



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #79 — FEB. 22, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Toward More Egalitarian Health Care

(posted by Pam McRae, Feb. 22, 2012)

It's been a while since I fulminated about health care in America, so tonight when I heard a piece on NPR about folks struggling without health insurance, I felt that old, familiar tingle of outrage that I have experienced ever since living in Canada back in the 'seventies. You know my mantra is, "universal coverage, single payer." As legal residents, not citizens, in Canada, my family was covered from day one. With two, then three children, this coverage was a godsend. Ever since living under the Canadian system, I have been a strong proponent of comprehensive health care insurance, based on income, not employment. Why does health insurance have to be tied to one's job? Car insurance isn't. Home insurance isn't. Life insurance isn't. People these days turn down jobs because they fear losing coverage, forgo divorce for fear of losing coverage, stay in jobs they hate because they need the coverage. What is the logic in coupling health insurance and employment? If we had one system--or ten regional systems--that covered everyone within a geographic area, based on population, wouldn't that drastically limit the paperwork and bureaucracy that clog the system we have now? Why can't health care be provided much the same way food is? You may not be able to get imported Greek olives in Podunk, Kansas, but you won't starve for lack of basic foodstuffs either. I'm not saying absolutely everyone should get the same high-tech care, but everyone should have access to life-saving and preventive care, no matter where they live or what they do for a living. Will this mean rationing? Perhaps it will. Champagne and caviar are rationed too. But no American should face bankruptcy or death because they can't afford adequate health care. Just as we ensure that people don't starve in our streets or aren't denied an education, so too we should make sure that every resident of the U.S. can see a doctor and fill a prescription without declaring bankruptcy. Other countries have better systems than ours and get better results for less money. Why can't we learn from them instead of braying about how great we are, when the statistics totally contradict that claim? OK, everyone. Let me have it. Give it your best shot. If you can convince me that our system works, I will happily agree with you. And I'm not talking about Obamacare, which is an improvement not a complete fix.

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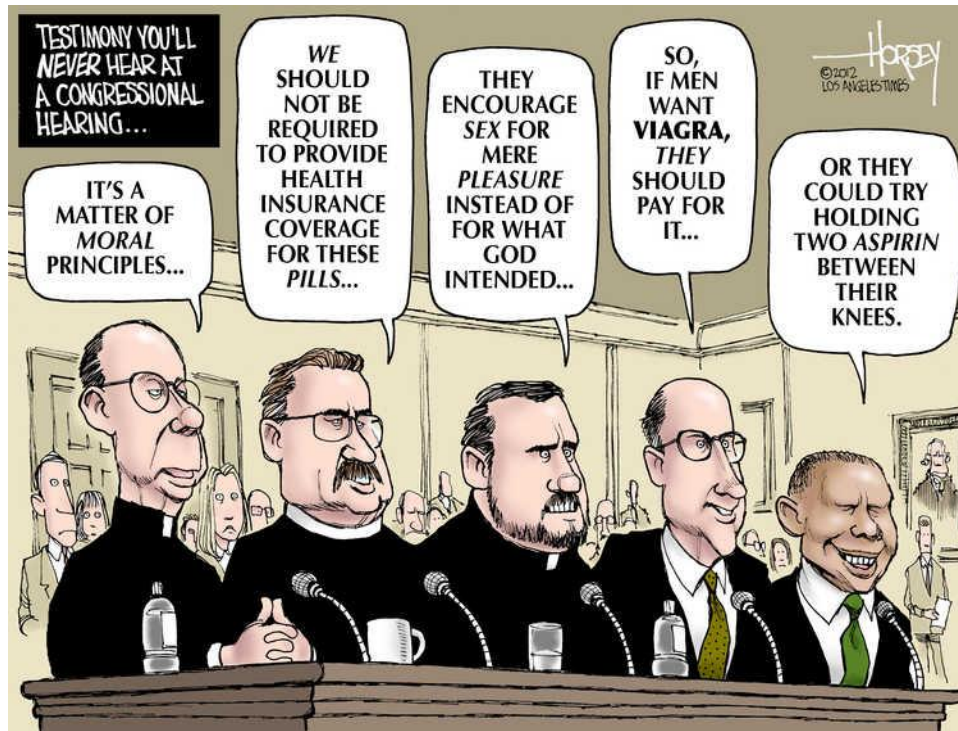
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Our system does not work.

Just watched a piece on local news about a local cancer center and patients having to wait at times 3 months without their medications because of shortages, doctors/clinics having to trade medications = you know low profit margins are not conducive to good health.

I take 6 medications a day – all generics – none made in the US – India , Thailand, and Israel seem to be the major manufacturers of generics. Keep the mantra alive!



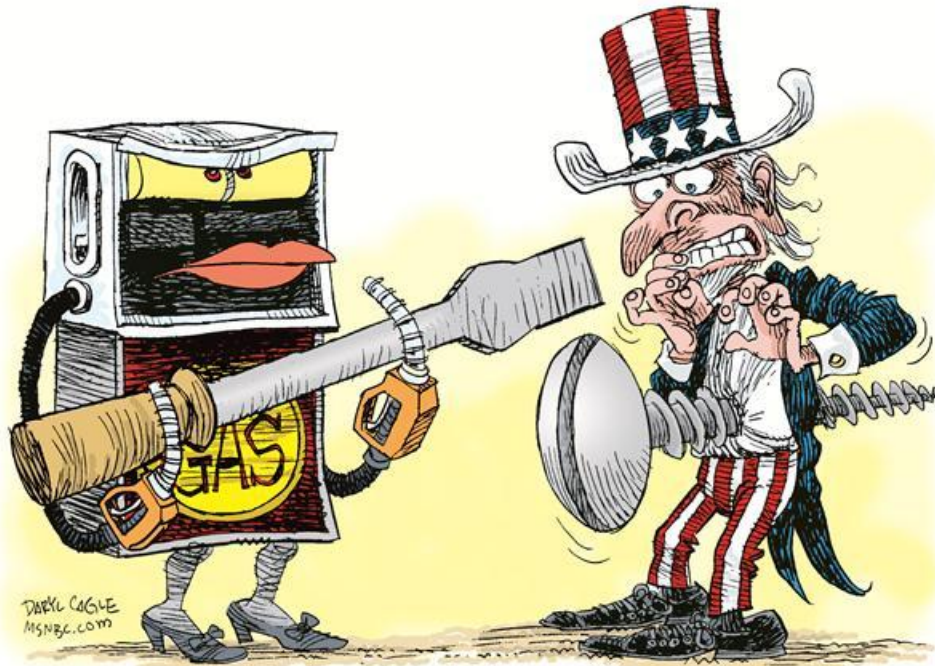
20120221-06 12:25 Pam Re: *Carnaval*/Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #78)

This is not a response to your assessment of Obama's chances for re-election, rather a comment on the craziness that is *Carnaval* in your beloved Bolivia. I must be too English, too repressed, too much of an introvert to see the pleasure in being smushed in a noisy crowd with gunk being poured all over me. Not that there's anything wrong with that. I think it's an interesting phenomenon that intensely Christian countries and communities go in for this sort of ribaldry. It speaks to the general heated-upedness of the Latin temperament, I suppose. Those of us with roots in the chilly north take our pleasures more sedately. In Bolivia, you get *Carnaval*. At Downton Abbey, you get the servants' ball, where the butler dances with the grand dame. We all need a bit of topsy turvey now and then. I just find it interesting the various ways in which various cultures approach letting go of the reins.

[And I left out the erotic parts! It's definitely not for everyone! Especially with guys like me roaming around. ^_^ The Latin temperament really does need a little cooling down at times! -SteveB]

20120221-09 13:26 SteveB Re: *Carnaval*/Santa Cruz de la Sierra (reply to Pam, above)

And I wish you hadn't told me about the servants' ball and the (gack) butler dancing with, of all people, the grand dame. Now I'm so excited I have goose bumps all over! When will they settle down and get civilized? I'm gonna go take a cold shower, then go hit *Carnaval* some more. That should cool me down! ^_^



Do we really need to be this intrusive except for the tendency of some "leaders" to try to control the whole world?

http://nationalpostnews.files.wordpress.com/2011/10/fo1029_usbases12001.gif

[WOW! Wish I could get the whole thing in the FotM Newsletter, but it's just too big. You owe it to yourself to follow the link and take a look at this monster. -SteveB]

"I Will Defend the 2nd Amendment" by Rick Santorum, Guns & Patriots

Feb. 21, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=49590>)

(Keystone State GOP White House hopeful talks gun rights.)

Coming from Pennsylvania, a state with a rich heritage of hunting and fishing, I understand firsthand the importance of preserving our constitutionally protected rights found in the second Amendment.

I fight to preserve this tradition, and will work to ensure these rights are not infringed upon.

As a Senator, I opposed frivolous lawsuits against the gun industry by supporting legislation, such as the Protection of Lawful Commerce Act that would protect law abiding firearms manufacturers and dealers from frivolous lawsuits attempting to hold them liable for criminal acts of third parties.

I also vehemently opposed the Assault Weapons Ban because I believe that there are more effective ways to stop gun violence, such as stricter enforcement of existing laws, than taking away the rights of law abiding gun owners.

It was with pride that I was the author of legislation to eliminate the requirement that all hunters and fishermen furnish their social security numbers when getting a license. It was estimated that this legislation would help save 16 million hunters and another 24 million fishermen who buy their licenses every year from falling victim to identity theft.

It is also with pride that for my work on behalf of gun owners and sportsmen across the country, I consistently received the highest possible ratings from the National Rifle Association and gun owners groups from around the country.

20120221-04	11:57	SteveB	"Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns"
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It seems Republicans have already lost a lot of support from:

1. Teachers and college students.
2. Retired People who paid for and expect to receive Social Security and Medicare insurance.
3. The millions with mortgages under water.
4. The millions without healthcare insurance.
5. Anyone who earns a wage and noticed the Republicans in Congress wanted badly to raise their taxes, but not those of the rich.
6. Thinking adults.

Now they're p*ssing off the women! (see article below)

Look what and who's left: A giant, nasty, divisive, internal and external GOP war. Rick Santorum. The evangelicals. The militias. The gun clubs. The KKK. Rush Limbaugh. Sarah Palin. Herman Cain. Rick Perry. The rest of the wackos.

Poor GOP...looks like a slam dunk for Barry.

"Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" by Laura Bassett, Huffington Post

Feb. 20, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/02/20/birth-control-republicans-democrats_n_1289166.html)

Where are the women?

The question, posed by Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) to an all-male panel at Thursday's House Oversight Committee hearing on a new birth control coverage requirement, has rapidly turned into a political rallying cry, sparking a viral online campaign and lighting a fire under Democratic campaigns.

It has also put a coda of sorts on a culture war argument that erupted several weeks ago. A debate that began with the straightforward constitutional question of what the government could instruct religious institutions to do with respect to health care coverage has become the most galvanizing political issue for Democrats since the president introduced his jobs act last fall.

A series of incendiary events has thrust the issue of contraception to the forefront of the national discussion in the past few weeks. There was an outcry after Obama introduced the rule, which requires most religiously affiliated employers to cover birth control for their employees. Soon after, Susan G. Komen for the Cure, the nation's largest breast cancer charity, cut off funds to Planned Parenthood, which provides affordable cancer screenings and contraception to millions of low-income women, because some of its locations also perform abortions. The ensuing controversy sparked a massive national discussion about the politicization of women's health and coaxed GOP politicians, such as former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, into taking sides.

Just as the Komen controversy died down, Sen. Roy Blunt (R-Mo.) introduced an amendment that would have allowed insurers to opt out of covering any form of health care to which they morally objected. This, in itself, was

low hanging fruit for the Democrats. But when House Republicans convened an all-male panel to discuss contraception, and when Foster Friess, a top financial backer of former Sen. Rick Santorum's presidential campaign, said that pregnancies could be prevented by "gals" putting Bayer Aspirin "between their knees," campaign consultants had the type of political imagery that they could only dream of. For Democratic lawmakers, it couldn't have come at a more opportune time, giving them the chance to launch a well-oiled, comprehensive effort to lock in women's votes ahead of the 2012 elections.

EMILY's List, a political action committee dedicated to electing Democratic women to Congress, has launched a multi-pronged effort to rally voters around the birth control issue. The group has sent out multiple fundraising emails and created a new television ad, which features Friess' comment and the image from the all-male Congressional hearing, in order to emphasize the need for more progressive women in leadership roles. Although Jess McIntosh, communications director for EMILY's List, did not reveal the amount of money the group has raised in the past two weeks, she said it's clear that the latest drive for money and supporters has been a huge success.

"We added over 60,000 members in the last couple weeks," McIntosh told The Huffington Post Friday. "We had over 30,000 petition signers just yesterday for a petition about the birth control mandate, which is unusual. We have raised more money for candidates at this point in the cycle than ever before, and we've definitely seen an uptick in also how active these folks are."

Sen. Patty Murray (D-Wash.), who chairs the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, sent a fundraising email and petition drive out to DSCC supporters urging them to oppose both the Blunt amendment and the "aspirin agenda." A petition about the "aspirin agenda" collected over 65,000 signatures in one day. A similar "Where are the women?" petition circulated by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee has collected over 250,000 signatures since it went out late Thursday night.

State Democratic parties and individual campaigns have also been able to use the federal birth control controversy to drum up local support. The Virginia Democratic Party, for instance, claims to have raised an unusually high amount of money and saw a "spike in interaction" in the two days following Issa's birth control hearing.

"People kind of came to life about this issue. Across the board, we have seen a considerable uptick in the financial response our people have had to what's going on," said Brian Coy, a spokesperson for the Virginia Democrats. "We've raised thousands of dollars over the last 48 hours over this, which is absolutely not normal, and we've seen a huge uptick in Facebook and Twitter activity."

Maggie Hassan, a Democrat running for governor of New Hampshire, said her campaign has also seen a considerable increase in donations and support since birth control rose to the forefront of the national discussion.

"All the men talking about birth control really is, I think, generating this kind of disbelief, and it's really firing people up," she told HuffPost. "We're beginning to see a lot of discussion about it on our Facebook pages, I get asked about it at house parties, and it's definitely motivating people to give money. Most of us, certainly in my generation -- we all thought this was settled."

Republican campaigns have been much more reluctant to discuss their fundraising efforts or success around the birth control issue. The National Republican Senatorial Committee circulated only one petition about the birth control rule, but left the words "birth control," "contraception," and "women's health" entirely out of it, focusing instead on the issue of religious freedom. The petition had only received 15,000 signatures by Monday afternoon -- a fraction of the DCCC's 250,000.

When asked about fundraising efforts, a staffer at the NRSC said only that it's hard to see how the DSCC's "gender war spin" can be taken seriously when two female GOP Senate candidates, Sarah Steelman in Missouri and Heather Wilson in New Mexico, oppose Obama's birth control rule.

Susan B. Anthony List, the anti-abortion alternative to EMILY's List, said it has been too busy educating people about the contraception mandate to fundraise around it. "We have not fundraised off of it yet, but we do plan to use it in races where we think it will make a difference," said SBA List president Marjorie Dannenfelser. "I think it will work in our direction. It is an underestimation of women that they are going to see this issue as being about

creating barriers to contraception and abortifacients -- that's not what this is. It's about something so much more fundamental: the right of conscience and religious liberty for all people, including women."

The Republican National Committee did not respond to multiple requests for comment for this article.

Whether the Democrats can hold onto their momentum after the uproar over birth control dies down remains to be seen, but it's clear that they see their stance on the issue as crucial for rallying women voters in 2012. Obama relied on the women's vote to win the presidency in 2008, winning ten million more votes from women than men. The unexpected controversy around an issue as fundamental to women's health as birth control is making it easy for Democratic campaigns to fire up those same voters once again.

"The fortunate or unfortunate thing about this attack on women's health is that you don't really need strategies to incense people," said Coy. "The task is just to make sure people know that it's happening."

None of this would have been possible, it seems, had the birth control debate expanded beyond its original focus. At first, it was confined to a very limited question: could the federal government compel religious institutions to include contraception coverage in the health care plans they offered employees?

But questions of religious liberties were soon overshadowed by gender politics on the Hill. First, Blunt (R-Mo.) introduced an amendment to the surface transportation bill that would completely roll back the president's birth control coverage rule and remove all of the non-discrimination protections from the Affordable Care Act. It was done under the auspices of decreasing regulations and boosting the free market. But many said that because the measure would essentially allow any employer or insurer to refuse to cover contraception, maternity care, or any other health care service by claiming a moral objection to it, it carried with it a true threat to women's health care.

Friess' comments later that week caused further problems. Hammering the problematic imagery home even further, Bishop William Lori, the first witness on the House Oversight Committee's all-male panel on religious liberty, spent a full ten minutes comparing birth control to a ham sandwich. "The government recognized that it is absurd for someone to come into a kosher deli and demand a ham sandwich," Lori said of Obama's revised birth control rule, "that it is downright surreal to apply this coercive power when the customer can get the same sandwich cheaply, or even free, just a few doors down."

Women's groups say they are not going to let that kind of rhetoric slide.

"It's a shame and it's appalling and it makes everybody really mad, but it's lucky we have a place to put all that energy," said McIntosh. "We have the luxury of saying, 'Yes, this is terrible, but look at all these great alternatives.' The women in office are on the front lines in this fight. Women like [Sen.] Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and [Sen.] Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) are standing up to the right, and everybody wants to send them more reinforcements."

20120221-05	12:23	SteveG	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Newt is back on the trail with his assertions that Obama is the most dangerous president, Buchanan is on the trail with his book, there is still talk of drafting someone else, there are new millionaires/billionaires throwing their free speech money into the Super PAC's. Remember the Swift Boat ads – they don't have to be true, just a lot of them.

20120221-08	13:20	SteveB	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveG, above)
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They get a ton of mileage out of those Barry issues, don't they?

1. He wasn't born here.
2. Nobody knew him in college.
3. He's a Muslim.

4. He's a socialist.
5. He's dangerous in some way undefined by the likes of Gingrich, Perry, Cain, Bachmann, Santorum, or Palin...all of whom, ironically, would be utterly dangerous because they are either idiots or twisted into pretzels.
6. "Shovel-ready" wasn't shovel-ready.

I worry about the Super-PACs and hate them, but when we get to the election, I think all the poison will come home to roost where we all know it belongs—its source. People are already getting sick of all the attacks, I think.

Lovin' the trip!

20120221-07	12:28	Pam	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
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This election is for sale, and no one is even trying to deny it. It's like Rome before the fall. Crazy beliefs abound, those who aren't decadent are moralistic, and women are occasions of sin once again. Crikey.

20120221-15	22:52	SteveG	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to SteveB, above)
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In Texas before a woman can have an abortion she has to have a doctor perform a sonogram, listen to the doctor's description of what is seen, is offered to hear the heartbeat, and has to wait another 24 hours. Virginia has a similar law being introduced. Insanity rules when it comes to health care in the US.

20120221-11	20:07	Art	Re: "Birth Control-Centered Gender War Boosts Democratic Campaigns" (reply to all, above)
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I'm sorry. There are 7 Billion people on this planet and we are about to 'expend resource' ourselves (humanity) out of existence. What utter cr*p! Does anyone read beyond 'People' these days? Let's hope SteveB's last bullet [thinking adults] is correct.

20120221-10	17:31	SteveG	"Woman Keeps Hapless Robber as Sex Slave"
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Our "Stupid Is as Stupid Does" Department...



But Repubs don't want Mittens...

Hey, Rush, what do you mean "explain his statement"? How do you "explain" Satan himself, hell-bent on sending America the Great down in flames to you-know-where?

Perhaps Mr. Santorum's Achilles Heel:

"We look at the shape of mainline Protestantism in this country, and it is in shambles. It is gone from the world of Christianity as I see it," Santorum said.

The Evangelicals ain't gonna like that! Maybe Santorum is really a Muslim sent in disguise by, you guessed it, Satan himself! Maybe he's really part of the plot to get President Obama re-elected? Maybe Santorum, gulp, Satan himself?

Nah, forget it. I was just trying to think like a Republican.

"Rush Limbaugh on Santorum and Satan" by Mackenzie Weinger, Politico

Feb. 21, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73137.html>)

(Rush says Rick Santorum will have to explain his 2008 statement.)

Rush Limbaugh said on his radio show Tuesday that Rick Santorum will have to explain his warning that "Satan has his sights on the United States of America."

"It's part of the predictable attempt to impugn Santorum as an absolute religious nut and wacko," Limbaugh said. "But he did say these things and he'll have to have an answer for these things when queried."

The speech Santorum made at Ave Maria University in 2008 in which he said Satan has set his sights on the United States exploded across the Web and headlined the Drudge Report on Tuesday.

"This is a spiritual war. And the Father of Lies has his sights on what you would think the Father of Lies would have his sights on: a good, decent, powerful, influential country — the United States of America. If you were Satan, who would you attack in this day and age," the Republican presidential contender said in August 2008. "He attacks all of us and he attacks all of our institutions."

"Satan is attacking the great institutions of America, using those great vices of pride, vanity and sensuality as the root to attack all of these strong plants that have so deeply rooted in the American tradition," Santorum added.

Limbaugh, who said the focus on Santorum's speech shows that a "double standard does exist," added that the former Pennsylvania senator's comments are "not the kind of stuff you hear a presidential candidate talk about."

"That stuff is out there," Limbaugh said, according to a transcript of the show. "It's headlined on Drudge and the left has it, and Santorum will have to deal with it. He'll have to answer it. I don't know. It's just not the kind of stuff you hear a presidential candidate talk about. It's not ordinary in that sense."

In the speech, Santorum also said Satan was "the most and first successful" in conquering academia, which he said "a long time ago fell."

The next, Santorum said, "was the church."

I knew I couldn't think like a Republican better than a Republican!

So, once again, folks, it's President Obama who's the Muslim!

"Rick Santorum Aide: Obama's 'Radical Islamic Policies'" by Mackenzie Weinger, Politico

Feb. 20, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0212/73084.html>)

(The spokeswoman quickly called MSNBC after the segment to say she misspoke.) [Big deal! –SteveB]

Rick Santorum's spokeswoman Alice Stewart said in a TV interview on Monday that Santorum was referring to President Barack Obama's "radical Islamic policies" when he said the president's agenda was driven by "phony theology" — but then quickly called up MSNBC after the segment aired to say she misspoke.

"There is a type of theological secularism when it comes to the global warmists in this country. That's what he was referring to. He was referring to the president's policies in terms of the radical Islamic policies the president has," Stewart said on "Andrea Mitchell Reports."

Mitchell later said on the air that Stewart phoned the show after the interview to say she had slipped up and said "radical Islamic policies" instead of Obama's "radical environmental policies."

Mitchell noted she had missed Stewart's phrasing of "radical Islamic policies" during the live interview.

"She had repeatedly said during that same interview 'radical environmental policies' and she said she slipped when she apparently said [it]," Mitchell said. "I did not hear it, or I would have caught her on it and tried to get a correction at the moment. I really, frankly, did not hear her use the word Islamic, but the tape tells the tale."

Santorum said in Ohio on Saturday that Obama's agenda is "not about you. It's not about your quality of life. It's not about your jobs. It's about some phony ideal, some phony theology. Oh, not a theology based on the Bible, a different theology, but no less a theology."

Santorum stood by his remarks later, telling reporters he wasn't suggesting Obama is less of a Christian.

"No one's suggesting that," he said. "I'm suggesting, obviously we all know in the Christian church there are a lot of different stripes of Christianity. I'm just saying he's imposing his values on the church and I think that's wrong. ... If the president says he's a Christian, he's a Christian."

Santorum said on Sunday that he was referring to what he described as Obama's radical views on the environment and on Monday, he continued attacking the president's environmental record on the campaign trail.

During a panel discussion on MSNBC on Monday after Stewart's slip of the tongue, The Washington Post's Anne Kornblut said she thought Stewart would apologize for the comment, but that it may not stop conspiracy theorists from grabbing onto her statement.

"I expect we're going to hear more from Alice Stewart apologizing about those remarks. But there will be conspiracy theorists thinking it was some kind of message she was trying to get out or it was really on the mind of the Santorum campaign when they are talking about President Obama," Kornblut said.

<http://www.travelblog.org/>

Poppies and Grape Vines, Sonoma Valley



Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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