



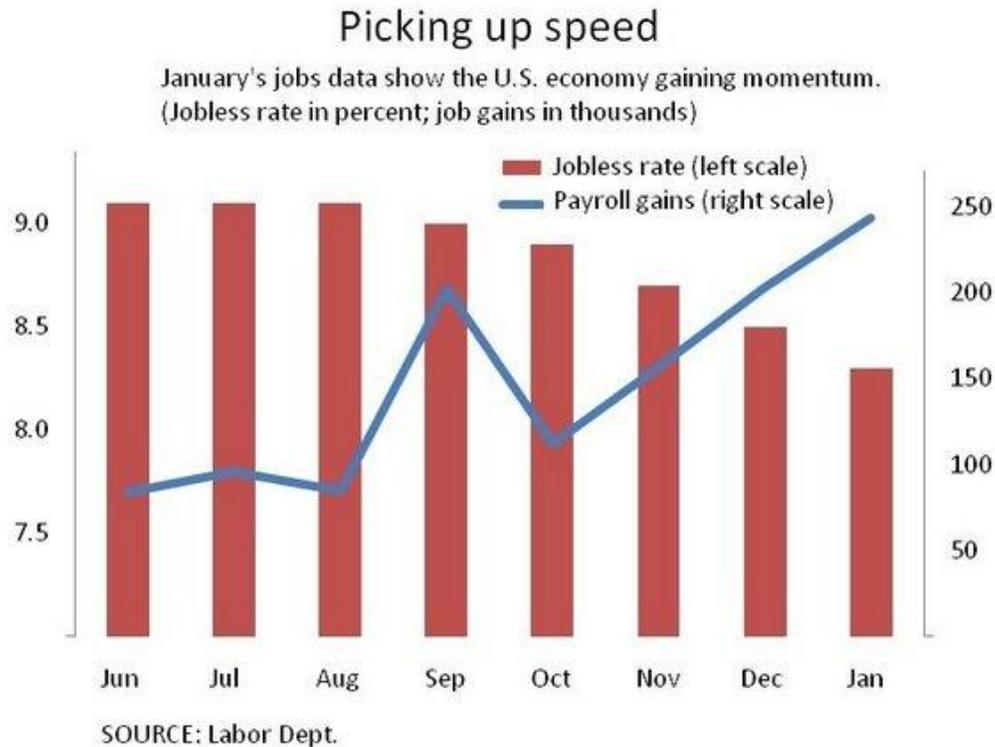
FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #68 — FEB. 7, 2012

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

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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."

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20120206-01	07:35	SteveB	Fw: Notice from The99%Declaration.org
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20120206-15	18:28	GaryF	Status Message from 'Make Congress Work'
20120206-16	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Beaver Island, Michigan

20120206-01	07:35	SteveB	Fw: Notice from The99%Declaration.org
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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)
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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 our 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"

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: Presidential Re-Mapping
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20120206-07	15:30	Dennis	"Indiana Republican Secretary Of State Found Guilty Of Voter Fraud"
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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, Nation of Change

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 Status Message from 'Make Congress Work'

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/91487f08f9c87870a_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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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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