



## **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](mailto: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](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."

**FotM NEWSLETTER #66 (Feb. 3, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

<b><u>DATE-ID</u></b>	<b><u>TIME</u></b>	<b><u>FROM</u></b>	<b><u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u></b>
<a href="#"><u>20120203-00</u></a>		SteveB	<b>Now, Even Our Constitution Ain't Up to Par</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Talks Constitution, Women & Liberty on Egyptian TV")
<a href="#"><u>20120202-01</u></a>	10:38	Phil	Fw: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline
<a href="#"><u>20120202-08</u></a>	13:55	Pam	Re: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline (reply to Phil, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-27</u></a>	20:18	SteveB	Re: Video: Keystone XL Pipeline (reply to Phil, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-02</u></a>	10:39	Pam	Re: "House Votes to Repeal Part of Healthcare Law" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-03</u></a>	11:15	Art	"A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'"
<a href="#"><u>20120202-05</u></a>	12:24	Pam	Re: "A Grand(standing) Plan to Cut Debt" or "Paying Off the Federal Deficit with 'Chump Change'" (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-04</u></a>	11:59	GaryC	Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High
<a href="#"><u>20120202-09</u></a>	15:40	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-10</u></a>	15:45	GaryC	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-11</u></a>	16:15	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-06</u></a>	12:25	SteveG	"Healthcare Reform Was the Tea Party's First Defeat"
<a href="#"><u>20120202-07</u></a>	13:26	Art	"Romney's 1% Nation Under God"
<a href="#"><u>20120202-12</u></a>	16:26	Beth	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #65)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-20</u></a>	18:05	SteveB	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to Beth, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-13</u></a>	16:35	Dennis	"Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot"
<a href="#"><u>20120202-14</u></a>	16:46	SteveG	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-16</u></a>	17:25	Art	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-17</u></a>	17:38	Pam	Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-15</u></a>	16:50	Larry	Fw: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds
<a href="#"><u>20120202-18</u></a>	17:44	SteveB	Re: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds (reply to Larry, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-19</u></a>	18:00	Pam	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-21</u></a>	18:32	SteveG	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-31</u></a>	11:01	Bill	Re: Civic Literacy Exam (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #65)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-22</u></a>	19:02	SteveB	"Biggest Holders of US Government Debt"
<a href="#"><u>20120202-30</u></a>	22:56	SteveG	"Bank of America Is Shrinking"
<a href="#"><u>20120202-23</u></a>	19:08	GaryC	Brutal Winter, Travel to Chile (to SteveB)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-25</u></a>	19:52	SteveB	Brutal Winter, Travel to Chile (reply to GaryC, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-24</u></a>	19:47	Dennis	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, below)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-26</u></a>	19:56	SteveB	Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-28</u></a>	20:19	Dennis	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-29</u></a>	22:50	SteveB	Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-32</u></a>	23:04	Jim	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-33</u></a>	23:15	SteveB	Re: Paradise & Lucky Dube (reply to Jim, above)
<a href="#"><u>20120202-34</u></a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Paradise & Lucky Dube

<a href="#"><u>20120202-01</u></a>	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>.

<a href="#">20120202-08</a>	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-way 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.

<a href="#">20120202-27</a>	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.

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

Un-f-----believable!

<a href="#">20120202-03</a>	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](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.

<a href="#">20120202-05</a>	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.

<a href="#">20120202-04</a>	11:59	GaryC	Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High
-----------------------------	-------	-------	--

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>

<a href="#">20120202-09</a>	15:40	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
-----------------------------	-------	--------	--

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!

<a href="#">20120202-10</a>	15:45	GaryC	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to SteveB, above)
-----------------------------	-------	-------	---

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.

<a href="#">20120202-11</a>	16:15	SteveB	Re: Video: Rep. Hank Johnson Maybe a Little High (reply to GaryC, above)
-----------------------------	-------	--------	--

Ditto. ^\_^

<a href="#">20120202-06</a>	12:25	SteveG	"Healthcare Reform Was the Tea Party's First Defeat"
-----------------------------	-------	--------	--

"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.)

<a href="#">20120202-07</a>	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.)

© 2011 Amy Goodman

<a href="#">20120202-12</a>	16:26	Beth	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #65)
-----------------------------	-------	------	--

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.

<a href="#">20120202-20</a>	18:05	SteveB	Re: A Former Slave Writes to His Master (reply to Beth, above)
-----------------------------	-------	--------	--

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"

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/>)

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

Delusional!!!

[20120202-16](#) 17:25 Art Re: "Georgia Judge Orders Obama Off the Ballot" (reply to Dennis, above)

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)

You've gotta laugh. Any other response is unprintable.

[20120202-15](#) 16:50 Larry Fw: This Birther Stuff Is Still Making the Rounds

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

<a href="#">20120202-30</a>	22:56	SteveG	"Bank of America Is Shrinking"
-----------------------------	-------	--------	--------------------------------

"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](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

You can subscribe to this free, no-obligation, daily Newsletter filled with lively, intelligent discussion centered on politics and government, but ranging to anything members feel is important, interesting, or entertaining. To subscribe, use the form on our website or blog, or simply reply to this email with "Yes" or "Start" in the Subject line, then add our email address (below) to your Contacts or Safe list. To opt-out, reply with "No" or "Stop" in the subject line.

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](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

original material ©2012 Steven W. Baker, all rights reserved