



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #77 — FEB. 20, 2012

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INDEX: Click here.

What the GOP Doesn't Want You to Know

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Feb. 20, 2012)

Ya, right, Democrats are all just a bunch of socialists. This Republican position will lead to nothing but Democratic victory. Here's a little quote for you, prompted by Rick Santorum's latest tactics. I think this does a great job of summing up the GOP in 2012:

Has the GOP become so intellectually bankrupt, so bereft of tenable principles and viable policies that the "Grand Old Party" must resort to rehashing the 2008 whisper campaign that President Obama is not a Christian? It's trite and vapid and would be outrageous if it just weren't so pitifully absurd. ...reasoned, rational conservative statesmen are growing rarer by the election cycle. More and more GOP politicians are incapable of simply disagreeing fundamentally and intellectually with an opponent and making their cases before the public. Instead, they ground their opposition in innuendo, name-calling, and flagrant lying to drive a false narrative born of suspicion and fear. —Brian Normoyle, Huffington Post

Today's article is thanks to Dennis.

"Why Obama's the Least Socialistic President in Modern History (And That's a Shame)" by Richard (RJ) Eskow, AlterNet

Feb. 18, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/154175/>)

The Republican presidential candidates keep calling Barack Obama a socialist. If they're trying to invoke the Red Menace like Republicans of past campaigns, they're a generation too late. Americans between the ages of 19 and 29 have no memory of the Cold War. Today they have a more positive impression of socialism than they do of capitalism.

The word "socialism" can be applied to a range of economic models, from Cuban collectivism to the Western European social democracies that are the home of some of the world's most successful corporations.

But until this election came along it had never been used to describe someone who expanded the private health insurance system, let a negligent company keep control of the cleanup for an environmental disaster it caused, offered to cut retirement and elder health benefits, and repeatedly insisted that the government should cut costs. This president is less socialistic than most of his predecessors, including many Republicans.

The irony is that socialist-inspired policies are popular with Americans, including many Republicans, even if the label is not. Polls suggest that a more "socialist" Obama would also be a more popular candidate, and the same is true of his opponents.

Socialisms

The word "socialism" is used to describe a spectrum of possible economies ranging from the Scandinavian model, where government involvement co-exists with multinational corporations, to the more communistic Cuban model and the idealistic anarcho-syndicalism of the anti-Franco insurgents in the Spanish Civil War.

The social democracy model emphasizes expanded public rights to social services and a more distributive tax base, but leaves ownership of production in capitalist hands. This form of socialism has had a major influence on the governments and economies of Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Finland. It hasn't interfered with the success of multinational corporations like Mercedes-Benz, Nokia, Deutschebank, Barclays Bank, or Ferrari.

Socialist ideas have a long history in the United States. Socialist and left-leaning parties were the first to propose a number of ideas that are now considered core American ideals, including civil rights, antipoverty programs, Social Security and Medicare.

The Pink Menace

But socialism was once linked with the Soviet Union, America's nuclear foe, which gave it an aura of treachery and danger it no longer possesses.

The Republicans who call Obama a socialist are using a GOP tactic that reached its zenith in Richard Nixon's 1950 Senate victory against Helen Gahagan Douglas. Nixon supporters handed out thousands of "Pink Sheet" flyers that year comparing his opponent's voting record to that of socialist-leaning New York City Representative Vito Marcantonio. Marcantonio ran on the American Labor Party ticket and belonged to several groups that were regarded as "red."

Douglas considered Nixon's actions thuggery, as did a number of other Americans in both parties. She called him as "a young man in a dark shirt," which was an indirect allusion to the fascists the US had been fighting five years before. (Upon hearing her remark, Nixon displayed an odd unfamiliarity with human anatomy. "Why, I'll castrate her!" the future president said. He also described Douglas as "pink right down to her underwear.")

Douglas found it hard to believe these attacks could be effective, and some people think her delay in responding to them cost her the election. But they did, and this set the tone for the next six decades of GOP campaigns.

Newtradamus

Newt Gingrich was the first of the current crop of contenders to attack Obama with the socialist label, as political writer John Nichols reminded me in a recent interview. Gingrich published a book last year titled *To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular-Socialist Machine*. Gingrich's publisher called it a "dire warning for America," which is "at risk for its very survival" after electing "the most liberal president ever."

Gingrich reacted to the GOP's 2010 electoral victories in his book by saying, "The American people rejected the secular-Socialist machine that had seized control of the Federal government."

In fact, one of the reasons Republicans really won in 2010 was because they ran a series of very effective ads around a so-called "Seniors' Bill of Rights" whose key proviso was a direct attack on "socialist" Obama's repeated attempts to negotiate entitlement cuts: "No cuts to Medicare to pay for another program," the Republicans declared. "Zero."

Yes, these Republicans were defending one of our country's most socialistic, and most popular programs, while accusing their "socialist" opponent of trying to cut it.

Gingrich's 2011 book waxes triumphant about recent conservative victories in Europe's three largest economies -- Germany, France and Great Britain. Within 18 months those governments' policies had plunged Europe into a deep recessionary spiral. He singles out the British election as a vote to "reverse years of socialist decay through a dramatic, Thatcher-like policy of radically shrinking the public sector, slashing government spending, reducing welfare, and restoring public enterprise."

What he didn't say is that Great Britain is now struggling with setbacks in unemployment, wages and growth, and recently weathered a series of nationwide riots sparked by economic conditions.

Gingrich was firm in his predictions for Obama in 2011. The president, said Gingrich, would embrace "card check" politics for unions and promote cap-and-trade to slow the ongoing destruction of our fragile ecosystem. Gingrich's predictions proved false as Obama quickly abandoned both initiatives.

Nostradamus he isn't. But Gingrich, undeterred by reality, still insists that Obama is imposing a "radical," "secular/socialist state" on the American people.

Red Tide

The socialist theme was quickly picked up by the other GOP candidates. "Obama's socialist policies are bankrupting America," said a Rick Perry TV ad. Michele Bachmann concluded her Iowa campaign by declaring she wouldn't let Obama "implement socialism" in the United States. Rick Santorum accused Obama of not doing enough to fight "militant socialism" around the world (the first draft of his presentation used the phrase "godless socialism"), adding that Obama is a "radical."

Front-runner Mitt Romney was the lone holdout, the only candidate not to label the president with the S-word. But he couldn't hold out forever, especially since both his rivals and the press pressed him about it repeatedly. He tried to avoid the question when he was asked directly whether Obama was a socialist, but finally allowed that the president "takes his political inspiration from Europe and from the socialist democrats in Europe." (Romney pointedly described Europe's "social democrats" as "socialist democrats" for maximum effect.)

And despite this year's lofty declarations against personal attacks, John McCain wasn't above a little red-baiting himself in the final weeks of the 2008 campaign. "At least in Europe the socialist leaders who so admire my opponent are upfront about their objectives," he said then. "They use real numbers and honest language."

The Enemy Within

In time-honored fashion, the red-baiters soon began to turn on one another. Gingrich described Romney as a "Massachusetts moderate" whose campaign was studying "European socialist ideas." And a caller to Rush Limbaugh's program even accused Limbaugh, who is above all else a Republican Party operative, of supporting the "socialist" Romney.

"If you're going to start throwing the 'socialism' term around there," Limbaugh answered indignantly, "I'll tell you, these are times of tumult."

Now he tells us.

Ron Paul's extreme libertarianism makes him, authentically, the least socialistic candidate in the race. Yet Paul was the only candidate who refused to call Obama a socialist. He's a "corporatist," said Paul, an assessment with considerably more evidence to support it.

Obama's Socialist Scorecard

Is Barack Obama a radical socialist, a "corporatist," or something else? A friendly journalist describes him as a "pro-business populist," and that's certainly been the posture he's tried to take. If "thin-skinned business leaders" ignore his rhetoric and "look at his proposals and record," writes Jonathan Alter, "they might be pleasantly surprised." Indeed.

John Nichols is the author of a book titled *The "S" Word: A Short History of an American Tradition ... Socialism*. When asked if Obama is a socialist he laughed and said, "Afraid not."

"In fact," Nichols added, "Obama is one of the most un-socialistic presidents this country's had in the last 150 years."

"When Barack Obama was asked to reform the healthcare system," Nichols said, "he rejected all of the models based on social democratic proposals, as well as their American 'single-payer' equivalent, and instead went for insurance reforms reforms that were initially proposed by the (conservative) Heritage Foundation." (The United States is the only developed nation without a "socialized" healthcare system, and its costs are twice those of many comparable countries.)

"There you see him rejecting social democratic ideas and going for a conservative model."

"Look at the Gulf oil spill," Nichols added, "a real disaster for America and the world. President Obama could have taken the response that Franklin Roosevelt and, I would argue, Dwight D. Eisenhower would have taken. He could have said 'Here's a big corporation that's caused us a huge, disastrous problem, and we cannot trust them to address that problem because of their past and current activities. So we're going to nationalize this problem ... control will be handed over to the Army Corps of Engineers and other agencies. Then we're going to assess this corporation for the cost of the cleanup.'"

"That's a solution with a social democratic overlay," said Nichols, "but also one that's very much rooted in the way this country's always done things. Obama didn't do that."

Red Dawn

Ironically, a more "socialistic" agenda could improve Obama's popularity – even among Republicans!

Polls taken during the health reform debate showed that 51 percent of Republican voters wanted a "public option" in the health bill that would allow them to purchase coverage from the "socialist" Medicare system. Even stronger majorities of voters overall supported the public option. But Obama never fought for it, and some reports indicated he had traded it away early on in return for a promise from the for-profit hospital industry that it would not resist the bill aggressively.

Other polls have shown that overwhelming majorities of Republican voters, including Tea Party members, oppose cutting Social Security or Medicare in order to reduce the federal deficit. Yet Obama created a "Deficit Commission" and appointed as its co-chairs two politicians who were publicly in favor of doing just that, and he has continued to offer cuts of that nature as part of a "Grand Bargain" with Republican leaders in Congress. A "millionaire's tax" is also popular among Republican voters, who also joined with other Americans in wanting the government to act more decisively to create jobs.

If the nation were governed by a referendum of Republican voters -- just Republicans -- it would be more "socialistic" than it has been under President Obama. Since these policies are supported even more strongly by Democrats and independents, a more "socialistic" Obama – one who rejected cuts to Medicare and Social Security, fought more aggressively for a "millionaires' tax," pushed a public option, and backed a more aggressive jobs agenda – would be more popular with American voters across the political spectrum.

Red Republicans

It's proven popular with previous presidents from both parties. In fact, based on their policies, most Republican presidents of the last century were more "socialistic" than Barack Obama. Eisenhower built the federal highway system and presided over the IRS when the top marginal tax rate for high earners was 91 percent.

Nixon proposed a minimum guaranteed income for all Americans, which he called a "negative income tax," without any Clinton-era preconditions like "workfare." It would have applied to all families with children, and passed

Congress but failed in the Senate. Nixon also imposed wage and price controls in 1971 to control inflation. These controls, while not considered traditionally "socialistic," were a radical imposition of state control over the private-sector economy.

Even Herbert Hoover, who presided over the Crash of 1929 and is often contrasted with FDR, described himself as a "progressive." He expanded the civil service, proposed a Department of Education and a guaranteed pension for all Americans, enlarged the national park system, ended private oil leases on government land, and formed an antitrust division within the Justice Department.

And, much as it irritates Republicans to be reminded of it, Ronald Reagan raised taxes 11 times.

Obama has proposed a reasonable \$476 billion program of infrastructure repair, but he's avoided the kinds of bold initiatives put forward by his Republican predecessors: No Hoover-like litany of progressive reforms, no major public projects like Eisenhower's highways, no Nixon-style negative income tax. And he certainly hasn't responded to our ongoing economic crisis with any state interventions on the scale of Nixon's wage and price controls.

Socialism's Super Salesmen

All this name-calling may not be helping the GOP, but there may be another surprise beneficiary: Socialism. The once-stigmatized ideology has become more acceptable since the fall of the Iron Curtain. The Pew Research Center reports that 31 percent of Americans have a favorable response to the term, while 61 percent respond negatively. The public's feelings about capitalism soured slightly in 2011, with approval/disapproval shifting from 52/37 to 50/40.

What's much more striking is the fact that, for the first time, more young people think favorably of socialism than they do of capitalism. Forty-nine percent of young people aged 18-29 have a positive view of socialism, while 43 percent see it negatively. Twenty months ago those numbers were reversed, making this a dramatic shift in youth opinion.

Which raises the question: Are today's Republican presidential candidates socialism's best salesmen?

Of course, many factors could be driving young people's improving opinion of socialism. Youth unemployment is at record highs, and they can see that little is being done to change that. The Occupy movement has highlighted the ills of unfettered capitalism. But could they also be watching the comic-opera figures on the GOP debate stage and being drawn to anything that group dislikes?

Nichols thinks so. "When they hear Republican politicians ranting and raving about socialism," he said, "young people may be thinking, 'If these yahoos are against it, it can't be that bad.' At the very least, I think it's opened up a great deal of interest in socialism as a alternative."

Socialism's Return?

Nichols notes that socialist parties were once part of a vigorous American debate and government's role in society. He believes that socialism should re-enter the mainstream and serve the same purpose on the left that libertarianism serves on the right.

There are even places where the two ideologies can collaborate, like civil liberties and foreign policy. As Nichols notes, many of today's mainstream ideas were first articulated by either libertarian or socialist thinkers.

And as Obama has embraced more seemingly "socialist" mainstream ideas – tax structure, or greater infrastructure spending – his popularity has risen.

Whatever happens, one thing's already clear: Love him or not, Barack Obama is no socialist. But socialist-inspired ideas remain as popular – and as American – as ever. That's something politicians in both parties would do well to remember.

(Richard Eskow is a writer, a senior fellow with the Campaign for America's Future, and the host of a weekly radio show, "The Breakdown.")

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FotM NEWSLETTER #77 (Feb. 20, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120220-00		SteveB	What the GOP Doesn't Want You to Know by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Why Obama's the Least Socialistic President in Modern History (& That's a Shame)")
20120217-01	10:16	Pam	"The 'Undue Weight' of Truth on Wikipedia"
20120217-02	21:06	SteveG	"Victory: MSNBC Dumps Pat Buchanan"
20120217-03	21:18	SteveG	Fw: Dennis Kucinich: A Prayer for America
20120217-04	22:47	SteveG	"The 5 Grossest Things You're Eating"
20120218-01	14:50	SteveG	"Republicans Are Unprotected on Contraception"
20120219-01	18:55	Dennis	"Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?"
20120219-02	19:44	Art	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120219-03	21:24	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)
20120219-04	21:40	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Art, above)
20120219-06	21:46	Jim	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to all, above)
20120219-07	21:57	Bill	Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Jim, above)
20120219-05	21:43	Jim	Video: Adele Trashes Newt Gingrich at the Grammys!
20120219-08	22:00	Jim	Video: Physics Lesson with a Knitting Needle in Space
20120219-09	22:25	Tom	Source for Gadgets/Electronics
20120219-10	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Salteña (inside)

20120217-01	10:16	Pam	"The 'Undue Weight' of Truth on Wikipedia"
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Remember Orwell's *1984* and the Ministry of Truth that rewrote history as they went along...

"The 'Undue Weight' of Truth on Wikipedia" by Mark Shaver, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*

Feb. 12, 2012, (<http://chronicle.com/article/The-Undue-Weight-of-Truth-on/130704/>)

For the past 10 years I've immersed myself in the details of one of the most famous events in American labor history, the Haymarket riot and trial of 1886. Along the way I've written two books and a couple of articles about the episode. In some circles that affords me a presumption of expertise on the subject. Not, however, on Wikipedia.

The bomb thrown during an anarchist rally in Chicago sparked America's first Red Scare, a high-profile show trial, and a worldwide clemency movement for the seven condemned men. Today the martyrs' graves are a national historic site, the location of the bombing is marked by a public sculpture, and the event is recounted in most American history textbooks. Its Wikipedia entry is detailed and elaborate.

A couple of years ago, on a slow day at the office, I decided to experiment with editing one particularly misleading assertion chiseled into the Wikipedia article. The description of the trial stated, "The prosecution, led by Julius Grinnell, did not offer evidence connecting any of the defendants with the bombing. ... "

Coincidentally, that is the claim that initially hooked me on the topic. In 2001 I was teaching a labor-history course, and our textbook contained nearly the same wording that appeared on Wikipedia. One of my students raised her hand: "If the trial went on for six weeks and no evidence was presented, what did they talk about all those days?" I've been working to answer her question ever since.

I have not resolved all the mysteries that surround the bombing, but I have dug deeply enough to be sure that the claim that the trial was bereft of evidence is flatly wrong. One hundred and eighteen witnesses were called to testify, many of them unindicted co-conspirators who detailed secret meetings where plans to attack police stations

were mapped out, coded messages were placed in radical newspapers, and bombs were assembled in one of the defendants' rooms.

In what was one of the first uses of forensic chemistry in an American courtroom, the city's foremost chemists showed that the metallurgical profile of a bomb found in one of the anarchists' homes was unlike any commercial metal but was similar in composition to a piece of shrapnel cut from the body of a slain police officer. So overwhelming was the evidence against one of the defendants that his lawyers even admitted that their client spent the afternoon before the Haymarket rally building bombs, arguing that he was acting in self-defense.

So I removed the line about there being "no evidence" and provided a full explanation in Wikipedia's behind-the-scenes editing log. Within minutes my changes were reversed. The explanation: "You must provide reliable sources for your assertions to make changes along these lines to the article."

That was curious, as I had cited the documents that proved my point, including verbatim testimony from the trial published online by the Library of Congress. I also noted one of my own peer-reviewed articles. One of the people who had assumed the role of keeper of this bit of history for Wikipedia quoted the Web site's "undue weight" policy, which states that "articles should not give minority views as much or as detailed a description as more popular views." He then scolded me. "You should not delete information supported by the majority of sources to replace it with a minority view."

The "undue weight" policy posed a problem. Scholars have been publishing the same ideas about the Haymarket case for more than a century. The last published bibliography of titles on the subject has 1,530 entries.

"Explain to me, then, how a 'minority' source with facts on its side would ever appear against a wrong 'majority' one?" I asked the Wiki-gatekeeper. He responded, "You're more than welcome to discuss reliable sources here, that's what the talk page is for. However, you might want to have a quick look at Wikipedia's civility policy."

I tried to edit the page again. Within 10 seconds I was informed that my citations to the primary documents were insufficient, as Wikipedia requires its contributors to rely on secondary sources, or, as my critic informed me, "published books." Another editor cheerfully tutored me in what this means: "Wikipedia is not 'truth,' Wikipedia is 'verifiability' of reliable sources. Hence, if most secondary sources which are taken as reliable happen to repeat a flawed account or description of something, Wikipedia will echo that."

Tempted to win simply through sheer tenacity, I edited the page again. My triumph was even more fleeting than before. Within seconds the page was changed back. The reason: "reverting possible vandalism." Fearing that I would forever have to wear the scarlet letter of Wikipedia vandal, I relented but noted with some consolation that in the wake of my protest, the editors made a slight gesture of reconciliation—they added the word "credible" so that it now read, "The prosecution, led by Julius Grinnell, did not offer credible evidence connecting any of the defendants with the bombing. ... " Though that was still inaccurate, I decided not to attempt to correct the entry again until I could clear the hurdles my anonymous interlocutors had set before me.

So I waited two years, until my book on the trial was published. "Now, at last, I have a proper Wikipedia leg to stand on," I thought as I opened the page and found at least a dozen statements that were factual errors, including some that contradicted their own cited sources. I found myself hesitant to write, eerily aware that the self-deputized protectors of the page were reading over my shoulder, itching to revert my edits and tutor me in Wiki-decorum. I made a small edit, testing the waters.

My improvement lasted five minutes before a Wiki-cop scolded me, "I hope you will familiarize yourself with some of Wikipedia's policies, such as verifiability and undue weight. If all historians save one say that the sky was green in 1888, our policies require that we write 'Most historians write that the sky was green, but one says the sky was blue.' ... As individual editors, we're not in the business of weighing claims, just reporting what reliable sources write."

I guess this gives me a glimmer of hope that someday, perhaps before another century goes by, enough of my fellow scholars will adopt my views that I can change that Wikipedia entry. Until then I will have to continue to shout that the sky was blue.

(Timothy Messer-Kruse is a professor in the School of Cultural and Critical Studies at Bowling Green State University. He is author of *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks*, to be published later this year by the University of Illinois Press.)

20120217-02	21:06	SteveG	"Victory: MSNBC Dumps Pat Buchanan"
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Some additional interesting reading with the links at the bottom of the Pat Buchanan piece.

"Victory: MSNBC Dumps Pat Buchanan" by ThinkProgress

Feb 17, 2012, (<http://thinkprogress.org/progress-report/victory-msnbc-dumps-pat-buchanan/>)

(Pat Buchanan's TEN Most Outrageous Statements.)

Sometimes victory comes quickly and sometimes it takes longer. In the case of Pat Buchanan, there's been literally years of organizing by progressives — including like Color of Change, Credo, and Media Matters — to draw attention to and hold him accountable for his racist, homophobic, and anti-Semitic statements.

Here's the rundown on his greatest misses:

1. Wanted to close the borders to protect white dominance. As he wrote in his 2006 book *State of Emergency*: "If we do not get control of our borders, by 2050 Americans of European descent will be a minority in the nation their ancestors created and built."
2. Blamed lower test scores on minorities. In his most recent book *Suicide of a Superpower: Will America Survive to 2025?*, he blames minorities for dragging down the country's test scores. "[T]he decline in academic test scores here at home and in international competition is likely to continue, as more and more of the children taking those tests will be African-American and Hispanic.
3. Claimed Jerry Sandusky's atrocities are because of "Homosexual marriage." Buchanan appeared on a right-wing radio show on November 15 to make some convoluted comparisons: "Let's take this Penn State thing...these horrors, there's an organization that marches in the gay pride parade in New York called—used to—called the North American Man Boy Love Association, which advocated voluntary sex along the lines of exactly what was going on at Penn State. Many of our political icons have marched in that parade right behind that NAMBLA float [...] This is now, homosexual marriage is now the civil rights cause of the decade."
4. Said the Jewish population in the United States dropped in the 90s because Jews aborted all their babies. Buchanan explains that the decline in the American Jewish population during the 1990s (a decline that a Brandeis study says never occurred), "is a result of the collective decision of Jews themselves. From Betty Friedan to Gloria Steinem in the 1970s to Ruth Bader Ginsburg today, Jewish women have led the battle for abortion rights. The community followed."
5. Asserted Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people including 69 teens in Norway, "may have been right." Buchanan called Breivik a coward, evil, and cold-blooded, and then proceeded to defend his twisted rationale for the killings: "As for a climactic conflict between a once-Christian West and an Islamic world that is growing in numbers and advancing inexorably into Europe for the third time in 14 centuries, on this one, Breivik may be right."
6. Claimed that all great nations punish the gays. In a Human Events column, Buchanan attacked California's 9th Circuit Judge Vaughn Walker after his ruling of Proposition 8 as unconstitutional as a "judicial tyrant," before going on to explain that "through history, all the great religions have condemned

homosexuality and all the great nations have proscribed or punished it. None ever placed homosexual liaisons on the same plane as traditional marriage, which is the bedrock institution of any healthy society.

7. Penned "The Affirmative Action Nobel." That's the title of Buchanan's October 13, 2009 column on Townhall.com in which he claims that President Obama's Nobel Prize was simply the result of affirmative action. And the column only got worse from there: "They have reinforced the impression that Obama is someone who is forever being given prizes — Ivy League scholarships, law review editorships, prime-time speaking slots at national conventions — he did not earn."

8. Argued that Poland and the United Kingdom had it coming in World War II. Buchanan seems to suggest in a 2009 column that World War II—and all the atrocities that accompanied it—was really the fault of Poland and Britain, for refusing to engage in diplomacy with Germany. "Why did Warsaw not negotiate with Berlin, which was hinting at an offer of compensatory territory in Slovakia? Because the Poles had a war guarantee from Britain that, should Germany attack, Britain and her empire would come to Poland's rescue."

9. Dabbled in Holocaust denial. Pat Buchanan danced alarmingly close to denying key facts of the Holocaust. In a 1990 column for the New York Post, he defended convicted Nazi war criminal Ivan Demjanjuk (whom he later compared to Jesus Christ) against charges from Holocaust survivors that he was guilty of murder by accusing the survivors of misremembering all of it: "This so-called 'Holocaust Survivor Syndrome' involves 'group fantasies of martyrdom and heroics.' Reportedly, half of the 20,000 survivor testimonies in Yad Vashem memorial in Jerusalem are considered 'unreliable,' not to be used in trials[...]The problem is: Diesel engines do not emit enough carbon monoxide to kill anybody."

10. Argued Hitler was an individual of "great courage." That's just one of the quotes that the Anti-Defamation League attributes to Buchanan in their compendium of offensive remarks from Buchanan over the years. In 1977, he qualified his labeling of Hitler as racist and anti-semitic by adding that "he was also an individual of great courage, a soldier's soldier in the Great War, a leader steeped in the history of Europe, who possessed oratorical powers that could awe even those who despised him[...]His genius was an intuitive sense of the mushiness, the character flaws, the weakness masquerading as morality that was in the hearts of the statesmen who stood in his path."

And since Republicans are apparently eager to reignite the divisive culture wars of the past, here's Buchanan's famous 1992 GOP Convention speech on the culture wars — a speech many believe helped cost President George H.W. Bush victory in that year's presidential election. Some of the language may be softer, but 20 years hence we still hear many of the same divisive attacks on progressive values from leading conservatives.

20120217-03	21:18	SteveG	Fw: Dennis Kucinich: A Prayer for America
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from <http://www.DennisKucinich.us>:

10 years ago today, Dennis Kucinich gave his "Prayer for America" Speech....which even after ten years maintains a fresh sense of urgency.

Watch the speech here:

<http://action.kucinich.us/page/m/13310fea/111cc9d0/12dab4d9/1e634931/1489489424/VEsF/>.

Text of Dennis' Prayer for America Speech, February 17, 2002:

I offer these brief remarks today as a prayer for our country, with love of democracy, as a celebration of our country. With love for our country. With hope for our country. With a belief that the light of freedom cannot be extinguished as long as it is inside of us. With a belief that freedom rings resoundingly in a democracy each time we speak freely. With the understanding that freedom stirs the human heart and fear stills it. With the belief that a free people cannot walk in fear and faith at the same time.

With the understanding that there is a deeper truth expressed in the unity of the United States. That implicit in the union of our country is the union of all people. That all people are essentially one. That the world is interconnected not only on the material level of economics, trade, communication, and transportation, but interconnected through human consciousness, through the human heart, through the heart of the world, through the simply expressed impulse and yearning to be and to breathe free.

I offer this prayer for America.

Let us pray that our nation will remember that the unfolding of the promise of democracy in our nation paralleled the striving for civil rights. That is why we must challenge the rationale of the Patriot Act. We must ask why should America put aside guarantees of constitutional justice?

How can we justify in effect canceling the First Amendment and the right of free speech, the right to peaceably assemble?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Fourth Amendment, probable cause, the prohibitions against unreasonable search and seizure?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Fifth Amendment, nullifying due process, and allowing for indefinite incarceration without a trial?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Sixth Amendment, the right to prompt and public trial?

How can we justify in effect canceling the Eighth Amendment which protects against cruel and unusual punishment?

We cannot justify widespread wiretaps and internet surveillance without judicial supervision, let alone with it.

We cannot justify secret searches without a warrant.

We cannot justify giving the Attorney General the ability to designate domestic terror groups.

We cannot justify giving the FBI total access to any type of data which may exist in any system anywhere such as medical records and financial records.

We cannot justify giving the CIA the ability to target people in this country for intelligence surveillance.

We cannot justify a government which takes from the people our right to privacy and then assumes for its own operations a right to total secrecy.

The Attorney General recently covered up a statue of Lady Justice showing her bosom as if to underscore there is no danger of justice exposing herself at this time, before this administration.

Let us pray that our nation's leaders will not be overcome with fear. Because today there is great fear in our great Capitol. And this must be understood before we can ask about the shortcomings of Congress in the current environment.

The great fear began when we had to evacuate the Capitol on September 11.

It continued when we had to leave the Capitol again when a bomb scare occurred as members were pressing the CIA during a secret briefing.

It continued when we abandoned Washington when anthrax, possibly from a government lab, arrived in the mail.

It continued when the Attorney General declared a nationwide terror alert and then the Administration brought the destructive Patriot Bill to the floor of the House.

It continued in the release of the bin Laden tapes at the same time the President was announcing the withdrawal from the ABM treaty.

It remains present in the cordoning off of the Capitol.

It is present in the camouflaged armed national guardsmen who greet members of Congress each day we enter the Capitol campus.

It is present in the labyrinth of concrete barriers through which we must pass each time we go to vote.

The trappings of a state of siege trap us in a state of fear, ill-equipped to deal with the Patriot Games, the Mind Games, the War Games of an unelected President and his unelected Vice President.

Let us pray that our country will stop this war. "To promote the common defense" is one of the formational principles of America.

Our Congress gave the President the ability to respond to the tragedy of September 11. We licensed a response to those who helped bring the terror of September 11th. But we the people and our elected representatives must reserve the right to measure the response, to proportion the response, to challenge the response, and to correct the response.

Because we did not authorize the invasion of Iraq.

We did not authorize the invasion of Iran.

We did not authorize the invasion of North Korea.

We did not authorize the bombing of civilians in Afghanistan.

We did not authorize permanent detainees in Guantanamo Bay.

We did not authorize the withdrawal from the Geneva Convention.

We did not authorize military tribunals suspending due process and habeas corpus.

We did not authorize assassination squads.

We did not authorize the resurrection of COINTELPRO.

We did not authorize the repeal of the Bill of Rights.

We did not authorize the revocation of the Constitution.

We did not authorize national identity cards.

We did not authorize the eye of Big Brother to peer from cameras throughout our cities.

We did not authorize an eye for an eye.

Nor did we ask that the blood of innocent people, who perished on September 11, be avenged with the blood of innocent villagers in Afghanistan.

We did not authorize the administration to wage war anytime, anywhere, anyhow it pleases.

We did not authorize war without end.

We did not authorize a permanent war economy.

Yet we are upon the threshold of a permanent war economy. The President has requested a \$45.6 billion increase in military spending. All defense-related programs will cost close to \$400 billion.

Consider that the Department of Defense has never passed an independent audit.

Consider that the Inspector General has notified Congress that the Pentagon cannot properly account for \$1.2 trillion in transactions.

Consider that in recent years the Dept. of Defense could not match \$22 billion worth of expenditures to the items it purchased, wrote off, as lost, billions of dollars worth of in-transit inventory and stored nearly \$30 billion worth of spare parts it did not need.

Yet the defense budget grows with more money for weapons systems to fight a cold war which ended, weapon systems in search of new enemies to create new wars. This has nothing to do with fighting terror.

This has everything to do with fueling a military industrial machine with the treasure of our nation, risking the future of our nation, risking democracy itself with the militarization of thought which follows the militarization of the budget.

Let us pray for our children. Our children deserve a world without end. Not a war without end. Our children deserve a world free of the terror of hunger, free of the terror of poor health care, free of the terror of homelessness, free of the terror of ignorance, free of the terror of hopelessness, free of the terror of policies which are committed to a world view which is not appropriate for the survival of a free people, not appropriate for the survival of democratic values, not appropriate for the survival of our nation, and not appropriate for the survival of the world.

Let us pray that we have the courage and the will as a people and as a nation to shore ourselves up, to reclaim from the ruins of September 11th our democratic traditions.

Let us declare our love for democracy. Let us declare our intent for peace.

Let us work to make nonviolence an organizing principle in our own society.

Let us recommit ourselves to the slow and painstaking work of statecraft, which sees peace, not war as being inevitable.

Let us work for a world where someday war becomes archaic.

That is the vision which the proposal to create a Department of Peace envisions. Forty-three members of Congress are now cosponsoring the legislation.

Let us work for a world where nuclear disarmament is an imperative. That is why we must begin by insisting on the commitments of the ABM treaty. That is why we must be steadfast for nonproliferation.

Let us work for a world where America can lead the day in banning weapons of mass destruction not only from our land and sea and sky but from outer space itself. That is the vision of HR 3616: A universe free of fear. Where we can look up at God's creation in the stars and imagine infinite wisdom, infinite peace, infinite possibilities, not infinite war, because we are taught that the kingdom will come on earth as it is in heaven.

Let us pray that we have the courage to replace the images of death which haunt us, the layers of images of September 11th, faded into images of patriotism, spliced into images of military mobilization, jump-cut into images of our secular celebrations of the World Series, New Year's Eve, the Superbowl, the Olympics, the strobic flashes which touch our deepest fears, let us replace those images with the work of human relations, reaching out to people, helping our own citizens here at home, lifting the plight of the poor everywhere.

That is the America which has the ability to rally the support of the world.

That is the America which stands not in pursuit of an axis of evil, but which is itself at the axis of hope and faith and peace and freedom. America, America. God shed grace on thee. Crown thy good, America.

Not with weapons of mass destruction. Not with invocations of an axis of evil. Not through breaking international treaties. Not through establishing America as king of a unipolar world. Crown thy good America. America, America. Let us pray for our country. Let us love our country. Let us defend our country not only from the threats without but from the threats within.

Crown thy good, America. Crown thy good with brotherhood, and sisterhood. And crown thy good with compassion and restraint and forbearance and a commitment to peace, to democracy, to economic justice here at home and throughout the world.

Crown thy good, America. Crown thy good America. Crown thy good.

Thank you. –Dennis Kucinich

20120217-04 22:47 SteveG "The 5 Grossest Things You're Eating"

[I guess the author means "tainted". I was thinking of liver, brains, or udders. –SteveB]

"The 5 Grossest Things You're Eating" by David Zinczenko with Matt Goulding, *Men's Health*

Feb. 6, 2012 (<http://health.yahoo.net/experts/eatthis/5-grossest-foods-supermarket>)

1. Grain Products
2. Shrimp
3. Salad Dressing
4. Jelly Beans
5. Mushrooms

20120218-01 14:50 SteveG "Republicans Are Unprotected on Contraception"

"Republicans Are Unprotected on Contraception" by Jonathan Alter, Bloomberg/The National Memo

Feb. 17, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/content/republicans-are-unprotected-contraception>)

During the 1928 presidential campaign, nutty right-wing Protestants claimed that Al Smith, the first Catholic nominated for president by a major party, was planning to extend New York's Holland Tunnel all the way to the Vatican.

Today's tunnel would run from the Vatican to a suburban Pentecostal megachurch.

We learned this week that U.S. Catholics support President Barack Obama's Feb. 10 compromise on contraception in almost identical numbers to the population as a whole. Many of those sticking with the Catholic bishops in opposition are evangelical Protestants.

Historians are rubbing their eyes in wonder that the spiritual and political descendants of Protestants who founded the Know Nothing Party in the 1850s on anti-Papist ideas -- who hassled not just Al Smith but also John F. Kennedy for supposed ties to Rome -- are now embracing Catholics. Rick Santorum was recently greeted at Oral Roberts University by an enthusiastic crowd of 4,000.

Yes, politics makes strange bedfellows, and in this case, the Republicans, by throwing in their lot with the bishops, are using no protection. Like the controversy over the Susan G. Komen for the Cure foundation withdrawing support from Planned Parenthood over its provision of abortion services, this struggle leaves Republicans politically exposed.

At first, the Komen case looked like just another example of anti-abortion activists flexing their muscles against hapless women's health advocates. Then came a furious, highly effective counterassault fueled by liberal social media, a new counterweight to conservative talk radio in defining the terms of debate. The outcome of that flap, in which the Komen foundation reversed itself and apologized, shows that bashing Planned Parenthood may work in Republican primaries but will be poison in the general election.

The demand for "conscience" exemptions from Obamacare for Catholic hospitals, schools and charities (churches were already exempt) also looked good for the Republicans initially. Conservatives thought that they had a chance to revive the "culture wars" -- the wedge-issue appeals to faith and family that have worked so well in the past. For more than a week, Republicans made Obama look like the guy who ordered Joan of Arc burned at the stake.

Their problem is that they never know when to stop. Recall the case of Terri Schiavo, the Florida woman in a persistent vegetative state whose plight led conservative lawmakers to champion federal legislation in 2005 to keep her alive. The measure passed, but public opinion polls afterward showed the law was widely unpopular and a clear case of congressional overreach.

This time conservatives stuck with the argument that the president was abusing religious freedom even when that attack was no longer plausible. By decreeing that insurance companies, not Catholic institutions, will pay for contraceptives in employee health-care plans (as allowed under the Affordable Care Act), the president successfully shifted the subject back to birth control, where he's on solid political footing.

Obama's like a quarterback who calls a bad play and seems trapped in the pocket, then scrambles for big yardage.

The bad play resulted from poor political planning inside the White House, which failed to line up supporters to defend its decision. But it's a little more defensible when you know the context. For months, the pressure seemed to come from the left. The White House learned that 28 states (including Mitt Romney's Massachusetts) already require that health plans under their jurisdiction cover contraceptives. These rules had survived court challenges on religious freedom grounds. In fact, women's groups were threatening lawsuits if Obamacare didn't also require such coverage, and some government lawyers argued that the new law provided no authority for any exemptions for institutions receiving federal money.

Obama's team debated the issue and, contrary to published reports, the discussion didn't break down cleanly along gender lines, with women on one side and Catholic men on the other. When the rule was made public on Jan. 20, White House press secretary Jay Carney faced not a single question about it. Then the regional and religious press embraced the story, and within a week even liberal Catholic columnists like E.J. Dionne and Mark Shields were up in arms.

But the firestorm may prove to be a political blessing. If the president had started on Jan. 20 with the compromise he eventually arrived at on Feb. 10, it would have been a one-day story for health-care policy wonks. Birth control would never have surfaced as a political issue.

Instead contraception is now the elephant in the bedroom -- the issue that no one in the Republican establishment wants to talk about because they know it's a disaster for them.

The Republicans may end up with a nominee, Rick Santorum, who has warned of "the dangers of contraception in this country." He said: "It's not OK because it's a license to do things in the sexual realm that is counter to how things are supposed to be."

This from a candidate who recently said of the president: "He thinks he knows better how to run your lives."

Imagine what Obama would do with that in a debate.

Instead of running away from Santorum, many Republicans are running toward him -- once again, failing to get the memo on when to stop. Senator Scott Brown co-sponsored a bill this week with Senator Roy Blunt that would let any employer with a "moral conviction" (a term left undefined in the legislation) deny access to any health service, including contraception, they personally oppose. This weapon is aimed at Obamacare, but it will probably boomerang on Brown, who is locked in a tight re- election campaign in Massachusetts against Elizabeth Warren.

With all the major candidates this year enjoying seemingly happy marriages, it didn't seem as if sex would figure much in this campaign. Wrong. The independent women who will help determine the election want the government -- and their bosses - - out of their private lives.

The culture wars are over, and the Republicans lost.

(Jonathan Alter is a Bloomberg View columnist and the author of *The Promise: President Obama, Year One*. The opinions expressed are his own.)

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20120219-01	18:55	Dennis	"Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?"
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My crap detector is highly suspicious of the conclusions in the following article. Although I do my own taxes using TurboTax, I'm far from being an accountant. Would one of you, Bill perhaps, take a whack at analyzing the credibility of the writer's statements? Do I really only pay 2/3 of what Buffet and Romney pay?

["Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" by Scott Burns, AssetBuilder](#)

Feb. 18, 2012 (http://assetbuilder.com/blogs/scott_burns/) (<http://www.dallasnews.com/business/columnists/scott-burns/20120218-will-the-real-tax-rate-please-stand-up.ece>)

Warren Buffett and Mitt Romney have something in common beyond wealth. Both pay federal income taxes at a 45 percent rate. That's three times the 15 percent rate mentioned by Mr. Buffett and reported in the press. That rate is also higher than the 30 percent "Buffett Rule" that President Obama is touting in the name of fairness.

How can this be? How can Buffett and Romney pay so much more in taxes than we see discussed in the press? Doesn't everyone know that the very rich have the advantage of being able to rent representatives and senators to write the best tax code money can buy?

The answer lies in understanding what economists call "tax incidence"— knowing who really pays a tax. We're going to get to that understanding by starting with a rapidly growing lemonade stand.

If you have a lemonade stand, it is considered a "proprietorship." You're the owner, operator and the person who earns income selling the lemonade. You subtract the costs of doing business from the sales of lemonade and that becomes your earned income. Since it is labor income, it is subject to employment taxes. It is also subject to the broader federal income tax.

But you have a vision. You want to become the Starbucks of lemonade. You open multiple stands. The net income of the business soars. Your new CPA says you need to turn your proprietorship into a corporation. Since you enjoy having a big income, you make it an "S" corporation, a form that allows you to pass all net income through to yourself for tax purposes and, perhaps, a few other shareholders.

That income, like the proprietorship income, will be subject to both the employment tax and the federal income tax. You'll pay at a 12.4 percent rate on the first \$110,100 you earn for the employment tax. (The Medicare tax is an additional 2.9 percent.) As a practical matter, you're earning so much that you leave the employment tax far behind. The only tax that matters is the federal income tax. On that, you pay at a rate as high as 35 percent.

Now suppose Ubiquitous Lemonade grows even larger. What do you do?

You become a "C" corporation, one that is a taxable entity unto itself. As a consequence, you now have to pay the corporate income tax. Whatever your corporation earns, it may be taxed at a rate up to 35 percent. For each \$1 of earnings, the corporation can retain 65 cents after taxes. The corporation can then pay you a dividend out of those 65 cents.

When you get that dividend, it will be subject to a federal income tax rate of 15 percent. Since you are paying a 15 percent tax on 65 cents, \$1 of what used to be your earnings is now down to 55 cents after taxes.

One of the reasons the tax rate on dividends is so low is that economists see this as double taxation. However you look at it, your effective tax rate is 45 percent because that's how much of each earned dollar goes to the government. If President Obama gets his "Buffett Rule," with a minimum tax rate of 30 percent for millionaires, the effective tax rate won't be 30 percent. It will be 55 percent.

Would that kill the economy? Maybe. Maybe not. It certainly wouldn't be friendly to income from capital, so we can expect to see yet more money being invested in other countries. We can also expect more wealthy Americans deciding that Australia, New Zealand or Brazil are better places to live, work and collect dividends. The reality here is that the United States is a high-tax land for everybody.

If you are a typical worker, you probably pay a top income tax rate of 15 percent. You also pay the 15.3 percent employment tax. (If you think you only pay half of that tax, you've been snookered by a smart politician. Stop working and your employer stops paying "his share" of the employment tax.) So your real but disguised tax burden is about 30 percent.

That's two-thirds of what Buffett and Romney pay.

What should our tax rate be? I don't know. But it would help if the politicians started with the right numbers.

[20120219-02](#) 19:44 Art Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)

This might work if Buffet and Romney owned lemonade stands and made all their money just off these stands. Romney pays about 14% and I pay about 30 plus %. Period.

[20120219-03](#) 21:24 Bill Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Dennis, above)

There are some problems with the article, which purports to deal with effective federal tax rates paid by the wealthy—at least as signaled by its lead paragraphs—but which misses the real cause of low effective federal tax rates for many of the very wealthy, which is the capital-gains rate. The writer seems instead to seek to rouse the rabble about double taxation. Finally, however, I'm not sure what the writer seeks to show, save that different rates apply to different levels of income at the individual level and that corporate dividends are taxed at 15 per cent at the individual level. The workings of S corporations vis-à-vis C corporations are well known. Language here and there suggests that the writer believes he is making a dramatic finding as to unfairness or some loophole exploited by the crooked among us, but no such drama or revelation is produced.

What is a false assertion or interpretation is that corporations don't pay half the employment tax, i. e. social security and unemployment taxes. Corporations, whether S or C, are legally obligated to pay their half. [Steve B. and I have had our differences on this; suffice it to say that someone goes to jail if these employment taxes aren't paid, even if the corporation isn't making any money.]

Finally, the writer seems to seek some reason for making smarmy remarks, but there simply is no revelation of conspiracy or proof of dishonesty or delivery of anything novel.

[I have to agree with Bill completely on this one. Maybe the writer is a tax expert, maybe not, but his writing is unfocused and attempts, unsuccessfully, to make big deals out of nothing. Why would he ignore the capital gains, etc. rates? –SteveB]

[20120219-04](#) 21:40 Bill Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Art, above)

As to the source of Romney's and Buffett's wealth, I think I erred in believing capital-gains revenue was the major source. It's more likely dividend revenue, including municipal bonds. But do know that the rate for long term capital-gains revenue maxes out at 15 per cent, the same as that for dividend revenue.

[20120219-06](#) 21:46 Jim Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to all, above)

Mitt's rate is so low because there is a loophole for hedge fund managers that lets them consider everything they make as a capital gains instead of earned income.

[20120219-07](#) 21:57 Bill Re: "Will the Real Tax Rate Please Stand Up?" (reply to Jim, above)

Yes, hedge-fund managers have that outrageous tax preference, but is he able to use it now? And how long has he been out of Bain Capital?

[20120219-05](#) 21:43 Jim Video: Adele Trashes Newt Gingrich at the Grammys!

I heard that Adele won a bunch of Grammys although I had not heard any of her songs. This one sounds like she means it.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pKucBtFwymU&feature=email>

I heard that you'd think it's cool
If the poor kids mopped up the floors at school.
--Adele

[20120219-08](#) 22:00 Jim Video: Physics Lesson with a Knitting Needle in Space

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qHrBhgwq_Q&feature=youtu.be

[20120219-09](#) 22:25 Tom Source for Gadgets/Electronics

<http://www.monoprice.com/>

<http://foodie-isms.com/?tag=saltenas>

Salteñas: Almost the Bolivian National Food (but much competition).



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

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