



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #101 — MAR. 23, 2012

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

INDEX: Click here.

Oliver North on Afghanistan

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Mar. 23, 2012)

Afghanistan may be a hell-hole for Americans soldiers, but it's apparently a cool subject for Republican lies. Notice how Oliver North sticks the knife in President Obama every chance he gets in today's article (below), but I see no real disagreement between the two on the subject. Very obviously, by Republican standards, you'd have to say President Obama has done the right things. The Right can't stand this, so they have to drool the lies. Now, how exactly President Obama is supposed to "win" Bush's stupid war (without breaking the bank and further destroying our worldwide credibility)?

Funny isn't it, that Ollie doesn't seem to have any advice on this subject. Chicken?

The Comments are much more informative than their authors (or the webpage which published them) ever intended. As Dale always says, consider the source.

"Afghan Ambivalence" by Oliver North, Guns & Patriots/Human Events

03/20/2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=50251>)

(Obama's vacillating Afghan strategy.)

(WASHINGTON) Four years ago, when then-Sen. Barack Obama was campaigning for president, he said of Afghanistan: This is "a war that we have to win." He also claimed, "The Afghan people must know that our commitment to their future is enduring because the security of Afghanistan and the United States is shared." But after three years of Obama's being commander in chief, it ought to be clear that he never really believed his own campaign rhetoric.

Now, in the aftermath of recent setbacks, his words are further evidence of presidential ambivalence and uncertainty. None of this bodes well for those who hope for a positive outcome in the shadows of the Hindu Kush.

This week, after a U.S. soldier allegedly killed 16 Afghan civilians in Panjwai, a hamlet in Kandahar province, Obama appropriately promised to "make sure that anybody who was involved is held fully accountable with the full force of the law." Though Defense Secretary Leon Panetta reiterated this commitment during a long-planned but unannounced two-day visit to Afghanistan, other unanticipated events -- a reality in all wars -- clouded the message.

Even before Panetta arrived, Afghan President Hamid Karzai was demanding that U.S. and NATO troops cease combat operations in populated areas and be confined to major bases.

Then, as Panetta's aircraft approached Camp Leatherneck in Helmand province, an Afghan national crashed a commandeered pickup truck, which burst into flames just off the base runway. By the time Panetta arrived at a meeting with American, British and Afghan personnel, U.S. Marines and British troops that mustered for a "meet and greet" with the secretary had been ordered to remove their weapons from the site.

Pentagon spokesman George Little told reporters that the unprecedented order to disarm was "unrelated" to the runway incident. But other officials, speaking on background, said the decision was prompted by "an abundance of caution" after six Americans were murdered last month by Afghan personnel.

Yet another story in widespread circulation attributed the order to "fairness" for Afghan troops, who are "not allowed to carry weapons in the presence of senior U.S. officials." Whatever the truth, the order quickly became a public relations nightmare -- and yet another distraction in shoring up public support for those who are fighting this long and difficult war. For that, Obama has no one to blame but himself.

Ever since he decided to provide fewer "surge troops" than requested by his hand-picked battlefield commander and announced an arbitrary "timetable for withdrawal" during a speech in December 2009, the president's rhetoric has been devoid of words about "winning," "defeating the Taliban" or even "peace and security for the Afghan people." Gone, too, is any attempt at comity with Karzai. And while Obama repeatedly reminds us that "we got Osama bin Laden," his efforts to repair relations with neighboring Pakistan have ground to a halt.

This week, in the aftermath of multiple reversals on the ground, the president reiterated that he still intends to withdraw 23,000 of the 91,000 U.S. troops currently deployed in Afghanistan before our presidential election -- and before the "fighting season" comes to an end. In Kabul, Panetta renewed the administration's commitment to "bringing home" all of the remaining 68,000 U.S. troops by 2014.

Taliban leaders immediately announced that they were suspending long-awaited "peace and reconciliation talks" in Qatar because of the "shaky, erratic and vague standpoint of the Americans." What they didn't say is what everyone already knows: The O-Team is getting out of Afghanistan no matter what's happening on the battlefield. All the Taliban have to do is wait until we're gone.

Obama still claims he is "confident that we can continue the work of meeting our objectives" and "accomplish the mission" while implementing his "exit strategy." But then he says his goal is to "responsibly wind down this war" and "bring our troops home." This isn't a "strategy," and it's not a valid reason to send young Americans into harm's way in one of the most difficult and dangerous places on earth.

The commander in chief we hired nearly four years ago still hasn't learned that the only "responsible" way to end a war is to win it.

On the day Taliban leaders announced they were pulling out of any further talks, I was visiting Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. While I was there, the mother of a severely wounded Marine said to me, "I hope my son's sacrifice was not in vain." I share her hope. We all should -- even our ambivalent commander in chief.

(Oliver North is the host of "War Stories" on Fox News Channel, the founder and honorary chairman of Freedom Alliance, and the author of *American Heroes in Special Operations*.)

Reader Comments (FIFO):

victorbarney (2 days ago)

Ollie, Surely you must know that both Islam and Marxism have a caliphate to destroy u.s. before they EVER deal with other? The only surprise is that NOT THEY, but the two-witnesses of chapter 11, Revelation in the Hebrew-INSPIRED Scriptures are going to do that because as it also is written YHWH ALWAYS PUNISHES

HIS OWN FIRST! If I'm reading the signs of the times correctly(i.e."forbidden foreigner") of Deuteronomy 17:15 and Obama is the ONLY foreigner(non-Israelite) EVER in the entire history of Israel that has been put over Israel BY IT'S OWN PEOPLE! By our women ONLY, but then, WELCOME TO ADAM'S WORLD! WATCH, especially September 16, 2012 if I'm reading the "signs" of the times correctly?

Kevin Hendon (2 days ago, in reply to victorbarney)

Apprciate your words Victor but can you be a more clear?

Victorbarney (2 days ago, in reply to Kevin Hendon)

Don't see how I can be more clear? WE, U.S., will be destroyed by the two-witnesses of Revelation, NOT by ISLAM! That's all that I'm saying...

Kevin Hendon (2 days ago)

OK not sure I agree but do know that Israel is the focus of a Christian nation! Obama of unknown denomination does not have the same focus. Thanks.

Bill (2 days ago)

The President is a secret Muslim Negro. I blame Jane Fonda.

StanW (2 days ago, in reply to Bill)

Blame Hillary Clinton, Bill. Shes the one that started that rumor.

Baldmotoman (2 days ago)

If Barry Insane Obama wins another term I'm convinced that he is indeed the antichrist, and this nation will be brought down to her knees. Afganistan is a tribul archaic society which will never be controlled by anyone, Karzai is in power by us but is totally against everything we try to do. I see no point of us staying there to be shot at and killed by so-called friends. Our troops are demororlized by many tours of duty (the young man who killed 16 Afgans was on his fourth tour) in a place that is a hellhole and can't be won by conventional warfare. The Taliban knew all they had to do was wait us out and then fill the vacuum, eventually this will be a Islamist terrorist haven, it doesn't take a genius to see what we should do!!!

33Charlemagne (2 days ago)

Obama is a left wing "community organizer" not a military leader or expert on international relations. As such his actions are motivated by political rather than strategic considerations. He undermines our military with his supposedly "egalitarian" scheme of allowing homosexuals to serve openly and he undercuts our strategic goals in Afghanistan by restricting troop levels and publicly announcing a withdrawal date. It is clear that BHO is as out of his element as General George S. Patton would be in a teaching "sensitivity training" class!

KitCarson (1 day ago)

ishmael and his descendants will not get along with their neighbors or themselves. they are taught to lie... thus, "the war the UNITED STATES must win" is now showing us to be weak. bluebama has destroyed our economy, and is doing the same to our military, while turning us into a pariah among the worlds nations. a true muslim communist, bred and handled by the communists of the FDR era.

KJQ (1 day ago)

Bring the troops home now, and not just from Afghanistan. Ron Paul has it right. If you must send Americans overseas, send Christian missionaries. It's not democracy that saves, renews and improves, it's the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bob Miller (1 day ago)

@victorbarney—I think your interpretation of the Scriptures is slightly twisted. The two witnesses are the prelude to the next coming of Christ. If I read my Scriptures correctly, the two witnesses, Enoch and Elijah, denounce the anti-christ and are killed in the street in front of the whole world. This precipitates the return of Christ, which results in total destruction of all man-made structures when His foot touches the Earth. That's my interpretation based on conversations I have had and research I have done. I could be wrong.

Mokyfellow (1 day ago)

Simply put, the people of our nation needs to get to their knees and pray. If we follow the teachings of the early Church as given to us in the New Testament's Book of Acts, we really do not need to worry about what is contained in the Book of Revelation!!!

2War Abn Vet, Citadel, 1964; 1st Bde (Abn), 1st Cav Div, RVN, 1965-6; HQ, XVIII Airborne Corps, Gulf, 1990-91; 2 tours (6yrs) & 23 yrs civ. Test Off, Abn Board (1 day ago)

Obama has already declared a surrender date we're just passing time and losing soldiers now.

studi30 (1 day ago)

Of course since this is Ovomits' war it is righteous unlike Bush's war which wasn't. Libturds!

Michaelnc (1 day ago)

Bird's eye view of the situation: Afghanistan is inhabited by ethnically different tribes of Tadhiks, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Hazanaras, Afghans, Pathans and a few more. Do we really want to waste our time and teach them Democracy, modern agriculture and how their women should be dressed? They were invaded 500 BC by Darius of Persia and subsequently over 26 centuries by Alexander the Great, Bactrians, Parthians, Mongols, Turks, Arabs, British, Russians and now the USA. We have been now there for over 10 years and nothing has or will fundamentally change. Why waste our blood, money and time?

Slim Jim (1 day ago)

What a disaster!

Burlofearl (10 hours ago)

I think that Panetta was afraid to face the troops with there weapons, I think he was in fear for his owen life with all the crap him and Obama have been pulling on the troops over there and with as many times as they have sent them over and with all of the lies they have told them. hell if I was there I might have shot him myself.

FotM NEWSLETTER #101 (Mar. 23, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120323-00		SteveB	Oliver North on Afghanistan by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Afghan Ambivalence")
20120322-01	09:04	Pam	News
20120322-02	10:52	Dale	"Topography of Faith" [in the U.S.]
20120322-04	11:29	SteveB	Re: "Topography of Faith" (reply to Dale, above)
20120322-03	10:55	Art	U.S. and Australian National Debt: "What's Worse Than Paying Taxes?" & "Reality Pill Needed for Australians" & "State of the Nation: Australia Today"
20120322-05	13:40	SteveG	Fw: EDF Petition: Stop the Toxic Air Bill!
20120322-06	13:44	SteveG	Fw: Daily Kos Petition: Investigate the Death of Trayvon Martin!
20120322-07	13:46	SteveG	Change.org Petition: Bring Zimmerman to Trial!
20120322-08	13:49	Art	Re: Trayvon Martin Petitions (reply to SteveG, above)
20120322-09	13:54	SteveG	Re: Trayvon Martin Petitions (reply to Art, above)
20120322-10	14:05	SteveB	Re: Trayvon Martin Petitions (reply to SteveG & Art, above)
20120322-11	15:06	SteveG	"Please Stop Apologizing"
20120322-12	15:23	Pam	Re: "Please Stop Apologizing" (reply to SteveG, above)
20120322-13	15:43	SteveG	Quote: Barry Goldwater on Christians in Politics
20120322-14	15:46	Pam	Re: Quote: Barry Goldwater on Christians in Politics (reply to SteveG, above)
20120322-15	17:07	SteveG	Conspiracy Theory
20120322-16	18:27	SteveG	"Walking While Black: The Killing of Trayvon Martin"
20120322-17	18:33	SteveG	"Three Hidden Time Bombs in the GOP's Medicare Budget"
20120322-18	19:04	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: End the Bush Tax Cuts on the Rich!
20120322-19	23:59	SteveB	Photos: War in Afghanistan

20120322-01	09:04	Pam	News
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Atty is coming right along. In a week or so he'll get a new, shorter cast that he should be able to walk on some. It's hard for a little boy to be so restricted, but he's been a trooper. This makes me realize what some families go through on a daily basis--forever.

I had a beer with my buddy Joe yesterday and started off telling him about my new enthusiasm about literature, art, and all things beautiful. By the end though I was back to bitching about injustice. That essay Art sent in by the women refuting the arguments re. women and sex really lit my fuse.

Have a great day. I'm sure the sun is shining.

20120322-02	10:52	Dale	"Topography of Faith" [in the U.S.]
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Before looking at this Pew survey map of religious topography, make a guess at what % of the US population classifies themselves as "unaffiliated," which includes atheist, agnostic and "nothing in particular."

<http://www.usatoday.com/news/graphics/pew-religion-08/flash.htm>

[16% 'unaffiliated' and 1% 'no answer'. -SteveB]

20120322-04	11:29	SteveB	Re: "Topography of Faith" (reply to Dale, above)
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You know, I guessed 20% and was pretty close to the 16%/17%. A lot would depend upon exactly how the questions were asked, but I believe at least some other surveys have shown similar results.

More interesting to me is the fact that when you clearly and fairly put any one of the "faith-based issues" or "moral issues" in front of the American people, it turns out that it is always a "moral" minority trying to impose its will on an "immoral" majority. Thank God!

20120322-03	10:55	Art	U.S. and Australian National Debt: "What's Worse Than Paying Taxes?" & "Reality Pill Needed for Australians" & "State of the Nation: Australia Today"
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Art: Hi SteveB, Little e-mail exchange with an Australian friend. He is a very successful businessman with lots of moxy. Just shows lots of other folks are watching.

Art: Hi Roger, Good article and good point. In the short term for the USA, getting a handle on the deficit is the most important issue of the day. (On the longer look global warming is much more important, but I don't think we can resolve at world level and, if not, won't be many folks left alive by 2100 to care.)

85% of our budget goes for defense, Medicare/Medicaid and Social Security. We have a terrible medical system. Expensive and it doesn't work very well. Not sure the new health care law will fix, but at least it's a step in a direction to try. It won't survive the next election, if Republicans win, and we'll be back to square one. This Administration is trying on Defense but getting lots of pushback. I forget off hand what we shell out in percentage relationship for Defense, but it exceeds the rest of the world combined.

Republicans have just come up with their new budget proposal. Sort of follows the old Robin Hood saying - Rob the poor and give to the rich. Only sort of. Whacks away at social programs and reduces taxes for the rich and better the super rich. Not really a serious attempt to address the deficit. Administration proposal not much better but heads in a better direction from my perspective.

I know your are a businessman and I don't know how it goes in Australia, but do you really think anyone is worth \$50- \$70 M a year in salary plus more for bonuses? And that's the low end.

Article below takes an attempt at explaining the issue.

"What's Worse Than Paying Taxes?" by Paul Buchheit, NationofChange

Mar. 19, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/what-s-worse-paying-taxes-1332171239>)

Roger: I couldn't resist sending this to you. Thought you might appreciate it!

When you look at the experience at the end it seems a bit scary.

Ross Greenwood has covered finance and business matters in Australia and around the world for almost 30 years. He is Nine Network's business and finance editor and was co-host of its former flagship current affairs program, Sunday. His reporting assignments for Nine have taken him to Europe, Asia and the Middle East. This is really well put, in terms the average punter can understand. It cuts through political doublespeak, providing clarity.

"Reality Pill Needed for Australians" by USA Today

Mar. 13, 2012, (<http://cbr250.com/forum/thread-8907.html>)

Lesson #1:

Why the U.S. was downgraded:

- U.S. Tax revenue: \$2,170,000,000,000
- Fed budget: \$3,820,000,000,000
- New debt: \$ 1,650,000,000,000
- National debt: \$14,271,000,000,000
- Recent budget cuts: \$ 38,500,000,000

Let's now remove 8 zeros and pretend it's a household budget:

- Annual family income: \$21,700
- Money the family spent: \$38,200
- New debt on the credit card: \$16,500
- Outstanding balance on the credit card: \$142,710
- Total budget cuts: \$385

Got It ?????

Lesson #2:

Here's another way to look at the Debt Ceiling:

Let's say, you come home from work and find there has been a sewer backup in your neighbourhood ... and your home has sewage all the way up to your ceilings.

What do you think you should do?

Raise the ceilings, or pump out the (ummmm) "effluent"?

Lesson #3:

"State of the Nation: Australia Today" by Ross Greenwood, *Money News*

Jan. 27, 2012,

(http://www.2gb.com/index.php?option=com_podcasting&id=36&Itemid=41&task=view&limit=10&limitstart=90)

Right now the Australian Federal Government is at pains to tell everyone - including us the mug-punters and the International Monetary Fund, that it will not exceed its own, self-imposed, borrowing limits.

How much? \$200 billion. And here's a worry.

If you work in a bank's money market operation; or if you are a politician; the millions turn into billions and it rolls off the tip of the tongue a bit too easily. but every dollar that is borrowed, some time, has to be repaid. By you, by me and by the rest of the country.

Just after 5 o'clock tonight I did a bit of math for Jason Morrison (Sydney radio presenter). But it's so staggering its worth repeating now.

First thought; Gillard, Swan, Wong, before that Rudd, all of the Labor Cabinet, call these temporary borrowings, a temporary deficit.

Remember Those Words : Temporary Deficit.

The total Government debt will end up around \$200 billion.

So here's a very basic calculation .. I used a home loan calculator to work it out..... it's that simple.,

\$200 billion is \$2 hundred thousand million.

The current 10 year Government bond rate is 4.67 per cent. I worked the loan out over a period of 20 years. Now here's where it gets scary really scary.

The repayments on \$200 billion, come to more than one and a quarter billion dollars - every month - for 20 years. It works out we - as taxpayers - will be repaying \$15.4 billion in interest and principal every year .. \$733 for every man woman and child - every year.

The total interest bill over the 20 years is - get this - \$108 billion.

Remember, this is a Government, that just 4 years ago, had NO debt. NO debt.

In fact it had enough money to create the Future Fund, to pay the future liabilities of public servants' superannuation, and it had enough to stick \$20 billion into the Building Australia Fund ...

A note was sent to me which explains that the six leading members of the Government, from Ms Gillard down, have a collective work experience of 181 years, but only 13 in the private sector.

If you take out of those 13 years the number that were spent as trade union lawyers, 11, only two years were spent in the private sector.

So out of those 181 years:

- no years spent running their own business
- no years spent starting their own business
- no years spent as a director of a family business or a company
- no years as a director of a public company
- no years in a senior position in a public company
- no years in a senior position in a private company
- no years working in corporate finance
- no years in corporate or business restructuring
- no years working in or with a bank
- no years of experience in the capital markets
- no years in a stock-broking firm
- no years in negotiating debt facilities with banks
- no years running a small business
- no years at the World Bank or IMF or OECD
- no years in Treasury or Finance.

But these people have plunged Australia into unprecedented debt.

Well, in a way you can't blame them.

It's clear the electorate did not do their homework, because the Government is there by right.

Ah, but they are Labor and people vote for them because Labor is good for the working family - right???

If you have read this you may like to pass it on to your friends to help educate a little as you, them and I, will be repaying the above.

from Environmental Defense Action Fund:

Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) is Congress's leading global warming denier. Now he wants to deny your right to breathe cleaner air that won't kill you or make you sick.

Please take action today. Help us stop the Inhofe toxic air bill, which would wipe the EPA's life-saving Mercury and Air Toxics Standards off the books and punch a huge hole through our clean air protections.

https://secure2.edf.org/site/Advocacy?pagename=homepage&page=UserAction&id=1953&autologin=true&utm_source=EDF%20action%20network&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=advocacy&JServSessionIdr004=s4m1jb1e1.app305b

Sen. Inhofe's bill -- S.J. Res 37 -- would use the obscure Congressional Review Act to block EPA's new emission standards for hazardous mercury and other toxic air pollution.

If enacted, this bill would also forever prohibit the EPA from adopting substantially similar clean air standards in the future.

These standards have been in the works for more than two decades!

- They will prevent up to 11,000 premature deaths every year.
- They will protect our kids from dangerous exposure to toxic mercury pollution, which can cause brain damage in infants and young children.
- And they will save the U.S. economy tens of billions of dollars in avoided health costs every year while putting 85,000 - 117,000 Americans to work installing pollution control technologies between now and 2015.

Last year, more than 800,000 Americans submitted comments to the EPA in support of these landmark standards.

But now, a small group of power industry lobbyists and their allies in the Senate are putting pressure on Senators to support Inhofe's toxic air assault to wipe these life-saving, job-creating standards off the books.

We can't let them win -- not with the stakes so high.

Please take action today. Don't let Sen. Inhofe and the Dirty Air Lobby deny your right to clean, healthy air that won't kill you or make you sick.

Sen. Inhofe claims to have the number of signatures he needs to force a vote on the floor of the Senate at any time. And, unlike most other Senate action, this bill filed under the Congressional Review Act only requires 51 votes.

Help us make sure a majority of the Senate stands with our kids and families against this toxic air assault.

Please take action today.

Thanks for all you do, Heather Shelby, Online Membership Associate

20120322-06	13:44	SteveG	Fw: Daily Kos Petition: Investigate the Death of Trayvon Martin!
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from Daily Kos:

In the wake of Trayvon Martin's death, please sign our petition asking Attorney General Eric Holder to investigate the Sanford Police Department's history of failing to prosecute violent crimes against African-Americans:

The Department of Justice has announced that its Civil Rights Division, in conjunction with the Federal Bureau of Investigation, will investigate Trayvon Martin's death. This is a positive step.¹

However, the Sanford Police Department has a history of failing to successfully prosecute crimes when the victim is African-American and the alleged assailant is not. This happened not only in the case of Trayvon Martin, but also in 2005 and 2010. In both of those earlier cases, the white son of a Sanford police officer was involved.

In addition to the Department of Justice's investigation into Trayvon Martin's death, a simultaneous investigation of the Sanford Police Department itself needs to be undertaken. Even the city commissioners of Sanford, Florida have now voted that they have no confidence in the police chief.²

Please, sign our petition asking Attorney General Eric Holder to investigate the Sanford Police Department's pattern of failing to prosecute violent crimes against African-Americans:

http://campaigns.dailykos.com/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=94

Keep fighting, Meteor Blades, Daily Kos

¹"Trayvon Martin case going to grand jury" <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/03/20/1076072/-Trayvon-Martin-case-going-to-grand-jury?detail=hide>.

²"Sanford commissioners vote no-confidence in police chief over Trayvon Martin slaying investigation" <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/03/21/1076585/-Sanford-commissioners-vote-no-confidence-in-police-chief-over-Trayvon-Martin-slaying-investigation?detail=hide>.

20120322-07	13:46	SteveG	Change.org Petition: Bring Zimmerman to Trial!
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from Change.Org:

Our son didn't deserve to die. Trayvon Martin was just 17 years old when he was shot and killed by George Zimmerman. Trayvon wasn't doing anything besides walking home with a bag of Skittles and some iced tea in his hands.

What makes Trayvon's death so much harder is knowing that the man who confessed to killing him, George Zimmerman, still hasn't been charged for Trayvon's killing.

That's why we started a petition on Change.org calling for Zimmerman's prosecution and trial. We aren't looking for revenge, we're looking for justice -- the same justice anyone would expect if their son were shot and killed for no reason.

Click here to join 900,000 people who have already signed our petition calling for justice for our son Trayvon:

http://www.change.org/petitions/prosecute-the-killer-of-our-son-17-year-old-trayvon-martin?utm_campaign=NbYqYZRNGG&utm_medium=email&utm_source=action_alert

No family should ever have to go through this nightmare. The law should protect everyone, regardless of where they live, how much money they make, or what color their skin is.

With our petition at 900,000 signers so far, we've made important progress toward making some sense out of what happened. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement will investigate Trayvon's death, and so will the FBI and Department of Justice.

But Trayvon's killer is still free. The surest path to justice runs through Sanford, Florida, and through the office of State's Attorney Norman Wolfinger, who is responsible for bringing charges against Zimmerman. With your help, we believe he'll have no choice but to give Trayvon and his killer their days in court.

Please sign our petition calling on Florida authorities to prosecute our son's confessed killer.

Thank you so much.

Tracy Martin and Sybrina Fulton

[20120322-08](#) 13:49 Art Re: Trayvon Martin Petitions (reply to SteveG, above)

Think this is the real crime. Bad enough this vigilante shot someone but that the police don't even try to hold the shooter is unbelievable. What are we coming to? This is murder, plain and simple.

[20120322-09](#) 13:54 SteveG Re: Trayvon Martin Petitions (reply to Art, above)

I have heard that the shooter:

1. Was held for 1 hour in questioning.
2. No drug or alcohol tests were taken.
3. He had grass stains on his shirt and blood on his head.
4. No clothing was kept for evidence or testing.
5. No forensic tests were done with the shooter.
6. In 14 months on the neighborhood watch the shooter had made 46 calls to the police station.

Of course, we do not know all the information or if what we have heard or read is accurate – but it smells and smells bad!

[20120322-10](#) 14:05 SteveB Re: Trayvon Martin Petitions (reply to SteveG & Art, above)

Mmmmm...I haven't seen this, but my guess is the perp is white!

Jeez! Rush would call me a racist. But it would really be a reverse racist? An inverted racist?

"Ah...since you put it like that, it sounds very interesting," says Mr. Santorum. "Let me think about this...inverted...with a person of color...it's getting hot in here...excuse me."

[20120322-11](#) 15:06 SteveG "Please Stop Apologizing"

"Please Stop Apologizing" by Bill Maher, *The New York Times*

Mar. 21, 2012, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/22/opinion/please-stop-apologizing.html>)

THIS week, Robert De Niro made a joke about first ladies, and Newt Gingrich said it was "inexcusable and the president should apologize for him." Of course, if something is "inexcusable," an apology doesn't make any difference, but then again, neither does Newt Gingrich.

Mr. De Niro was speaking at a fund-raiser with the first lady, Michelle Obama. Here's the joke: "Callista Gingrich. Karen Santorum. Ann Romney. Now do you really think our country is ready for a white first lady?"

The first lady's press secretary declared the joke "inappropriate," and Mr. De Niro said his remarks were "not meant to offend." So, as these things go, even if the terrible damage can never be undone, at least the healing can begin. And we can move on to the next time we choose sides and pretend to be outraged about nothing.

When did we get it in our heads that we have the right to never hear anything we don't like? In the last year, we've been shocked and appalled by the unbelievable insensitivity of Nike shoes, the Fighting Sioux, Hank Williams Jr.,

Cee Lo Green, Ashton Kutcher, Tracy Morgan, Don Imus, Kirk Cameron, Gilbert Gottfried, the Super Bowl halftime show and the ESPN guys who used the wrong cliché for Jeremy Lin after everyone else used all the others. Who can keep up?

This week, President Obama's chief political strategist, David Axelrod, described Mitt Romney's constant advertising barrage in Illinois as a "Mitzkrieg," and instantly the Republican Jewish Coalition was outraged and called out Mr. Axelrod's "Holocaust and Nazi imagery" as "disturbing." Because the message of "Mitzkrieg" was clear: Kill all the Jews. Then the coalition demanded not only that Mr. Axelrod apologize immediately but also that Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz "publicly rebuke" him. For a pun! For punning against humanity!

The right side of America is mad at President Obama because he hugged the late Derrick Bell, a law professor who believed we live in a racist country, 22 years ago; the left side of America is mad at Rush Limbaugh for seemingly proving him right.

If it weren't for throwing conniption fits, we wouldn't get any exercise at all.

I have a better idea. Let's have an amnesty — from the left and the right — on every made-up, fake, totally insincere, playacted hurt, insult, slight and affront. Let's make this Sunday the National Day of No Outrage. One day a year when you will not find some tiny thing someone did or said and pretend you can barely continue functioning until they apologize.

If that doesn't work, what about this: If you see or hear something you don't like in the media, just go on with your life. Turn the page or flip the dial or pick up your roll of quarters and leave the booth.

The answer to whenever another human being annoys you is not "make them go away forever." We need to learn to coexist, and it's actually pretty easy to do. For example, I find Rush Limbaugh obnoxious, but I've been able to coexist comfortably with him for 20 years by using this simple method: I never listen to his program. The only time I hear him is when I'm at a stoplight next to a pickup truck.

When the lady at Costco gives you a free sample of its new ham pudding and you don't like it, you spit it into a napkin and keep shopping. You don't declare a holy war on ham.

I don't want to live in a country where no one ever says anything that offends anyone. That's why we have Canada. That's not us. If we sand down our rough edges and drain all the color, emotion and spontaneity out of our discourse, we'll end up with political candidates who never say anything but the safest, blandest, emptiest, most unctuous focus-grouped platitudes and cant. In other words, we'll get Mitt Romney.

(Bill Maher is host of "Real Time With Bill Maher" on HBO.)

20120322-12 15:23 Pam Re: "Please Stop Apologizing" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Bill Maher nails it again! One of the tests of a free society is whether people can make offhand remarks or jokes, especially about their leaders. No one laughed at Stalin. It's ironic the Jews took after Axelrod, who is a Jew himself. I'm with Bill. I'm fed up with outrage over trivia. I'm saving mine for things like the black kid shot down in cold blood in Florida or the tax breaks that benefit the rich at everyone else's expense. There IS a place for outrage, but idiots like New take advantage of the common people's (yes, I said "common") proclivity toward anger. It feels so good. Especially when nothing much is at stake.

20120322-13

15:43

SteveG

Quote: Barry Goldwater on Christians in Politics

Mark my word, if and when these preachers get control of the [Republican] party, and they're sure trying to do so, it's going to be a terrible damn problem. Frankly, these people frighten me. Politics and governing demand compromise. But these Christians believe they are acting in the name of God, so they can't and won't compromise. I know, I've tried to deal with them.

~ Republican Barry Goldwater



[I'll admit it. I still have a soft spot in my heart for straight-talkin' Barry! Almost the first President Barry. -SteveB]

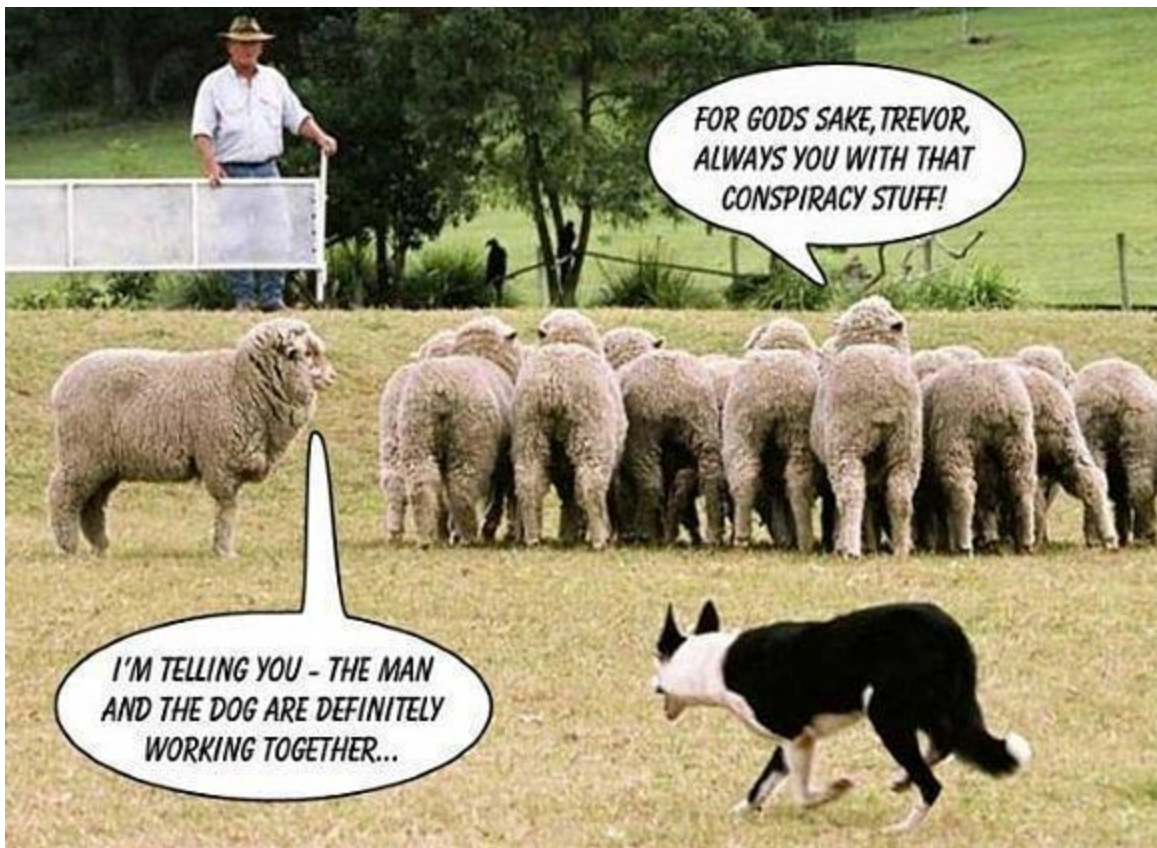
20120322-14

15:46

Pam

Re: Quote: Barry Goldwater on Christians in Politics (reply to SteveG, above)

Isn't this great?!!!!



"Walking While Black: The Killing of Trayvon Martin" by Amy Goodman, NationofChange

Mar. 22, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/walking-while-black-killing-trayvon-martin-1332430878>)

On the rainy night of Sunday, Feb. 26, 17-year-old Trayvon Martin walked to a convenience store in Sanford, Fla. On his way home, with his Skittles and iced tea, the African-American teenager was shot and killed. The gunman, George Zimmerman, didn't run. He claimed that he killed the young man in self-defense. The Sanford Police agreed and let him go. Since then, witnesses have come forward, 911 emergency calls have been released, and outrage over the killing has gone global.

Trayvon Martin lived in Miami. He was visiting his father in Sanford, near Orlando, staying in the gated community known as The Retreat at Twin Lakes, where Zimmerman volunteered with the Neighborhood Watch program. The Miami Herald reported that Zimmerman was a "habitual caller" to the police, making 46 calls since January 2011. He was out on his rounds as a self-appointed watchman, packing his concealed 9 mm pistol, when he called 911: "We've had some break-ins in my neighborhood, and there's a real suspicious guy ... this guy looks like he's up to no good, or he's on drugs or something."

Later in the call, Zimmerman exclaims, "OK. These a—holes always get away. ... [Expletive], he's running."

Sounds of Zimmerman moving follow, along with a controversial utterance from Zimmerman, under his breath, considered by many to be "[Expletive] coons." The sound of his running prompted the 911 operator to ask, "Are you following him?" Zimmerman replied, "Yeah," to which the dispatcher said, "OK, we don't need you to do that."

One of the attorneys representing the Martin family, Jasmine Rand, told me: "The term 'coon' on the audiotape ... is a very obvious racial slur against African-Americans. We also heard the neighbors come forward and say, 'Yeah, in

this particular neighborhood, we look for young black males to be committing criminal activity.' And that's exactly what George Zimmerman did that night. He found a young black male that he did not recognize, assumed that he did not belong there, and he targeted him."

Another 911 call that has been released is from a woman who hears someone crying for help, then a gunshot.

Eyewitnesses Mary Cutcher and Selma Mora Lamilla both heard the cries, which police say could have been from Zimmerman, thus supporting his claim, even though he had a gun and outweighed Trayvon Martin by 80 pounds.

Cutcher said at a press conference: "I feel it was not self-defense, because I heard the crying. And if it was Zimmerman that was crying, Zimmerman would have continued crying after the shot went off. The only thing I saw that night—I heard the crying. We were in the kitchen. I heard the crying. It was a little boy. As soon as the gun went off, the crying stopped. Therefore, it tells me it was not Zimmerman crying."

Sanford Police Chief Bill Lee has defended his department's decision not to arrest Zimmerman. They bagged Martin's body and took it away, labeling him a "John Doe," even though they had his cellphone, which anyone, let alone law enforcement with a shooting victim, could have used to easily identify a person. They tested Martin's corpse for drugs and alcohol. Zimmerman was not tested. Neighbors say that Zimmerman loaded things into a U-Haul truck and left the area.

So, while the police and State Attorney Norm Wolfinger have defended their inaction, a democratic demand for justice has ricocheted around the country, prompting a U.S. Justice Department investigation and leading Wolfinger to promise to convene a grand jury. The Rev. Glenn Dames, pastor of St. James AME Church in nearby Titusville, has called Martin's death "a modern-day lynching." His demand for the immediate arrest of Zimmerman was echoed by the organizers of the "Million Hoodie March" in New York City, named after the often racially stereotyped sweatshirt Martin was wearing in the rain when he was shot.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has called for the removal of Sanford Police Chief Lee. NAACP President Ben Jealous, recounting a mass meeting in a Sanford-area church Tuesday night, quoted a local resident who stood up and said, "'If you kill a dog in this town, you'd be in jail the next day.' Trayvon Martin was killed four weeks ago, and his killer is still walking the streets."

With his gun.

© 2011 Amy Goodman

20120322-17 18:33 SteveG "Three Hidden Time Bombs in the GOP's Medicare Budget"

"Three Hidden Time Bombs in the GOP's Medicare Budget" by Richard Escow, Huffington Post

Mar. 21, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/rj-eskow/three-hidden-time-bombs-i_b_1371531.html?ref=politics)

By now most people have heard some of the worst things about the Republican budget proposal - commonly called the "Ryan plan" and un-ironically described by the GOP as "the Path to Prosperity": That it decimates programs for middle class and lower-income Americans while giving even greater tax breaks to the rich - \$3 trillion worth, in fact. That it guts education, research, and transportation while preserving tax breaks for Big Oil. That it undercuts Medicare with a voucher system that will be worth less and less with each passing year.

And that, despite all that, it would actually increase the deficit.

You'd think that pretty much covers it - but it doesn't. When it comes to Medicare, there are three more ugly facts about this plan that have yet to attract widespread attention - mostly be-cause the Republicans have done their best to keep them secret:

1. They're secretly planning to raise the Medicare age.

It's not in House Budget Chair Paul Ryan's Wall Street Journal editorial, the one where he sneered at "some who would distort for political gain our efforts to preserve programs like Medicare" and said "our plan provides guaranteed coverage options financed by a premium-support payment." It's not in the summary description of the GOP budget, which it claims "strengthens health and retirement security by taking power away from government bureaucrats and empowering patients instead with control over their own care." It's not even in the full budget document itself, which is 99 pages long and contains a section entitled "Strengthening Health and Retirement Security."

So how do we know that the GOP wants to raise the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67? Be-cause that's what Ryan and his staff told the Congressional Budget Office when they asked the CBO to calculate the impact of their plan. It's right there in the CBO report on the budget.

Here's the key sentence: "In addition, the eligibility age for Medicare would increase by two months per year beginning in 2023 until reaching age 67 in 2034."

That's right: When Ryan and his staff instructed the CBO to calculate the impact of the Republican budget, they told its analysts that the GOP plan included an increase in the eligibility age for Medicare. Apparently they didn't have room to mention that fact anywhere in their 99-page document, and didn't see fit to bring it up while they were spouting all that rhetoric about "preserving entitlement programs for the future."

The Republican Party intends to raise the Medicare age for people as they approach the costliest years for receiving health insurance, and they're keeping it a secret from the public. This change alone would indirectly cut Social Security benefits by as much as 45 percent, by forcing seniors to spend that much of their benefit check on additional health care costs.

And remember, the GOP wants to raise the eligibility age for Social Security too. The net effect of these two changes means that older Americans would be forced to keep working - or looking for work - at an age when their medical expenses would make hiring them prohibitively expensive for employers who offer health insurance. They would be forced to try purchasing health insurance on the open market.

Which gets us to our second dirty secret...

2. Insurers will get to set their own rates.

The Ryan plan lets private, for-profit health insurers set their own rates - rates which, according to the Ryan plan, will determine the Federal budget for senior health. It doesn't say that, of course, but that's how it would work.

According the GOP's proposal, "All plans ... would participate in an annual competitive bidding process ... The second least expensive approved plan ... would establish the benchmark that determines the premium support amount ... Program growth would be determined by the competitive bidding process ..."

What does that mean in English? That Medicare goes away, to be replaced by a system of private health insurance companies who'll be paid to provide services that are supposed to (but won't) resemble the level of coverage seniors currently receive under Medicare. That health insurers would submit their bids to provide those services once a year.

And then comes the surprising part: The Federal government's expenditures for senior health care will be determined by the private insurers themselves, because the second-lowest bid establishes what the government is willing to pay for health insurance.

How crazy is that? Private health insurance rates have been climbing at three and four times the rate of today's Medicare. They've shown no ability to restrain costs -- and have no motive to do so, since they make money the old fashioned way: on the mark-up. And now they - or the lowest bidder among them - will dictate what the government must pay.

The plan says so, very clearly. "As opposed to pegging the growth rate to a predetermined formula," the GOP document say, "competitive bidding offers the ideal means of harnessing the power of choice and competition to control costs, while also securing guaranteed affordability for patients." In other words, the Republican Ryan plan places budgetary control for a major government program in the hands of the very insurance companies that profit from it.

At least that's what it would do, if they didn't contradict themselves in the very next paragraph.

3. The GOP plan radically cuts per-person spending for Medicare.

Remember that sentence we just quoted, the one about not pegging the growth rate to a predetermined formula? They totally lied about that. The plan does peg the growth rate to a predetermined formula, and Ryan's staff were very specific about it in their instructions to the CBO: "Total spending would grow in subsequent years," the CBO was told, "with nominal growth in per capita GDP plus 0.5 percentage points per year."

That's a "predetermined formula." And it's important to note that "nominal growth in per capita GDP" is not the same as the growth in per capita health care costs, which have risen much more quickly than general inflation or GDP. That amounts to a major cut in benefits every year.

It gets even worse. The "per capita GDP" applies to everybody in the nation, not the ever-swelling ranks of Medicare-eligible seniors. This gets technical, but here's what it means: After this formula takes effect in 2023, there will be much faster growth in the Medicare-eligible age group than in the overall population. By structuring their formula this way the Republicans have ensured that there will be dramatic benefit cuts, especially as the "age wave" of Baby Boomers retires in the 2023-2030 period.

The "predetermined formula" is itself a secret, since they said there wasn't one. And the way it's structured will lead to dramatic cuts in Medicare.

Three-Pronged Attack

While the contradictions and evasions make exact forecasts difficult, it's clear that the net effect of these three changes would be to create a budget-busting giveaway to rich insurance corporations while at the same time slashing health coverage for seniors. And this isn't some radical ideologue's manifesto: it's the Republican Party's official Medicare proposal.

One terrible plan, three dreadful secrets. Presidential candidate Mitt Romney has said very, very nice things about this budget. In fact, all of the GOP's leaders have been bragging about it. Since they're so proud of it, why don't they tell more people what it really does?

20120322-18	19:04	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: End the Bush Tax Cuts on the Rich!
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from CREDO Action:

Tell Congress: End the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy:

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/bush_cuts_2011/?r_by=-3891339-6Q6gSVx&rc=confemail

It's outrageous. The average tax break from the Bush tax cuts enjoyed by the top 1 percent of Americans is larger than the average income of the rest of the 99 percent.

And after a decade of giving money to those who literally didn't need it, the deficit caused in large part by the Bush tax cuts is being used as an excuse to take away the social safety net that protects the most vulnerable members of society.

Tell your member of Congress and your senators: End the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy.

Ending these cuts should be a no brainer. They had been set to expire at the end of 2010, but President Obama ended up cutting a deal with the Republican leadership to extend the cuts for another two years.

And we know that the cuts won't be allowed to expire at the end of 2012 without a big fight.

Republican intransigence on the Bush tax cuts was at the heart of the failure of the Super Committee.

Not only did the Republicans on the Super Committee want the Bush tax cuts to be made permanent, they took the morally bankrupt position that we should blow a bigger hole in the budget by giving even larger tax cuts to the rich.

Simply extending the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy alone would cost us more than \$700 billion over the next decade.

There is very little that so clearly demonstrates the callous venality of some members of Congress than the simultaneous demand to give the Koch brothers a tax cut while pushing benefit cuts to programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid.

Tell your member of Congress and your senators: End the Bush tax cuts.

Democrats caved in 2010, and Republicans expect them to cave again. Between now and the end of 2012, we can expect a relentless push to make the Bush tax cuts permanent.

But this is a fight we can win if we are relentless, too. In this case gridlock and inaction work to our benefit because we don't have to pass a bill - we just need to ensure that Congress doesn't pass a bill that extends the Bush tax cuts past 2012.

The first step is speaking out and laying down a marker so that your member of Congress and senators know their constituents want the Bush tax cuts to end.

Tell your member of Congress and your senators: End the Bush tax cuts.

<http://www.lilith-ezine.com/articles/politics/Afghanistan.html>

<http://www.boston.com/bigpicture/afghanistan/>

Soviet Troops in Afghanistan



Afghan Soldier in a Poppy Field (Paula Nelson) [I love the texture! –SteveB]



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