



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #73 — FEB. 14, 2012

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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Even Newt Knows

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 14, 2012)

Perhaps now that arch conservative Newt Gingrich has rejected the issue, we can all move forward. Here's my plan: We bury this "birther" issue and all the other racist cr*p in a big, deep hole and move on to solving our nation's problems. If anyone needs more evidence, please see: <http://factcheck.org/2008/08/born-in-the-usa/>. Case closed!

"Newt Goes Positive, Encounters Orly Taitz" by Alexander Burns, Politico

Feb. 13, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/2012/02/newt-goes-positive-encounters-orly-taitz-114382.html#comments>)

Via POLITICO's Ginger Gibson on the Newt Gingrich West Coast Tour, the former House speaker says he expects to accomplish yet another political comeback by – switching back to a positive message:

Newt Gingrich said he's backing off his attacks on Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum moving forward, and made little mention of his opponents in his stump speech on Monday.

"I think my ideas are much bolder than Santorum or Romney's," Gingrich said when asked why he didn't mention either during his speech. "I think my ideas are much clearer and more specific and I have to focus on communicating those ideas. The two periods I focused on communicating those ideas I ended up No. 1 in Gallup both times. And we're going back to doing what we did that worked."

"When we went back and analyzed it I do dramatically better when I focus on the nation's problems and I focus on the nation's solutions," he said. "I don't do nearly as well when I focus on my competitors. So we took the lesson that has worked twice in the last 3 months."

And from the "Close Encounters" department of campaign events, Ginger reports:

At an event later in Pasadena, Gingrich got a question from Orly Taitz, the California attorney who fanned the "birther" phenomenon by filing a flurry of federal lawsuits challenging President Obama's legitimacy to hold office.

Taitz laid out her arguments against Obama and told Gingrich it could be a "boost" to his campaign if he picked up the issue.

Gingrich responded largely by ignoring her question, instead outlining a litany of issues he sees facing the country.

"I think I have enough issues to debate Obama about," he said.

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20120213-02	11:27	Mary	Fw: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!
20120213-05	16:26	SteveB	Re: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist! (reply to Mary, above)
20120213-01	10:12	NormF	The State of the Nation
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20120213-08	18:43	Pam	Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120213-09	20:26	SteveB	"The War for Privatization"
20120213-10	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Magog Lake Sunrise (near Banff National Park, Canada)

20120213-02	11:27	Mary	Fw: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist!
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Would you consider putting this in your newsletter? I would like to know how Obama supporters defend him. Obviously the last paragraph is appealing to emotion, but, aside from that, how can one explain/justify the documented actions of our American president. Wrong is still wrong....regardless of what side of the aisle one sits on.

[Source of original email unknown. —SteveB]

When?

It's happening fast — WAKE UP AMERICA!

"When you see that in order to produce, you need to obtain permission from men who produce nothing; when you see that money is flowing to those who deal not in goods, but in favors; when you see that men get rich more easily by graft than by work, and your laws no longer protect you against them, but protect them against you... you may know that your society is doomed." ... Ayn Rand

WHEN...

1. He ["Barrack Hussein Obama", to assuage your curiosity. —SteveB] refused to disclose who donated money to his election campaign, as other candidates had done...
2. He received endorsements from people like Louis Farrakhan, Moamar Kaddafi and Hugo Chavez...
3. It was pointed out that he was a total newcomer and had absolutely no experience at anything except community organizing...
4. He chose friends and acquaintances such as Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn who were revolutionary radicals...
5. His voting record in the Illinois Senate and in the U.S. Senate came into question...
6. He refused to wear a flag lapel pin and did so only after a public outcry...
7. People started treating him as a Messiah and children in schools were taught to sing his praises...
8. He stood with his hands over his groin area for the playing of the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance...

9. He surrounded himself in the White House with advisors who were pro-gun control, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual marriage and wanting to curtail freedom of speech to silence the opposition...
10. He said he favors sex education in kindergarten, including homosexual indoctrination...
11. His personal background was either scrubbed or hidden and nothing could be found about him...
12. The place of his birth was called into question, and he refused to produce a birth certificate...
13. He had an association in Chicago with Tony Rezko - a man of questionable character and who is now in prison and had helped Obama to a sweet deal on the purchase of his home...
14. It became known that George Soros, a multi-billionaire Marxist, spent a ton of money to get him elected...
15. He started appointing White House Czars that were radicals, revolutionaries, and even avowed Marxist /Communists...
16. He stood before the Nation and told us that his intentions were to "fundamentally transform this Nation" into something else...
17. It became known that he had trained ACORN workers in Chicago and served as an attorney for ACORN...
18. He appointed cabinet members and several advisors who were tax cheats and socialists...
19. He appointed a Science Czar, John Holdren, who believes in forced abortions, mass sterilizations and seizing babies from teen mothers...
20. He appointed Cass Sunstein as Regulatory Czar who believes in "Explicit Consent," harvesting human organs without family consent and allowing animals to be represented in court, while banning all hunting...
21. He appointed Kevin Jennings, a homosexual and organizer of a group called Gay, Lesbian, Straight, Education Network as Safe School Czar and it became known that he had a history of bad advice to teenagers...
22. He appointed Mark Lloyd as Diversity Czar who believes in curtailing free speech, taking from one and giving to another to spread the wealth, who supports Hugo Chavez...
23. Valerie Jarrett, an avowed Socialist, was selected as Obama's Senior White House Advisor...
24. Anita Dunn, White House Communications Director, said Mao Tse Tung was her favorite philosopher and the person she turned to most for inspiration...
25. He appointed Carol Browner, a well known socialist as Global Warming Czar working on Cap and Trade as the nation's largest tax...
26. He appointed Van Jones, an ex-con and avowed Communist as Green Energy Czar, who since had to resign when this was made known...
27. Tom Daschle, Obama's pick for Health and Human Services Secretary could not be confirmed because he was a tax cheat...
28. As President of the United States , he bowed to the King of Saudi Arabia...
29. He traveled around the world criticizing America and never once talking of her greatness...
30. His actions concerning the Middle East seemed to support the Palestinians over Israel , our long time ally...
31. He took American tax dollars to resettle thousands of Palestinians from Gaza to the United States...
32. He upset the Europeans by removing plans for a missile defense system against the Russians...
33. He played politics in Afghanistan by not sending troops early-on when the Field Commanders said they were necessary to win...
34. He started spending us into a debt that was so big we could not pay it off...
35. He took a huge spending bill under the guise of stimulus and used it to pay off organizations, unions, and individuals that got him elected...
36. He took over insurance companies, car companies, banks, etc....
37. He took away student loans from the banks and put it through the government...
38. He designed plans to take over the health care system and put it under government control...
39. He claimed he was a Christian during the election and tapes were later made public that showed Obama speaking to a Muslim group and 'stating' that he was raised a Muslim, was educated as a Muslim, and is still a Muslim...
40. He set into motion a plan to take over the control of all energy in the United States through Cap and Trade...

...PEOPLE SAID IT DIDN'T MATTER!

He finally completed his transformation of America into a Socialist State , people woke up but it was too late. Add these up one by one and you get a phenomenal score that points to the fact that Barrack Hussein Obama is determined to turn America into a Marxist-Socialist society. All of the items in the preceding paragraphs have been put into place. All can be documented very easily. Before you disavow this do an Internet search. The last paragraph alone is not yet cast in stone. You and I will write that paragraph.

Will it read as above or will it be a more happy ending for most of America? Don't just belittle the opposition. Search for the truth. We all need to pull together or watch the demise of a free democratic society. Pray for Americans to seek the truth and take action for it will keep us FREE. Our biggest enemy is not China , Russia , North Korea or Iran . Our biggest enemy is a contingent of politicians in Washington , DC . The government will not help, so we need to do it ourselves.

Question ... will you delete this, or pass it on to others who don't know about Obama's actions and plans for the USA, so that they may know how to vote in November, 2012 and the ensuing years? It's your decision. I believe it does matter. How about you? November 2012 comes, it will matter who you vote for!

20120213-05 16:26 SteveB

Re: They Said It Didn't Matter. Wake Up America! Barrack [sic] Hussein Obama Is a Socialist! (reply to Mary, above)

Hi, I'll be happy to post it. I love this stuff! Here are a few facts I dug up, there are lots more. This is apparently a pretty old, widely discredited email.

I notice that you mention "the documented actions of our American president" yet I don't find any evidence of any kind in the email, just a laundry list of old disproven and unproven allegations or things that are so obvious they don't matter, like President Obama being left of George Bush. I'm kind of surprised that one of the 40 points is not something like: "WHEN he was born half-black, PEOPLE SAID IT DIDN'T MATTER"...and, lo and behold, it turned out that it didn't matter, except to the Right, who can't seem to get it out of their minds. I find this email blatantly racist. That's just my humble opinion.

It's interesting that the original email contained several points that were apparently so disproven, so untrue that they were deleted.

If anyone is interested, I will publish additional arguments presented on any of the 52 points of contention.

1. Quotations from the email in question are in quotation marks and, often, all caps. Where there is a one-to-one correspondence with the above email, I have numbered the point.
2. SteveB's commentary is bracketed [] and indented.
3. Analysis form the article in question are in italics and indented.

"They Said It Didn't Matter' (A Giant Mess of Propaganda and Lies)" posted by voice13, CrazyEmailsAndBackStories

Sept. 8, 2011, (<http://crazyemailsandbackstories.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/they-said-it-didnt-matter-a-giant-mess-of-propaganda-and-lies/>)

Sigh, another day, another crazy right wing email. This one was credited to John W. Wallace, a self proclaimed "oathkeeper" teabagger, birther, and far-right activist, but I did not see it on his website, so it may have falsely been attributed to him. It is so full of misinformation, typical FOX "news" innuendo, and outright lies — AND it is so very LONG, that I didn't really want to take the time to address each and every item.

A very smart liberal blogger posted a copy of this email back in 2009, so evidently my email sender is way, way behind in his propaganda promotion. So, I'm currently posting it as a work in progress. I'll fill in each answer over

time, or hopefully some of you can help out. Feel free to look up some of the items I've not yet addressed, and email them to me via this site. I'd love any help I can get in addressing this mountain of misinformation...and will happily credit YOU for your contribution.

N/A. "AMERICA IS SLOWLY BEING TURNED INTO A SOCIALIST COUNTRY BECAUSE MANY AMERICANS SAID OBAMA'S PAST AND HIS POST-ELECTION ACTIONS DIDN'T MATTER."

[The version of the email, above, did not include this sentence. But this is the theme of the email, just slightly different words are used: "PEOPLE SAID IT DIDN'T MATTER! He finally completed his transformation of America into a Socialist State , people woke up but it was too late. Add these up one by one and you get a phenomenal score that points to the fact that Barrack Hussein Obama is determined to turn America into a Marxist-Socialist society." The discussion below is completely pertinent. –SteveB]

Your initial statement is ridiculous. Firstly, exactly HOW is America even close to being a "socialist" country? Right Wingers (or perhaps more correctly: Reich-wingers) constantly use this word as a knee-jerk swear word, yet few seem to even know what they're talking about. Can you even define "socialism"? How does it work? What do you find bad about it? And how on earth could the U.S. be considered even remotely socialist? Because we collectively build roads that anyone can use and hire firefighters who will save both the rich and the poor? Oooh, the horror! Come on, this is a meaningless and ridiculous statement.

And, by the way, are you aware that Socialist Democracies top the Forbes list of the globe's happiest citizens year after year? Why do you think that is? They pay FAR higher taxes, but their government is responsive to THE CITIZENS. For their taxes they get, among other things, free medical care and free education FOR ALL. This results in a healthy, educated society.

Progressive taxation means that a doctor won't make all that much more than a teacher. This system results in people seeking employment in fields that they LOVE, rather than tolerating a job in a field that detest, just to make a ton of money. The result? High job satisfaction, which equals higher happiness in life. And what about the claim that greed is the only driver of innovation? These countries top ours in the amount of new patent applications, which remains the gold standard of determining the creativity and output of a society.

Further, these Socialist Democracies have lower crime rates per capita, than we do. They demand – and get – better quality food and labeling. Cleaner air. Cleaner water. Higher quality of life. Meanwhile our country is being looted and dismantled by the wealthy elite.

Barack Obama is nowhere near socialist, he is painfully CENTRIST. The right has moved so far right that even Saint Reagan would now be considered too liberal to run for office in the Republican party. The Democrats are boringly centrist. Progressive, liberals are not even on the political map, but for a few brave and notable exceptions. Let me repeat, President Obama is not even a liberal, he is a centrist like the rest of the Democratic party.

Now back to this ridiculous email:

N/A. "When Barack Obama wrote a book and said he was mentored as a youth by Frank (Frank Marshall Davis) an avowed Communist, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[This is a point that has apparently been scrubbed from the email in question. I can only guess that the statement is such a huge lie that "it didn't matter." –SteveB]

While Obama briefly mentions his grandfather's friend, Frank Marshall Davis, (the journalist, poet, and social activist) in his memoir "Dreams From My Father", NOTHING in the book could lead to the conclusion that Davis was Obama's MENTOR during Obama's childhood and adolescence in Hawaii. Obama wrote of imagining him back in the 30s "in a baggy suit and wide lapels, standing in front of the old Regal Theatre,

waiting to see Duke or Ella emerge from a gig." Not exactly sitting at the foot of a raving "communist mentor"! This is just silly.

N/A. "When it was discovered that his grandparents, were strong socialists who sent Obama's mother to a socialist school where she was introduced to Frank Marshall Davis, a Black Liberation communist. He was later introduced to young Barrack Hussein Obama. People said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[Another missing point that didn't stand up to even minimal scrutiny, I guess. –SteveB]

WTF? This seems like a re-statement of the first accusation, see the above response. Are you accusing people of socialism or communism? The two are NOT the same. Educate yourself, get your facts straight, and get back to us when you make sense.

N/A. "When people found out that Barrack Hussein Obama was enrolled as a Muslim child in school and his father and stepfather were both Muslims, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[See #39, below. –SteveB]

N/A. "When Barack Obama wrote in another book he authored "I will stand with them (Muslims) should the political winds shift in an ugly direction", people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

What a surprise – this is taken out of context and misleading. From The Audacity of Hope, p.261, "Of course, not all my conversations in immigrant communities follow this easy pattern. In the wake of 9/11, my meetings with Arab and Pakistani Americans, for example, have a more urgent quality, for the stories of detentions and FBI questioning and hard stares from neighbors have shaken their sense of security and belonging. They have been reminded that the history of immigration in this country has a dark underbelly; they need specific assurances that their citizenship really means something, that America has learned the right lessons from the Japanese internments during World War II, and that I will stand with them should the political winds shift in an ugly direction."

N/A. When he admittedly, in his book, said he chose Marxist friends and professors in college, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

The actual quote refers to a time in college when, like many young people, he was concerned about what his friends thought. He didn't want to appear a "sell-out" to his friends. From Dreams From My Father: "To avoid being mistaken for a sellout, I chose my friends carefully. The more politically active black students. The foreign students. The Chicanos. The Marxist professors and structural feminists and punk-rock performance poets." Nothing scary there, unless you are a right wing wack job. ... "Boo!"

N/A. When he traveled to Pakistan, after college on an unknown national passport, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Factcheck.org calls this statement "More Birther nonsense" and explains that in 1981, at the time of Obama's visit, Americans freely traveled to Pakistan without incident, as shown by a travel piece that appeared in the New York Times in 1981, dated June 14. Barbara Crossette, an assistant news editor of the Times, told her mostly American readers they could travel to Lahore, Pakistan, by air, rail or road, adding: "Tourists can obtain a free, 30-day visa (necessary for Americans) at border crossings and airports."

N/A. When he sought the endorsement of the Marxist Party in 1996 as he ran for the Illinois Senate, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

OMG, what a load of crap. This was shown false years ago. Party founder denies Obama was member; campaign denies Obama sought party's endorsement. Carl Davidson stated that "Obama was never a man of the left, either in his view or in being a member of an actual socialist organization" It came from a right wing book that's been laughed at as "throwing the kitchen sink" at Obama.

<http://mediamatters.org/research/201005070018>

N/A. When he sat in a Chicago Church for twenty years and listened to a preacher spew hatred for America and preach black liberation theology, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Anyone who has been paying attention to the black experience in America and has listened to the sermons in context, knows that 1)the preacher had a point and 2)the right took a couple of quotes far out of context. We won't even point out the white preachers to tell their followers to hate gays, Muslims, Mexicans, etc. We won't even bring up the crazy right wing preacher who says that Hitler was sent by "god". We won't even bring up the wack-jobs who protest at funerals with signs that say god hates everybody. Nope, don't need to do it.

N/A. When an independent Washington organization, that tracks Senate voting records, gave him the distinctive title as the "most liberal senator," people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Yawn. If Obama is a "liberal" then I'm George Washington. Being slightly human is not being liberal. I only wish he were actually liberal.

N/A. When the Palestinians in Gaza set up a fund raising telethon to raise money for his election campaign, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

In a case earlier this year, the Obama campaign returned \$33,000 to two Palestinian brothers in the Gaza Strip who had bought T shirts in bulk from the campaign's online store. They had listed their address as "Ga.," which the campaign took to mean Georgia rather than Gaza. When the error was discovered, the funds were returned in full.

N/A. When his voting record supported gun control, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

Yawn again. So far, only two gun bills have crossed the President's desk. Both liberalized gun rights, and both were signed into law by Obama. Many of us disagreed with his allowing loaded weapons into our National Parks, for example, but President Obama supported the rights of gun owners to do so. However, the NRA and gun manufacturers make a LOT of money by stoking the fears of gun fetishists. Stores sold out of both guns and ammunition after the election because the propaganda was so effective.

1. "When Barack Obama refused to disclose who donated money to his election campaign, as other candidates had done, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

2. "When he received endorsements from people like Louis Farrakhan, Mummar Kadaffi, Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

This is another complex situation that requires actual critical thinking. We'll have to list each name individually to get to the truth:

Farrakhan: Barack Obama denounced the recent support for his candidacy expressed Sunday by controversial minister and Nation of Islam leader Louis Farrakhan.

"I have been very clear in my denunciation" of Farrakhan's history of anti-Semitic remarks, Obama said at the Democratic debate in Cleveland, "I did not solicit his support." Some commentators found Farrakhan's "endorsement" suspect because Farrakhan knew full well that his endorsement would badly damage Obama. Rumors about that he was paid to make this endorsement, but the question is: by whom? The GOP or the Clinton campaign are likely suspects, but "the truth may never come out." Unrelated fact: McCain was endorsed by White Racist David Duke, but did NOT reject Duke's endorsement, probably out of fear that he would alienate The Base. This is the same "Southern Strategy" Republican politics that has been successfully at work since the Nixon years.

Kadaffi: Did indeed say he preferred Obama over McCain, but his ties with the US, the GOP and McCain specifically have been very close for many many years. Wikileaks cables memorialize an August 2009

meeting between Gaddafi and his son Muatassim, with US Republican Senators John McCain (Arizona), Lindsey Graham (South Carolina), Susan Collins (Maine) and Connecticut "independent" Joe Lieberman. McCain took the lead in currying favor with the Gaddafis. According to the embassy cable, he "assured" them that the United States wanted to provide Libya with the military equipment and weaponry it needed.

Castro: *The subject line of an e-mail from the Republican Party of Florida was designed to deceive and grab attention: "Fidel Castro endorses Obama." Inside was a doctored phony image of Castro holding a poster of Obama. Above Castro are the words, "I love this guy!" The truth? Castro actually spent most of his words criticizing a speech Obama made to the Cuban American National Foundation in Miami just a few days before this email was crafted, on May 23. According to Politifact, Castro said, "Presidential candidate Obama's speech may be formulated as follows: hunger for the nation, remittances as charitable handouts and visits to Cuba as propaganda for consumerism and the unsustainable way of life behind it." Not exactly a warm and fuzzy endorsement. Katie Gordon, press secretary for the Republican Party of Florida, said the whole thing was a "joke". The "cartoon" image, she said, was not meant to be taken literally.*

Chavez: *Chavez said there was no difference between the Obama and McCain, and that US-Venezuela relations would not improve if Obama won in November.*

3. "When it was pointed out that he was a total newcomer and had absolutely no experience at anything except community organizing, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

As the first black president of the Harvard Law Review, Obama made history. He also worked as a civil rights attorney and taught constitutional law at the University of Chicago Law School from 1992 to 2004. He served three terms representing the 13th District in the Illinois Senate from 1997 to 2004. President Obama had plenty of experience in leading, legislating, and working with diverse types of people, and indeed, specialized in getting people of differing ideas to come together and compromise. So, yes, he is quite experienced and equipped to govern – far more than a certain half-term governor from Alaska, for example. Read more about Obama at Harvard: <http://www.law.harvard.edu/news/obama-at-hls.html>.

4. "When he chose friends and acquaintances such as Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn who were convicted revolutionary radicals, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

What should we address first? That Bill Ayers is a retired professor in the College of Education at the University of Illinois at Chicago, formerly holding the titles of Distinguished Professor of Education and Senior University Scholar, or that they're not "close friends" but barely know one another? Another snooze fest.

5. "When his voting record and lack of taking positions in the Illinois senate and in the U.S. Senate came into question, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

6. "When he refused to wear an American flag lapel pin, and did so only after a public outcry, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Oh Pull-eeze, not that crazy idea. As if wearing a made-in-China flag pin on your lapel says anything at all, except that your PR person thinks that Americans are dumb enough to be swayed by it.

7. "When people started treating him as a Messiah and children in schools were taught to sing his praises, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Latest Right-Wing Ragegasm: School Kids Sing of Obama for Black History Month

So, a school teacher had some kids sing a song about the country's first black president for Black History Month. Perhaps more partisanship in our education system than one would like, but given the context a

relatively minor manner. For normal people, that is — but the video got posted on Youtube and the usual suspects on the right freaked out, screaming of socialist indoctrination and yadda, yadda.

Predictably, there were right supremist death threats against the school's principal.

Dangerous though they may be, it can be pretty hard to take the kind of people who freak out over this stuff seriously.

By the way, have you watched "Jesus Camp"? The children were encouraged to pray "at" a life size cutout photo of G.W. Bush. Some were crying hysterically. The teachers routinely blended conservative politics, fetishism of Bush and Christianity into one unholy mix. You can watch the entire movie at the link above. It is truly frightening.

8. "When he stood with his hands over his groin area for the playing of the National Anthem and Pledge of Allegiance, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Oh look, we found one that's partially true! Someone did manage to snap a photo showing Barack Obama with hands clasped respectfully in front of him (presumably what the author considers "his groin area") during the singing of the national anthem, which got a lot of right-wing publicity. And, of course, there are multiple photos of Barack Obama with hand over heart during the pledge. Does this matter? Evidently to the author, posing correctly during the entire anthem every time makes the man. Certainly we could find GOP candidates in various positions during the National Anthem, but I doubt that anyone other than a right-wing PR firm would take the time to find such images.

9. "When he surrounded himself in the White house with advisors who were pro-gun control, pro-abortion, pro-homosexual marriage and wanting to curtail freedom of speech to silence the opposition, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Wrong again. One of Obama's first rules allowed MORE guns into National Parks. Liberals, progressives, animal lovers, and sane people decried this decision, but the NRA loved it. Many liberals are deeply disappointed in Obama's pro-gun decision, among others.

- N/A "When he aired his views on abortion, homosexuality and a host of other issues, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[He upholds the Constitution as mandated by the Constitution itself and the Supreme Court, even in the matter of *Roe v. Wade*, just as George Bush did. He has stated that his goal is fewer abortions. I don't know what more you can rationally expect from a President in a secular country based on a system of Law. And, as stated below, his position can't possibly be construed as weird or unusual since it has been proven time and time again that the majority of Americans do not favor a return to abortions being illegal. Period. – SteveB]

Actually, people said it DID matter and voted him in because of it. The majority of Americans are not afraid of gay people and still favor women's right to choose.

10. "When he said he favors sex education in Kindergarten, including homosexual indoctrination, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

False. A McCain-Palin campaign ad claims Obama's "one accomplishment" in the area of education was "legislation to teach 'comprehensive sex education' to kindergarteners." But the claim is simply false, and it dates back to Alan Keyes' failed race against Obama for an open Senate seat in 2004.

Obama, contrary to the ad's insinuation, does not support explicit sex education for kindergarteners. And the bill, which would have allowed only "age appropriate" material and a no-questions-asked opt-out policy for parents, was not his accomplishment to claim in any case, since HE WAS NOT EVEN A CO-SPONSOR – and the bill never left the state Senate.

11. "When his personal background was either scrubbed or hidden and nothing could be found about him, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

12. "When the place of his birth was called into question, he initially refused to produce a birth certificate, then produced one that is an obvious forgery, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Bwaaa-ha-ha! Oh, sorry, we're not here to laugh at the birthers. Snopes.com, Politifact, and factcheck.org have called the entire birth certificate "question" a joke, including the charge that the long form is somehow a forgery. We'll file this under "loonie bin".

13. "When he had an association in Chicago with Tony Rezko-a man of questionable character and who is now in prison and had helped Obama to a sweet deal on the purchase of his home, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

14. "When it became known that George Soros, a multi-billionaire and Marxist, spent a ton of money to get him elected, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

George Soros is not a Marxist, but is a philanthropist and human rights champion, and has helped bring down three communist governments. He has stated that he will no longer support President Obama because Obama's policies are so conservative, and more resemble a republican of about 30 years ago than a democrat, much less a liberal democrat. By the way, the Koch brothers control far more money than Mr. Soros, and outright have purchased many, many republican politicians and continue to use their vast wealth to influence elections in multiple states. One of the worst corporate polluters in this United States, they continue to destroy our lands, air, and water while they also actively attempt to destroy the middle class in America. These guys are power-hungry despots, while Soros is an acclaimed author, a philanthropist and human rights champion world-wide.

15. "When he started appointing White House Czars that were radicals, revolutionaries, and even avowed Marxist/Communist, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

WTF?

16. "When he stood before the Nation and told us that his intentions were to "fundamentally transform this Nation" into something else, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Ooh, "something else" sounds scary. Let's use real descriptions: How about this? "Into a better, stronger nation, more fair, with a stronger middle class". However, his continued compromising with corporatists who are intent upon looting our country, has made any kind of "transformation" impossible.

17. "When it became known that he had trained ACORN workers in Chicago and served as an attorney for ACORN, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Acorn, a wonderful organization that has helped the poor and disenfranchised to register to vote and to gain some help in America for decades, was the target of a dishonest right-wing activist who edited tapes and created false impressions. Fox "news" and its acolytes hammered this false story into the ground, and Congress rushed to de-fund Acorn – even while all charges against them were proven false and malicious. Sadly, this champion of democracy in America did not recover.

18. "When he appointed cabinet members and several advisors who were tax cheats, marxists and socialists, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

WTF?

19. "When he appointed a Science Czar, John Holdren, who believes in forced abortions, mass sterilizations and seizing babies from teen mothers, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

PolitiFact Gave Rumor A "Pants On Fire!" Rating, the rating reserved for the biggest lies.

20. "When he appointed Cass Sunstein as Regulatory Czar who believes in "Explicit Consent," harvesting human organs without family consent, and allowing animals to be represented in court, while banning all hunting, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

The campaign against Sunstein has largely written itself. One of the most regularly cited legal scholars, the author, co-author, or editor of dozens of books — two of them published since he was nominated to run OIRA — Sunstein has left a trail of theoretical writings and speeches that have provided plenty of ammo for conservative opponents— and frustrated his many conservative and libertarian supporters. StopSunstein.com, a Website launched by the American Conservative Union, is festooned with out-of-context quotes ("We ought to ban hunting") and fake newspaper headlines written as if Sunstein's opinions had become law — "Guns Banned!" and "FCC Pulls Plug on Limbaugh!" Much of the damaging material comes from "Nudge," a thoughtful 2007 book Sunstein wrote with the University of Chicago's Richard Thaler, which investigates the possibilities for "libertarian paternalism," not government control, to encourage good behavior. This, for example, is where the conservative CNSNews.com drew its damaging allegation headlined "Obama Regulation Czar Advocated Removing People's Organs Without Explicit Consent."

In January, the libertarian blogger and law professor Glenn Reynolds wrote a hearty endorsement of Sunstein, telling readers that the nomination "shows that the Obama Administration is perhaps willing to look at new and less intrusive approaches to regulation." Today, he sees the lengthy campaign against Sunstein as an unflattering example of "how the messed-up appointments process works."

By the way Sunstein is not only a friend of many conservatives, but is well respected and has testified before congressional committees on many subjects, and he has been involved in constitution-making and law reform activities in a number of nations, including Ukraine, Poland, China, South Africa, and Russia. A member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Mr. Sunstein has been Samuel Rubin Visiting Professor of Law at Columbia, visiting professor of law at Harvard, vice-chair of the ABA Committee on Separation of Powers and Governmental Organizations, chair of the Administrative Law Section of the Association of American Law Schools, a member of the ABA Committee on the future of the FTC, and a member of the President's Advisory Committee on the Public Service Obligations of Digital Television Broadcasters.

21. "When he appointed Kevin Jennings, a homosexual, and organizer of a group called Gay, lesbian, straight, education network as Safe School Czar and it became known that he had a history of bad advice to teenagers, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

False. In an interview with Media Matters, the young man in the center of the controversy said the charges against Jennings isn't true:

Since I was of LEGAL CONSENT at the time, the fifteen-minute conversation I had with Mr. Jennings TWENTY-ONE YEARS AGO is of nobody's concern but his and mine. However, since the Republican noise machine is so concerned about my "well-being" and that of America's students, they'll be relieved to know that I was not "inducted" into homosexuality, assaulted, raped, or sold into sexual slavery. In 1988, I had taken a bus home for the weekend, and on the return trip met someone who was also gay. The next day, I had a conversation with Mr. Jennings about it. I had no sexual contact with anybody at the time, though I was entirely legally free to do so. I was a sixteen year-old going through something most of us have experienced: adolescence. I FIND IT REGRETTABLE THAT THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE THE COMPASSION AND INTEGRITY TO PROTECT OUR NATION'S STUDENTS ARE THEMSELVES IN NEED OF PROTECTION FROM HOMOPHOBIC SMEAR ATTACKS. Were it not for Mr. Jennings' courage and concern for my well-being at that time in my life, I doubt I'd be the proud gay man that I am today.

22. "When he appointed Mark Lloyd, as Diversity Czar, who believes in curtailing free speech; taking from one and giving to another to spread the wealth; who supports Hugo Chavez, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Since the FCC appointed Mark Lloyd as the agency's Chief Diversity Officer/Associate General Counsel on July 29, conservatives have made him their new target in the ongoing campaign to baselessly warn about the reemergence of the Fairness Doctrine.

The most absurd attacks have come from pundits like right-wing radio host Michael Savage, who has called Lloyd a "neo-Nazi" and "piece of garbage" intent on closing down "conservatives in the media." He said that Lloyd's title — Chief Diversity Officer — is "code word for the KGB." For the record, Lloyd has a distinguished career on communications policy issues. Most recently he was a vice president at the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. He taught communications policy at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, served as general counsel to the Benton Foundation, worked as a communications attorney at a major D.C. law firm, and has nearly 20 years of experience in journalism. Obviously, the right-wing noise machine continues unchecked and its lies continue to go uncorrected in the corporate media.

23. "When Valerie Jarrett was selected as Obama's Senior White House Advisor and she is an avowed Socialist, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Valerie Jarrett is NOT a communist, although it is rumored that her husband's father was once affiliated with them. How do these lies take hold? This one was invented in the conservative World Net Daily, and then repeated ad nauseum by Glenn Beck on Fox "news". WorldNetDaily's smear-monger-in-chief, Aaron Klein, ran an attack piece on Valerie Jarrett, the president's senior adviser, accusing her of Communist ties. It's Beck candy, wrapped up with a big, fat, racist bow.

His lead: "Was Valerie Jarrett, one of President Obama's closest advisers, introduced to the president's political circles by her father-in-law, a communist sympathizer who worked with the radical Obama mentor Frank Marshall Davis?"

The icing: "Jarrett reportedly interviewed Obama's former environmental adviser Van Jones for his White House position from which he resigned this past weekend. WND exposed Jones is an admitted black nationalist and radical communist. Jarrett defended Jones after his appointment in March. She stated in an interview that the White House staff were 'so delighted to be able to recruit him into the White House.'"

Klein goes on to claim that "Jarrett's family background and her initial introduction to Obama may tie her to Jones' radical ideology" because her father-in-law worked with Davis, whom Klein describes as "the controversial labor movement activist who has been identified as an early influence on Obama." As well as Jarrett's own work with—gasp!—lots of black people in Chicago. By the way, World Net Daily's board of directors is mostly comprised of secretive, powerful California conservatives — plus a man on the lam for tax evasion.

24. "When Anita Dunn, White House Communications Director said Mao Tse Tung was her favorite philosopher-and the person she turned to most for inspiration, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

N/A "When Barack Obama, as president, refused to uphold the Defense of Marriage Act, unilaterally declaring it unconstitutional, the people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Thank any gods and goddesses! Maybe we can finally stop appeasing the religious theocratic dominionists and move out of their craziness. They had far too much influence in the Bush administration and nearly destroyed our country with their backward attempt to force their ideas on the rest of us.

25. "When he appointed Carol Browner as Global Warming Czar, and her being a well known Socialist working on Cap and Trade as the nations largest tax, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

I am tempted to make a rude sound here.

26. "When he appointed Van Jones, an ex-con and avowed Communist as Green Energy Czar, who since had to resign when this was made known, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

There was no such thing as a "Green Energy Czar." Van Jones was not an ex-con. Van Jones is not a communist. He is a rather amazing man who cares deeply about America, who advises us to "keep the love" and "work for the best". To read a good de-bunking of the bull about Van Jones, visit: <http://www.grist.org/article/2009-09-02-cleaning-some-of-the-fox-off-of-van-jones>.

27. "When Tom Daschle, Obama's pick for health and human services secretary could not be confirmed, because he was a tax cheat, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Ooh, we found a true statement! Yes, Tom screwed himself — and us — by owing taxes on unreported income and the use of a car and driver provided to Daschle . He would have probably made a good health and human services secretary. Too bad so many wealthy people 'forget' to pay what little taxes they owe...on both sides of the aisle.

28. "When as President of the United States , he bowed to the King of Saudi Arabia , people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Oh that's just funny. Can't resist this:



29. "When he traveled around the world criticizing America and never once talking of her greatness, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[This one is completely and positively ridiculous! –SteveB]

nothing

30. "When his actions concerning the Middle-East seemed to support the Palestinians over Israel, our long time ally, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

31. "When he took American tax dollars to resettle thousands of Muslim Palestinians and Somalis in the United States, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

32. "When he upset the Europeans by removing plans for a missile defense system against the Russians, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

33. "When he played politics in Afghanistan by not sending troops early-on when the Field Commanders said they were necessary to win, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

nothing

34. "When he started spending us into a debt that was so big we might never be able to pay it off, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Excuse me? What planet are you living on? Is anyone, anywhere not aware that George W. Bush wracked up the highest debt in the history of the United States? Even with budgetary trickery such as moving Social Security Funds and not entering the costs of his TWO WARS into the budget, Bush is still on record as the biggest spender of any administration, EVER.

35. "When he took a huge spending bill under the guise of stimulus and used it to pay off international bankers, Wall Street donors, socialists organizations, unions, and individuals that got him elected, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[See #34. –SteveB]

36. "When he took over insurance companies, car companies, banks, etc., people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

The federal government temporarily

37. When he took away student loans from the banks and put it under the control of the government, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

nothing

38. When he designed plans to take over the health care system and put it under government control, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER.

What? Despite the fact that most citizens favored the public option, President Obama took it "off the table" and left the private corporate insurance in charge – NOT the government. His painfully modest bill address a few of the insurance companies most onerous and cruel policies. For example: They must now spend 80% of what they take in on the customers health rather than ever higher CEO pay. (Ooh, that's so scary!) They are no longer allowed to drop a customer when they become ill and require treatment (so un-American!). They cannot refuse to accept a person with a pre-existing condition.(Isn't this anti-capitalism?) To reiterate, the government of THE PEOPLE is still not in control of health care in America. Not even close. Liberal citizens are frustrated and disappointed with Obama over this, as well as many other policies.

- 39 "When he claimed he was a Christian during the election and tapes were later made public that showed Obama speaking to a Muslim group and 'stating' that he was raised a Muslim; was educated as a Muslim; and that he is still a Muslim, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

[President Obama has said very seriously that he is a Christian. When did Christians stop taking the word of other Christians as to their faith? Not very Christ-like, if you ask me. –SteveB]

How very faux news-like to use a clever misspelling of "Barack" and adding the "Hussein" middle name. Why, he must not be a "real Amerikin" like somebody named "Bubba" or "Jim-Bob"!

According to snopes.com, Barack Obama's FATHER although raised a Muslim, like many people raised as Christians, had rejected his childhood religion and was actually an ATHEIST when he married Barack's mother. Obama's mother went out of her way to educate her son in a multitude of religious studies. Obama's book says, "In our household the Bible, the Koran, and the Bhagaved Gita sat on the shelf alongside books of Greek and Norse and African mythology. On Easter or Christmas Day my mother might drag me to church, just as she dragged me to the Buddhist temple, the Chinese New Year celebration, the Shinto shrine, and ancient Hawaiian burial sites." In the 4-5 years spent in Indonesia, Obama attended both Catholic and Muslim schools because his mother wanted him to obtain the very best education possible. He never attended a "madrassa". Barack Obama is a Christian.

40. "When he set into motion a plan to take over the control of all energy in the United States through Cap and Trade regulations, people said IT DIDN'T MATTER."

Cap and Trade was originally a Republican idea.

20120213-01 10:12 NormF The State of the Nation

I've read your information sent to me via email. Would "Friends of the Middle" be willing to state a few thing on my behalf? I made a bid to have my name placed on the ballot in West Virginia.(see twitter, fergn). America has no idea about this sad situation. America has not a clue as to what's actually occurring. For instance, the countries we have invaded. for a search for weapons of mass destruction. The oil fields now in the hands of the USA. The same rich countries whose common citizens have no electricity, not to mentions a vehicle.

It seems Iran is the new target of USA propaganda. As with Saddam or the guy with a dialysis machine (O.bin laden). The common man will never see/hear their opinions (Whooh, for the Iran president). Only what the major 3 networks allow (news/media). Example being: UH forgive me for my ignorance, but I could have sworn I heard there was some kind of protest upon Wall Street or Oakland, California—a 99% vs. 1% debate occurring. This is my point. The upper class has chosen, most are not a part. Think about it. In all states the same group of people run for politics. Some have spent generations ~40 to 75 years in power. Yeah, it's going to change , ha ha ha. Well I love America. So god bless the meek.

20120213-03 15:29 GaryF Life Expectancy Calculator

I appear to be good until 91.

This is a calculator that estimates your life expectancy. It's pretty cool. It was developed by Northwestern Mutual Life. It's interesting that there are only 13 questions. Yet, they believe they can predict how long you're likely to live.

<http://media.nmfn.com/tnetwork/lifespan>

20120213-04 15:32 SteveG Fw: DCCC Petition: Support President Obama's Budget!

<http://dccc.org/pages/budget>

President Obama just sent his budget to Congress that would finally end special tax breaks for the top 1%. The President's plan includes the "Buffett Rule," which would put an end to the days of multi-millionaires paying a smaller share of their income in taxes than middle-class families.

Republicans in Congress and right-wing pundits are already attacking President Obama's plan, which would ensure the wealthy pay their fair share. Will you stand behind President Obama's budget?

Help us reach 100,000 signatures in the next 24 hours supporting President Obama's budget that would ensure millionaires pay their fair share.

[I fully support this petition, but, to me, the problem is not the people taking a stand with the President, it's the President taking a stand he doesn't sell-out on. –SteveB]

20120213-06 16:28 SteveG

The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks"

Given the contents of the article below, the talk from Catholics about the US movement on birth control seems even more irrelevant – they have more problems than most governments all cloaked in the name of religion.

"Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" by Philip Pullella, Reuters

Feb. 13, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/monsignors-mutiny-revealed-vatican-leaks-140524856.html>)

(VATICAN CITY) Call it Conspiracy City. Call it Scandal City. Call it Leak City. These days the holy city has been in the news for anything but holy reasons.

"It is a total mess," said one high-ranking Vatican official who spoke, like all others, on the condition of anonymity.

The Machiavellian maneuvering and machinations that have come to light in the Vatican recently are worthy of a novel about a sinister power struggle at a medieval court.

Senior church officials interviewed this month said almost daily embarrassments that have put the Vatican on the defensive could force Pope Benedict to act to clean up the image of its administration - at a time when the church faces a deeper crisis of authority and relevance in the wider world.

Some of those sources said the outcome of a power struggle inside the Holy See may even have a longer-term effect, on the choice of the man to succeed Benedict when he dies.

From leaked letters by an archbishop who was transferred after he blew the whistle on what he saw as a web of corruption and cronyism, to a leaked poison pen memo which puts a number of cardinals in a bad light, to new suspicions about its bank, Vatican spokesmen have had their work cut out responding.

The flurry of leaks has come at an embarrassing time - just before a usually joyful ceremony this week known as a consistory, when Benedict will admit more prelates into the College of Cardinals, the exclusive men's club that will one day pick the next Roman Catholic leader from among their own ranks.

"This consistory will be taking place in an atmosphere that is certainly not very glorious or exalting," said one bishop with direct knowledge of Vatican affairs.

The sources agreed that the leaks were part of an internal campaign - a sort of "mutiny of the monsignors" - against the pope's right-hand man, Secretary of State Cardinal Tarcisio Bertone.

Bertone, 77, has a reputation as a heavy-handed administrator and power-broker whose style has alienated many in the Curia, the bureaucracy that runs the central administration of the 1.3 billion-strong Roman Catholic Church.

He came to the job, traditionally occupied by a career diplomat, in 2006 with no experience of working in the church's diplomatic corps, which manages its international relations. Benedict chose him, rather, because he had worked under the future pontiff, then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, in the Vatican's powerful doctrinal office.

"It's all aimed at Bertone," said a monsignor in a key Vatican department who sympathizes with the secretary of state and who sees the leakers as determined to oust him. "It's very clear that they want to get rid of Bertone."

Vatican sources say the rebels have the tacit backing of a former secretary of state, Cardinal Angelo Sodano, an influential power-broker in his own right and a veteran diplomat who served under the late Pope John Paul II for 15 years.

"The diplomatic wing feels that they are the rightful owners of the Vatican," the monsignor who favors Bertone said.

Sodano and Bertone are not mutual admirers, to put it mildly. Neither has commented publicly on the reports.

Whistle-Blowing Archbishop

The Vatican has been no stranger to controversy in recent years, when uproar over its handling of child sex abuse charges has hampered the church's efforts to stem the erosion of congregations and priestly recruitment in the developed world.

But the latest image crisis could not be closer to home.

It began last month when an Italian television investigative show broadcast private letters to Bertone and the pope from Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, the former deputy governor of the Vatican City and currently the Vatican ambassador in Washington.

The letters, which the Vatican has confirmed are authentic, showed that Vigano was transferred after he exposed what he argued was a web of corruption, nepotism and cronyism linked to the awarding of contracts to contractors at inflated prices.

As deputy governor of the Vatican City for two years from 2009 to 2011, Vigano was the number two official in a department responsible for maintaining the tiny city-state's gardens, buildings, streets, museums and other infrastructure, which are managed separately from the Italian capital which surrounds it.

In one letter, Vigano writes of a smear campaign against him by other Vatican officials who were upset that he had taken drastic steps to clean up the purchasing procedures and begged to stay in the job to finish what he had started.

Bertone responded by removing Vigano from his position three years before the end of his tenure and sending him to the United States, despite his strong resistance.

Other leaks center on the Vatican bank, just as it is trying to put behind it past scandals - including the collapse 30 years ago of Banco Ambrosiano, which entangled it in lurid allegations about money-laundering, freemasons, mafiosi and the mysterious death of Ambrosiano chairman Roberto Calvi - "God's banker."

Today, the Vatican bank, formally known as the Institute for Works of Religion (IOR), is aiming to comply fully with international norms and has applied for the Vatican's inclusion on the European Commission's approved "white list" of states that meet EU standards for total financial transparency.

Bertone was instrumental in putting the bank's current executives in place and any lingering suspicion about it reflects badly on him. The Commission will decide in June and failure to make the list would be an embarrassment for Bertone.

Italian Pope?

Last week, an Italian newspaper that has published some of the leaks ran a bizarre internal Vatican memo that involved one cardinal complaining about another cardinal who spoke about a possible assassination attempt against the pope within 12 months and openly speculated on who the next pope should be.

Bertone's detractors say he has packed the Curia with Italian friends. Some see an attempt to influence the election of the next pope and increase the chances that the papacy returns to Italy after two successive non-Italian popes who have broken what had been an Italian monopoly for over 450 years.

Seven of the 18 new "cardinal electors" -- those aged under 80 eligible to elect a pope -- at this Saturday's consistory are Italian. Six of those work for Bertone in the Curia.

Bertone, as chief administrator, had a key role in advising the pope on the appointments, which raised eyebrows because of the high number of Italian bureaucrats among them.

"There is widespread malaise and delusion about Bertone inside the Curia. It is full of complaints," said the bishop who has close knowledge of Vatican affairs.

"Bertone has had a very brash method of running the Vatican and putting his friends in high places. People could not take it any more and said 'enough' and that is why I think these leaks are coming out now to make him look bad," he said.

Pope "Isolated"

Leaked confidential cables sent to the State Department by the U.S. embassy to the Vatican depicted him as a "yes man" with no diplomatic experience or linguistic skills and the 2009 cable suggests that the pope is protected from bad news.

"There is also the question of who, if anyone, brings dissenting views to the pope's attention," read the cable, published by WikiLeaks.

The Vatican sources said some cardinals asked the pope to replace Bertone because of administrative lapses, including the failure to warn the pope that a renegade bishop re-admitted to the Church in 2009 was a well-known Holocaust denier.

But they said the pope, at 84 and increasingly showing the signs of his age, is not eager to break in a new right-hand man.

"It's so complicated and the pope is so helpless," said the monsignor.

The bishop said: "The pope is very isolated. He lives in his own world and some say the information he receives is filtered. He is interested in his books and his sermons but he is not very interested in government."

(Editing by Jon Boyle and Alastair Macdonald)

20120213-07 16:39 Dennis Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)

Hope they don't change their medieval clown costumes. They're soooo photogenic.

If that offends any Catholics or Christians of any other sect, then check out this bit of blasphemy (or revelations of religious myths, depending on how you look at it):

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTyVWACKii0&feature=related>

20120213-08

18:43 Pam

Re: The "Church"—Chpt. 23: "Monsignors' Mutiny" Revealed by Vatican Leaks" (reply to SteveG, above)

If only humanity could think of religion the way we think about art or music, something meaningful to enjoy but nothing to go to war over. You don't like Mozart? Off with your head! You find abstract art revolutionary? Lock up all the abstract expressionists. Ridiculous and pointless--just like hating and killing because someone prefers Allah to Ganesh.

20120213-09

20:26 SteveB

"The War for Privatization"

"The War for Privatization" by Dekker Dreyer, NationofChange

Feb. 13, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/war-privatization-1329146614>)

Can the private sector really do a better job than the government? That's what lobbies in the health insurance, energy, and educational sectors would have us believe.

A Gallop poll from November of 2009 shows that 81% of Americans were satisfied with their personal health care options, as opposed to the results of a 2003 Washington Post-ABC News poll which indicated over 62% of Americans wanted, "a universal health insurance program, in which everybody is covered under a program like Medicare that's run by the government and financed by taxpayers". As of November 2011 Gallup indicates, within a four point margin of error, that the nation is in favor of repealing the Obama administration's health care reforms.

Does this indicate that over the last decade our private health insurance system has drastically increased the quality of its services? It's possible, but unlikely. Unless there was a dramatic shift in the American health industry there is no data to dispute the widening gap between the US mortality rate and that of other developed nations like Australia, as cited in a 2010 article in the New England Journal of Medicine. Despite the positive message being put forward by special interests, the private health care system continues to decline against the public options presented by other first world countries.

This under-performance is also true for the energy industry, where deregulation in the state of New Jersey caused unexpected increases in the average cost of electricity as opposed to the theorized consumer savings. Lack of incentive to improve facilities contrasted with few new players entering the market lead to poor service and rising prices.

Arguments toward privatizing our nation's educational system are also gaining considerable ground against public schools and teachers' unions across the country, even with less than stellar performance by for-profit alternatives. K12 Inc., one of the nation's leading online charter school companies, is the subject of a damning new report previewed to the New York Times from Western Michigan University and the National Education Policy Center highlighting the fact that only one in three of K12's total student population are achieving adequate progress. This new data reinforces the position of the center's president Jack Jennings that, "Contrary to popular belief, we can find no evidence that private schools actually increase student performance".

With all the available information leaving private enterprise, at best, on-par with their government run counterparts, why are private businesses still widely believed to be more efficient than public services? Since the 1980s The corporate lobby for privatized social services has backed many conservative campaigns and developed a public-facing media strategy to undermine government services that were once considered the envy of the developed world.

Right-wing financiers, like the DeVos family, have waged one such war against the American school system for decades. Through organizations like The Alliance for the Separation of School & State they have engineered the concept of school vouchers as a first step toward dismantling public education as we know it.

Joseph Bast, President and CEO of the conservative Heartland Institute is quoted as saying, "The complete privatization of schooling might be desirable, but this objective is politically impossible for the time being. Vouchers are a type of reform that is possible now, and would put us on the path to further privatization."

Are the rewards of deregulation worth the cost of such a massive public relations effort? All indications are yes, privatization can be incredibly profitable. Take, for example, Affiliated Computer Services' (a division of Xerox) contract to distribute California's welfare benefits. Bank fees and other end-user charges took \$17.4 million from the state's working poor in 2010; this is on top of the company's lucrative service contract.

In late 2011, K12 Inc. posted record profits, and although their stock (NYSE: LRN) recently took a 46% drop, they are still estimated to reap revenues north of \$680 million in the 2012 fiscal year. K12 is only one of a myriad of players in the semi-private charter education field.

The real question is what happens to the quality of these services when they're under pressure to keep a high market capitalization. As a publicly traded corporation K12 is required to act in the best interest of its shareholders, which translates to producing increased profits. Having essentials, like education, monetized in this way raises real concerns about how such a business will keep its profits growing after enrollment reaches a saturation point. Consolidation of classes, reduction of the teaching force, and cuts to day to day expenses will all become realities as the corporation stretches to meet the goals of financial analysts.

Another danger is that every industry which becomes privatized is one less industry in which tax payers have a direct say. In the most extreme scenario, any debate over school curriculums or what medications to provide under schemes like planned parenthood would be immediately settled by closed votes in shareholder meetings. The average citizen would be at a complete disadvantage to challenge any aspect of these programs without the financial means to buy stock in their service provider.

Public agencies do not have the budget to craft an effective counter-marketing message because every dollar goes toward the operation of much needed services. These services, which are accountable to the general public, will never be volatile to financial markets or become budget line-items on corporate ledgers. For the immediate future there is no clear strategy for cleaning up the image of our nation's public services, but without such a strategy we may find ourselves in an American wasteland of even lower educational standards and few social safety nets that aren't somehow bankable.

20120213-10

23:59 SteveB

Photo: Magog Lake Sunrise (near Banff National Park, Canada)

<http://www.photographyblogger.net/25-amazing-locations-every-landscape-photographer-should-visit/>

Magog Lake Sunrise, Assiniboine Provincial Park, British Columbia, Canada (Jeff Pang)



—Friends of the Middle,

Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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