy obtained by Politico.

That clash of views on tax reform is expected to mark the opening bell for the first round of what's likely to be a long battle over how to tax the foreign earnings of mega-firms like Google, Oracle, Pfizer, Duke Energy and Hewlett-Packard. It's a showdown that is putting Republicans and lobbyists for the tech, energy and pharmaceutical industries squarely at odds with the White House.

The president's plan ignores calls by the GOP and the tech lobby for a repatriation tax holiday and a transition to a territorial system, which would allow companies to largely avoid having foreign income taxed.

The administration, and some tax experts, say the plan will clamp down on the biggest companies shifting income and investments outside the U.S. to tax havens. The blueprint has been applauded by some lawmakers and trade groups because it lowers the overall corporate tax rate, broadens the tax base and pumps up manufacturing and R&D.

The administration last week rolled out the framework, which Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner described as the foundation to build consensus for a plan that can eventually pass muster with a bitterly divided Congress. He said the "process will take time. It will be politically contentious."

Already, Republicans and the tech lobby are taking aim at the blanket tax on overseas earnings, saying it will hurt U.S. companies trying to compete globally.

"It's going to be a topic of discussion not only among the ranking members and the chairs of the two [tax-writing] committees," said a senior GOP staffer, "but there's going to be some explaining to do when the administration comes up and tries to tell members why they are taking a turn that is so very different from our global competitors."

The president's willingness to weigh in on the issue has largely been praised. Most have been waiting for Obama to drop some form of corporate tax reform for years. But the tech industry, by and large, was blindsided by the White House's dismissal of a territorial system.

"We certainly didn't expect an embrace of a global system," said Dean Garfield, president and CEO of the Information Technology Industry Council. "On that, the administration is clearly out of step."

"We're not going to get behind a system that doesn't include a territorial competitive framework," he added.

Now that the plan has been rolled, the heavy lifting starts.

The administration and members of Congress will spend the better portion of this year — and possibly next year, too — largely focused on hashing out the details of how to tax the foreign earnings of U.S.-based multinationals, which have an estimated \$1.5 trillion in profits parked overseas that is not currently taxed by the U.S.

It's unclear whether Republicans will budge on the issue of international taxation since it's at the top of the agenda for the powerful business community.

Consider this: Google says it has \$21.2 billion in cash and assets, as of the end of last year, held by foreign subsidiaries, according to a regulatory filing. Apple puts its overseas assets at \$64 billion for the end of 2011, and Microsoft reported \$46 billion in profits held by foreign subsidiaries that would be subject to the U.S. 35 percent tax rate if they chose to repatriate.

Companies are loath to repatriate those profits because of the stiff tax penalty, so they're trying to sell Congress on a tax holiday. Obama has said he would consider repatriation only in the context of a tax reform package.

For now, that money is overseas, and while some is pumped back into U.S. stocks and securities, companies don't generally pay taxes to the U.S. on foreign earnings until they're repatriated. Obama's plan would do away with the deferral on foreign earnings and impose a minimum tax regardless of whether that money is ever brought home. It would provide a credit against earnings already taxed by a foreign jurisdiction.

"Today's global economy provides strong incentives for companies to shift investment and profits to countries with low tax rates. We want to reduce the opportunities the Tax Code now provides to shift income and investment outside the United States," Geithner told reporters last week.

Robert Pozen, a senior lecturer at Harvard Business School and a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution, defended the Obama approach, saying a territorial system would only exacerbate the current "race to the bottom," in which countries essentially bid for corporations by lowering tax rates.

"A pure territorial system will push a lot of U.S. corporate income to tax havens outside the U.S.," he said.

But Republicans already have this element of the president's plan in their cross hairs.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, the ranking Republican on the Senate Finance Committee, called Obama's plan "a set of bullet points designed more for the campaign trail." He also chided the president for retaining "the antiquated worldwide system of corporate taxation."

House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp (R-Mich.), who has proposed a comprehensive tax reform plan that includes repatriation and a shift to a territorial system, told NPR on Friday that the president's plan is a "good step forward." But he said Obama "missed the boat by not addressing the fact that the U.S. is the only country in the world left with a worldwide system of taxation."

"I hope this is just the opening shot," Camp said. "I hope we can develop it into something that really will do a better job of making sure that American companies that do business overseas can bring those profits back and invest them back here for American workers."

Garfield said the administration has already showed some "willingness" to hear the tech industry's argument about moving to a territorial system. But moving forward, discussions about the tax plan will need to deeply involve the industry and that includes the chiefs at the top tech firms.

"They have reached out to a lot of CEOs in our community to get their feedback and walk them through the plan," Garfield said, adding that some CEOs of tech giants have already sounded off to the White House.

"I'm sure they're already getting an earful directly from those CEOs," he said.

There are still plenty of details to hash out, like a potential range for the minimum tax on foreign earnings.

Pozen, the tax expert from Harvard, said that figure is likely to be negotiated between 20 percent — the average of most U.S. trading partners — and 12.5 percent. The latter is Ireland's effective corporate tax rate and is considered the lowest of any non-tax haven jurisdiction. Tech sources have put a figure closer to 15 percent or 16 percent.

And the tech industry is still waiting to see how the administration tackles issues like transfer pricing and intellectual property, along with a number of other so-called offshore tax-haven loopholes — measures the administration say will boost efforts to prevent corporate tax lawyers from gaming the system.

At least one lawmaker, the Senate's foremost opponent of repatriation, has pledged to take up that fight as part of corporate tax reform.

"The president's proposal adds to the momentum that is building for tax reform that closes loopholes," Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.) told Politico in a statement. "I'm going to keep working to make sure that any tax reform closes egregious loopholes such as offshore tax dodging and the stock-option loophole."

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[20120227-09](#) 23:59 SteveB Photo: Convento da Arrábida, Setuba, Portugal

<http://www.poramoralisboa.com/arredores>



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

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FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #84 — FEB. 29, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

A Christian Dictatorship?

(posted by Friends of the Middle, Feb 29, 2012)

Rick Santorum didn't like what President Obama said in his State of the Union address last month:

Higher education can't be a luxury - it is an economic imperative that every family in America should be able to afford. —Barack Obama

Isn't the repression and dismantling of education what the world has always experienced with fascist, communist, and Islamic dictators? Is America now to be a Christian dictatorship? Will we be under "Taliban Rick" "Frothy" Santorum?

from "Obama Responds to Santorum's 'Snob' Jab?" by Alexander Mooney, CNN

Feb. 27, 2012, (<http://whitehouse.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/27/obama-responds-to-santorums-snob-jab/>)

Standing by his comments in a subsequent interview Sunday, Santorum said, "Barack Obama is a person of the left. He is someone who believes in big government. He believes in the values that are, unfortunately, the dominant values, and political values, and overly politicized values, and politically correct values that are on most college and university campuses."

Funny how Santorum's name seems to be eerily similar to, a play on, or almost an anagram of the name, "**SATAN!**"

PASS THIS EMAIL ON. IF YOU DON'T SEND THIS TO 10 PEOPLE YOU ARE GOING TO HELL. IF YOU DO AS I SAY, HEAVEN AWAITS YOU. EMAIL! EMAIL! FORWARD! FORWARD! :-)

Pam: I love the piece on GOP panic. [Newsletter #82] Fear is the strongest emotion, and lots of Americans are very afraid right now. I am trying to understand every side, even the ones I disagree with, because unless you understand your "enemy" you will never defeat him. I do consider Santorum an enemy--of everything all Americans hold dear: personal freedom, fairness, and last but not least compassion. When he says the separation of church and state is not absolute and that people of faith are being denied a voice, he is more than disingenuous; he's perverse. He lashes out in all directions, and he makes no effort to understand the "other side." It is obvious from his speeches that Obama is all about personal freedom (gays in the military), fairness (reform the tax code and

election financing), and compassion (every American should have a fighting chance). He doesn't stoop to name-calling, and he so easily could. The epithet "fascist" comes to mind. Republicans see this election as a "tipping point" in the direction of what they admit is a majority view. Last time I looked, minorities in this country enjoy all sorts of protections. When minorities call the shots, you no longer have a democracy; you have a theocracy, an oligarchy, a plutocracy, or all three at once. We may have reached a tipping point, but it sure isn't the one Santorum teeters on.

My son is part of a voluntary organization that spends Saturday mornings building fences around unfenced yards where dogs are being chained up. The fences are free, the labor is free. Typically the yards that have chained dogs (often pit bulls) also have rusting washing machines and trucks up on blocks scattered around as well. The owners are those folks Santorum thinks so highly of--the good ol' boys, the anti-elitists, the 2nd amendment fanatics. Tanner's group isn't out to change anyone's politics or religion; it just wants to make life more pleasant for helpless animals. The people doing this are what Santorum calls godless liberals with college educations. The social stratum Santorum appeals to is precisely the sort of disgruntled, nationalistic, humiliated people Hitler appealed to. When an oppressive government puts its foot on the country's neck, it is the intellectuals, the highly educated, those capable of sophisticated analysis that it goes after. In Cambodia under Pol Pot anyone wearing glasses was shot; wearing glasses meant you could read. Keeping people ignorant, scared, and angry is what every demagogue in history has tried, often successfully, to do. This election cycle proves my point.

Santorum definitely has a "holier than thou" attitude, and we all know how attractive that is. The truth is, Santorum doesn't believe in freedom of religion or religious pluralism. He believes all laws come from a Christian (Catholic, the one true faith) god, and he wants America's law code to be based on absolutely Christian premises. How is he not a theocrat? You don't have to be an atheist to fear this guy.

Art: First of all, God bless Tanner. As a doggie rescuer myself, my hat is off to him. In western Virginia we see a lot of that "good ole boy" cr*p]My apologies. -SteveB], which usually includes abusing animals.

Does it not strike everyone that the one fairly consistent theme of these Republican candidates is that colleges and universities are viewed as hotbeds of evil. One of the previous candidates, Huey, Dewey or Louie, I forget, also referred to universities as places where young people are turned into communistic monsters.

Now, last I recall colleges and universities are where you go to expand your knowledge of the world and also learn how to think. Apparently dangerous stuff by Republican standards these days.

Pam: Wasn't there a political movement back in the day called the "Know Nothings"?

Art: There was indeed just prior to the Civil War. Alas, the "Know Nothing" came from their responses when asked about things. On the other hand their constituency was the same group as the Republicans appeal to today.

SteveB: I wish I were the *New York Times* or the *Washington Post*! I can just imagine what they would say about Pam's write-up:

"Witty, insightful, incredibly brilliant analysis."

If you don't agree with that, then let me say this: The second or third thing Santorum and his devil's angels would do, if they had power, would be to take your damned guns! Your Constitution is toilet paper to him. It makes him want to puke, because God probably didn't write it!

We have so many dog and animal lovers in our group and in our networks of life expanding out! I love it! Thank you all!

I'm sure that says something important!

I don't think Rick Satan or Santana or whatever would allow dogs into Heaven. I think he would classify them like he does gays, because he talks so much about that "man-on-dog" thing, you know? (Psssst! I'm sure he's not revealing any of his innermost fantasies there.)

Myself? I am firmly convinced and completely believe that dogs are people too and cats are either close or, as they believe, even better than people! I expect to find both in Heaven when I get there or I'm going to be pi*sed!

SteveG: Catholics are interesting as they do think they are the one true religion. I have worked with a few folks over the years that are Orthodox – Serbian/Greek/etc – their form of religion seems to be based on earlier forms than Catholics – different dates for holidays, more rituals, etc. Theocrats have zero business running this government.

Bill: Amen, SteveG. And too many who want to be in power need to be reminded of that—and the constitution.

Pam: The scary thing is, there are lots of folks out there who admire Santorum's absolutist faith and are stoked by his anger at "liberal elites." Anger is tricky. There are times when it's absolutely the correct response and even the right remedy, but when anger is diffuse, general, and aimed at strange targets, I get suspicious. If you held a gun to my head, I'd say I'm an atheist, but the fact is, no one really has a handle on metaphysics. Belief is not fact, and faith does not explain why microbes cause disease. Some Christian patriarch (forget who) said he believed in the resurrection of Christ BECAUSE it was unbelievable. So when anyone, Christian, Jew, or Muslim, claims to have THE truth, I stop listening. Talk about kindness or tolerance or respect for others, and you can couch it in any terms you want. But absolutists like Santorum, Franklin Graham, or the Grand Ayatollah are delusional. I conclude that these religious zealots get angry at the faithless because of an underlying fear, perhaps fear that they might be wrong or fear that their god will damn them if they don't obey the rules. The more fervent the belief, the more rules and taboos there are. People want to put themselves in little boxes where they feel safe; it can be disorienting to feel like a speck in the universe, but that's what we all are. We create our own meaning, whether through religion or in other ways, and that is a noble and human thing to do. If we could think of religions as stories that explain the mysteries we hunger to have solved, then perhaps we could acknowledge that one culture's stories may not work in another place at another time. When I read a great Victorian novel, I take away profound moral lessons. That does not mean I want to embrace a Victorian lifestyle. If Rick Santorum wants to wear a hair shirt and give all his money to the poor (yeah, right), it's none of my business. When he decries non-Christians (he really means non-Catholics) as inherently and hopelessly evil, as out to attack religion or indoctrinate others in the "faith" of atheism, it seems to me that he is projecting some dark aspect of his own soul onto the rest of the world. He strikes me as a man who is angry, afraid, and potentially very dangerous.

When I was a teenager and still a Methodist, one of the ministers at my church (Gobin Memorial for those of you from Greencastle) was asked one day, at a youth group meeting, whether non-Christians were going to hell. He said it was regrettable but he was afraid that was true. Well, what is hell and what is heaven? Constructions of the human imagination. I believe that every man needs a good woman to look after him. Now, I know that is not actually true, but it is a belief that guides my life and makes me happy when my sons are in good relationships. We all need to feel that life is meaningful and that what we do is for the good, but when that desire turns against others with violence and intolerance, we are not acting for the good, and we are certainly not demonstrating the basic humility that is incumbent on all of us. Santorum displays the vengeance of religion, not its charity. "Let he who is without sin cast the first stone." I'm sounding preachy, aren't I? Sorry about that, but this is what I really think.

Dennis: My opinion is that Hell would be spending eternity with religious fundamentalists. Save me from that, O Lord.

Heaven is one of those days when the world is full of wonder and I'm enjoying it while I can.

Pam: I'm with you, Dennis.

SteveB: So healthy for the soul and for the human race to know that this is Heaven (too?):

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

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Dwh5_hicoE&feature=related.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w9TGj2jrJk8&feature=related>,
(go to 5:55 if you don't have much time).

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYcJ9J5DggU>.

Enjoy!

Beth: Right on, SteveB!

SteveG: When our son was a freshman in high school he went with a friend to an all night church youth group – hockey game, music, bowling, etc. He spent the night arguing with a minister about who does and does not get into heaven.

Dennis has the right idea.

Belief systems – theology, ideology, personal, etc - all seem to be developed to make life palatable for the developer and of course each group thinks theirs is the one and only system.

20120228-01 08:37 SteveB Fw: Avaaz Hits 13 Million

from Ricken Patel, Avaaz.org:

It feels like everything is happening exponentially.

In the last 30 days, our community has grown by 2.5 million people. We were already the largest political web movement ever, and yet we're growing faster than anyone has seen before! We're taking more actions, winning more victories, donating more and generating thousands more media hits in one month than we used to in a year. It's thrilling, even a little scary, especially when we see that the pace is still accelerating...

Just to give a snapshot of the last few weeks:

- 5 million of us stood up to the ACTA and SOPA internet censorship bills, helping to put SOPA on ice, and putting ACTA under threat, with the President of the European Parliament and Germany, Poland and many other countries reconsidering their positions.
- We smuggled \$1.8 million worth of medical supplies into Syria when no one else could, and raised \$1.5 million more in donations, while our citizen journalists provided much of the world media's information and images.
- We generated thousands of news articles on 20 different campaigns.
- Our sex trafficking hotline generated information that will result in a major set of arrests this week (can't say which country yet).
- We raised over \$4 million online to supercharge our work, and are growing our staff team like mad to keep up with the need.
- We ran over 40 campaigns, took over 10 million actions and told 25 million friends about campaigns we care about, on everything from deforestation in Brazil to the Murdoch scandal in the UK -- and made a serious impact on many of these.

If all that wasn't enough, we're about to launch a couple of big projects (stay tuned) that will take our community to a whole NEW level!

It's a thrilling privilege to serve this amazing community, and while the challenges we face are growing, the surge of spirited people rising to meet these challenges is growing even faster and stronger. We've come together and built something special, and it's taking off. Let's shoot for the stars.

<http://www.avaaz.org/en/>

20120228-02 09:05 SteveB Republican Presidential Candidates in Michigan Primary

I know there are many factors at work, especially today in Michigan, yet I can't help but notice the following:

1. Mitt Romney's criticisms of President Obama are fundamentally flawed and even Republicans are starting to notice. "A guy who's an eloquent speaker who made a lot of promises he hasn't been able to keep." (The truth: despite great odds and opposition, Barry has done a good job. Not as good as Democrats had hoped for, but much better than Republicans wanted and worked to achieve, counterproductively.)
2. Rick Santorum has no such problem, because his criticisms are rooted in religiosity and lunacy. He doesn't even believe in the separation of church and state. (The truth: LOL! I maintain that we need a constitutional amendment that will clearly and forever state this complete separation, else we will be made to become like the Taliban instead of free men and women.)
3. The Republican establishment must be going nuts today, and will break into total unMITTigated panic if Santorum wins Romney's "home state" of Cadillacs...er...Michigan.
4. Yet you reap what you sow; this is the monster that Big Money created.

20120228-03 09:46 MarthaH Republican Politics

I was rethinking 2000 and that debacle...and adding the "corporations are people, too" decision and how the make-up of the court group has sent us further down this path. I remember the "no way" on PBS when W. got the nomination. OOPS...and here we are! A blink and 12 years, and what will the children inherit...a long way from what the children of the Greatest Generation did. Incredibly sad. Pandering is not a really high item on what I want to hear from a candidate. Lugar was just in Greencastle, and he and our "new" gerrymandered Congressman Rokita spoke right down the line to get their "R" \$\$\$\$\$. And then after I read their remarks, I find the "gas prices cannot be blamed on Obama's not accepting the pipeline" so had to cut and paste to Lugar. Doubt I will hear back (again!) His interns never reply with a truth...I have frequently begged him to step away from the caucus and lead...wonder if any one of the interns might have seen a truth there. Before I saw the light, I saw Lugar as my (college) hero...and wanted some dust from his mayor's perch when we went there! Not so much now...BUT THEN there's the teabagger bunch wanting him out...so...a rock and a hard place.

20120228-06 10:41 SteveB Re: Republican Politics (reply to MarthaH, above)

I agree with you so much about how our generation screwed-up the handoff from the GG (Greatest Generation) and Dick "Hoary" Lugar. Thank you for your activism on all our behalves.

Love your "rant"! Feel free anytime. :-)

I graduated in 1964, smack dab in the middle of God's Country at just about the mid-point of the Golden Age.

20120228-09 11:38 MarthaH Re: Republican Politics (reply to SteveB, above)

Ah, small towns! I do appreciate the ability with which we all (sometimes I fall short in my passion!) can write...I majored in PS/US/English and taught 31 years. There, for Putnam County high school brains, I honed my "devil's advocate" mode and began to truly believe that which I taught...love that our president can also quote the Constitution verbatim! I read his books for a look-see, convinced Art after myself that he was a Real Deal with the things I observed and believed. IF only they governed like I taught--from the middle!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! As lemmings, our grandchildren will face extinction, and I can only do so much. Art is on the global warming page

which is the "primary mover after God." It's not like He hasn't smacked us in the face many times already. Over the edge...is...too far!

Have you read Howard Zinn? He shows what we know and the rest deny about history...The rich run over poor on the way to opulence. But...the poor an outnumber...and all HECK breaks loose, duh! I say raise them up through education and the rest falls into place. How can WE be so stupid with such poor educations by the "standards" of the nay-sayers. I really want to show up for a Teabagger meeting and give them my Government 12 final. They and too many political mouths would FAIL, big time. I believed in teaching and demanded learning...or repeating, ha.

I do NF in winter and then fiction in summer to "escape" reality and bask in warmth. So far, it has been a too warm Hoosier winter. Fleas will be vehicles when we get gas at \$6, ha.

20120228-17 21:35 SteveB Re: Republican Politics (reply to MarthaH, above)

I really enjoyed your stories and reminders of our little hometown. I definitely remember your father and his shop. I'm sure Bill was there at least sometimes, because I bet your dad's was the closest welding shop to his house. :-)
That boy loved welding! He once welded a rocket for me in those days. In later years, during summer jobs when I was teaching, I learned that I really liked welding too.

Howard Zinn was a great man. I believe American public schools are still largely incredibly good, with very many dedicated teachers—all so endangered by Republicans right now.

I remember many of the people you mention, but I don't remember you or Larry, I guess. But I'm so very happy to be in touch with you and so many of our fellow Greencastlonians (???)

20120228-04 10:31 SteveG "Romney Looks to Squeak By in Native Michigan"

from "Romney Looks to Squeak By in Native Michigan" by Matt Taylor, The National Memo

Feb. 27, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/romney-looks-squeak-native-michigan>)

"His father was a beloved governor because he was pragmatic and compassionate and moderate," said Former Michigan Governor Jennifer Granholm. "Mitt Romney, while he may have been some of those things while he was governor of Massachusetts, is vying to outflank Rick Santorum on the right, and he is not his father. He has morphed into something his father would not recognize."

20120228-05 10:37 SteveG Religion in Politics in Michigan

In an interview yesterday AM on Morning Joe, Franklin Graham stated that Sanatorium is more of a Christian than Obama is and that Romney is not a Christian, he is a Mormon.

I have also heard that the Southern Baptist denomination is looking for a different name so that they feel like they will appeal to more northern people.

As SteveB has said, we complain about some middle eastern countries being run by theology and we are traveling down the same road.

20120228-07 11:05 SteveB Re: Religion in Politics in Michigan (reply to SteveG, above)

Muslims use a book that is not the Christian Bible. Scientologists use a book that is not the Christian bible. Mormons use a book that is not the Christian Bible. All are faultless actions. All say the Christian Bible is basically OK with them, as far as it goes. No one should have any problems with this.

But to then say that any of them is "Christian" would, by definition, be a fallacy, no matter how much Mormons might wish to be Christian or, as in Mitt Romney's case, wish to appear to be Christian. Clearly, they are not, or they would have to forsake the *Book of Mormon*, which I don't see happening anytime soon.

[20120228-10](#) 13:57 SteveB Republican Primary in Michigan (to Dennis)

Hey, Dennis, are you voting for Rick today?

[20120228-11](#) 14:41 Dennis Re: Republican Primary in Michigan (reply to SteveB, above)

If I vote in the Repub primary it will be for Fred Karger:

<http://motherjones.com/mojo/2010/04/fred-karger-president>.

[20120228-12](#) 16:57 Pam Re: Republican Primary in Michigan (reply to Dennis, above)

He sounds better than today's front runners.

[20120228-08](#) 11:25 Mark Video: Blues at the White House!

Finally Obama has done something that I'm all "on board " with.....however, Mick Jagger doesn't seem to fit in as nicely as the rest. Gary Clark Jr is new to me and man, I like him!.....Buddy Guy's band members (not on this show) are playing at my car show this July 8, you're all invited....Democrats and Republicans.....cheers, mark

Click here: "In Performance at the White House" (PBS):

<http://www.pbs.org/inperformanceatthewhitehouse/>.

[20120228-18](#) 21:56 SteveB Re: Video: Blues at the White House! (reply to Mark, above)

THIS IS JUST SO VERY, VERY COOL!!! GREAT, HAPPY MUSIC. WONDERFUL TO SEE BARRY SING!

Thanks, Mark!

I'll take my POTUS over Mr. Roboto or Mr. Satan any day or night.

LONG LIVE THE BLUES!

[20120228-13](#) 19:33 Art Global Warming Mind-Changing Experiment & "The Great Carbon Bubble: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry Fights So Hard"

Little experiment I am running. This guy and I go back to Desert Storm, when I was the G-5 of VII Corps and he commanded a civil affairs brigade that was attached to us. We became pretty good friends and devised a rather innovative way to manage civil affairs actions in Desert Storm. Got us both quite a bit of internal recognition.

Bob and I have remained distant friends since the war and see each other once a year at our annual reunions. Last Saturday he and his brother and I got into a short discussion on global warming. Although we had never discussed politics previously, I could quickly tell they were both ardent Republicans and President Obama haters.

They, especially the brother, really got very heated very fast. They both seem the stereotypes of the Republicans identified in that recent article who simply deny the facts of a matter. I am going to continue to push this and we will see where it goes. The interesting thing is these folks are not bad people but they are absolutely fixed in their beliefs.

Thought you might enjoy.

Pam, the quote from the "right wing friend" is TerryP, whom I often despair of but who may be turning a bit.

From: rbeahm
To: Art
Sent: 2/28/2012 1:09:41 P.M. Eastern Standard Time

I enjoyed Saturday night and look forward to some golf. I will get a copy of the book you referenced. There may, in fact, be a warming trend, but I'm not even convinced of that. If there is a warming trend, I'm certainly not convinced it's man made. This year has only been the seventh warmest winter on record. The warmest were in the '30s. The earth's climate has continually cycled forever.

From: Art
To: rbeahm
Sent: Tuesday, February 28, 2012 11:10 AM

Hi Bob. Just wanted to say thanks again and say again what a great talk you gave. Really thought it hit the mark about this Memorial Service being the only "Wall" these guys will ever have.

Sorry we didn't get a chance to chat a bit more but that little start off crisis kept me busy. I also didn't mean to touch a third rail when I mentioned climate change but I am interested to hear other positions. I have really been digging into this for the past few years and the more I learn the more concerned I have become. There are many scientific articles and books out but the most readable I have seen so far is "Six Degrees" by Mark Lynas. It was written in 2008, so a bit older, but still seems right on the mark. If you could find time to read it, I'd value your take.

Both you and your brother seemed to be pretty knowledgeable on the subject and diametrically opposed to the idea that there is a problem and I am curious as to why. If bright accomplished guys like the two of you don't see it, then what am I reading that is wrong? At any rate, if you have the time and could send me the opposing scientific facts, I would be really grateful. Maybe we can discuss during a round of golf. Winter is getting to be the best time to play these days.

I think my current position is best described by a somewhat politically oriented right wing friend:

"The global warming analogy.....I would rather trust the scientific evidence supporting the theory of global warming, of which I know little about, and find out 50 years from now that it was all bunko science, than find out 50 years from now that it is too late to reverse the environmental collapse."

The below article just forwarded to me the other day. The picture is a satellite shot of North America on 1 JAN 2012.

"The Great Carbon Bubble: Why the Fossil Fuel Industry Fights So Hard" by Bill McKibben, TomDispatch

Feb. 7, 2012, (<http://www.commondreams.org/view/2012/02/07-2>)

20120228-14	20:35	Pam	Re: Global Warming Mind-Changing Experiment (reply to Art, above)
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Winter is the best time to play golf. Right. It doesn't matter who or what caused global warming; the science proves that it is happening. If we keep adding carbon to the atmosphere, we will burn ourselves off the face of the earth. Then it won't matter whose fault it was, because there will be no one left to blame. I know this sounds apocalyptic, but that's just where we're headed: apocalypse. Of course climate changes in the normal course of geologic ages, but we live here, now, and what we're doing is despoiling our climate here, now. Even the scientists who were supposedly doubters of climate change now admit it is real. I think your friends are in what's called denial. I will be very interested to hear what they have to say. Don't let them wriggle off the hook.

[20120228-15](#) 21:04 SteveB Re: Global Warming Mind-Changing Experiment (reply to Art, above)

More power to ya, Art. I wish you the best in this endeavor. The results might tell us all if logic is possible with some of our, shall we say, "contrarian" friends, many of whom we still love dearly.

I'm sure you'll find plenty of help and resources (or good argument) from Friends of the Middle.

[20120228-16](#) 21:21 SteveG "Why Does America Lead the World in School Shootings?"

The US is # 1 in school shootings. Another scary statistic.

"Why Does America Lead the World in School Shootings?" by Frank Ochberg, CNN

Feb. 28, 2012, (http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2012/02/28/why-does-america-lead-the-world-in-school-shootings/?hpt=hp_t3)

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/themes/adventure-travel/dive-into-the-big-blue/?intaffil=lpemail>

Great Blue Hole, Belize



—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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