



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #100 — MAR. 22, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org> FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com

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It Is Simply NOT Going to Happen!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Mar. 22, 2012)

Paul Ryan and the rest of the Republicans might as well understand once and for all—DEMOCRATS AND A MAJORITY OF AMERICANS ARE NOT GOING TO ALLOW THE GOP TO RETURN THE U.S. TO THE 19TH CENTURY! It is simply NOT going to happen! There would be much less of a political disaster for Republicans if they would just recognize this simple fact and work in a bipartisan way to help fix things instead of panicking. But, unfortunately for America and for Republicans most particularly, that's simply not going to happen either. Bye, bye, self-destructive GOP, it's been nice knowin' ya! LOL!

"The Republicans' Social-Darwinist Budget Plan" by Robert Reich, NationofChange

Mar. 21, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/republican-s-social-darwinist-budget-plan-1332336007>)

In announcing the Republicans' new budget and tax plan Tuesday, House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan said "We are sharpening the contrast between the path that we're proposing and the path of debt and decline the president has placed us upon."

Ryan is right about sharpening the contrast. But the plan doesn't do much to reduce the debt. Even by its own estimate the deficit would drop to \$166 billion in 2018 and then begin growing again.

The real contrast is over what the plan does for the rich and what it does to everyone else. It reduces the top individual and corporate tax rates to 25 percent. This would give the wealthiest Americans an average tax cut of at least \$150,000 a year.

The money would come out of programs for the elderly, lower-middle families, and the poor.

Seniors would get subsidies to buy private health insurance or Medicare – but the subsidies would be capped. So as medical costs increased, seniors would fall further and further behind.

Other cuts would come out of food stamps, Pell grants to offset the college tuition of kids from poor families, and scores of other programs that now help middle-income and the poor.

The plan also calls for repealing Obama's health-care overhaul, thereby eliminating healthcare for 30 million Americans and allowing insurers to discriminate against (and drop from coverage) people with pre-existing conditions.

The plan would carve an additional \$19 billion out of next year's "discretionary" spending over and above what Democrats agreed to last year. Needless to say, discretionary spending includes most of programs for lower-income families.

Not surprisingly, the Pentagon would be spared.

So what's the guiding principle here? Pure social Darwinism. Reward the rich and cut off the help to anyone who needs it.

Ryan says too many Americans rely on government benefits. "We don't want to turn the safety net into a hammock that lulls able-bodied people into lives of dependency."

Well, I have news for Paul Ryan. Almost 23 million able-bodied people still can't find work. They're not being lulled into dependency. They and their families could use some help. Even if the economy continues to generate new jobs at the rate it's been going the last three months, we wouldn't see normal rates of unemployment until 2017.

And most Americans who do have jobs continue to lose ground. New research by professors Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty show that the average adjusted gross income of the bottom 90 percent was \$29,840 in 2010 — down \$127 from 2009 and down \$4,842 from 2000 — and just slightly higher than it was forty-six years ago in 1966 (all figures adjusted for inflation).

They could use better schools, access to higher education, lower-cost health care, improved public transportation, and lots of other things Ryan and his colleagues are intent on removing.

Meanwhile, America's rich continue to grow richer — and many of them (and their heirs) are being lulled into lives whose hardest task is summoning the help.

Anyone who thought the Great Recession might reduce America's wild lurch toward wild inequality should think again. The most recent data show that just 15,600 super-rich households — the top 1 tenth of 1 percent — pocketed 37 percent of all the economic gains in 2010. The rest of the gains went to others in the top 10 percent.

Republican Social Darwinists are determined that the Bush tax cuts of 2001 and 2003 be made permanent. Those cuts saved the richest 1 percent of taxpayers (roughly 1.4 million people) more money on their taxes last year than the rest of America's 141 million taxpayers received in total income.

Thank you, House Republicans, for "sharpening the contrast" between your radical Social Darwinism and those of us who still cling to the belief that the most fortunate have a responsibility to the rest.

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<u>20120321-01</u>	08:02	Dick	Fw: Where Are Muslims Happy?
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[Source of original email unknown. –SteveB]

The Muslims are not happy!

They're not happy in Gaza .
They're not happy in Egypt .
They're not happy in Libya .
They're not happy in Morocco.
They're not happy in Iran .
They're not happy in Iraq .
They're not happy in Yemen .
They're not happy in Afghanistan.
They're not happy in Pakistan.
They're not happy in Syria .
They're not happy in Lebanon.

So, where are they happy?

They're happy in Canada.
They're happy in Australia.
They're happy in England.
They're happy in France.
They're happy in Italy.
They're happy in Germany.
They're happy in Sweden.
They're happy in the USA.
They're happy in Norway.
They're happy in every country that is not Muslim.

And who do they blame?

Not Islam.
Not their leadership.
Not themselves.

THEY BLAME THE COUNTRIES THEY ARE HAPPY IN!

AND THEY WANT TO CHANGE THEM TO BE LIKE THE COUNTRIES THEY CAME FROM...

WHERE THEY WERE UNHAPPY.

Excuse me, but...
How stupid can you get?

20120321-02	09:47	SteveG	"Bob Kerrey Runs Hard on Old Washington"
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"Bob Kerrey Runs Hard on Old Washington" by Matt Taylor, *The National Memo*

Mar. 20, 2012 (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/article/bob-kerrey-senate-republicans-nebraska-exclusive-healthcare>)

Bob Kerrey, the Democrat and former governor of Nebraska who is running this fall to win back the U.S. Senate seat he held from 1989 until 2001, said Tuesday he was lured back into public life by something many in Washington find increasingly elusive: the potential to solve lingering national problems the old fashioned way, with strong bipartisan cooperation.

"The thing that pulls me back into the public space, into a campaign that will be exceptionally difficult to win, is the fact that we postponed a number of very significant problems that will only get worse with the remedies on the table," he told *The National Memo*.

His initial campaign announcement on February 29 came one day after Maine Republican Olympia Snowe retired because she said she couldn't deal with the partisan gridlock caused by a Republican Party that has raised filibustering in the upper chamber to a high art form. And to be sure, Kerrey is well aware that the disastrous war in Iraq and economic collapse have sharpened ideological divides since he left Washington to become president of the New School in New York. But the former businessman and Vietnam Medal of Honor winner believes that the fights of the Obama years don't have to break along party lines, and is fond of conjuring up images of a time when now-legendary bipartisan Senate relationships like that between Democrat George Mitchell and Republican Bob Dole forged national policy.

Republicans disagree. Already in the short time since Kerrey joined the field to replace outgoing Democrat Ben Nelson, Karl Rove's Crossroads GPS has spent \$80,000 on a TV ad campaign savaging him for allegedly cutting a "backroom deal" with Democratic Majority Leader Harry Reid on seniority privileges should he win the seat. Perhaps it's because while Nelson was a thorn in the side of his party, a centrist who voted with Republicans much of the time, Kerrey has occasionally taken progressive stands on issues like universal access to healthcare and marijuana legalization. He quickly responded to the TV attack by going on the air with two ads of his own, reintroducing himself as a moderate problem solver and real Nebraskan whose decade in Greenwich Village has not led him astray.

In a wide-ranging discussion with *The National Memo*, he articulated a populist political message that echoes recent concerns over increasing income inequality.

"When men and women go to work and obey the law, they should share in the results of the production," Kerrey said. "And the market won't always value them the way we value them personally, the way we value teachers or the people who manufacture our products. The market won't always place the same value and we'll have to adjust with laws and taxes, or trade policies. That [approach] separates me from mainstream Republican ideology"

But Nebraska has lurched even further to the right since Kerrey left the Senate.

"He has got a long row to hoe," said Michael Wagner, a political scientist at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and an expert on local politics.

To win, Kerrey will have to catch a few breaks. First, he needs a weak GOP opponent, like Sharon Angle, the Tea Party-backed conservative whose extreme views and controversial statements helped Reid survive a brutal year for Nevada Democrats in 2010. Angle riled up the conservative base but alienated moderates, handing the long-unpopular Reid a surprisingly comfortable victory in a state that had seemed to turn against him.

Conservative Don Stenberg, who is attacking Republican frontrunner Attorney General Jon Bruning from the right for being untrustworthy on social issues (and getting some support from the conservative blogosphere), could fill this role, according to Jennifer Duffy, senior editor at the Cook Political Report. He's a perennial candidate -- and a consistent loser, going down to Chuck Hagel in the primary in 1996, Ben Nelson in the general election in 2000, and Mike Johanns in the primary (again) in 2006.

Kerrey also needs a strong performance from President Obama in the Omaha area, where he won the congressional district (and because of state law, an electoral vote) in 2008. A robust campaign organization and enthused liberal base could help Kerrey compensate for what will likely be weaker numbers in the more rural parts of the state.

But most important to Kerrey's hopes is "the increasing number of Nebraskans who don't affiliate with either party, and how they feel about him," Wagner said. "Do they think it's okay to move back to your sister's house before the filing deadline?" Indeed, the carpetbagger label -- and whether it sticks on the former Navy SEAL -- will be a key factor in the race.

"They're going to talk about his very public musings in 2005 about running for mayor in New York, and I suspect the New School will eventually be an issue," said Duffy.

Kerrey brushed off the chatter about his time away from the state as nonsense that Nebraskans would reject.

"I have no hope that the Republican Party in Nebraska will ever learn what a carpetbagger really was in the 19th century," he said. "It's quite common for people to leave their home and find employment someplace else, and quite common for them to come home."

He will surely highlight his budget cutting as governor and a moderate track-record during two terms in the Senate. But healthcare could be tricky for Kerrey, who based his 1992 presidential campaign on a universal scheme not altogether unlike Obama's. Like many to his left, he says the Obama plan that became law in 2010 doesn't go far enough. Polls show healthcare reform remains toxic in the Cornhusker state, which made headlines for a special deal Nelson brokered to save the state money in the law's mandated expansion of Medicaid; the provision was struck from the final bill.

"It is false choice to say, 'Are you for repealing the Affordable Care Act?', which is called Obamacare in Nebraska," Kerrey said. "My answer will be no, and I will say to whoever the Republican nominee is: it's not enough to say yes or no. Because the problem still persists. We're spending 17 percent of GDP on healthcare today, more than any other industrial nation. It is a tapeworm inside the economy of our country and the Affordable Care Act didn't solve that problem."

Kerrey comes across as the happy warrior, especially when proposing ways to tackle the entitlement funding issues over which the political class occasionally works itself into a bipartisan frenzy. He cited economist Alice Rivlin's partial privatization approach as preferable to that of Rep. Paul Ryan, the Wisconsin Republican budget guru whose effort already has the sheen of bipartisanship thanks to Democratic Senator Ron Wyden of Oregon.

"I'm intrigued by the Wyden-Ryan plan only because [bipartisanship] is the only way you're going to solve this problem of overhang, almost \$40 trillion of unfunded liability," he said of the plan, which would shift Medicare toward becoming a voucher program, if less aggressively than Ryan's original proposal. "Social Security's actually a relatively small problem compared to Medicare. It begins with the partnership of a prominent influential Republican

and influential Democrat. That's what [former Missouri Senator] Jack Danforth and I tried to do in the '90s. You cannot withstand the attacks of the left and right unless you begin with a strong partnership."

Whether there will be any moderate Republicans remaining for him to partner with is an open question.

"You can aspire all you want to bipartisanship, but you need partners," said Norm Ornstein, a congressional scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute. "And they've been increasingly difficult to come by. Kerrey was very good at doing this when he was in the Senate before, but the real question is whether there is any kind of possibility of reconstituting the kind of Senate that there was when he was there, and the answer is it's a real uphill battle."

20120321-03	10:37	Charis	"Beyond Environment: Falling Back in Love with Mother Earth"
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"Beyond Environment: Falling Back in Love with Mother Earth" by Jo Confino, *The Guardian*

Feb. 20, 2012 (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/sustainable-business/zen-thich-naht-hanh-buddhidm-business-values>)

(Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh explains why mindfulness and a spiritual revolution rather than economics is needed to protect nature and limit climate change.)

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh says a spiritual revolution is needed if we are going to confront the environmental challenges that face us.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh has been practising meditation and mindfulness for 70 years and radiates an extraordinary sense of calm and peace. This is a man who on a fundamental level walks his talk, and whom Buddhists revere as a Bodhisattva; seeking the highest level of being in order to help others.

Ever since being caught up in the horrors of the Vietnam war, the 86-year-old monk has committed his life to reconciling conflict and in 1967 Martin Luther King nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize, saying "his ideas for peace, if applied, would build a monument to ecumenism, to world brotherhood, to humanity."

So it seems only natural that in recent years he has turned his attention towards not only addressing peoples' disharmonious relationships with each other, but also with the planet on which all our lives depend.

Thay, as he is known to his many thousands of followers, sees the lack of meaning and connection in peoples' lives as being the cause of our addiction to consumerism and that it is vital we recognise and respond to the stress we are putting on Earth if civilisation is to survive.

What Buddhism offers, he says, is the recognition that we all suffer and the way to overcome that pain is to directly confront it, rather than seeking to hide or bypass it through our obsession with shopping, entertainment, work or the beautification of our bodies. The craving for fame, wealth, power and sex serves to create only the illusion of happiness and ends up exacerbating feelings of disconnection and emptiness.

Thay refers to a billionaire chief executive of one of America's largest companies, who came to one of his meditation courses and talked of his suffering, worries and doubts, of thinking everyone was coming to take advantage of him and that he had no friends.

In an interview at his home and retreat centre in Plum Village, near Bordeaux, Thay outlines how a spiritual revolution is needed if we are going to confront the multitude of environmental challenges.

While many experts point to the enormous complexity and difficulty in addressing issues ranging from the destruction of ecosystems to the loss of millions of species, Thay sees a Gordian Knot that needs slicing through with a single strike of a sharp blade.

Move beyond concept of the "environment"

He believes we need to move beyond talking about the environment, as this leads people to experience themselves and Earth as two separate entities and to see the planet in terms only of what it can do for them.

Change is possible only if there is a recognition that people and planet are ultimately one and the same.

"You carry Mother Earth within you," says Thay. "She is not outside of you. Mother Earth is not just your environment.

"In that insight of inter-being, it is possible to have real communication with the Earth, which is the highest form of prayer. In that kind of relationship you have enough love, strength and awakening in order to change your life.

"Changing is not just changing the things outside of us. First of all we need the right view that transcends all notions including of being and non-being, creator and creature, mind and spirit. That kind of insight is crucial for transformation and healing.

"Fear, separation, hate and anger come from the wrong view that you and the earth are two separate entities, the Earth is only the environment. You are in the centre and you want to do something for the Earth in order for you to survive. That is a dualistic way of seeing.

"So to breathe in and be aware of your body and look deeply into it and realise you are the Earth and your consciousness is also the consciousness of the earth. Not to cut the tree not to pollute the water, that is not enough."

Putting an economic value on nature is not enough

Thay, who will this spring be in the UK to lead a five-day retreat as well as a mindfulness in education conference, says the current vogue in economic and business circles that the best way to protect the planet is by putting an economic value on nature is akin to putting a plaster on a gaping wound.

"I don't think it will work," he says. "We need a real awakening, enlightenment, to change our way of thinking and seeing things."

Rather than placing a price tag of our forests and coral reefs, Thay says change will happen on a fundamental level only if we fall back in love with the planet: "The Earth cannot be described either by the notion of matter or mind, which are just ideas, two faces of the same reality. That pine tree is not just matter as it possesses a sense of knowing. A dust particle is not just matter since each of its atoms has intelligence and is a living reality.

"When we recognise the virtues, the talent, the beauty of Mother Earth, something is born in us, some kind of connection, love is born.

"We want to be connected. That is the meaning of love, to be at one. When you love someone you want to say I need you, I take refuge in you. You do anything for the benefit of the Earth and the Earth will do anything for your wellbeing."

In the world of business, Thay gives the example of Yvon Chouinard, founder and owner of outdoor clothing company Patagonia, who combined developing a successful business with the practice of mindfulness and compassion: "It's possible to make money in a way that is not destructive, that promotes more social justice and more understanding and lessens the suffering that exists all around us," says Thay.

"Looking deeply, we see that it's possible to work in the corporate world in a way that brings a lot of happiness both to other people and to us ... our work has meaning."

Thay, who has written more than 100 books, suggests that the lost connection with Earth's natural rhythm is behind many modern sicknesses and that, in a similar way to our psychological pattern of blaming our mother and father for our unhappiness, there is an even more hidden unconscious dynamic of blaming Mother Earth.

In a new essay, "Intimate Conversation with Mother Earth", he writes: "Some of us resent you for giving birth to them, causing them to endure suffering, because they are not yet able to understand and appreciate you."

How mindfulness can reconnect people to Mother Earth

He points to increasing evidence that mindfulness can help people to reconnect by slowing down and appreciating all the gifts that the earth can offer.

"Many people suffer deeply and they do not know they suffer," he says. "They try to cover up the suffering by being busy. Many people get sick today because they get alienated from Mother Earth."

"The practice of mindfulness helps us to touch Mother Earth inside of the body and this practice can help heal people. So the healing of the people should go together with the healing of the Earth and this is the insight and it is possible for anyone to practice."

"This kind of enlightenment is very crucial to a collective awakening. In Buddhism we talk of meditation as an act of awakening, to be awake to the fact that the earth is in danger and living species are in danger."

Thay gives the example of something as simple and ordinary as drinking a cup of tea. This can help transform a person's life if he or she were truly to devote their attention to it.

"When I am mindful, I enjoy more my tea," says Thay as he pours himself a cup and slowly savours the first sip. "I am fully present in the here and now, not carried away by my sorrow, my fear, my projects, the past and the future. I am here available to life."

"When I drink tea this is a wonderful moment. You do not need a lot of power or fame or money to be happy. Mindfulness can help you to be happy in the here and now. Every moment can be a happy moment. Set an example and help people to do the same. Take a few minutes in order to experiment to see the truth."

Need to deal with ones own anger to be an effective social activist

Thay has over many years developed the notion of applied Buddhism underpinned by a set of ethical practices known as the five mindfulness trainings, which are very clear on the importance of tackling social injustice.

However, if social and environmental activists are to be effective, Thay says they must first deal with their own anger. Only if people discover compassion for themselves will they be able to confront those they hold accountable for polluting our seas and cutting down our forests.

"In Buddhism we speak of collective action," he says. "Sometimes something wrong is going on in the world and we think it is the other people who are doing it and we are not doing it."

"But you are part of the wrongdoing by the way you live your life. If you are able to understand that, not only you suffer but the other person suffers, that is also an insight."

"When you see the other person suffer you will not want to punish or blame but help that person to suffer less. If you are burdened with anger, fear, ignorance and you suffer too much, you cannot help another person. If you suffer less you are lighter more smiling, pleasant to be with, and in a position to help the person."

"Activists have to have a spiritual practice in order to help them to suffer less, to nourish the happiness and to handle the suffering so they will be effective in helping the world. With anger and frustration you cannot do much."

Touching the "ultimate dimension"

Key to Thay's teaching is the importance of understanding that while we need to live and operate in a dualistic world, it is also vital to understand that our peace and happiness lie in the recognition of the ultimate dimension: "If

we are able to touch deeply the historical dimension – through a leaf, a flower, a pebble, a beam of light, a mountain, a river, a bird, or our own body – we touch at the same time the ultimate dimension. The ultimate dimension cannot be described as personal or impersonal, material or spiritual, object or subject of cognition – we say only that it is always shining, and shining on itself.

"Touching the ultimate dimension, we feel happy and comfortable, like the birds enjoying the blue sky, or the deer enjoying the green fields. We know that we do not have to look for the ultimate outside of ourselves – it is available within us, in this very moment."

While Thay believes there is a way of creating a more harmonious relationship between humanity and the planet, he also recognises that there is a very real risk that we will continue on our destructive path and that civilisation may collapse.

He says all we need to do is see how nature has responded to other species that have got out of control: "When the need to survive is replaced with greed and pride, there is violence, which always brings about unnecessary devastation.

"We have learned the lesson that when we perpetrate violence towards our own and other species, we are violent towards ourselves; and when we know how to protect all beings, we are protecting ourselves."

Remaining optimistic despite risk of impending catastrophe

In Greek mythology, when Pandora opened the gift of a box, all the evils were released into the world. The one remaining item was "hope".

Thay is clear that maintaining optimism is essential if we are to find a way of avoiding devastating climate change and the enormous social upheavals that will result.

However, he is not naïve and recognises that powerful forces are steadily pushing us further towards the edge of the precipice.

In his best-selling book on the environment, *The World we Have*, he writes: "We have constructed a system we can't control. It imposes itself on us, and we become its slaves and victims.

"We have created a society in which the rich become richer and the poor become poorer, and in which we are so caught up in our own immediate problems that we cannot afford to be aware of what is going on with the rest of the human family or our planet Earth.

"In my mind I see a group of chickens in a cage disputing over a few seeds of grain, unaware that in a few hours they will all be killed."

(An edited video of Jo Confino's interview with Thich Nhat Hahn can be seen here:

<http://plumvillage.org/video/337-beyond-environment.html>.

For information on Thay's visit to the UK this spring, which includes a meditation in Trafalgar Square, a talk at the Royal Festival Hall, a five-day retreat and a three-day mindfulness in education conference, go to the Cooling the Flames website: <http://www.mindfulnessretreats.org.uk/>

20120321-04

11:20

SteveG

Fw: Common Cause Webinar: Toward a Constitutional Amendment to Overthrow *Citizens United*

from Robert Reich at Common Cause:

Please join me on Wednesday, March 28 for a conversation on the challenges facing our economy and democracy in this election year, and a new campaign -spearheaded by Common Cause - to restore everyday Americans to our rightful place at the center of our politics.

Our campaign, Amend 2012, is focused on helping voters make our voices heard in support of a Constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United and again impose sensible limits on political spending. Montana is our first battleground; we're working for a ballot initiative that would allow citizens to instruct Congress to pass an amendment and refer it to the states for ratification.

RSVP today to join me for this special webinar on Wednesday, March 28 at noon eastern time:

<https://www3.gotomeeting.com/register/965743950>.

Other speakers include Joshua Estevan Ulibarri, a leading voice in progressive politics and pollster whose research is helping shape our Montana campaign and those to follow, and Derek Cressman, western states regional director for Common Cause.

You will learn about our Montana effort and plans to advance ballot initiatives and referenda in other states.

If you have any questions that you'd like us to address, please submit them in the "Questions and Comments" box when you sign up. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions live during the webinar.

I hope you will join us on March 28, and thanks for all you do.

Sincerely, Robert Reich and the rest of the team at Common Cause

P.S. If you want to learn more, please visit the Amend 2012 website:

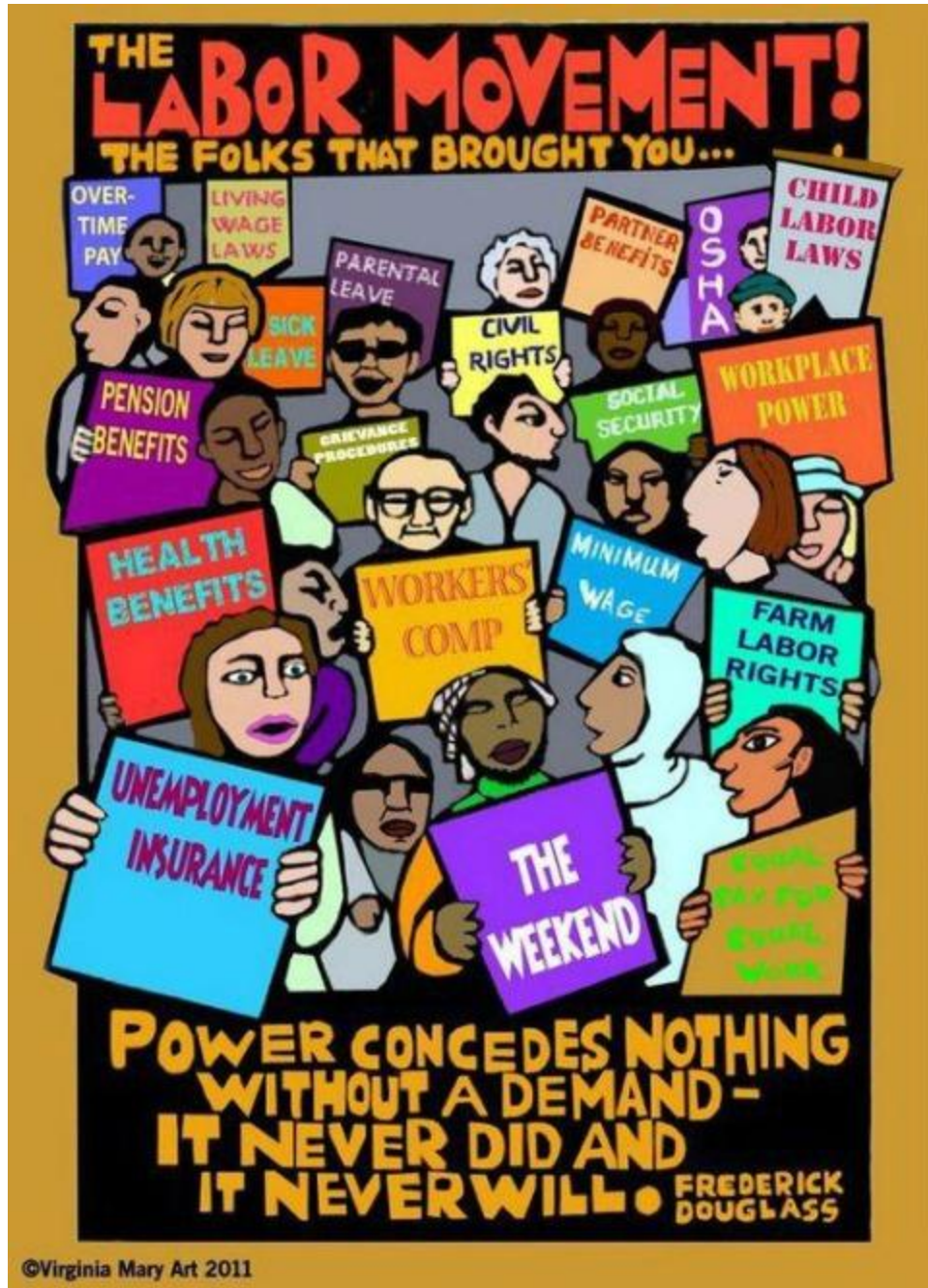
http://www.amend2012.org/site/c.8qKOJXMvFaLUG/b.7939705/k.1AA3/Reverse_Citizens_United_because_only_people_are_people.htm?sid=347505265.

Gee: Everything Republicans are against...

"One Graphic Republicans Hope You Don't Share with Your Friends" posted by Jayne, MoveOn.Org

Mar. 20, 2012, (<http://front.moveon.org/one-graphic-republicans-hope-you-dont-share-with-your-friends/?rc=daily.share&id=37639-18997482-FFdMipx>)

How many items on this list is the GOP trying to dismantle?



"The Most Eye-Opening Fact About Inequality That We've Seen All Week" posted by Jeb, MoveOn.Org

Mar. 20, 2012, (<http://front.moveon.org/the-most-eye-opening-fact-about-inequality-that-weve-seen-all-week/?rc=daily.share&id=37639-18997482-FFdMipx>)

Guess who's making bank? Not the American worker.

**If the minimum wage
had kept pace with the rise in
executive salaries since 1990,
America's poorest paid workers
Would be making more than
\$23 an hour.**

[20120321-06](#) 13:29 SteveG U.S. History: When the U.S. Pulled-Out of the Olympics Over Afghanistan

Sept. 21, 1980: President Jimmy Carter pulled the U.S. from participation in the Olympics in protest of the Soviet Union's war against Afghanistan.

[20120321-07](#) 13:40 Pam Re: When the U.S. Pulled-Out of the Olympics Over Afghanistan (reply to SteveG, above)

An interesting reminder. I remember not supporting that decision, and I still don't. It seemed to me like cutting off your nose to spite your face. We made a gesture, yeah, but what did it accomplish? It denied all of our athletes, who had been training for years and might never get to the Olympics again, a chance to compete in the biggest competition of them all. The Olympics are about peace, supposedly, but Carter's gesture was a bellicose one. I guess he thought he was taking the high ground, but maybe he should have consulted the athletes first.

[20120321-08](#) 14:39 Bill Re: When the U.S. Pulled-Out of the Olympics Over Afghanistan (reply to SteveG & Pam, above)

We were, at the same time, if I remember correctly, supplying the Afghans with portable surface-to-air missiles, among other weapons. The Russians did the invading then, I suppose, but international relations is not a realm of great moral truth.

[20120321-09](#) 15:26 SteveG Re: When the U.S. Pulled-Out of the Olympics Over Afghanistan (reply to Pam & Bill, above)

I just find it ironic that 32 years later we have been there 10 years fighting. I don't really remember when the Soviet Union left, but less than 20 years between the USSR and the USA invading.

[20120321-10](#) 17:13 SteveG "Banker Hubris Knows No Bounds"

"Banker Hubris Knows No Bounds" by Jim Hightower, [NationofChange](#)

Mar. 21, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/banker-hubris-knows-no-bounds-1332335770>)

Have you heard about the earthquake that has shaken Wall Street to its very core? Well, brace yourself, for this really is a shocker: Bonus payments are down.

Yes, the exorbitant bonus checks pocketed each year by the Goldman Sachs, Citigroupers and other financial tinkerers have been cut by about 25 percent this year, and — oh! — you should hear the Wall Streeters moaning the hard-times, down-and-out banker blues.

"It's a disaster," sobbed one. "The entire construct of compensation has changed."

Many Americans, of course, will say ... "Good! About time!" And it is difficult in these times of middle-class collapse and rising poverty to get teary-eyed over a few financial swells getting a trim. But, come on, Wall Street bankers are human, too (aren't they?) — so open your hearts to their pain.

A hedge-fund manager, for example, says he'll now have to strain to pay his \$7,500 annual dues to remain a member of the Trump National Golf Club in Westchester. Plus, he worries about food, health care and boarding. Not for him and his family, but for his two dogs — he's been laying out \$17,000 a year for upkeep of his labradoodle and bichon frise, including around \$5,000 to hire a dog-walker to take them out each day. He might resort to walking them himself a couple times a week.

The crunch is so bad that one financier confesses that he now shops for discounted salmon for dinner and has had to give up his annual ski trip to Aspen, Colo. And a high-dollar accountant who does financial planning for the wealthy practically weeps for clients who are having to cut back.

Empathizing with the stress of it all, he asks: "Could you imagine what it's like to say, 'I got three kids in private school, I have to think about pulling them out?' How do you do that?" Dabbing his eyes with tissues, he adds that these people have been raking in around \$500,000 a year, and they never dreamed "that they'd be broke."

Broke? We should all be as "broke" as they are.

Are these one-percenters actually worth their bonus checks, even at this year's discounted level? Well, one of the top one-tenth-of-one-percenters, Lloyd Blankfein, says: Hell yes! CEO of Goldman Sachs, Blankfein has sacked up a multimillion personal fortune in bonus cash, but he claims to be worth every penny because he's doing "God's work."

Whoa — that would be one very mean god! Blankfein actually is an ungodly angel of avarice, who turned his once-proud investment house into a casino of greed that was a central player in Wall Street's crash of our economy. But don't take my word for it. He has now been burned by one of his own — a Goldman Sachs executive who got so fed up with the "toxic and destructive" culture fostered by Blankfein that he has resigned and gone public with the banking giant's internal ugliness.

Greg Smith, a 12-year veteran with Goldman and head of one of its major divisions, penned a March 14 New York Times op-ed piece declaring, "It makes me ill how callously (Goldman bankers) talk about ripping their clients off." Forget about the quaint notion that banks are meant to serve the *public* good, Smith confirms that his fellow financiers no longer care about serving the good of their own customers, instead focusing laser-like on enriching the bankers themselves.

Rather than helping clients, he writes, "it's purely about how we can make the most possible money off of them." Smith pointedly adds that this crass selfishness all comes from the top, noting that it's now common to hear Goldman's managing directors privately deride their own clients as "muppets" — stupid people who're easily manipulated. The ruling ethic is — by hook or crook — to haul in bags of client gold for Goldman. If you do that, he writes, "(and are not currently an ax murderer) you will be promoted into a position of influence."

Remember, these are the people you and I were forced to bail out, yet far from showing even a modicum of humility or gratitude, their narcissism is now so extreme that it's even causing bankers to gag!

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20120321-11 23:59 SteveB Photos: Picking Cotton for the 'Boss' (Here We Go Again!)

Some things never change...

The desire to exploit other humans to get rich never fades. Let us be wary, fellow workers/consumers, or we shall all be made into something even more like slaves than we already are. —SteveB

<http://www.1st-art-gallery.com/William-Ludlow-Sheppard/Slaves-Picking-Cotton-On-A-Plantation.html>

<http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/migrants-1.htm>

<http://textilefibre.blogspot.com/p/jute-fiber.html>

1. Slaves Picking Cotton on a Southern Plantation, ~1850's (William Ludlow Sheppard)



2. Illegal Alien Mother and Child Picking Cotton in Arizona, ~2011



3. Picking Cotton in China, ~2011 (National Geographic)



Picking cotton in China
Photograph by Michael S. Yamashita



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