



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #97 — MAR. 19, 2012

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Game Change: Women in Power

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, May 19, 2012)

Sometimes, there are things that need to be said. Three glimpses, now, that shed light on possible futures, when women hold sway in American politics, and one look at business as usual. Four comments in advance:

1. I love the sound and idea of a "zone of civility" in Congress.
2. I do not like Sarah Palin, not even one little bit!
3. Women clearly have: "The right to life. The right to privacy. The right to freedom. The right to bodily integrity. The right to decide when and how [they] reproduce."
4. Men traditionally often seem to prefer "holier than thou" and a "zone of exploitation".

And one more thing, we can't let a bunch of ignorant fools make us forget or lose our history. FIGHT THE LIES! FIGHT TO MAINTAIN THE PROGRESS WE MADE IN MORE THAN 100 YEARS AT THE COST OF MANY LIVES! Do not allow the Right to drag us back to the 19th Century!

1. "Mikulski Makes History While Creating 'Zone of Civility' for Senate Women" by Dana Bash, CNN

Mar. 16, 2012, (<http://us.cnn.com/2012/03/16/politics/mikulski-history/index.html>)

(WASHINGTON) On the walls of Barbara Mikulski's Capitol hideaway are some of her most prized possessions -- portraits taken every two years of all the women in the Senate.

The first picture from 1988 is Mikulski, a Democrat, and one other female senator, Republican Nancy Kassebaum of Kansas.

"The hemline's a little different, the hair color," Mikulski mused, staring at the photograph. "That's when there were two."

The two forged a bond across party lines.

The most recent picture, taken last year, features 17 female senators -- five Republicans and 12 Democrats.

Mikulski remarks that there are more women in that photograph than had served in the Senate in all of American history when she arrived some three decades ago.

The Maryland senator knows a lot about the history of female lawmakers, and she should. She has made a lot of it herself: the first Democratic woman ever elected to the Senate in her own right; the first woman in the Senate Democratic leadership; and in late 2010 she became the longest-serving woman ever in the Senate.

On Saturday she will top that, becoming the longest-serving woman ever in the history of the U.S. Congress, surpassing Rep. Edith Nourse Rogers of Massachusetts, who represented Massachusetts from 1925 to 1960.

To mark the milestone, she invited three other women senators who span parties and generations, to talk about what Senate women call their "zone of civility."

Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand of New York and Republicans Olympia Snowe of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska joined Mikulski to sit at a table that came from her childhood home and explained how hard the women of the Senate work to maintain a lost dynamic in Congress these days: comity.

Ironically, it is a relic of the old boys network that doesn't really exist anymore in today's era of partisanship: Get to know each other personally, so they can work better together professionally.

Regular dinners across party lines

It starts with regular dinners organized by Mikulski, whom some call the "Dean," others call "Coach Barb."

"When the day's over, let's kick back and put our lipstick on and have a glass of wine, and keep the institution and America going," Mikulski said.

Though the dinners are strictly off the record, the senators spilled a few details.

"We talk about our families, our concerns in our lives. Sometimes we talk about what we are working on but it's a very collegial setting where we are trying to cultivate friendship first and foremost," said Gillibrand, who jokes they "rarely get nights off anyway, so that's our big night out."

Snowe, a moderate Republican who recently made a surprise announcement that she is retiring because she is fed up with the polarization in Congress, said, "We made the commitment to do it on a monthly basis, and to get together because it's critical, and we naturally bond, and we have an opportunity to let our hair down."

Murkowski said when her husband sees one of the Senate women dinners on the calendar, he knows it's non-negotiable.

"He doesn't say, 'My gosh, why are you at work so late tonight?' He knows that that is a time that I value because I derive so much from the conversation, from the camaraderie that we have in the hour and a half at the end of a very long day, so I make it a priority when the dinners are scheduled to be there and enjoy that conversation with friends," Murkowski said.

Mikulski notes that the Senate can be a "lonely place," so the dinners are a refuge with "no agenda, nothing to prove [except] finding common ground where we're going to talk about what we're going to work on in other committees or circumstances."

"I think it's a place that gives us energy, gives us a sense of our own community and we all really do know we can count on each other if something comes up we would be the first there," Mikulski said.

A bipartisan sisterhood

But does this bipartisan sisterhood translate into bipartisan legislative action?

Murkowski replied that just this past week she was able to work out differences in the highway bill with Barbara Boxer, the Democrat overseeing it, primarily because of their personal friendship.

Gillibrand recalled getting tremendous help from Snowe and Murkowski on the 9/11 first responders legislation.

"I remember when I was trying to so hard to pass the 9/11 health bill, both Lisa and Olympia were encouraging me. They said we're not going to be name sponsors in the bill for instance, but we believe in what you are doing, and I think that if you approach it a, b and c, you'll be more effective," Gillibrand remembered.

"I think we're just natural allies and we trust each other. It's almost instinctive," Snowe said, turning to Gillibrand, "I can remember the conversations that we had. She was eliciting ideas about how to advance the bill, and so we trust another to give solid advice and to take that advice."

"We are all a team as women. We may not agree on every issue but that's not the point," Snowe continued. "We know how to work together in the give and take of it and achieve results."

Murkowski offered another explanation for what makes Senate women different from the men: ego.

"I don't think that we have as much ego attached with who's getting the credit," said Murkowski, who noted that oftentimes with the men, it's "my way or the highway."

"We're all pretty competitive or we wouldn't have gotten here in the first place, but in order to achieve the results that we are looking for, I think there is less personal ego on the line," she said.

There is also another female trait that factors in here. They all say they instinctively know how to listen.

"I think it is how we communicate the message and how we listen to what is being communicated. And I think that the listening part of it is an important part of how we get the results," Murkowski said.

Four generally agree on women's issues

Though they differ on everything from taxes to energy policy, they generally agree on women's issues.

But Lisa Murkowski recently voted with fellow Republicans against free access to contraception. Women back home in Alaska got upset, and she said she regretted her vote.

Asked if any of her female colleagues went to her and urged her not to side with her party on this one, Murkowski made clear the answer was no.

"I wish that we had had that discussion, I can honestly tell you that," she said, and then ripped into the GOP on the issue.

"I think that my party is in an unfortunate place right now as viewed by many women in this country who are feeling very anxious about what they believe to be attacks on women's health," she said.

In a bitterly partisan era, Senate women cherish this cross-party sisterhood.

Columnist Margaret Carlson wrote recently in the Daily Beast that Senate men complain they no longer have time to forge such relationships. She joked that Senate women somehow do it, and it's certainly not like they get more time in the day from their extra X chromosome.

"If anything, these women have more demands upon them," said Mikulski, who notes Gillibrand has two young sons and Murkowski is the mother of teenagers.

"I had to make school lunch this morning," Gillibrand chimed in, laughing.

They talk surrounded by Mikulski's female-oriented memorabilia adorning her walls: a poster of Geraldine Ferraro, the first female vice presidential candidate; a photograph with Madeleine Albright before she was appointed the first female secretary of state; even a picture of the Girl Scouts.

Mikulski's female colleagues credit her with cultivating and maintaining these relationships, and say she starts by mentoring new Senate arrivals.

"I remember when I first got appointed, she was one of the first to ask me to visit her, gave me guidance on how things work, how to pass legislation," Gillibrand recalled.

After 12,858 days of service, that makes her the longest-serving woman in congressional history, it's abundantly clear that creating a collegial oasis for women inside the intensely partisan atmosphere is one of her proudest accomplishments.

"I won't always be here, but I hope the legacy of civility, that I've worked with the other women to create will remain," she said.

(CNN producers Laurie Ure and Ted Barrett contributed to this report.)

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2. "God's Will?": Sarah Palin's Secret Plot to Capture the White House in 2012" by Geoffrey Dunn, Huffington Post

Mar. 16, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/geoffrey-dunn/sarah-palin-2012_b_1351763.html)

Anyone who has watched Sarah Palin closely in recent months can only marvel at the "magical thinking" she embraces with respect to the potential outcome of the Republican Party primary for president. It's clear that Palin still has her sights set on the White House for 2012.

In an interview with Sean Hannity in February, she declared:

[A] brokered convention, I wouldn't be afraid of that. The electorate shouldn't be afraid of that. That's a continuation of the process, and competition that perhaps would be, in the end, very good for our party, and good for the cause of defending our republic.

In her widely reported interview with CNN on Super Tuesday, she openly stated that she would consider accepting the nomination at a brokered GOP convention:

Anything is possible. I don't close any doors that perhaps would be open out there, so, no, I wouldn't close that door. My plan is to be at that convention.

It's a line she has uttered repeatedly ever since her ill-fated candidacy as John McCain's running mate in 2008. To most casual observers of the American political process, even Republicans, this would seem to border on the delusional. Her favorability rating among the general populace is now staggeringly low. In many circles, she is a laughingstock or a punch line. She didn't even bother to enter the primaries. Even Ann Coulter has now turned against her.

But a close look at Palin's recent activities and statements -- and, most significantly, the writings of her acolytes -- reveals that she is still plotting to take the White House in 2012. Take a look at the video she released last month on her website entitled "Chords of Memory," which links Palin's image with those of Lincoln and Reagan.

Palin has been consistent about four things since she announced her decision not to enter the Republican primaries last October:

1. She has strongly and vociferously attacked GOP frontrunner Mitt Romney.

2. She has embraced the idea of an endless primary season and has encouraged all four of the remaining candidates to stay in the race -- her sole purpose being the outcome of a brokered GOP convention in Tampa.
3. She has continued with her obsessive assault on Barack Obama, positioning herself as the "anti-Obama" among the conservative Republican base.
4. And, as noted above, she has made it clear now on several occasions that she is "open" to accepting the GOP nomination in Tampa.

At least one source close to the Palin family in Wasilla, Alaska, has confirmed that Palin "still believes it is God's will" that she serve as president, if not in 2012 then perhaps in 2016. Every move she has made in recent months -- every attack on Romney and Obama, every push for an elongated primary, every speculation about an open convention -- has been issued with this political calculation in mind.

In the aftermath of the devastating portrayal of Palin in HBO's *Game Change*, Palin's once-close political associate in Alaska, the good-government activist Andree McLeod, told me yesterday:

People can laugh all they want, but she ain't done. She's only developed a tougher skin through all 'this' and, out of desperation, has to inflict more damage for reasons only Sarah and her constantly-changing set of patrons knows. She has become even more dangerous and desperate.

Skeptics may argue that all of this is really Palin's feeble attempt to keep the spotlight on her and to boost her brand as a talking head on Fox News and as a highly paid celebrity speaker. Perhaps. But the lengthy interview she gave CNN on Election Day was no accident and her follow-up interviews since then on Fox News were certainly calculated as well. There's now even a Facebook page entitled "Palin -- Our Brokered Convention Selection."

Most significantly, the Palin-centric website Conservatives4Palin (C4P) -- with which Palin's inner-circle still maintains direct contact -- provides considerable evidence of Palin's political intentions and long-term national strategy.

Conservatives4Palin was co-founded by Rebecca Mansour, the controversial Palin sycophant who remains on Palin's SarahPAC payroll (as Aries Petra Consulting) but has apparently been sent to the Palin penalty box for comments she made last spring mocking Bristol Palin. The site, however, remains the primary Internet locale where Palin's acolytes openly push Palin's personal and political agenda. It is the site where Palin's Republican "enemies" -- everyone from Karl Rove to Romney and, now, even the likes of Coulter and Bill O'Reilly -- are repeatedly trashed or derided. Most importantly, C4P continues to represent an accurate reflection of the Palin political outlook in advance of the 2012 elections.

When Palin, for instance, went on Fox with Greta Van Susteren, and declared, "We need to replace Barack Obama with someone who understands... energy security," the minions at Conservatives4Palin made sure that everyone understood that the candidate Palin was actually referencing was -- ta da! -- none other than *Sarah Palin*.

But the most openly articulated playbook for Palin's presidential aspirations was submitted in late February by C4P contributor Nancy Labonete, entitled "In the Event of a Brokered Convention, All Bets are Off." It provides a fascinating glimpse into the Palin mindset and connects all the dots in Palin's seemingly zig-zag political strategy in advance of the 2012 election.

It begins with a hyperbolic argument that Palin is the only Republican capable of beating Obama:

If Sarah Palin's most electrifying speech at the CPAC did not convince that only she can articulate Americans' concerns and vision for our nation, then Obama has just been handed his second term. The CPAC event proved that only she can rouse the unexcited base to their feet. Only she can energize and move voters to go out to the polls. Only she can unite us to defeat Barack Obama.

Labonete's polemic continues by arguing that Palin is the only candidate who can withstand the "Alinsky attacks" during the election; Palin, she argues, is the lone Republican who has "the smarts to throw the media into a convulsive tizzy and still have her message ring out loudly and win the argument." Palin is the only candidate with "the fortitude and fire in the belly to defeat Obama." Only, only, only.

What's fascinating about the Labonete posting is that it does not focus merely on the hypothetical; it urges Palin supporters to become delegates to the GOP convention in Tampa and provides a link for doing so. "Even if Governor Palin is not a candidate (yet)," Labonete argues, "let your county GOP official know that you will vote for the best candidate at that time, but in the event of a brokered convention, you will be voting for Sarah Palin."

Labonete concludes, "*We must coalesce around a patriot whose message is ingrained in her conservative character.*"

This is precisely the type of right-wing groundswell and organizing that Palin is fostering with her recent rhetoric about "open doors" at Tampa. "Lots of prayers can make this happen," replied one commentator on the C4P blogsite. "*God is listening. Let's make sure He hears us.*"

In recent weeks, Palin has used the unflattering portrait of her in HBO's *Game Change* as a way to advance herself as a victim of the "liberal media" -- (C4P posted no fewer than 40 attacks on the film.) While *Game Change* has likely hurt her favorability with the general populace, it has raised the ante with her conservative Republican base, who now command a significant majority in the Republican party. Palin remains the base's superstar and is the only Republican -- Romney included -- who claims a rock-star status on the hustings.

Palin never could have survived the scrutiny of a prolonged primary season and the reality-television string of debates it encumbered. In a recent appearance on "Morning Joe," former McCain senior strategist Steve Schmidt was asked by Andrea Mitchell if he thought Palin had a "future" as "a national leader" in the Republican Party.

I hope not. And the reason I say that is because if you look at, over the last four years, all of the deficiencies in knowledge, all the deficiencies in preparedness, she's done not one thing to rectify them, to correct them. She has become a person who I think is filled with grievance, filled with anger who has a divisive message for the national stage when we need leaders in both parties to have a unifying message.... The lack of preparedness was a bad thing and the total disinterest in being more prepared and rectifying that is something that disqualifies.

But in the bubble of the Republican Convention, those deficiencies would never even come close to the surface. Even without the Palinista's organizing efforts, GOP delegates are most heavily weighted toward the conservative base -- and Palin remains their darling. She might very well capture the emotional narrative of the convention like Romney and Santorum could only imagine.

Moreover, the Republican establishment has lost control of both the party and the process in Tampa. Establishment leaders were not able to solidify Romney's nomination during the so-called "silent primary" in the year leading up to the Iowa caucuses; the establishment will have little control over the majority of delegates in Tampa. Palin remains a formidable force with the party base. On the campaign trail, Palin would draw crowds the likes of which have never been seen before by a Republican Party candidate for president.

As the film *Game Change* revealed to a broad American audience, Sarah Palin is many things: vain, anger-driven, intellectually lazy, polarizing and dysfunctional. But as I also discovered in researching my book *The Lies of Sarah Palin: The Untold Story Behind Her Relentless Quest for Power*, she is equally ambitious, calculating, and sly as a fox. She has no intention of going gently into that political goodnight.

Pay close attention: Palin's rhetoric between now and Tampa will continue to be critical of both Romney and Obama; it will continue to push for a contested primary; and it will continue to signal Palin's willingness to accept the nomination of a brokered convention. Palin knows that Romney will never pack her star power with the base -- and that neither Rick Santorum nor Newt Gingrich will either.

In the aftermath of Santorum's sweep of Alabama and Mississippi on Tuesday, a brokered GOP convention is a very real possibility. The Republican Party has become a fractured mosaic of fringe constituencies -- from Tea Partiers to evangelical anti-abortion activists, from libertarians who support Ron Paul to white supremacists who despise the fact that there is a black man in the White House. It is an unruly lot. The days of a GOP elite framing the presidential selection process are over. Charisma trumps experience; celebrity trumps substance; and, perhaps most disturbingly, anger trumps reason. Mama grizzlies, especially those who have been wounded, don't go down easy.

(Award-winning writer and filmmaker Geoffrey Dunn's best-selling *The Lies of Sarah Palin: The Untold Story Behind Her Relentless Quest for Power* was published by Macmillan/St. Martin's in May, 2011 and will be published in paperback this May.)

3. "10 Reasons the Rest of the World Thinks the U.S. Is Nuts" by Soraya Chemaly, Huffington Post

Mar. 15, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/soraya-chemaly/womens-reproductive-rights_b_1345214.html)

This week the Georgia State legislature debated a bill in the House, that would make it necessary for a woman to carry a stillborn baby until she 'naturally' goes into labor just as, according to Representative Terry England, pregnant cows and pigs do.

I have a question for Terry Edwards, Sam Brownback, Rick Santorum, Rick Perry and too many others: I have three daughters, two of them twins. If one of my twins had been stillborn would you have made me carry her to term, thereby endangering both the other twin and me? Or, would you have insisted that the state order a mandatory fetal extraction of the living twin fetus from my womb so that I could continue to carry the stillborn one to term and possibly die myself? My family is curious and since you believe my uterus is your public property, I am, too.

Mr. England, unlike the calves and pigs for which you expressed so much empathy, I am not a beast of burden. **I am a woman and I have these human rights:**

- The right to life.
- The right to privacy.
- The right to freedom.
- The right to bodily integrity.
- The right to decide when and how I reproduce.

Mr. England, you and your friends do not get to trade these rights, while "dog and hog hunting," in return for a young man's chickens.

My human rights outweigh any you or the state corruptly and cynically seek to assign to a mass of dividing cells that will eventually turn into a 'natural' person. Personhood-for-zygote based bills and related legislation, like Georgia's and hundreds of others, bills and laws that criminalize pregnancy and abortion and penalize women for being women, violate my human rights.

Just because you cannot get pregnant does not mean I cannot think clearly, ethically, morally, rationally about my body, human life or the consequences of my actions. Just because you cannot get pregnant does not mean that I do not have rights when I *am* pregnant. I have responsibility but am powerless. You have power but are irresponsible with my rights.

By not trusting me, you force me to trust you. **And YOU are not trustworthy.**

I gestate humans, you do not. I know how it feels to be pregnant. You do not. I know what happens to a fetus in a womb. You do not. I have carried three fetuses to term. You have not. What I experience when I am pregnant is not empathy. It is permeability. The fetus is me. And the state is you, apparently. But, no matter what you say or do I have fundamental human rights. What makes you think that you, who cannot have this fully human

experience, can tell me anything about gestation or how I experience it? **Especially when you compare my existence and experience to that of brutish animals.**

The rest of the civilized world thinks this country has lost its mind. It's no wonder. Look at this list of frenzied misogyny:

1. Making women carry still-born fetuses to full term because cows and pigs do. This week, Mr. Edwards, you supported a bill requiring just this, because of just that. It has passed the House in Georgia and might very well pass the Senate. Women are different from farm animals, Mr. England, and this bill, requiring a woman to carry a dead or dying fetus, with no possibility of abortion, even when the she is in danger of dying, is inhumane and unethical. By forcing a woman to do this, you are violating her right not to be subjected to inhuman treatment and tortured. And, yes, involuntarily carrying a dead fetus to term, although not torture to you or to a pig, is torture for a woman. It is also a violation of her bodily integrity and a threat to her life and as such violates her right to life.

2. Consigning women to death to save a fetus. Abortions save women's lives. "Let women die" bills are happening all over the country. There is no simple or pretty way to put this. Every day, all over the world, women die because they do not have access to safe abortions. Yet, here we are, returning to the dark ages of maternal sacrifice. Do really have to type this sentence: this is a violation of women's fundamental right to life.

3. Criminalizing pregnancy and miscarriages and arresting, imprisoning and charging women who miscarry with murder, like Rennie Gibbs in Mississippi or at least 40 other similar cases in Alabama or like Bei Bei Shuai, a mentally ill person, who is currently imprisoned and charged with murder after trying to commit suicide while pregnant. Pregnant women are becoming a special class subject to "special" laws that infringe on their fundamental rights.

4. Forcing women to undergo involuntary vaginal penetration (otherwise called rape) with a condom-covered, six- to eight-inch ultrasound probe. Pennsylvania is currently considering that option along with eleven other states. Trans-vaginal ultrasounds undertaken with out a woman's consent are rape according the legal definition of the word. This violates a woman's bodily integrity and also constitutes torture when used, as states are suggesting, as a form of control and oppression. Women have the right not to be raped by the state.

5. Disabling women or sacrificing their lives by either withholding medical treatment or forcing women to undergo involuntary medical procedures. We impose an unequal obligation on women to sacrifice their bodily integrity for another. For example, as in *Tysiac v. Poland*, in which a mother of two, became blind after her doctor refused to perform an abortion that she wanted that would have halted the course of a degenerative eye disease. If my newborn baby is in need of a kidney and you have a spare matching one, can I enact legislation that says the state can take yours and give it to her? No. We do not force people to donate their organs to benefit others, even those who have already been born. One of the most fundamental of all human rights is that humans be treated equally before the law. Denying a woman this right is a violation of her equal right to this protection.

6. Giving zygotes "personhood" rights while systematically stripping women of their fundamental rights. There is too much to say about the danger of personhood ideas creeping into health policy to do it here. But, consider what happens to a woman whose womb is not considered the "best" environment for a gestating fetus in a world of personhood-for-zygote legislation: who decides the best environment -- the state, her insurance company, her employer, her rapist who decides he really, really wants to be a father? Anyone but a woman.

7. Inhibiting, humiliating and punishing women for their choices to have an abortion for any reason by levying taxes specifically on abortion, including abortions sought by rape victims to end their involuntary insemination, imposing restrictive requirements like 24 hour wait periods and empowering doctors to lie to female patients about their fetuses in order to avoid prosecution. In Arizona, Kansas, Texas,

Virginia, Colorado, Arkansas and other states around the country bills that make women "pay" for their choices are abounding.

8. Allowing employers to delve women's private lives and only pay for insurance when they agree, for religious reasons, with how she chooses to use birth control. In Arizona, which introduced such a bill this week, this means covering payment for birth control as a benefit only when a woman has proven that she will not use it to control her own reproduction (i.e., as birth control). As much as I am worried about women and families in Arizona though, I am more worried about those in Alabama. You see, as recently revealed in a public policy poll in Alabama, conservative, evangelicals who support "personhood" related "pro-life" legislation and are fighting for their "religious liberty" -- 21 percent think interracial marriage should be illegal. So, what if they decide that an employee involved in an interracial marriage should not, by divine mandate, reproduce? Do they switch and provide birth control for this employee? Do they make contraception a necessary term of employment for people in interracial marriages? This violates a woman's right to privacy. My womb is one million times more private than your bedrooms, gentlemen.

9. Sacrificing women's overall health and the well-being of their families in order to stop them from exercising their fundamental human right to control their own bodies and reproduction. Texas just did that when it turned down \$35million dollars in federal funds thereby ensuring that 300,000 low-income and uninsured Texas women will have no or greatly-reduced access to basic preventive and reproductive health care.

10. Depriving women of their ability to earn a living and support themselves and their families. Bills, like this one in Arizona, allow employers to fire women for using contraception. Women like these are being fired for not.

You presume to consign my daughters and yours to function as reproductive animals.

This is about sex and property, not life and morality. Sex because when women have sex and want to control their reproduction that threatens powerful social structures that rely on patriarchal access to and control over women as reproductive engines. Which brings us to property: control of reproduction was vital when the agricultural revolution took place and we, as a species, stopped meandering around plains in search of food. Reproduction and control of it ensured that a man could possess and consolidate wealth-building and food-producing land and then make sure it wasn't disaggregated by passing it on to one son he knew was his -- largely by claiming a woman and her gestation capability as property, too.

This is not about freedom of religion. If it were, we would, for example, allow Christian Scientists to refuse to pay for coverage of life-saving blood transfusions for employees. Religious freedom means I get to chose whether or not to be religious and if so, how. It does not mean that I get to impose my religion on others. Paying for insurance is part of the way we compensate employees, even when they use their insurance in ways we don't agree with and are in contravention of our own personal beliefs. I think that it is stupid, dangerous and immoral to chain smoke, especially around children whose lungs it irreparably harms. But, I still have to pay for an employee to have access to lung scans, nicotine patches and oxygen tanks. I do not get to say that my religious beliefs, which include keeping bodies as healthy as possible, make it possible for me to withhold payment of this employee's insurance. Guaranteed coverage of contraception and reproductive health care has overwhelming benefits for society, including reducing unwanted pregnancies and abortions. By inserting your religious beliefs so egregiously into government legislation and my life, you are imposing your religious beliefs on me. You don't like mandated insurance coverage for basic reproductive health humans with two X chromosomes? I don't like being bred by state compulsion like Mr. England's farm animals. **I have a MORAL OBJECTION to being treated like an animal and not a human.** You do not have to use contraception, you do not have to use birth control. **But, that does not mean you have any right to tell me that I cannot if I chose. That is my right.**

Property, control, sex, reproduction, morality, defining what is human. Sounds a lot like issues surrounding slavery 170 years ago. It is no surprise that of the 16 states that never repealed their anti-miscegenation laws, but rather had them overturned by the Supreme Court in 1967 more than half have introduced personhood bills. Like anti-miscegenation laws, anti-choice laws and bills that humiliate women, that treat them like beasts, that violate their

bodily autonomy, are based on ignorance, entitlement and arrogance. These laws are not about "personhood" but "humanity." That women of color are massively, disproportionately affected by these assaults on their bodies and rights should also come as no surprise - their rights and their bodies have always been the most vulnerable assault.

This is about keeping women's wombs public and in other people's control -- the exact opposite of private and in their own control.

And, yes, I do know how complicated the ethics, bioethics and legal arguments related to these decisions are. You, apparently, do not. If you were truly concerned with sustaining life and improving its quality or in protecting innocent children, you would begin by having compassion and empathy for living, born people that require and deserve your attention. You feed them, educate them, lift them from poverty and misery. You do not compound these problems as you are with twisted interpretations of divine will. Only after that do you have the moral legitimacy to entertain the notion of talking to me about *my* uterus and what I do with it. By then, fully functional artificial wombs should be available and you can implant your own, since you are so fond of animal analogies, as was completed with this male mouse. What you are doing is disgraceful, hypocritical and morally corrupt.

And, no, I am not crazy. I am angry.

Mr. Santorum, Mr. England and Mr. Brownback and Mr. Perry you should consider not clinging so dangerously and perversely to the Agrarian Revolution ideas. Birth control and safe abortions are life-saving technologies. These archaic bills and laws, wasteful of time, money and lives, obscure an enduring and unchangeable truth: **safe and effective family planning is the transformative social justice accomplishment of the 20th century.** They will not go away. This is a revolution, too.

In a 1851 speech in which she argued for equal rights for women, Sojourner Truth said the following: "The poor men seems to be all in confusion, and don't know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights, give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they won't be so much trouble."

Do you, Terry England, Sam Brownback, Rick Santorum and friends even *know* who Sojourner Truth is?

[She said this, "**Religion without humanity is very poor human stuff.**" —Sojourner Truth. —SteveB]

4. "Did Robert Downey Jr. Really Just Accuse Kirk Douglas of a Brutal Rape?" by Ryan Tate, Gawker

Mar. 15, 2012, (<http://gawker.com/5893793/did-robert-downey-jr-really-just-accuse-kirk-douglas-of-a-brutal-rape>)

Deep in the weeds of show business blogging, in the comments under a blind gossip item, the actor Robert Downey Jr. may have just laid a venomous bite on Kirk Douglas, accusing the legendary actor of raping actress Natalie Wood.

Either that or hundreds of people have just been conned by a massive fraud who wants us to believe famous screen stars obsess over anonymous blog comments (as, in fairness, some have been known to do). The purported Downey commenter did provide the correct home phone number of Wood's daughter as evidence of his own authenticity, for whatever that's worth.

Here's how things unfolded: Over on the Hollywood blog Crazy Days and Nights, mysterious longtime commenter "Himmmm" today posted repeatedly under a blind item about a longtime actor who slept with an underage teenager, abused women, and pressured them into getting abortions. Himmmm, who online gossipers recently decided was Downey Jr, claimed actor Ryan O'Neal was the one who did those things, and went on to out another purported woman abusing scumbag, claiming Kirk Douglas repeatedly raped actress Natalie Wood in a hotel room decades ago, then laughed at and mocked her.

Rumors about Douglas raping Wood have been around for years , but Himmmm's cred within the blog as a Hollywood insider , the level of detail in his story, and his insinuation that he is Downey Jr. all lent his claim a certain standing, at least on the site.

Himmm started with O'Neal, lamenting "the HELL he's caused me and so many other" (O'Neal and Downey Jr. co-starred in a 1989 movie) and claiming O'Neal had managed "to piss off Steven Spielberg, Aaron Spelling, Tippi Hedren, Brian DePalma, Robert Evans, Charlie Bludhorn, Lew Wasserman, and about 90% of the then-powerful William Morris Agency."

Himmm's initial comment was well received by other commenters. As his stuff usually is: Not only does Himmm often seem to have inside details, he has insinuated in the past that his account is shared between a "movie star," "rock star" and two "true creative geniuses."

Today he was clearly in movie star mode. After lashing O'Neal, Himmm promised "later on I'm going to share with all of you a story (or two) I promise will make your heads explode."

The Kirk Douglas rape accusation

He delivered, laying out three long postings in page three of the comments (part 1, part 2, part 3.) This was the purported Kirk Douglas-Natalie Wood story. It begins with an introduction describing how Wood, wanting edgier roles as a rebellious teenager, had a consensual affair with a married, older director to win a part. Other actors then thought she would sleep with anyone for a part. One such actor, Douglas, allegedly went well beyond trying to barter for sex:

[This story] concerns one of the biggest male stars ever, and one of the most beloved female stars to ever live...

One day she was invited to meet with this movie star about an upcoming major role. This man was a legend already, and was very powerful. ... Thinking [s]he herself was powerful and savvy, she accepted the invite. In his hotel room. She never saw it coming.

Without even discussing the film, this actor — drunk already — began making a pass at her. She politely declined, and excused herself. He wouldn't have it. He literally threw her down, slapped the hell out of her, and ripped her clothes off. He shouted obscenities at her, continually punched and held her arms so tight he left scars and bruises.

He raped her repeatedly, spitting on her, and did permanent damage to her body. She was bleeding everywhere, with a battered face. She passed out. When she came to, the actor was still in the room gloating, and told her to come see him tomorrow night and he might give her the role. He laughed at her as she fell down, her legs so wobbly and weak. She gathered her torn clothes, and tried to walk out of the hotel and to her car - blood and semen running down her legs and bruises already forming on her face.

She could barely make it back home in her car. She wanted to kill herself, so ashamed of what happened. The damage to her psyche was permanent, and haunted her forever.

...Her mom said she must have made the actor mad and offended him. They called a doctor, who took her to the hospital secretly to have her treated... The studio knew, and did nothing. After all, the star actor was a money machine. ... She grew into an amazing woman with a legendary career. But she never forgot, or forgave, and never got over what happened.

She never named the star actor publicly, but her friends and family knew the truth. Even after marriage and kids, if she saw this actor anywhere - she would almost convulse and cry. And worst of all, Hollywood and the world continued to honor him, pay him, and treat him like a king.

Himmm went on to name the actor in question:

Today, he's still alive and barely holding on. But those who know the truth are still hoping and praying he will rot in hell for eternity. That all his good deeds and donations will never mask the truth...

So when the time comes, and the now 95-year-old Kirk Douglas, the superstar actor, finally dies, there will be tributes and honors about him. Just remember that he is a monster who never repented, apologized, nor showed any sorrow for destroying the lives of others. Especially the life of that young beloved actress named Natalie Wood.

Accuser claims to be Robert Downey Jr. (basically)

Our sister site Jezebel this week speculated and relayed the speculation of others that Himmmm might be Downey Jr. In these new postings, he seemed to confirm this, inasmuch as an anonymous blog commenter can confirm anything, giving clues that amount to an outright claim he is Downey Jr.. These included Wood's daughter's home phone number.

This is the money paragraph where Himmmm attempts to out himself as Downey Jr. (from part 2):

I worked with Natalie's daughter on a film in the late 90s. Like her mother, Natasha is an amazing woman and amazing actress who is a great person in every way.

I know a lot of you have speculated that I'm some nobody nut-case pretending to be someone else. Pretending to be a movie star when in fact I'm not. I think that's kind of hilarious. But if you want to call Natasha and ask her the name of the male actor she co-starred with in a movie with Heather Graham, then go for it. Call her at home if you want to but be polite. Her number is: ac 310 Four [last six digits redacted]. And remember, she's NOT in on this so don't blame or interrogate her.

The movie Himmmm mentions is almost certainly *Two Girls and a Guy*, the only 1990s film by Wood's daughter Natsha Gregson Wagner in which the actress co-starred with Heather Graham. The film's other co-star was Downey Jr. Recall how Himmmm claimed Wood's "friends and family knew the truth" about the rape. So the idea is Wagner knew about the attack on her mom and grew close enough to Downey Jr. after working with him to vent about it.

The number Himmmm provided for Gregson Wagner does, in fact, belong to a person in Malibu matching her name and age, according to a public records database. (The person with Wagner's name and age who owns that number and a related cell phone number did not return calls to both numbers seeking comment.)

Of course, the number also appears in a few stray internet white pages searches under the name "Natasha Wagner."

Which is to say, this could all be some sort of elaborate hoax by someone with an axe to grind, a knack for sounding authoritative about Hollywood, and way too much time on his hands. Someone who wants us to believe, as Himmmm put it, that "you'd be surprised how many actors, filmmakers, and musicians read this blog. Some even comment." And someone smart enough to pin his impulsive, reckless, obsessive comments on an impulsive, reckless, obsessive actor like Downey Jr.

Either way, the Crazy Days and Nights crowd is going bananas. Not only did we receive two different tips about this within one hour of Himmmm's comment going up, the comments' associated thread has grown to 827 postings, from around 600 when Himmmm first posted his Douglas allegations, and less than 200 when he posted his comments on O'Neal.

Most of the comments about Himmmm's Douglas allegation are supportive, along the lines of this one, which read in part, "To Himmmm... you rock dude. SO SO SO SO SO much utter respect for you and your cojones to say what you've said." Or this one, reading, "All I can say is a big THANK YOU ... I can only speculate on your identity, but if you are who most people think you are, I am happy that you have chosen to be one of us here at this site.

Others were more skeptical, like this one, which read, "The Kirk Douglas/Natalie Wood story is well known. It's described in multiple biographies of Natalie Wood, without naming the actor, but it's not a secret. Let's not pretend that Himmmm just revealed something spectacular."

Whether "Himmmm just revealed something spectacular" depends, in the end, on whether he really is Downey Jr., and whether he really did get his information, as he implies but never quite says, from Natalie Wood's daughter after co-starring with her in a movie 15 years ago. For all the hubub, it seems unlikely a star - even Robert Downey Jr. - would make accusations this recklessly after having his real name associated with his anonymous handle. Himmmm concluded his allegations by signing off from Crazy Days and Nights forever, but, ludicrous as it may seem, something tells us the real-life Downey Jr. is going to have to answer questions about these comments with more than an internet kiss off.

Update: Himmmm's comments about Douglas specifically were "removed by the author" within an hour and a half of this post going up.

FotM NEWSLETTER #97 (Mar. 19, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120319-00		SteveB	Game Change: Women in Power by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Mikulski Makes History While Creating 'Zone of Civility' for Senate Women" & "God's Will?: Sarah Palin's Secret Plot to Capture the White House in 2012" & "10 Reasons the Rest of the World Thinks the U.S. Is Nuts" & "Did Robert Downey Jr. Really Just Accuse Kirk Douglas of a Brutal Rape?")
20120316-01	08:05	SteveB	"Andrew Breitbart: Big Deal, Big Coronary, Big Corpse"
20120316-03	11:49	Beth	Re: 2012 Republican Primaries & 2012 Election (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #96)
20120316-04	14:41	Ben	"Gasoline Lifts Inflation, Dents Confidence"
20120316-02	10:17	SteveB	Friends of the Middle Website
20120316-05	15:32	Pam	Re: Friends of the Middle Website (reply to SteveB, above)
20120316-06	15:43	SteveB	"Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" [& Anything having to Do with S-E-X]
20120316-07	15:59	Pam	Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120318-01	06:57	SteveB	Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to Pam, above)
20120316-08	16:01	Ben	Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120316-10	17:48	Art	Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to SteveB, above)
20120316-09	17:39	SteveB	Re: Cartoon (reply to MarthaH)
20120316-13	19:35	Pam	Re: Cartoon (reply to MarthaH)
20120316-11	17:58	SteveG	"George Clooney Arrested for Protesting at Sudanese Embassy" & "Facing Recall, Wisconsin Senator Pam Galloway Will Resign" & "130,000 Texas Women Lose Health Care Just So Texas Can Prove How Anti-Abortion It Is"
20120316-12	18:02	SteveG	"Senate Bill Could Roll Back Consumers' Health Insurance Savings"
20120317-01	11:25	SteveG	Fw: Somebody Else's Opinion: 2012 Republican Primaries
20120317-02	12:41	Art	Re: Somebody Else's Opinion: 2012 Republican Primaries (reply to SteveG, above)
20120317-03	13:23	Pam	Re: Somebody Else's Opinion: 2012 Republican Primaries (reply to Art, above)
20120317-04	16:12	SteveG	Fw: Change.org Petition: Don't Let the Bullies Win
20120317-05	16:14	SteveG	"The Power of Recalls in Wisconsin"
20120317-06	17:24	Pam	Poem: "The Necklace" by Osip Mandelstam
20120318-02	13:33	SteveG	"Scientists Warn EPA Over Monsanto's GMO Crop Failures, Dangers"
20120318-03	17:20	Pam	Tony Judt R.I.P.
20120318-04	21:16	Bill	Re: Tony Judt R.I.P. (reply to Pam, above)
20120318-05	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Sojourner Truth: An American Hero

20120316-01	08:05	SteveB	"Andrew Breitbart: Big Deal, Big Coronary, Big Corpse"
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The truth about Andrew Breitbart, R.I.P....

"Andrew Breitbart: Big Deal, Big Coronary, Big Corpse" by Mobutu & Gen. Ze'Evi, Gawker

Mar. 6, 2012, (<http://gawker.com/5890660/andrew-breitbart-big-deal-big-coronary-big-corpse?tag=america.s-screaming-conscience>)

Provocateur, website founder and collector of America's largest wads of spittle Andrew Breitbart died last Thursday morning, when some sentient shred of his cardiac organ kamikazed out of an exhausted sense of justice.

The invertebrate response from journalists was exactly to be expected. Breitbart said, like, *bad stuff* in his lifetime, but he also married someone and fathered people; once he even objected to anti-gay GOP rhetoric. A malicious career and two milquetoast mitigating facts: It all balanced out, really, at least for the purposes of forced, quailing objectivity. To borrow a gross analogy lustily employed on Breitbart's own websites, if today's mainstream media was penning obits on May 1, 1945, they would have summed up with, "Despite initiating the Second World War, the German leader was fond of public architecture and is survived by his beloved dachshunds."

But nothing so generic could be the money quote of this squeamish grudging esteem-a-thon. For that, we have to go to *Slate's* Dave Weigel, who quoted Breitbart thus: "'Feeding the media is like training a dog,' he wrote. 'You can't throw an entire steak at a dog to train it to sit. You have to give it little bits of steak over and over again until it learns.'" This is just the carrot part of the metaphor. Nobody mentioned the stick.

Breitbart knew the shtick all too well: Accuse journalists of contrived groupthink, partisan deception and indoctrination to needle them professionally, while transmitting that rote accusation to your audience. Insult and demonize them on any available level until they strike back like cornered animals, and—suddenly—there's America's proof: these liberal journo thugs want to silence an honest voice, and, golly, are they ever mad when they try to.

Breitbart trained the media like dogs, and he was still doing so, on Thursday morning, from beyond the grave. People joked that they didn't know if his death was a hoax, and it's a certainty that some asked because they were afraid of telling the truth about someone by then literally incapable of hurting them. It was like watching a sick rerun of a Stalinist apparatchik sitcom, where one functionary was unwilling to believe another that The Leader is really dead, each presuming the announcement might be a trap.

If you beat a dog long enough, it learns to cower before you reach for a switch.

The anemic response wasn't all wariness. Numerous journalists, even ones on the other side of the ideological fence, were quick to note that Breitbart was generous and warm in private. But Breitbart also destroyed a woman's career in public. He destroyed an institution that helps poor minorities in public. He called Occupiers rapists in public. He screamed at strangers and loved to talk about kicking their a*ses in public. Outside of books written by the Aqua Net-shellacked c-minus *Sturmabteilung* of FOX News, his stamp on history in 20 years will be a Coughlin-esque paragraph about race-baiting and fraud.

Besides, those latter anecdotes won't ever have much traction for anyone but beltway raconteurs. The middle-class-and-sinking Tea Party that Breitbart claimed to speak for has little idea who he was sucking scallops with in Georgetown and would likely deny that he did it. Even if they could be persuaded that it happened, it would take the same role as his CPAC story of dining with Weather Underground wash-up Bill Ayers, a tale that elicited a concerned hush when he began it but soon resulted in smug smirking from the clone audience: "Ahahaha, I get it. He ate their good food, but he was trolling them and gathering intel for the coming mission to Galt's Gulch/RAHOWA/etc.!"

But this cynical gadfly behavior presents no aberrancy. What his biggest fans have never confronted, and what the obits omitted, perhaps out of embarrassment, is that Andrew Breitbart was always a creature of the left, accepted by the establishment, nurtured by the American elite. They made him from cradle to grave. He was banal troll indistinguishable from any gin-blossomed paunch of resentment occupying a neighboring barstool and nursing his own sense of denied grandeur—save for the glorious intervention of two cultures he so loudly claimed to hate: The Hollywood madding crowd and, later, the Beltway water cooler.

[The Sorrows of Young Breitbart](#)

If, as the Dean from *Animal House* said, "fat, drunk, and stupid is no way to go through life," Breitbart's is an inspiring story of persistence in spite of the odds.

Andrew James Breitbart was born to hippie parents in the middle of the last American century's prosperous liberal period, then adopted by upper-middle-class restaurateurs in one of the nicer neighborhoods in our nation's blue states. Breitbart, aware that "scion to a Santa Monica steakhouse" does not a man of the people make, attempted to downplay his family's success, allowing only that "My parents granted me a brilliant middle-class life, one that didn't overwhelm and lavish spoils on me to the point of absurdity." Like a great many of the personal-responsibility sh*tickers of the right wing's social-Darwinian moshpit, he didn't have to do much bootstrapping to go from a zygote, to Brentwood, to a place like Tulane, where people can drink a lot of beer and wake up seven years later as attorneys.

So far, Breitbart's story lacks an essential tragedy, the sense of loss that conservatism mourns. Horatio Alger never wrote the story of a well-heeled Californian nearly failing out of his American Studies program because he tried to drink the Southern Comfort equivalent of Lake Ponchartrain. And so like Rick Santorum, who transformed the dull meathead reality of his Penn State days into an epic, dark struggle against the oppressive forces of cultural studies, Tulane provided Breitbart a key thing: An excuse to break from the vague liberalism of his youth. His later accounts of the fateful moment of realization varied; historians will determine whether it was indeed during a concert by The Cure at the Hollywood Bowl, or while watching the public grilling on C-SPAN of a "dignified" Clarence Thomas, America's pube-bequeather.

What is beyond question is the critical role his Tulane professors played in crafting "Breitbart: Bubba Avenger." Their attempts at "brainwashing" had, instead, created a fighter. Repudiating liberal indoctrination by failing to meet even the shabby standards of the apparently predictable and sclerotic left is a familiar hero's journey for the right. Breitbart slouched, eked out a pathetic GPA as an *American Studies major*, then tried to exonerate his failure via a baseless indictment of "Marxist" scholarship: He didn't fare poorly because of innate failures but because he rejected the school's terms. ("Dude, I woulda done waaay better on the SATs, but I took 'em drunk, because f*ck that.")

It's a familiar conservative refrain, and a familiar origin story, because nothing propels you toward the modern GOP's welcoming counterfactual bosom like finding your mediocrity disdained by institutions relying on historicity, evidence and peer review. Conservatives know why conservatives test badly: The tests are rigged commie bullsh*t. Conservatives know how conservatives are smart: They agree with other conservatives. There's even a publishing structure for this.

He Is Heavy, He's My Brother: Drudging His Way To The Top

From Tulane, Breitbart took the well-worn route of many a conservative before him: To Hollywood, where he took a job with E! Entertainment Television, helping to develop their online presence. But as vital as were Breitbart's efforts in writing synopses for last week's episode of *Party of Five*, he was still destined for bigger and better things.

The 1990s were a very special time for conservatives. Due in no small part to Breitbart's efforts, during the Clinton years, the right wing merry-go-round broke the sound barrier. Breitbart made friends fast, introducing himself in 1995 to bilgewater Beltway rainmaker Matt Drudge, for whom he came to work as assistant and night editor. In 1997 he began working as a researcher for union-busting gadfly Arianna Huffington; it was Breitbart who helped break the story of chickenhawk Clinton donor Larry Lawrence's improper burial in Arlington. Nevertheless, as late as 2007, Breitbart remained relatively unknown-his own independent website functioning as little more than a Drudge clone, a drab link aggregator. It took the rise of Obama for Breitbart to spread his wings and fly.

The Bully Pulpit

ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, was a community-based nonprofit founded in 1970 devoted to issues of poverty, housing, wages, voter registration, education, labor and social justice. Very active against predatory lending, ACORN consistently delivered a commodity liberal groups generally eschew: victory.

But in 2009, "whey-faced little sh*t" James O'Keefe and Florida dumbbelle dropout Hannah Giles went around the country to ACORN offices, playing dress-up, and talking with low-level representatives about their plans for illegal behavior, mostly relating to prostitution and sex trafficking. The videos, released on Breitbart's new website, *Big Government*, were heavily edited, and O'Keefe never appeared on camera, raising questions as to the veracity of Breitbart's claim that ACORN was facilitating crime in poor communities.

O'Keefe further fostered the idea that he was dressed as a fanciful, 1970s-era pimp in the meetings, appearing on cable news in the get-up and playacting as Iceberg Slime. This was a lie, confirmed several times by Giles herself, but elided by Breitbart as he pushed his dittohead rendition of *Harlan County USA*. His article was definitively debunked on factual grounds several times over.

But when it was all over, ACORN was bankrupted, targeted by Congress, roasted by the talking heads. A good organization was taken under by a massive series of lies given life by a media that, rather than interrogate the obviously baseless accusations made against them, uncritically accepted them.

It was the first major hit in Breitbart's short but brutal career, and the media's reaction was pure delight. The right-wing blogosphere and FOX News unsurprisingly went balls-to-the-wall about the perfidious black slavers at ACORN. But if Breitbart's most-consuming hatred was that of the irredeemably corrupt, exclusionary media, the reaction to his ACORN muckraking presented a quandary: The drive-by media ate it up. As the story brewed and steamed in the echo chamber, Politico's Mike Allen, a Drudge-baiter afforded remarkable influence among the DC villagers, whined that ACORN's purported crimes weren't being covered *enough* in the media. As it became a bigger and bigger story, media outlets were accused of bias for not covering it. And so it was that no less a "liberal" media titan like the *New York Times* itself laughed alongside Breitbart several times over. Upon pushback, the *Times* refused to retract their incredibly flawed reportage, even though a series of successive investigations had found ACORN a largely innocent party to a malicious, fabricated hoax.

The fact was, there was no "there" there, as the *New Yorker* documented:

The hidden-camera footage, which Breitbart has called "the Abu Ghraib of the Great Society," did not expose endemic corruption at Acorn: though O'Keefe and Giles induced employees to coöperate with an appalling scenario, they did not dig up evidence of any actual wrongdoing by those employees.

In anything other than a thoroughly besh*tted republic, Breitbart's shamelessly pimping a false exposé like this would have seen him broken on a rack. That same magical land of justice and proper incredulity would at least have addressed itself to the quality of investigation brought by an accuser, rather than running like pageload mercenaries and buzz merchants to update their sites' banner headlines. Instead, Breitbart's allegedly sworn enemies did his work for him. They weren't his antagonists: They were his accomplices. When Andrew Breitbart mounted the head of a community organization onto his wall, it was the liberal media that had hoisted it into place.

Mr. Breitbart's America

Breitbart is another sign of American decline. He's what happens when even the ratf*ckers have lost all subtlety to their art. When the far-right is bad at dirty tricks, and can't even frame up some black activists without a messy, drawn-out pushback, it's time to fear for the state of the union, because their every success is indication that they've had help. Donald Segretti and G. Gordon Liddy plotted to kill Jack Anderson and firebomb the Brookings Institute. Breitbart's "Little Rascals" targeted mid-level black female USDA officials and got arrested playing "Plumbers" in Mary Landrieu's office. Nixon couldn't have used these punks as anything but Cambodian cannon fodder.

It was not any remarkable skills on Breitbart's part that got him where we was, beyond a certain animal cunning about the currents of new media. And for all his whining about the corrupt, decadent, "Democrat Media," it was those same outlets that made him. For all the posthumous tributes to his "fearlessness," it remains unclear what exactly he needed to fear. He was accepted! As labor journalist Mike Elk recalled, having crashed a fancy DC cocktail party, he was shocked to find Breitbart "chatting up some black woman, making her laugh, and I was in a state of shock. Here was this man who had done so much to flame racial hatred, hitting on a black woman... hanging out with fancy liberals instead of poor, redneck Tea Party guys." How was Breitbart able to inflict a critical

hit on ACORN? A truly subversive journalist diagnosed the means years ago: "It was the built-in blind spots of the Objective rules and dogma that allowed Nixon to slither into the White House in the first place." Breitbart snorted out those blind spots like a truffle pig.

The Beltway Village is a dull place, full of boring people. Breitbart stood out, and in an elite culture that worships savvy and confidence, he was destined for stardom. Sure, he'd play rabblouser to the Tea Party cheap seats, but he always remained insecure enough to drop terms like "the Frankfurt School" or "cultural Marxism." He wanted to be taken seriously by those liberals, a weakness that might have been endearing, were his unregenerate viciousness not routinely employed in racist whistleblowing and character assassination.

An Atlantic article published in the wake of his wake commemorated him as a "punk rock Republican." Please—George Wallace was more punk than Breitbart. He wore his execrable racism pinned through his nostril, a DIY fascist scaring all the straights in America, hissing tribal exhortations as low and fast as a two minute Black Flag song. Breitbart craved that liberal respect, wanted to still go to the White House Correspondents' Dinner, and so angrily denied the obvious truth: That he relied on the dog whistle as his go-to mobilizing cry. Such race-baiting constituted some of Breitbart's last writings, alleging Obama marched with the Black Panthers in 2007, with black militants constituting the driving force behind an Obama Administration settlement with black farmers for decades of financial deprivation. Nope, no racial tropes here.

Breitbart, like that acid-filled tear duct Glen Beck, knew that the blatant, unconcealed racism of Wallace was now beyond the pale, and both devoted themselves to the same project—appropriating the mantle of "civil rights" for white conservatives, and labeling blacks, Muslims and liberals as the bigots and aggressors. And in spite of his professed hatred for the media, it was the mainstream's myopic acceptance of buzz that allowed such McCarthyite fairy tales to gain traction. So it was with ACORN, and its black staffers: A race-baiting frame job receives mainstream suction and puts a tough-minded advocate of social justice into Chapter 11. And USDA official Shirley Sherrod, whose speech to the NAACP about overcoming bias and helping indigent white farmers save their livelihoods was twisted into "video evidence of racism coming from a federal appointee and NAACP award recipient." The accusation was obviously false, but the NAACP, the Department of Agriculture and the Obama White House all threw her under the bus. Sherrod lost her job, and was well on her way to winning a defamation lawsuit against Breitbart before he croaked.

There are more crimes—his incoherent defense of Tea Partiers caught shouting "nigger" at civil rights icon Rep. John Lewis and "faggot" at Rep. Barney Frank, his repeated assaults on working people and labor unions, his final appearance at CPAC 2012, which the thoroughly sh*tfaced bullfrog concluded with the pre-coronary warm-up of hollering at the "rapists" of Occupy Wall Street.

Hell, for all his machismo, he was a cold sweating skink when trapped in a corner. Blogger Mike Stark bent Breitbart into a stuttering wreck over the ACORN vids, leaving the clam belly to sputter that he couldn't "legally" discuss his starmaking moment, like some mob snitch bombing on the stand. Even a milquetoast like George Stephanopoulos shamed him on air like a tongue-tied toddler over the Sherrod story. His crew of flunkies is a menagerie of some of the most hideous political detritus collected around a political figure since the Gaddafi family fled into the four winds.

Inherit the Windbag

Who will be heir to Breitbart's proud legacy? James O'Keefe is by now an oft-arrested Alfalfa lookalike who still lives with his parents, was brutally humiliated at Columbia University *in the middle of his own ambush*, and was most recently accused of drugging and sexually harassing a female blogger. One wonders if Andy ever yelled "stop raping people" at him. Ex-*Saturday Night Live* star Victoria Jackson has shown an impressive capacity for producing music that even the most die-hard Bircher might find cause for involuntary detention in a state-funded facility. The two leading lights of the anti-Muslim movement, Robert Spencer and Pamela Geller, can only improve upon their records of inspiring mass murder in Scandinavia. Then there's *Big Journalism* editor-in-chief Dana Loesch, reliable dispenser of Nazi analogies and state-mandated rape apologetics, who got punked by Roland Martin on the confrontation-allergic CNN and whose husband is accomplished at rapping a word that sounds like "n*gger."

Regardless, whoever replaces him will work with the same gamed system that made him. Breitbart rode to prominence on the toadying of a media wary of being called liberal and petrified by conservative outrage. It was his winning formula: Keep beating the dogs until they start preemptively terrorizing themselves. Like any good bully, Breitbart picked his targets well, exploiting the existing insecurities of an institution that could be beaten further to the right by its own complaisance. After a decade of keeping his foot on the throats of fellow journalists, it never occurred to them to kick his bloated wineskin around the Beltway the moment they learned he'd died. Instead, they warily asked one another, "Is it for real? Is he really dead? Can the creature come back? *Can he hear us talking about him?*"

There's a more generous interpretation, one echoed by a lot of comments made in hasty obituaries, that a wife has been widowed and four children left fatherless. And perhaps for some that's enough reason to whitewash a career richly studded with racism, hatred, and contempt. Perhaps that's enough to turn honest evaluations of a life riven with opportunistic malice into mealy-mouthed encomia about "a provocateur" and a "punk rock journalist."

Of course, nobody was asking fretful hand-wringing questions about children when it was time to throw a sop to conservatives and pillory ACORN and Shirley Sherrod. Nobody asked how many children had been given a better life for having their parents rescued from predatory lending. Nobody asked how many children's lives were improved by the good offices of Shirley Sherrod. In the last few days, nobody's asked how many lives will not be affected for the better because we've lost their contributions. And for all the talk of his children, nobody's asked what kind of America they stand to inherit from their father—whether black kids on the playground with them will endure a wider world of fear, wary of a country so easily whipped into a furor of suspicion of them, their motives, their peer groups, their voices.

There wasn't time to ask those questions, not when one needed to labor to find a plausible compliment for someone who luxuriated in poisoning the racial discourse and raining abuse down on colleagues in a crass endless hump for pageloads and ad revenue. There wasn't time, and in any event, they were still afraid—checking the thesaurus for words of praise that seemed acceptably sincere, instead of taking up a spade to help bury him deep in the earth, not merely to put greater distance between him and humanity but so that Hell does not have to reach so high to claim him.

20120316-03	11:49	Beth	Re: 2012 Republican Primaries & 2012 Election (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #96)
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From Beth (Mar. 16, 2012, 11:49 am)—reply to Pam, Mar. 15, 2012, ref: 2012 Republican Primaries and 2012 Election

In response to Pam's comment about a Santorum/Gingrich ticket. That would frighten me so much that I would be unable to sleep or breathe from the convention to election day. Someone said to me the other day that Santorum is how fascism comes to America. I just read the definition of "fascism" on Wikipedia, and Santorum is pretty close. I do not believe he is electable, but I have been horrified by the success he has had in the primaries. I certainly would not stay in this country if he were elected.

20120316-04	14:41	Ben	"Gasoline Lifts Inflation, Dents Confidence"
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Election year conspiracy?

I don't have time to dig through statistics and past election years, but, hey! You're retired!

I figure that the Republicans are far more in control of refined gasoline prices than the Democrats, but, hey: I see conspiracies everywhere.

But if they can't find anything better to nail on the incumbent, there's always a rising price of gasoline, isn't there? Record profits breaking the records of last quarter's record profits, again and again, and... who's paying that dividend? Joe Consumer - the voter - of course!

"Gasoline Lifts Inflation, Dents Confidence" by Lucia Mutikani, Reuters

Mar. 16, 2012, (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/16/us-cpi-idUSBRE82F0N220120316>)

(WASHINGTON) Consumer prices rose the most in 10 months in February as the cost of gasoline spiked, but there was little sign that underlying inflation pressures were building up.

Surging gasoline prices put a small dent in consumer confidence early this month, other data showed on Friday. Still, Americans do not believe the sharp run-up in prices will last.

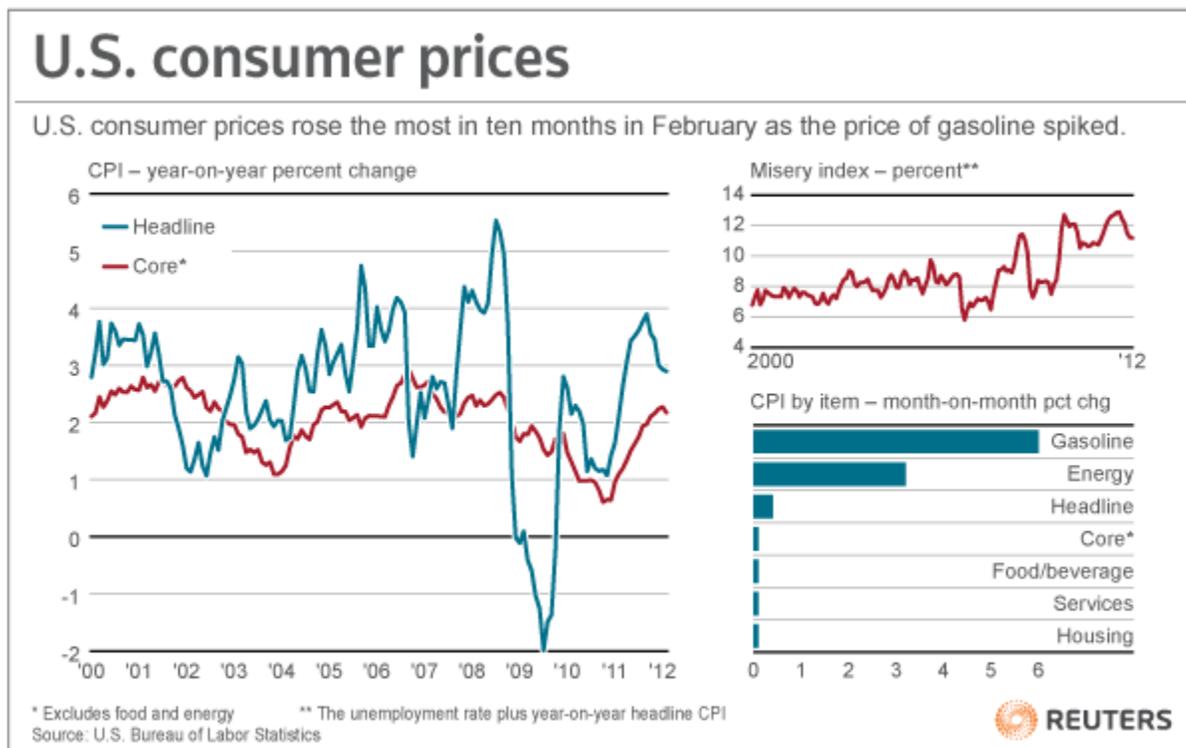
The Labor Department said the Consumer Price Index rose 0.4 percent in February after advancing 0.2 percent in January. Gasoline accounted for more than 80 percent of the rise.

Stripping out volatile food and energy costs, the so-called core CPI edged up just 0.1 percent.

"Consumer purchasing power, at least for the next few months, is going to remain pressured by rising gasoline prices," said Sam Bullard, a senior economist at Well Fargo Securities in Charlotte, North Carolina. However, he said a trend toward lower inflation was still in place.

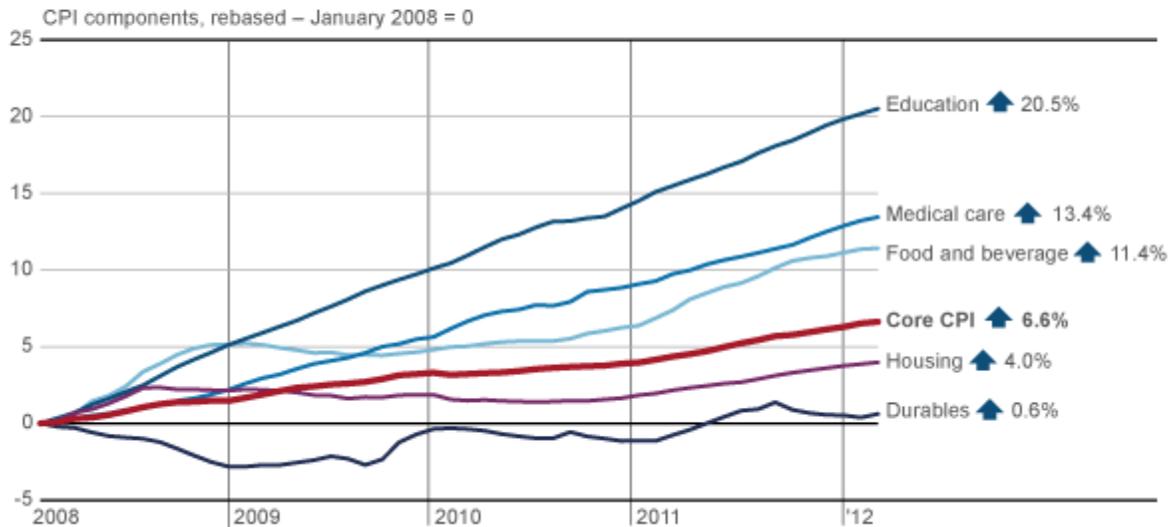
Consumer prices rose 2.9 percent last month from a year-ago, unchanged from January but down from a peak of 3.9 percent in September. The core index was up 2.2 percent over the 12 months through February, slowing from 2.3 percent in January.

The Federal Reserve said on Tuesday the recent spike in energy costs would likely lift inflation only temporarily. Over a longer horizon, it said inflation was poised to run at or below its 2 percent target.



U.S. inflation

Core CPI (which excludes food and energy) rose 0.1 percent in February. Since the onset of the recession, education, medical care and food/beverage costs have risen faster than core CPI. The price of housing and durable goods, however, have lagged core CPI.



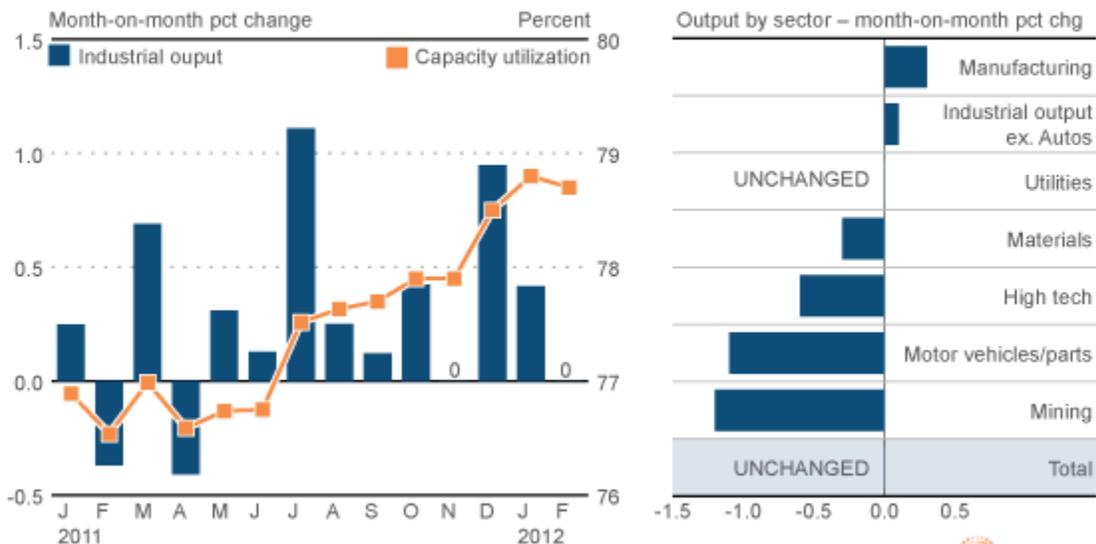
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics



Reuters graphic/Stephen Culp 16/03/12

U.S. industrial output, capacity utilization

Industrial production was unchanged in February as a sharp drop in mining output offset a third straight monthly gain in factory production.



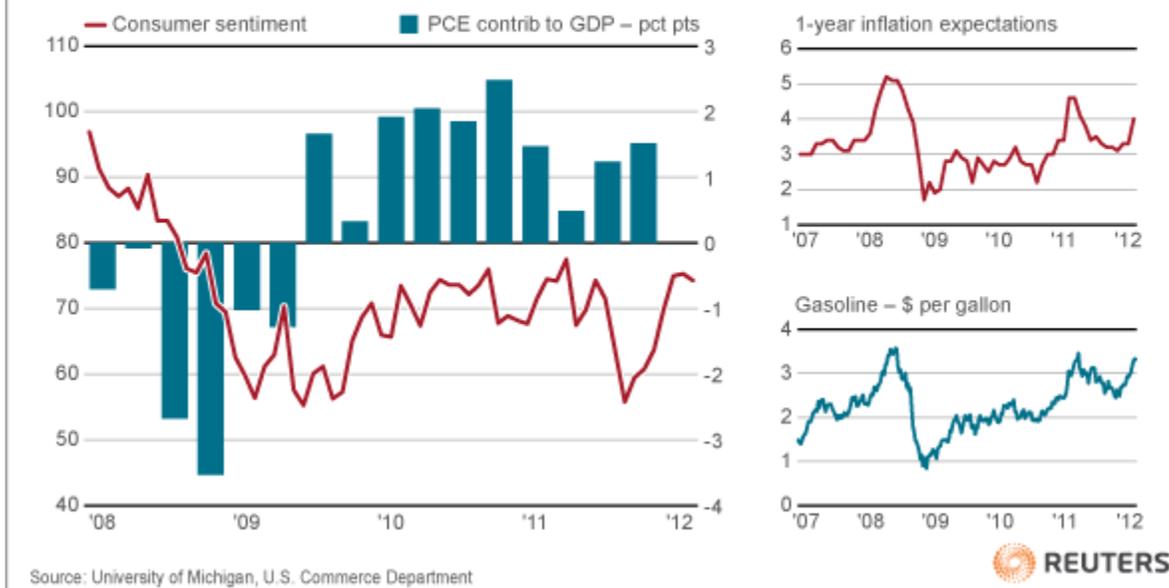
Source: U.S. Federal Reserve



Reuters graphic/Stephen Culp 16/03/12

U.S. consumer sentiment

Consumer sentiment dipped in early March due as rising gasoline prices pushed American's inflation expectations for the next year higher.



Source: University of Michigan, U.S. Commerce Department

Reuters graphic/Stephen Culp

16/03/12

GASOLINE HURTS SENTIMENT

Gasoline prices have increased 53 cents since the start of the year to an average of \$3.88 a gallon in the week to Monday.

That helped pull the Thomson Reuters/University of Michigan index on consumer sentiment down to 74.3 early this month from 75.3 in February.

Consumer expectations for inflation one year ahead jumped to 4 percent from 3.3 percent, but the five-year reading rose only slightly to 3 percent, and the survey's director said Americans do not expect the steep climb in gasoline costs to last.

"Overall, the data indicate that \$4 gasoline has lost its shock value, although the drain on discretionary income will still affect spending, mostly among lower-income households," survey director Richard Curtin said.

Inflation expectations among investors, as signaled by spreads in the bond market, have also been on the rise, supported by a stream of relatively upbeat economic data. Inflation expectations, however, as measured in the U.S. Treasuries debt market, fell back a bit after the CPI report.

Tensions over Iran's nuclear program have kept alive fears of oil supply disruptions and have pushed prices higher.

With gasoline weighing on the economy's recovery, President Barack Obama, who faces re-election in November, has been considering tapping strategic oil stocks to ease the price pressure.

Other data on Friday showed the economy continues to expand moderately. Production at the nation's mines, factories and utilities held steady last month after a 0.4 percent gain in January, the Federal Reserve said.

Manufacturing output rose 0.3 percent, even as automakers cut production by 1.1 percent after two big monthly gains. Carmakers had raised production to meet pent-up demand for popular models in short supply.

"While higher energy prices and the euro zone recession are headwinds for manufacturers, an expanding U.S. economy, propelled by strengthening job market gains, should keep factory activity strong this year," said Paul Edelstein, an economist at IHS Global Insight in Lexington, Massachusetts.

INFLATION OUT PACES WAGES

On Wall Street, the Standard & Poor's 500 index [finance/markets/index?symbol=us%21spx">.SPX](#) edged up to wrap up its best week in three months. It gained 2.4 percent for the week as it topped 1,400 to reach its highest level since May 2008.

U.S. Treasury debt prices fell for an eighth straight day, with benchmark yields touching four-month highs. The dollar weakened broadly.

The CPI report showed gasoline prices soared 6 percent last month, the largest increase since December 2010. They had risen 0.9 percent in January. While the strengthening jobs market is providing some cushion against rising gas prices at the pump, salaries are not keeping up.

Average weekly earnings, adjusted for inflation, fell 0.3 percent last month after slipping 0.1 percent in January, the Labor Department said. Compared with February last year, weekly earnings were down 0.4 percent.

But there was some price relief for households. Food costs held steady in February, marking the first time in 1-1/2 years they did not rise, and apparel prices dropped by the most since July 2006.

There were also declines in the prices of tobacco, airline tickets and used cars and trucks. Recreation costs also fell. But new motor vehicle prices recorded their first increase in nine months, reflecting rising domestic demand for autos.

A measure of the amount homeowners would pay to rent or would earn from renting their property - one of the largest single components of the CPI - rose at the slowest pace since April. Rents have risen as Americans have moved away from ownership in the face of persistent declines in house prices.

"The downward trajectory for consumer price inflation remains largely intact," said Millan Mulraine, a senior macro strategist at TD Securities in New York.

(Additional reporting by Mark Felsenthal and Leah Schnurr; Editing by Neil Stempleman and Leslie Adler)

20120316-02 10:17 SteveB Friends of the Middle Website
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I have "finished" the FotM Website (for now) by adding a page about our group (mainly from Issue #1) and working on the Links page (nearly 150, for now).

Please let me know of any errors or omissions. I've tried to include most of the sources mentioned by group members, but expect to be continually adding more. I particularly need (Pam, Beth, MarthaH) your recommendations of books and movies! I included Group Member businesses I knew about. If there are any I left out, or you don't wish to be listed, please let me know.

Home: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/>

Blog: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/blog/>

Links: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/links.html>

About: <http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/about.html>

20120316-05 15:32 Pam Re: Friends of the Middle Website (reply to SteveB, above)

This is starting to look all slick and professional, which is impressive. I hope, though, that we will maintain our spontaneous, unrehearsed, sometimes outrageous commentary. I have come to think of FotM's readers as a community of friends. I'd like to hold onto that.

20120316-06 15:43 SteveB "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" [& Anything having to Do with S-E-X]

Ya gotta love the poor, sick, misguided b*stard!

"Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" by Leigh Owens, Huffington Post

Mar. 16, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/16/rick-santorum-war-on-porn_n_1353383.html)

Republican presidential candidate Rick Santorum has promised to initiate a war on porn if elected.

"America is suffering a pandemic of harm from pornography. It contributes to misogyny and violence against women. It is a contributing factor to prostitution and sex trafficking. **All that may give me a big lump in the pants, but I know what's right and wrong, and sex, especially with underwear still on is very kinky and just not Christian. Everybody knows that, and most of us were beaten as children until we admitted we knew exactly that, and a lot more.**" the former Pennsylvania senator wrote in a statement posted on his campaign website.

Santorum has chosen the porn industry as his latest target in his effort to be viewed as the most conservative candidate in the GOP primary, ahead of opponent Mitt Romney. He believes that current obscenity laws should be more stringently enforced.

"Current federal 'obscenity' laws prohibit distribution of hardcore (obscene) pornography on the Internet, on cable/satellite TV, on hotel/motel TV, in retail sex shops, houses of prostitution, Congress, and through the mail or by common carrier," Santorum wrote in the statement, adding that these laws should be **"vigorously enforced with whips, if necessary."**

The statement also took the opportunity to slam the Obama administration and its handling of the issue so far, stating that the president has "refused to enforce obscenity laws" and that the Department of Justice "seems to favor pornographers over children and families. **In fact, Obama is one of the biggest child pornographers on the planet and a big snob about it too. So there!**"

Not everyone agrees with Santorum's analysis of how the industry affects Americans. Steve Chapman, a writer for the *Chicago Tribune* took issue with Santorum's claims, which he describes as "just wrong."

"Santorum doesn't seem to notice that as porn has become ever-more available via the Internet, the prevalence of rape has plunged. Since 1991, the national rate has fallen by 86 percent -- compared to a decline in overall violent crime of 65 percent," Chapman wrote.

The porn industry is a billion-dollar-a-year business nationwide, and with the rise of the internet and technology it has become one of highest-grossing industries in the world, **as well as one of the grossest industries, at times.**

(For more of Santorum's past comments on sex, see the slideshow on this website: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/16/rick-santorum-war-on-porn_n_1353383.html.)

[20120316-07](#) 15:59 Pam Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to SteveB, above)

Ol' Rick just goes from absurdity to absurdity. And this country does too.

It's virtually summer here already. I wonder what the real summer will be like. We'll probably have to start growing palm trees soon. I don't like palm trees.

[20120318-01](#) 06:57 SteveB Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to Pam, above)

Nothing invokes my flaming youth in my memory like palm trees. I love `em and, yes, I guess you will have them soon.

Well, you have so much talking and discovering to do. What a true adventure, and one you are ideally suited for. I think if I needed you to take a night watch on patrol or sailing, I might be in trouble, but if I needed words, empathy, and understanding, you are among the very best. Your son is lucky to have found you. And we don't care what his politics are, he's always welcome here. Friends and relatives of our other friends here are always the most welcome. Maybe especially if he's a conservative Republican! :-)

[20120316-08](#) 16:01 Ben Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to SteveB, above)

"...most of us were beaten as children until we admitted we knew exactly that..."

Really? Rick, your parents beat you until you conceded that sex while wearing underwear is "very kinky and just not Christian"???

This dude has some grave personal issues that exceed his understanding of what religion actually is...

[20120316-10](#) 17:48 Art Re: "Rick Santorum Promises War on Porn Industry" (reply to SteveB, above)

From Art (Mar. 16, 2012, 5:48 pm)—reply to SteveB, above, ref: Rick Santorum's War on Pornography & Anything Having to Do With Sex

Well, on the other hand this is something that Santorium can probably grasp. Much more important than climate change, the fiscal deficit, or the growing Middle East issues. This guy is certifiable wacko.

[20120316-09](#) 17:39 SteveB Re: Cartoon (reply to MarthaH)

Cartoon not received. Maybe try again, Martha. Thanks.

[20120316-13](#) 19:35 Pam Re: Cartoon (reply to MarthaH)

Sometimes I think this (the Primaries) is all just a show put on to keep us distracted from the really important things that are happening in the world. Santorum comes out against porn, and the Internet lights up. Massacres occur in places we've never heard of, and no one lifts an eyebrow.

[20120316-11](#)

17:58

SteveG

"George Clooney Arrested for Protesting at Sudanese Embassy" & "Facing Recall, Wisconsin Senator Pam Galloway Will Resign" & "130,000 Texas Women Lose Health Care Just So Texas Can Prove How Anti-Abortion It Is"

"George Clooney Arrested for Protesting at Sudanese Embassy" by David Edwards, Raw Story/AlterNet

Mar. 16, 2012,

(http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/859367/george_clooney_arrested_for_protesting_at_sudanese_embassy/#paragraph5)

"Facing Recall, Wisconsin Senator Pam Galloway Will Resign" by David Nir, Daily Kos/AlterNet

Mar. 16, 2012,

(http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/article/859160/facing_recall%2C_wi_senator_pam_galloway_will_resign/#paragraph7)

"130,000 Texas Women Lose Health Care Just So TX Can Prove How Anti-Abortion It Is" by Amanda Peterson Beadle, Think Progress/AlterNet, Mar. 16, 2012,

(http://www.alternet.org/newsandviews/859168/130%2C000_texas_women_lose_health_care_just_so_tx_can_prove_how_anti-abortion_it_is)

The Obama administration notified Texas yesterday that it was officially stopping funds to the Texas Women's Health Program because of the state's decision to block abortion providers, including Planned Parenthood, from participating in the program. About half of the participating clinics were cut off by the new state rule that went into effect this week, affecting 130,000 women in the health program:

Twenty-nine states participate in the Medicaid's Women Health Program, which extends Medicaid coverage for reproductive health services to lower-income women who do not qualify for the rest of the entitlement program's benefits.

"We very much regret the state's decision to implement this rule, which will prevent women enrolled in the program from receiving services from the trusted health care providers they have chosen and relied on for their care," Medicaid director Cindy Mann wrote in a Thursday letter to Texas officials.

While nine states have passed legislation to end abortion provider's government funding, Texas is the first to lose federal dollars over it. Other states' laws have only affected state spending, or have been held up by court challenges.

Federal law prevents states from banning specific providers from Medicaid programs, leading to the Women's Health Program showdown. Mann said that while they try to give as much flexibility as possible, "on this case, federal law precludes us from doing so."

Last year, the federal government gave \$39 million for the program. The state pays \$1 for every \$9 Medicaid puts into the program, but Gov. Rick Perry (R) has insisted the state will fill the gap to keep the program going without including Planned Parenthood. Texas Democrats are seeking alternate federal funds to continue the program through a different route.

A poll earlier this month showed that a majority of Texans disagreed with the Republican push to cut off Women's Health Program funds to clinics simply because they also provide abortions. Fifty-nine percent of voters opposed the new rule, while 38 percent agreed with it.

UPDATE: Perry reacted angrily to the news that federal officials were cutting off funds. He tweeted, "Obama Admin ends #WHP via media conference call; @GovernorPerry pledges state will keep pgm going" and "This is how Obama Admin works? Notifying press before the state administrators? Purely political. #WHP."

[20120316-12](#)

18:02

SteveG

"Senate Bill Could Roll Back Consumers' Health Insurance Savings"

Somebody is protecting the health insurance companies here...

I bet you didn't know about this rebate. Almost nobody does, except the health insurers. They know and they don't like it.

"Senate Bill Could Roll Back Consumers' Health Insurance Savings" by Lena Groeger, ProPublica

Mar. 16, 2012, (<http://www.propublica.org/article/senate-bill-could-roll-back-consumers-health-insurance-savings>)

This summer, health insurance companies may have to pay more than a billion dollars back to their own customers. The rebate requirements were introduced as part of the 2010 health-care reform law and are meant to benefit consumers. But now an insurer-supported Senate bill aims to roll back the rebate requirements.

Known as the medical loss ratio rule, it's actually pretty simple. Under the health-care law provision, 80 to 85 cents of every dollar insurers collect in premiums must be spent on medical care or activities that improve the quality of that care. If not, they must send their customers a rebate for the difference. The goal, according to the Department of Health and Human Services, is to limit the money insurers spend on administrative costs and profit.

"It essentially ensures that consumers receive value for every dollar they spend on health care," HHS spokesman Brian Chiglinsky told ProPublica.

Last month, Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., introduced a bill that would change what costs companies can include in the 15 to 20 percent they are allotted for overhead, salaries and marketing. The bill, similar to a House bill introduced in March 2011 that has yet to come up for a vote, focuses on payments to insurance agents and brokers. Traditionally, these commissions are bundled into the administrative costs when making the final calculation. But insurance regulators have argued that fees paid to insurance agents and brokers shouldn't count.

Such a change could mean big savings for insurance companies — and much smaller rebates for consumers.

This is the first year that companies are required to send out rebates. According to a report by state insurance commissioners, if rebates had been handed out last year, insurers would have had to pay consumers almost \$2 billion. If they had carved out the broker fees, as proposed in the two current bills, consumers would have gotten only about \$800 million.

Landrieu's office did not immediately respond to our call for comment.

"[The bills] would water down the standard to a point where it becomes ineffective," said Sondra Roberto, a spokeswoman for the nonprofit advocacy group Consumers Union. The group, which also publishes Consumer Reports, recently urged members to oppose the bill.

The rebates have gotten relatively modest attention. Only 38 percent of the public is even aware of the rule's existence, according to a Kaiser poll.

Insurance companies have supported the two bills, claiming that the rebate rule, as it stands now, stifles jobs and actually drives up insurance premiums. A 2011 government report found that most insurance companies were, in fact, lowering their premiums to meet the requirements, as the administration had hoped.

While most insurance companies hit the 80 to 85 percent target, the few that didn't may be required to send out rebates this year.

"Some insurance companies pay an inordinate amount, as much as 40 percent, on administration and profit and not health care," Roberto said.

The rules on rebates differ slightly depending on whether the insurance comes from a large-group plan (employers with more than 100 employees), or a small-group or individual plan. In each case, insurance companies will be required to make all their costs publicly available so consumers can see how their premium dollars are spent.

The government granted insurance companies in seven states extra time to meet the requirements. Insurers that serve states with more rural populations, for example, tend to have higher overhead costs and cannot meet the requirement as easily, according to Eric Fader, a New York health-care lawyer. But the government decided that for all other states, enforcing the requirement wouldn't pose any risk to the market, and that the federal government didn't "need to coddle an inefficient insurance company," Fader said.

[20120317-01](#) 11:25 SteveG Fw: Somebody Else's Opinion: 2012 Republican Primaries

Below is an email I recently received – author unknown.

I think the Republicans are in great shape really. Nothing but an obverse "love fest" going on here. Newt is horrified with jealousy because He thinks Santorum and Romney may end up in bed together. Santorum is gloating with malicious gratification directed down toward Newt, declaring He's already copped a feel, but won't tell Newt from whom. Romney, meanwhile is piling up delegates, and has lost interest in both Newt and Rick. He's confused and looking for substance. Feels like a well used prostitute who was paid with worthless checks, and has yet to experience orgasm. Then too, there is the proverbial Dr. Ron Paul, who now grows impatient with the feeble efforts of the confederate states strategy in winning the American Civil war. All this is pure typical Republicanism.

[20120317-02](#) 12:41 Art Re: Somebody Else's Opinion: 2012 Republican Primaries (reply to SteveG, above)

Do I note a hint of irony here?

[20120317-03](#) 13:23 Pam Re: Somebody Else's Opinion: 2012 Republican Primaries (reply to Art, above)

Just a smidge, I'd say.

[20120317-04](#) 16:12 SteveG Fw: Change.org Petition: Don't Let the Bullies Win

from Change.org:

I was bullied a lot in middle school. Five years ago, it got so bad that four guys came up behind me, called me awful names and slammed my hand in my locker, breaking my finger. The worst part is, I felt so terrified and alone that I couldn't even tell my parents the truth about what happened.

So when I saw the new documentary *Bully*, which was produced to stop bullying, it felt so good to know that the filmmakers were telling the stories of kids like me. I think that every kid should see *Bully*. That's why I was shocked to learn that it was given an "R" rating because some of the bullies in the film use bad words.

Two weeks ago, I started a petition on Change.org asking the Motion Picture Association of America to change *Bully's* rating to PG-13. More than 300,000 people have joined me.

The past two weeks have been incredible. I've been on CNN, MSNBC, FOX News, CBS, and The Ellen Show. Celebrities like Ellen DeGeneres, Meryl Streep, Johnny Depp, Justin Bieber, Randy Jackson, Demi Lovato, and Drew

Brees -- as well as 29 members of Congress, led by Rep. Mike Honda -- have said publicly that they agree with my campaign.

But even after all that, the MPAA hasn't budged. I got to meet with one of their executives last week, and she told me that they have to keep things "consistent." Maybe she thought that I would give up, or that I'm just 17, so how much can I really change anyway? But I know that if we keep up the pressure, the MPAA will have no choice but to admit that being "consistent" isn't as important as letting kids see a movie that could literally save lives.

Thanks for your help. Knowing that all these people are standing with me, I don't feel alone or afraid anymore.

--Katy

Click here to sign my petition to tell the MPAA to change Bully's rating to PG-13:

http://www.change.org/petitions/mpaa-don-t-let-the-bullies-win-give-bully-a-pg-13-instead-of-an-r-rating?utm_campaign=HIWYvitjgM&utm_medium=email&utm_source=action_alert

20120317-05	16:14	SteveG	"The Power of Recalls in Wisconsin"
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"The Power of Recalls in Wisconsin" by John Nichols, *The Nation*/NationofChange

Mar. 17, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/power-recalls-wisconsin-1331997712>)

With Wisconsin recall elections looming against four Republican state Senators -- as well as Governor Scott Walker and Lieutenant Governor Rebecca Kleefisch -- the state's politics was thrown for another loop Friday when a targeted senator up and quit.

State Senator Pam Galloway, a Tea Party favorite and one of Walker's steadiest backers in the legislature, announced her immediate resignation from the legislature and her decision not to contest the recall election.

The move had dramatic repercussions:

1. Republicans have lost the complete control of state government that allowed the governor to advance an austerity agenda that was defined by attacks on unions and deep cuts in public education and public services funding -- along with the harshest Voter ID law in the nation, a rigidly partisan redistricting of legislative districts and what critics complain has been a battering of the state's open-government tradition.
2. State Senate Majority Leader Jeff Fitzgerald, a Walker ally who is targeted for recall, has lost his position as the dominant player in the legislature. He now must enter into a power-sharing agreement with Minority Leader Mark Miller, a progressive Democrat who led a historic walkout by his caucus during last year's struggle over Walker's labor law changes. Committee assignments will be redone to reflect what is now a 16-16 split in the Senate.
3. Governor Walker, who has threatened to call special sessions of the legislature to deal with pet projects, will now only be able to do so if he can work with the Democrats -- something he has not done up to this point.
4. If, as expected, the federal courts reject the state's redistricting plan, it could be sent back to a legislature where Democrats can now play a critical role in drawing the maps. That could result in a significant upturn in their fortunes going into this fall's elections.
5. Republicans have lost their premier candidate in one of four state Senate recall elections that are now scheduled for May 8 primaries and a June 5 election. Galloway had raised major money and organized a campaign of consequence before announcing that family health concerns had led her to exit the legislature. Now, Democrat Donna Seidel, a popular former county official in the Wausau-area district and the assistant

minority leader in the state Assembly, emerges as a clear frontrunner for a seat that -- if she wins -- would tip the Senate to full Democratic control.

All of these changes were made possible by the recall power, which allows citizens to petition for new elections. This old progressive tool of accountability was used last summer to force a number of Republican senators who supported the Walker agenda to defend their seats.

Going into last summer's recall votes, Republicans held a 19-14 advantage in the Senate. Two Republicans were defeated, leaving the GOP with a narrow 17-16 advantage -- and giving moderate Republican Senator Dale Schultz the power to temper his party's excesses. Now, with Galloway's exit, the chamber goes to the 16-16 split.

After the next round of recalls, it is possible that Democrats could end up with full control of the Senate, potentially by a margin of up to 19-14 -- or, if Fitzgerald is defeated by upstart challenger Lori Compas, 20-13.

Additionally, a new Democratic Senate could sit with a new Democratic governor, as Walker's recall is now all but certain to take place on the same day as the senators.

What has happened is remarkable. What could happen is historic. And the people, using the recall power afforded them by progressive reformers of a century ago, are making it happen.

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20120317-06 17:24 Pam Poem: "The Necklace" by Osip Mandelstam

I read this poem by Osip Mandelstam in the April *Atlantic* magazine. I think it lovely, and I wanted to share it.

"The Necklace"

Take, from my palms, for joy, for ease,
A little honey, a little sun,
That we may obey Persephone's bees.

You can't untie a boat unmoored.
Fur-shod shadows can't be heard,
Nor terror, in this life, mastered.

Love, what's left for us, and of us, in this
Living remnant, loving revenant, brief kiss
Like a bee flying completed dying hiveless

To find in the forest's heart a home,
Night's never-ending hum,
Thriving on meadowsweet, mint, and time.

Take, for all that is good, for all that is gone,
That it may lie rough and real against your collarbone,
This string of bees, that once turned honey into sun.

Translated from the Russian by Christian Wiman

Mandelstam is considered the greatest Russian poet of the 20th century. He was persecuted by Stalin and committed suicide.

20120318-02 13:33 SteveG "Scientists Warn EPA Over Monsanto's GMO Crop Failures, Dangers"

"Scientists Warn EPA Over Monsanto's GMO Crop Failures, Dangers" by Anthony Gucciardi, Natural News/NationofChange

Mar. 18, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/scientists-warn-epa-over-monsanto-s-gmo-crop-failures-dangers-1332083780>)

A group of scientists is calling for major federal action in order to deal with the threat posed by Monsanto's GMO crops, now petitioning the EPA to address the issue head on. The groups of 22 academic corn experts are drawing attention to the immense failure of Monsanto's genetically modified corn, which is developing mutated and resistant insects as a result of its widespread usage. Corn is critical not only as a food staple, but is heavily used in ethanol production, animal feed, and much more. As GM corn becomes the norm, currently taking over 94 percent of the supply, these scientists are seriously concerned about the future of corn production.

Joseph Spencer is one outspoken member of the group, a corn entomologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey, part of the University of Illinois. Spencer states that what is happening is no surprise, instead it is something that needs to be addressed. Warning the EPA over the dangers, the experts sent a letter on March 5th to the agency explaining their worries regarding long-term corn production prospects in light of GMO crops failures. Specifically, the experts are worried about the lack of protection presented by GMO crops against rootworms.

The EPA has already acknowledged that Monsanto's GMO crops are creating resistant rootworms, which are now ravaging the GMO crops as they mutate to the bio pesticide used known as *Bacillus thuringiensis* (BT). The EPA found that the resistant rootworms, which are evolving to resist the insecticide, are currently found Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Nebraska. After the EPA evaluated documented cases of severe crop damage as well as reports from entomologists, the EPA stated "Monsanto's program for monitoring suspected cases of resistance is 'inadequate'".

Essentially, the GMO crops are doing the opposite of their supposed purpose — leading to more damage from rootworms as they become mutated to resist the defense of the crops. And Monsanto has answered by simply further genetically modifying the Bt, which research shows is extremely ineffective.

"When insecticides overlay transgenic technology, the economic and environmental advantages of rootworm-protected corn quickly disappear," the scientists wrote.

It's time for the EPA and other agencies to address the serious threats to nature and human health presented by Monsanto's genetically modified creations.

20120318-03 17:20 Pam Tony Judt R.I.P.
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From Pam (Mar. 18, 2012, 5:20 pm)—Tony Judt R.I.P.

from "On Intellectuals and Democracy" by Tony Judt, *New York Review of Books*, March 22, 2012 (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2012/mar/22/intellectuals-and-democracy/?pagination=false>):

Democracy bears the same relationship to a well-ordered liberal society as an excessively free market does to a successful, well-regulated capitalism.

...our chief task is not to imagine better worlds but rather to think how to prevent worse ones.

The Greeks knew that democracy is not likely to fall to the charms of totalitarianism, authoritarianism, or oligarchy; it's much more likely to fall to a corrupted version of itself.

The only way for democracy to survive, or even to exist, is to have an educated, law-abiding, trust-worthy populace that can be counted on to mostly do the right thing and take an active part in civic life, even if that's only to vote.

Our mistake for the past 10 years and more has been to assume that democracy is the solution, the start of something good. That's like saying fixing the schools is the beginning of a solution rather than alleviating poverty. Democracy is a luxury that depends on special circumstances, ie., an educated, engaged populace. It is irrelevant in a country like Afghanistan, where upwards of 80% of the people are illiterate, rural and urban areas are worlds apart, and what we call corruption is merely the Afghan way of doing business. People in a democracy must be loyal to an idea. When tribal loyalty, family ties, and revenge are paramount, democracy doesn't stand much of a chance.

I keep reading the phrase "nation building" when I read about Afghanistan. Is that really what we are trying to do there? If so, it's a fool's errand. Are we after al Qaeda? I thought it had moved on to Pakistan. Are we trying to liberate women? A worthy goal, but unachievable even in the medium-term future. We're trying to do the equivalent of building air-conditioned schools with state-of-the-art equipment, when what Afghan school children need right now are pencils and a blackboard. If we still had a draft, we would have exited Afghanistan years ago. I don't want to bring back the draft, but this war is being fought by private corporations, not a determined, Stateside population, willing to do whatever it takes. Most Americans aren't willing to do anything at all, and why should they? Afghanistan is no threat to us. I just read an article about a successful mercenary (former military officer) who has built an incredibly lucrative business providing security for Americans in Afghanistan. If the war ends, so does his business. The war is costing the nation billions of dollars, but a few enterprising souls are getting rich off it. Why do we let this happen? Why isn't the war a major issue in the election campaigns, the way Viet Nam was? Our military is being asked to do too much (the troops on the ground), and the American people aren't even asked to think about what's happening.

I know a major argument for continuing to do something is that quitting would mean you'd been wrong up till that point. For example, it would be difficult for the Pope to suddenly condone birth control. How would he answer all those good Catholics who last year or twenty years ago denied themselves access to it? It's embarrassing to lose a war, but is that what we're doing? Trying to avoid embarrassment? George Orwell wrote a wonderful essay about his time as a policeman in Burma, "Shooting an Elephant." An elephant went "must," which is to say berserk, and it demolished a bunch of open-air shops, which was bad. But then it trampled a man to death, and that was insupportable. Orwell, as the white man in charge with the only weapon, was expected by the crowd that gathered to kill the elephant. He didn't want to, but he knew that the reputation of every British soldier in the country depended on his not looking weak in the face of the howling mob. By the time he reached the elephant, the must had gone off and the elephant was peacefully eating some straw. He was no longer dangerous, and he was valuable to his owner, but the crowd wanted a spectacle, so Orwell shot the elephant. Only it didn't die right away. He had to pour round after round into its pink throat until finally, after half an hour or so, the poor beast expired. It's a wonderful essay about a sickening experience, and I think it carries a lesson we would do well to consider.

20120318-04	21:16	Bill	Re: Tony Judt R.I.P. (reply to Pam, above)
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Finished Tony Judt's magnum opus, *Postwar*, earlier in the year. It was a long slog, but worth it, and I can only marvel at the enormity of the man's learning and scholarship. He's probably also right about the unfortunate attractions of a faux-democracy, and he's definitely on target with respect to democracy performing better when well ordered rather than wild and woolly. Still, Churchill may have the greater wisdom in saying that democracy is the worst form of government—except for all the others. That may resonate in people's minds along with Judt's exhortation about preventing worse worlds.

Nevertheless, I can only agree with your doubts about nation building in Afghanistan. The societal structure there simply isn't built for anything remotely like western democracy. The place is too tribal, too Muslim, too corrupt, and too ignorant to be fertile soil for anything like western democracy. I'm sure there are those in our government who believe that something like western democracy can be transplanted. I doubt it. Who would not agree that it's time for the U. S. and its allies to get out of a very backward place? They don't want democracy or anything western or Christian.

Sojourner Truth, born Isabella Baumfree, died in 1883. I wonder if 1883 is far enough back in time for these Republicans? Or is their goal something even further back? 1848? 1019? Interesting what Sojourner Truth had to say about their **Sacred Constitution**. (Be assured I'm saying that in ominous tones with my right hand over my heart, deep in prayer blessing the Founding Fathers for following God's one true, divine plan. Why is no one except Rick Santorum listening to God now?) **"Dere is a little weasel in it."**

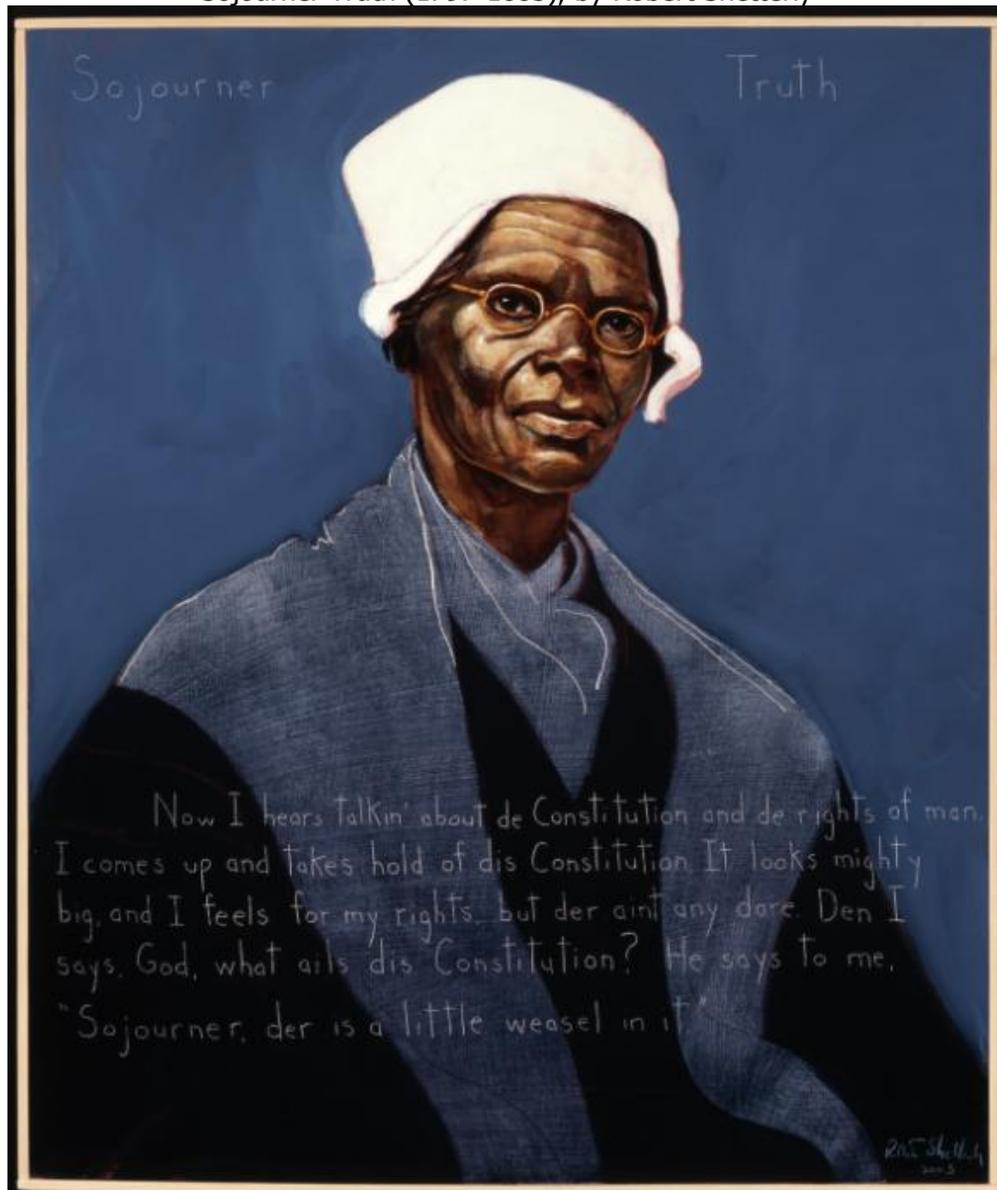
http://myhero.com/go/gallery/open.asp?art=sojourner_truth_2010

from Americans Who Tell The Truth - portraits and quotes by Robert Shetterly

"Now I hears talkin' about de Constitution and de rights of man. I comes up and I takes hold of dis Constitution. It looks mighty big, and I feels for my rights, but der ain't any dare. Den I says, God, what ails dis Constitution? He says to me, 'Sojourner, dere is a little weasel in it.'" —Sojourner Truth

With no formal education, Truth would become one of America's great orators, speaking out against racial oppression and later for the suffrage movement.

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), by Robert Shetterly



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

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