



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #71 — FEB. 10, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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'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."

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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.

20120209-07 13:56 SteveB Re: Freedom of Information & So Much More (reply to Pam, above)

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.

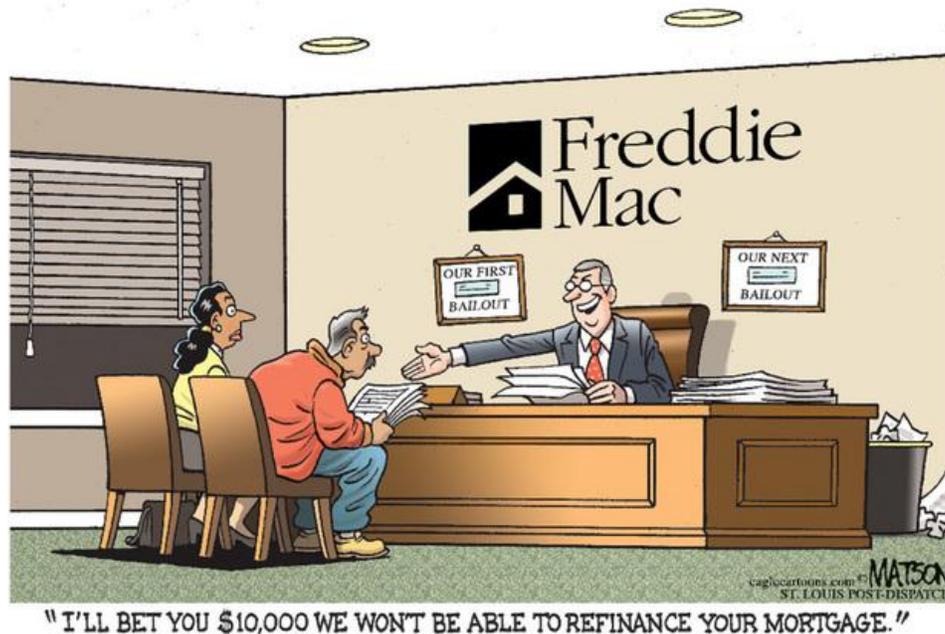
Tell your state lawmakers you want the right to know what's in the food you're eating. Send your email now to support labeling of GE food sold in Washington.

20120209-08

14:57

SteveG

"\$25B Settlement Reached Over Foreclosure Abuses" & "3 Big Health Insurers Stockpile \$2.4 billion as Rates Keep Rising"



"\$25B Settlement Reached Over Foreclosure Abuses" by Derek Kravitz, AP/ *Seattle Times*

Feb. 9, 2012,

(http://seattletimes.nwsourc.com/html/business/20120209_25b_settlement.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/20120208_3big.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)

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!

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

Corruption pays...

from FreePress.net:

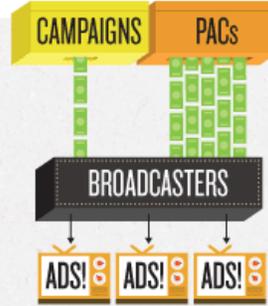
The supreme court says that businesses can pay as much as they want to get influence in government. They call this "free speech" from corporate persons like GE, Monsanto, GM, Ford, etc. Businesses benefit from this influence.

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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