



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #102 — MAR. 26, 2012

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

[INDEX: Click here.](#)

The Reality of Obamacare

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Mar. 26, 2012)

(And why I'm proud to call it by that name and so should President Obama. In fact, I believe the Republican pejorative will become an honorable nomenclature.)

Obamacare will go down in history as a step forward, not backward. There is no reason on earth not to get these insurance companies to operate under fair laws. It's exactly like seat belts in your cars, folks. They install so easily, cost almost nothing, have saved countless lives, but the industry kicked and screamed and cried until they were forced to take action. And, as the article below shows, those beneficial actions are really no big deal for the insurance companies that started operating under Obamacare even before they had to.

Corporate greed must be controlled! Especially when it comes to people's lives.

"Health Care Reform Repeal Would Put People at Risk" by Jeffrey Young, Huffington Post

Mar. 23, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/23/health-care-reform-supreme-court-n_1373735.html?ref=elections-2012)

(Dawn Josephson and her family were able to find health insurance that covered her son, Wesley, after health care reform passed.)

Dawn Josephson could barely believe it when she found health insurance that would actually cover the cost of treating her young son's eye condition.

Josephson, a freelance editor, wife and mother of two in Jacksonville, Fla., had been spending as much as \$1,000 a month of her family's budget on surgery, doctor visits, tests, and treatments in the seven months since 2-year-old Wesley awoke one morning with his eyes pointed toward each other, a condition called strabismus. That was on top of the \$807 in monthly premiums the family spent on an insurance plan that excluded anything related to her son's eyes.

A few weeks after President Barack Obama signed a sweeping health care reform law in March 2010, Josephson got a call from another insurance company telling her the family had been accepted into a new plan. "What about Wesley's eye? If he needs another surgery, another test, another something, is it covered?" she asked the customer service representative. She pressed the point again: What's the catch? "Nothing. Your family's fully covered," she was told.

Josephson's change in fortune was the result of the new law's provision that prohibits insurance companies from refusing to cover children with pre-existing medical conditions. The family's new insurer decided to change its rules before the law required it, giving Josephson, her husband Dave, Wesley, and his little sister Margo some relief. A few months later, Josephson got to meet Obama at a health care reform event in Falls Church, Va.

Even with that relief, Josephson can't rest easy. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear arguments next week in a case challenging the constitutionality of health reform. The court, or a Republican president next year, could reverse the family's fortunes again, with Josephson's son, now 6, still struggling to gain control of his right eye. He sometimes wears an eye patch, and might need more surgery, Josephson said.

The fate of millions of other Americans also hangs on the Supreme Court's ruling. Repealing health care reform would squash the hopes of uninsured people struggling to pay for health care.

"I definitely think I'd have to worry about it," Josephson said. "It's scary because you see the before and after."

Josephson now pays about \$600 a month for a plan that covers the whole family, about \$200 less than the old insurance that excluded Wesley's eyes. The savings go deeper than that, she said, because she doesn't have to pay out of pocket for her son's doctor visits and tests and won't be on the hook for the full cost if he needs more surgery.

The Obama administration defends the law as a step toward reforming a dysfunctional and expensive industry of care providers, insurers and for-profit companies. Republicans assail it as unconstitutional. And many Americans remain skeptical, or some hostile. The biggest parts of the law, to extend health coverage to more than 30 million uninsured people, are still two years away from reality -- and may never take effect if the court or a Republican president undoes the law.

But it's not just about political abstractions. Two years later, health care reform has had real and profound effects on some Americans. Insurance companies can't deny coverage to sick children, young adults can stay on parents' workplace plans until they turn 26, people with pre-existing medical conditions now have a fallback plan when they can't find insurance anywhere else, and senior citizens are paying less for prescription drugs.

The first two years of health care reform haven't been without pitfalls. A plan for adults with pre-existing conditions has enrolled far fewer people than reform's creators predicted and has spent more per person than anticipated. A program to help small businesses offer insurance to workers has reached a fraction of eligible firms. The administration had to cancel an insurance plan for people with disabilities called the CLASS Act because officials determined it was fiscally unworkable.

To the people who've been helped by health care reform, all of that is less important than the security the law has provided. To them, repeal isn't a topic for political debate, but a threat to their security.

Janice Llanos, 24, is set to earn her master's degree in public health at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., in May. The Woodbridge, Va., resident has asthma and has been dealing with an undiagnosed gastrointestinal disorder for several years. When she graduated from Virginia Tech three years ago, she lost the insurance she had through her father, a retired Army officer. Llanos learned then she's not the type of person who health insurers want.

After getting rejected by some health plans, she found one that came with a \$5,000 deductible -- meaning she'd have to pay that much money out of pocket before any benefits would kick in. "I was never going to reach the deductible cap with my health care expenses, so I was paying for everything out of pocket" even though her plan charged about \$150 a month in premiums. "I had to forego some health care services just because of the cost." She spent about \$3,200 out of pocket in about 18 months.

That changed at the beginning of last year, when Llanos enrolled in the insurance plan her mother, a federal employee, gets through work. Her mother pays \$390 a month to cover herself, her husband, and Janice. The extra

cost of adding the rest of the family comes to \$160 a month, or just \$10 more than Janice was paying on her own for a plan she couldn't use.

Michele Rappaport and Alan Sorkowitz's problem wasn't that they couldn't find health insurance. It was that their monthly premiums jumped from about \$1,700 to more than \$2,400 in one year. To qualify for health care reform's Pre-Existing Condition Insurance Plan, the married couple from Tucson, Ariz., had to go uninsured for six months first. Still, the "essentially retired" Rappaport and Sorkowitz, both 59, feel they're better off now because of it. His insurance costs \$450 each month and hers is \$334.

They were paying so much before because of pre-existing medical conditions -- Sorkowitz has diabetes -- even though they consider themselves healthy and haven't used their new insurance much since they signed up last August. "The private insurers looked at us like we were ready to fall apart," Rappaport said. "Not enough Americans have had that experience," she said. "People need to understand they're also vulnerable."

FotM NEWSLETTER #102 (Mar. 26, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120326-00		SteveB	Headline by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("article title")
20120323-01	10:06	Pam	Being a Grandparent
20120323-02	10:40	SteveG	Fw: POGO (the Project On Government Oversight)
20120323-03	10:41	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Protect Access to Birth Control!
20120323-04	10:52	SteveG	Planned Defense Expenditure by Country (2011)
20120323-05	11:19	Art	Re: Bill Maher: Please Stop Apologizing (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #101)
20120323-06	11:20	SteveG	"Santorum Suggests Obama Beats an 'Etch-A-Sketch' Candidate"
20120323-12	13:06	MarthaH	"Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican"
20120323-13	13:49	Pam	Re: "Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican" (reply to MarthaH, above)
20120323-14	13:52	SteveG	Re: "Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican" (reply to MarthaH & Pam, above) & "Romney Does Etch-A-Sketch Damage Control"
20120323-07	12:19	SteveG	No Kid Hungry Request: Watch <i>Hunger Hits Home</i>
20120323-08	12:20	SteveG	Fw: Video: The 99% Spring—100,000 Strong!
20120323-09	12:25	SteveG	Fw: Common Cause Petition: Stop the Koch Brothers
20120323-10	12:26	Pam	Magical Thinkers
20120323-11	13:05	SteveB	Re: Magical Thinkers (reply to Pam, above)
20120323-20	17:04	Dennis	Re: Magical Thinkers (reply to Pam, above)
20120323-21	17:26	Pam	Re: Magical Thinkers (reply to Dennis, above)
20120324-03	13:41	SteveG	More Magical Thinkers
20120324-05	14:51	Art	Re: More Magical Thinkers (reply to SteveG, above)
20120324-10	22:17	SteveG	Re: More Magical Thinkers (reply to Art, above)
20120323-15	14:05	SteveB	"Can We Escape the Global Energy Spiral?"
20120323-16	15:03	SteveG	"OWS Activist Cecily McMillan Describes Seizure, Bodily Injuries in Arrest by NYPD"
20120323-17	16:01	SteveG	USAction Petition: Demand a Budget for All, Not Just the 1%!
20120323-18	16:10	Art	"Epic March Heat Wave in Midwest, Great Lakes & Northeast: Link to Global Warming?"
20120323-19	17:03	SteveB	Fw: An All-of-the-Above Energy Plan (from Sen. John Tester) & "EIA Projects U.S. Non-Hydro Renewable Power Generation Increases, Led by Wind & Biomass"
20120324-01	09:02	SteveB	Fw: 2012 Republican Political Survival Total Ideological Immersion Suit
20120324-08	19:40	Larry	War
20120324-02	11:19	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell the FDA: No BPA in Food Packaging!
20120324-04	13:48	SteveG	Shipping Container Homes (to SteveB)
20120324-06	17:11	SteveB	Re: Shipping Container Homes (reply to SteveG, above)
20120324-07	18:29	SteveG	"U.S. Rep. Brad Miller: 'If Duke Was Playing the Taliban, I'd Have to Pull for the Taliban'"
20120324-09	20:48	SteveG	"Wall Street Confidence Trick: The Interest Rate Swaps That Are Bankrupting Local Governments"
20120325-01	10:02	MarthaH	"As Supreme Court Justices Review Health-Care Law, Stakes Will Be Hard to Ignore"
20120325-02	12:35	SteveB	"Ryan Budget Plan Would Cut Income Taxes for Millionaires by at Least \$187,000 Annually & Facilitate Corporate Tax Avoidance"
20120325-03	14:22	SteveG	"116 Billion Reasons to Be For the Health Care Mandate"
20120325-04	16:21	SteveB	Music from the Friends of the Middle Website
20120325-05	18:11	Dennis	Fw: Internet Warning
20120325-06	19:37	Art	"5 Myths About the Health-Care Law"
20120325-07	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Terminators = Corporations (Control Is the Key)

20120323-01 10:06 Pam Being a Grandparent

from SteveB:

I was just thinking...something to tell Atty...breaking his leg and having his cast and all may very well give him one of his first memories in his life. The bad part will disappear. That's kind of a silver lining. Unfortunately, the bad part remains a little longer for Mom and Grandma (?) Mum {?} I don't know what he calls you. My grandkids have so many grandfathers (4) that names get contested. Somehow, I got lucky and got Grandpa.

The boys call me Grandmommy, sometimes Grandmommy Pam to distinguish me from Ben's mother, Grandmommy Weedie (Atty calls her Grandmommy Robert, Ben's dad's name). I have wondered, too, whether Atty will remember this broken leg. I've been spending so much time with him, which has brought us even closer, I think. The night right after his accident, Saskia said he called for me three times. Poor little monkey. Yesterday we were sitting on the swing (cushioned) on our deck, and he went to sleep. He slept for well over an hour, and I just sat there, swinging gently, listening to the birds and taking in the flowers and blooms on the redbuds and dogwoods. It was lovely. I feel close to Jonas too, but he's seven and what he cares about mostly these days are bey blades.

20120323-02 10:40 SteveG Fw: POGO (the Project On Government Oversight)

from POGO:

Our Mission: Founded in 1981, the Project On Government Oversight is a nonpartisan independent watchdog that champions good government reforms. POGO's investigations into corruption, misconduct, and conflicts of interest achieve a more effective, accountable, open, and ethical federal government.

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

20120323-03 10:41 SteveG Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Protect Access to Birth Control!

from CREDO Action:

President Obama did the right thing for women when he rejected the demands of rightwing activists to limit access to no-cost birth control.¹

But before these new guidelines go into effect, his administration is holding a public comment period on the new rules. And we know that anti-woman activists will flood President Obama's Department of Health and Human Services with comments urging the administration to overturn their historic decision.

If President Obama had caved to the demands of these radical activists, certain employers like religiously affiliated universities and hospitals would have been allowed to prevent their female employees and students from having access to the same health care as every other woman in America.

We must ensure that President Obama hears that the vast majority of Americans support his decision to ensure no-cost birth control for all women. Click here to submit a public comment in support of access to birth control.

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/bc_comment/?r=5542639&id=37170-3891339-PGAc0Kx

The Department of Health and Human Services and the medical community agree that providing no-cost birth control is an essential part of preventive health care for women. And Kathleen Sebelius, the director of HHS, said that providing birth control at no cost to women should be like "covering flu shots."²

However, before activists from CREDO and Planned Parenthood began petitioning President Obama, the New York Times reported that the president was dangerously close to caving to the demands of the anti-woman lobby by adding a giant loophole that would keep a large number of women from being able to access no-cost birth control.³

CREDO members sent over 160,000 petitions and made over 3,000 calls to the White House asking President Obama not to cave.

In the end, President Obama listened to our call to protect women's health. But that doesn't mean our work is done.

The anti-woman extremists who are unhappy with President Obama for taking this stand will surely let him know. So let's make sure he hears from those of us who support him standing strong and protecting access to contraception.

Make sure that President Obama hears that the vast majority of Americans support his decision to ensure no-cost birth control for all women.

Click below to submit a comment in support of access to contraception:

<http://act.credoaction.com/r/?r=5542639&id=37170-3891339-PGAc0Kx&t=9>

Thank you for standing up for women's access to birth control.

Ali Rozell, Campaign Manager, CREDO Action from Working Assets

¹"Obama Birth Control Policy: Administration Lays Out Proposals For Carrying Out Compromise," N.C. Aizenman, The Huffington Post, 3-16-2012.

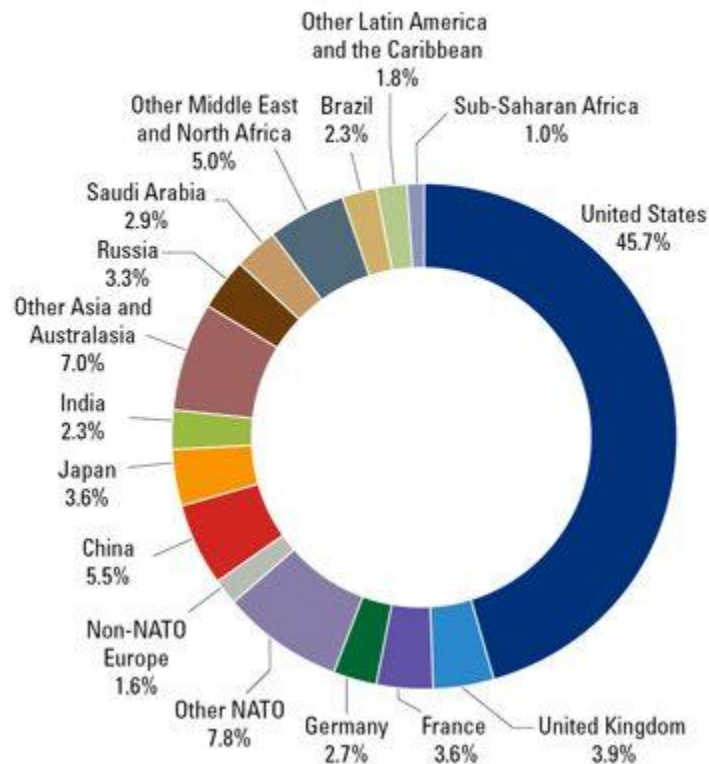
²"New U.S. rules require insurance coverage for contraception," N.C. Aizenman, The Washington Post, 8-1-2011.

³"Democrats Urge Obama to Protect Contraceptive Coverage in Health Plans," Robert Pear, New York Times, 11-19-2011.

20120323-04	10:52	SteveG	Planned Defense Expenditure by Country (2011)
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<http://cdn.front.moveon.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/DSoriginal3.jpg>

Planned Defence Expenditure by Country 2011†



[Gee! Just one country is completely disproportionate! –SteveB]

[20120323-05](#)

11:19 Art

Re: Bill Maher: Please Stop Apologizing (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #101)

Found this just ridiculous- "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."

Blitzkrieg means Lightning Warfare and has absolutely nothing to do with the Holocaust. It was a style of warfare developed by the German Army as a way to get out of the stalemate of WW I. This just silly. Equivalent of associating the development of radar with the massacre of the Jews.

[I suppose if some talking head were to use the word "kaput" (*kaputt*) from the Yiddish for lost or dead, they would be condemned for Holocaust imagery. Ridiculous. Maybe next we won't be able to say the word "German". – SteveB]

Also think your top picture of troops in Afghanistan is Russians. At least the equipment is.

[Well...these are American troops borrowing some old Soviet equipment... Actually, sharp-eyed Art is right. I had even scanned the thing with a magnifying glass... Will correct the error in online version of the newsletter. Thanks, Art! –SteveB]

Good stuff!!

[20120323-06](#)

11:20 SteveG

"Santorum Suggests Obama Beats an 'Etch-A-Sketch' Candidate"

What better endorsement does Obama need?

from "Santorum Suggests Obama Beats an 'Etch-A-Sketch' Candidate" by Arlette Saenz, ABC News

Mar. 22, 2012, (<http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/2012/03/santorum-suggests-obama-beats-an-etch-a-sketch-candidate/>)

You win by giving people a choice. You win by giving people the opportunity to see a different vision for our country, not someone who's just going to be a little different than the person in there. If you're going to be a little different, we might as well stay with what we have instead of taking a risk with what may be the Etch A Sketch candidate of the future.

20120323-12	13:06	MarthaH	"Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican"
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"Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican" by Andrew Rafferty, NBC

Mar. 22, 2012, (<http://firstread.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/03/22/10814436-santorum-gop-better-off-with-obama-than-etch-a-sketch-republican?chromedomain=todayonthetrail>)

(Republican presidential hopeful Rick Santorum told a crowd of supporters in Texas Thursday that the GOP might be better off sticking with President Obama than "taking a risk" on Mitt Romney, who [sic] he referred to as the "Etch A Sketch candidate.")

(SAN ANTONIO, Texas) -Rick Santorum today suggested it would be better to stick with President Obama over a candidate that might be "the Etch A Sketch candidate of the future" -- a shot at chief rival Mitt Romney.

"You win by giving people the opportunity to see a different vision for our country, not someone who's just going to be a little different than the person in there," said Santorum. "If you're going to be a little different, we might as well stay with what we have instead of taking a risk with what may be the Etch A Sketch candidate of the future."

For the second day in a row, the former Pennsylvania senator brought an Etch A Sketch on the trail as a prop to remind voters of Romney adviser Eric Fehrnstrom's response to a question about whether Santorum is pushing Romney too far right to win over moderate voters in a general election. "Well, I think you hit a reset button for the fall campaign. Everything changes," Fehrnstrom said Wednesday on CNN. "It's almost like an Etch A Sketch. You can kind of shake it up and restart all over again."

The comment gave plenty of ammunition to Santorum and Newt Gingrich, both of whom have made the well-known children's toy a staple of their stump speeches.

Speaking at the USAA headquarters here, Santorum showed optimism about his chances in the delegate rich state of Texas. He told the crowd the primary would not be over by the time the Lone Star State votes on May 29.

"It's the second-biggest delegate prize, and you're going to have an important role. This race will not be over when Texas is coming around," he said.

Santorum's viability hinges on picking up a majority of the 155 delegates that will be up for grabs here. When asked about his path to the nomination, Texas plays a key role.

Still, the GOP hopeful avoided calling on Newt Gingrich to leave the race, though senior campaign advisers have said the former House speaker remaining in the race is cutting into their vote totals and that they would like to receive the former House speaker's support.

Santorum said his campaign has been in contact with both the Gingrich and Romney campaigns, though he declined to give specifics of the conversations.

"I'm worried about being a candidate. I'm not worried about anything else right now," Santorum told reporters who asked about the nature of the conversations.

Accompanying Santorum on the trail today was billionaire-backer Foster Freiss, who is a chief contributor to the pro-Santorum Super PAC Red, White and Blue Fund. They will attend a fundraiser in Dallas on Thursday afternoon.

(UPDATE) The Romney camp responds with this statement from the former Massachusetts governor: "I am in this race to defeat Barack Obama and restore America's promise. I was disappointed to hear that Rick Santorum would rather have Barack Obama as president than a Republican. This election is more important than any one person. It is about the future of America. Any of the Republicans running would be better than President Obama and his record of failure."

[Mitt has all the standard lies down pat, doesn't he? A little smarter than Rick Perry. But just a very little. -SteveB]

20120323-13	13:49	Pam	Re: "Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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Obama's "record of failure" is actually the REPUBLICANS'!

20120323-14	13:52	SteveG	Re: "Santorum: GOP Better Off with Obama Than 'Etch-A-Sketch' Republican" (reply to MarthaH & Pam, above) & "Romney Does Etch-A-Sketch Damage Control"
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"Romney Does Etch-A-Sketch Damage Control" by Matt Taylor, The National Memo

Mar. 23rd, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/romney-does-etch-sketch-damage-control/>)

A top campaign advisor comparing his positions before and after he (eventually) secures the GOP presidential nomination to shaking up an Etch A Sketch toy continues to dog Mitt Romney, who went into a second day of damage control Thursday led by a visit to the don of conservative politics, South Carolina Senator Jim DeMint.

Romney reportedly requested the Thursday morning meeting, and also met with other top conservatives in Congress, including Wisconsin Republican Paul Ryan.

"I can tell conservatives from my perspective is that, I'm not only comfortable with Romney, I'm excited about the possibility of him possibly being our nominee," DeMint said.

The niceties aside, the meeting was clearly an attempt by Romney to talk some conservative movement leaders into helping him end this primary. The current dynamic, where Romney has one foot in the moderate waters he navigated in Massachusetts and the other in the mosh pit of Tea Party politics, isn't working.

The undisputed winner in all of this? Etch A Sketch (OART), whose stock value has soared:

<http://content.usatoday.com/communities/onpolitics/post/2012/03/etch-a-sketch-stock-price-mitt-romney-eric-fehrnstrom-/1?csp=34news>

20120323-07	12:19	SteveG	No Kid Hungry Request: Watch <i>Hunger Hits Home</i>
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from No Kid Hungry:

Mark your calendar for Saturday, April 14.

That night, Food Network will premiere a first-of-its-kind documentary about childhood hunger in America.

The documentary, *Hunger Hits Home*, tells the story of three American families facing hunger, and takes a close-up look at the impact hunger has on a child. The documentary also provides a potent and urgent call to action — something everyone can do to make a difference. We're so proud to be a part of this important documentary. This is a big moment for our cause and our campaign, and I want to be sure that you are a part of it.

We hope you'll watch the premiere with us — at your home — starting at 8:00 p.m. EST/7:00 p.m. CST.

Be among the first to see *Hunger Hits Home* — and make sure others do, too.

Let us know that you're committed to watching it and then take a peek at the trailer.

What: *Hunger Hits Home*, narrated by Jeff Bridges, national spokesman for No Kid Hungry.

Where: Your home with TV tuned to Food Network.

When: Saturday, April 14 - 8:00 p.m. EST/7:00 p.m. CST.

Video Trailer & RSVP: http://join.strength.org/site/R?i=8lL2K1KkC1veIxLTm_gFbg.

20120323-08 12:20 SteveG Fw: Video: The 99% Spring—100,000 Strong!

from the 99% Spring:

This April, we're pulling off one of our biggest and brightest actions against corporate corruption yet: we're working with 40+ other groups to train 100,000 people in nonviolent direct action in the tradition of Dr. Martin Luther King and M.K. Gandhi in a 99% spring where we take aim at the megabanks, polluters and election-buyers.

Today, we're debuting our brand-new video and call to action - and we need YOUR help to spread the word. Check it out NOW!

This is just the first step in a shared effort to make this spring one that finds people across America taking direct action in their communities for the first time - and we need your help to spread the word.

<http://the99spring.com/100000-strong-the-99-spring/>



[Businesses might as well have no income tax as pay 2.3%. But to enjoy the 0% rate, businesses must behave and operate the way the people demand. Otherwise, a 50% rate applies. For instance, foreign profits retained in foreign countries are subject to the 50% tax, but 0% if reinvested in the U.S. And I don't mean simply acquisitions and stock buy-backs. Human beings don't let machines or corporations control them, humans control the machines and corporations. That's the way it must be, or we perish. Re-watch the *Terminator* or *The Matrix* trilogies, please! – SteveB]

20120323-09 12:25 SteveG Fw: Common Cause Petition: Stop the Koch Brothers

from Common Cause:

The Koch brothers are trying to buy control of the Cato Institute, an independent think tank, and use it to advance their personal, partisan agenda. And they want taxpayers to subsidize them.

This wrong-headed attempt to skirt the tax laws and politicize a respected non-profit organization must be stopped. Sign our petition today and tell the IRS to crack down on the Koch brothers.

Here's the simple fact: Cato's tax exemption requires it to steer clear of partisan politics.

The Koch brothers' latest takeover attempt would make that null and void. You can stop them by joining with thousands of other Common Cause supporters and taking action today.

Sign the petition and tell the Internal Revenue Service to crack down on the Kochs' latest scheme to push their corporate agenda.

<http://www.commoncause.org/siteapps/advocacy/ActionItem.aspx?c=dkLNK1MQIwG&b=8013269>

Thanks for all that you do. Bob Edgar and the rest of the team at Common Cause

20120323-10 12:26 Pam Magical Thinkers

I don't see how Santorum's "vision" is essentially different from Obama's. Yes, they disagree on policy, but the values Santorum prattles on about are not alien to Obama. He just doesn't prattle on about silly things like pornography, when there are much bigger issues, like poverty, unemployment, inadequate health care, etc. etc., to worry about. This election is NOT about values. Liberals have values, whatever the tea baggers think. We're not debating whether people should be honest and kind. It seems to me those two qualities are the basis of every decent morality. Everything else is extraneous. If EVERYONE were honest and kind, we wouldn't need a defense budget. If politicians are going to disagree, I wish they'd argue about what actions should be taken and why. If you don't want a single-payer health insurance system, fine. Argue about that with reasons and specifics. Don't just call Obama a socialist and think you've done your job.

I'm still reeling from the twilight-zone comments that I assume came from the blog, the ones about how Obama is a Muslim socialist who's bringing the apocalypse. How does one engage with people who think like that? This is a serious question. My first thought was just to write him (them) off, thinking no good ever came of trying to argue rationally with someone whose thinking is magical. But there are too many magical thinkers to ignore. I see them everywhere, even in the university--granted, I'm in the south. Short of a course in Western Civilization, what is a decent response to an illogical belief? I don't mean I want a way to talk someone out of their religious faith. I just want a way to address those comments that are the next thing to crazy.

20120323-11 13:05 SteveB Re: Magical Thinkers (reply to Pam, above)

It's that old dichotomy again—the one between the rational folks and the emotional folks, right? Some of us have arrived at our world views through study, research, weighing arguments and evidence, science, and such tools.

Others have arrived at world views by circumventing all this and going directly to the gut, to views based on emotions like fear, love, and hate.

Not very often can the two groups communicate in any meaningful way. Occasionally, something speaks to the masses. The French Revolution comes to mind. The Arab Spring. The Tea Party movement. But to really understand how the logical speak to the illogical, I guess you'd have to ask a Republican. I believe it is nearly always done through lies and based upon great need—the lies from the top meeting the need from the bottom...until all hell finally breaks loose and the people demonstrate their power to destroy, if nothing else. Thus: the guttural communication upward.

[20120323-20](#) 17:04 Dennis Re: Magical Thinkers (reply to Pam, above)

Pam: Argue about that with reasons and specifics. Don't just call Obama a socialist and think you've done your job.

Dennis: You obviously don't understand wedge-issue politics, Pam.

Pam: I'm still reeling from the twilight-zone comments that I assume came from the blog, the ones >>about how Obama is a Muslim socialist who's bringing the apocalypse... ...I just want a way to address those comments that are the next thing to crazy.

Dennis: When I was a social worker for the mentally ill in Detroit, the professional way to deal with this was to prescribe Thorazine. I once tried to reason with an agitated schizophrenic, got too close, and barely escaped a roundhouse right to the chin. Best to just stay away from Tea Party rallies.

[20120323-21](#) 17:26 Pam Re: Magical Thinkers (reply to Dennis, above)

I keep hoping there's a way into their teeny little brains without being reduced to name-calling. It seems there isn't any. Sigh.

[20120324-03](#) 13:41 SteveG More Magical Thinkers

Please read the items below and could someone tell me what the logical thought processes are behind the comments?

The comments are from a Fox news cast, a minister, and an attendee at a Republican fundraising event.

A response, especially from a Republican or from the right, or any response would be appreciated – I truly do not understand any of the comments being made.

"As Santorum Fires Gun, Woman Shouts 'Pretend It's Obama'" by Arlette Saenz, ABC News, Mar. 23, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/santorum-fires-gun-woman-shouts-pretend-obama-160942541--abc-news.html>)

"Pat Robertson Believes Peyton Manning Should Get Hurt This Year" by Chris Chase, Yahoo! Sports/Shutdown Corner, Mar. 23, 2012, (<http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/nfl-shutdown-corner/pat-robertson-believes-peyton-manning-hurt-142935112.html>)

"Geraldo Rivera Finds Real Culprit in Trayvon Martin Slaying: The Hoodie" by Zachary Roth, Yahoo! News/The Lookout, Mar. 23, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/lookout/geraldo-rivera-finds-real-culprit-trayvon-martin-slaying-182043689.html>)

[20120324-05](#) 14:51 Art Re: More Magical Thinkers (reply to SteveG, above)

It's all about hate.

20120324-10	22:17	SteveG	Re: More Magical Thinkers (reply to Art, above)
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Hate, racism, racial cleansing, and evil are the answers I have received so far about the articles above.

20120323-15	14:05	SteveB	"Can We Escape the Global Energy Spiral?"
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"Can We Escape the Global Energy Spiral?" by Joe Conason, *The National Memo*

Mar. 22, 212, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/can-we-escape-global-energy-spiral/>)

When the price of gasoline rises, so does political demagoguery, especially during an election year. Frustrated drivers, infuriated by the spinning numbers that denude their wallets at the pump, understandably want to believe the loudmouthed candidate who promises cheaper fuel if only the magic of the marketplace is freed from environmental safeguards, bureaucratic regulations and burdensome taxes. Even an obvious charlatan like Newt Gingrich can get a little mileage by claiming he will fill their tanks for \$2.50 a gallon, or that the Keystone XL pipeline, designed to transport tar-sand petroleum from Canada to Mexico for export, will somehow reduce prices here.

Yet America has already tried the cure prescribed by Gingrich, Mitt Romney, and the Republicans in Congress. Under the Bush administration, Dick Cheney worked in secrecy with the oil industry to remove all obstacles to domestic drilling, regardless of the cost to the air, water, land, and wildlife, not to mention the Treasury. No doubt Cheney and his cronies are gratified by the results, which include increasing production, spectacular profits, and less dependence on foreign resources, as well as spreading environmental degradation.

What the oil boom has not brought so far is a reduction in consumer prices, now approaching the same level as during the summer of 2008, before the economic crash. Worldwide recovery has meant a return to rising prices — mitigated only by trends toward energy conservation, urban revival, and fuel economy. In those hopeful signs may be found the only reliable escape from the global energy spiral.

Certainly Barack Obama seemed to understand that survivable future would require us to move from carbon-based energy to cleaner sources derived from the sun, wind, waves, and biomass — and most importantly, in the short term, many modes of conservation. As president he has spent significant capital toward those ends, both rhetorically and in his budgets, while pragmatically supporting and even extending Cheney's "drill baby, drill" program. As the New York Times reported on Wednesday, the combined effects of increased domestic production and lower fuel consumption are substantially diminishing U.S. dependence on OPEC oil.

So why do consumers continue to pay more and more, with no relief in sight? The simple answer is that oil and gas respond to a world market that demands more and more oil to power growing economies abroad where people want to drive cars, eat meat and imitate the wasteful, polluting and ultimately dangerous lifestyle of the West — even as Western nations seek to reduce those harmful patterns.

Drilling everywhere may please the corporate patrons of Gingrich and Romney, but it won't reduce gas prices here unless the world economy slumps again. The technologies that produce more oil from old fields here are highly damaging to the environment, ruining and depleting scarce water resources that will eventually leave many places uninhabitable. The unprecedented heat wave now scaring scientists here and abroad is a clear warning against the hubris of the oil lobby and its political echoes.

Many cities are already embarked on the pathway out of our enslavement to oil, by reducing fuel consumption, rebuilding transit, and encouraging conservation, clean energy, and smarter development patterns, all of which create far more employment than the oil boom ever will. The president hasn't hindered oil production, as his opponents claim, but he hasn't abandoned his commitment to a secure and healthy future — and he must not.

20120323-16	15:03	SteveG	"OWS Activist Cecily McMillan Describes Seizure, Bodily Injuries in Arrest by NYPD"
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"OWS Activist Cecily McMillan Describes Seizure, Bodily Injuries in Arrest by NYPD" by Amy Goodman, NationofChange

Mar. 23, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/ows-activist-cecily-mcmillan-describes-seizure-bodily-injuries-arrest-nypd-1332519913>)

20120323-17	16:01	SteveG	USAction Petition: Demand a Budget for All, Not Just the 1%!
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from USAction:

Rep. Paul Ryan's budget is, simply put, an all out attack on the 99%.

Not only would it end Medicare as we know it, but it would eliminate the Affordable Care Act, drastically reduce Medicaid payments to states and cut back nearly all programs to help lower-income families. All the while, Ryan's plan would increase Pentagon spending and give trillions in tax breaks to the richest 1%.

Meanwhile the Congressional Progressive Caucus just released their own budget plan: the Budget for All. Unlike the Republican plan, which would gut nearly every program to help low-income and unemployed Americans get back to work, the CPC plan would invest \$2.4 trillion in job-creation and direct-hire programs.

The CPC plan also calls for public financing of congressional and presidential elections, ending the Bush tax cuts for the top 2% and taxing wealth like work, all while reducing military spending.

Will you send a message to your Representative in Congress and urge them to vote NO on the Ryan plan and to co-sponsor the Congressional Progressive Caucus' Budget for All plan instead?

http://act.truemajorityaction.org/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=345&track=email_2841&Email=sgooch46@aol.com

Republicans claim that they are serious about cutting the deficit, but their only solution is to gut nearly every program of the federal government -- including cuts to veterans' programs, food stamps and housing assistance to lower income families, and reducing transportation spending -- at a time when our infrastructure is crumbling. Ryan's plan would even cut federal education spending by 45 percent, creating a permanent underclass with limited opportunity and access to education.

At a time when Americans are struggling to hold down their jobs and make ends meet, it is outrageous that Republicans would rather balance the budget on the backs of the middle class, than make the 1% pay their fair share.

The CPC plan is proof that we can balance the budget while still investing in our future and protecting necessary programs like Medicare and Social Security for our future generations.

Click here to ask your Representative to co-sponsor the Budget for All plan and to vote NO on the Ryan plan.

Sincerely, David Elliot, USAction / TrueMajority

20120323-18	16:10	Art	"Epic March Heat Wave in Midwest, Great Lakes & Northeast: Link to Global Warming?"
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Think this might be the indications of a problem. Breaking temperature records is one thing, but this is off the charts.

"Epic March Heat Wave in Midwest, Great Lakes and Northeast: Link to Global Warming?" by Jason Samenow, *The Washington Post*, Mar. 22, 2012

Mar. 22, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/capital-weather-gang/post/epic-march-heat-wave-to-conclude-in-midwest-great-lakes-link-to-global-warming/2012/03/22/gIQA6hj3TS_blog.html)

For more than a week, dozens of places in the Midwest, the Great Lakes states and the Northeast have obliterated records for warm weather.

In some cases, record highs have been destroyed by more than 30 degrees, and even morning low temperatures have bested record highs.

In Marquette, Mich., Wednesday's record-crushing high was 81, compared with the old record of 49, which even the morning low of 52 topped. The same day, Grand Rapids, Mich., scored its all-time record temperature, soaring to 87 — 40 degrees above normal.

"When low temperatures are the same as previous record highs, that's incredible — to me, that's just mind-boggling," Mike Halpert, deputy director of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center told the Web site OurAmazingPlanet.

Chicago hit 80 for the eighth time in nine days on Thursday and set its ninth record high in as many days.

Compared with 3,550 warm-weather records set in the United States from March 12 through Sunday, there were a piddling 18 cold-weather records, according to the National Climatic Data Center.

The extreme weather pattern is a result of an abnormally huge ridge in the jet stream over eastern North America that has remained stationary for days.

With so many records being broken by such large margins and for so long, what can we say about a connection to global warming?

The University of Utah's Jim Steenburgh is convinced that global warming has a role. The Weather Channel's Stu Ostro shares a similar view, while Accuweather's meteorologists seem more reluctant to connect the dots.

Although the configuration of weather systems made this heat wave possible, I favor the viewpoints of Ostro and Steenburgh: that global warming contributed to its intensity. The background increases in greenhouse gases — at levels unprecedented in at least 800,000 years — are stacking the deck for more extreme heat events such as this.

20120323-19	17:03	SteveB	Fw: An All-of-the-Above Energy Plan (from Sen. John Tester) & "EIA Projects U.S. Non-Hydro Renewable Power Generation Increases, Led by Wind & Biomass"
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from Montana Democratic Senator Jon Tester (Mar. 23, 2012):

As we work to grow our economy and create jobs, energy development presents great opportunities for Montana.

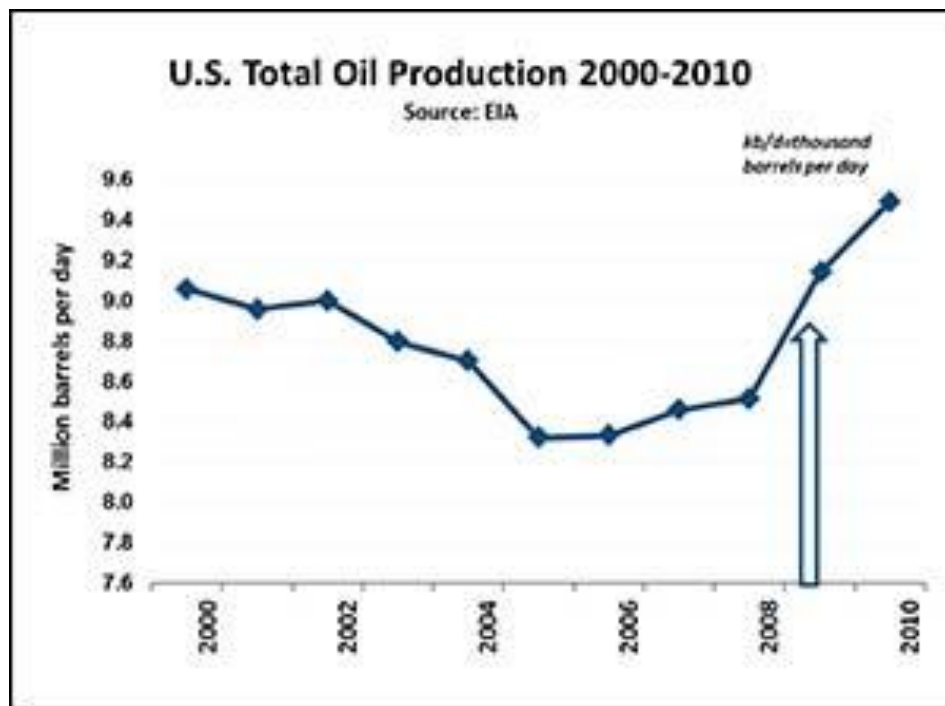
That's why I'm for an all-of-the-above energy plan. This means responsible development of traditional energy resources like coal, oil, and natural gas along with cutting edge renewable energy sources like wind, geothermal, biomass, and solar power.

Last Friday when I visited Richland County, I got a close-up view of the key role Montana can play in developing our energy future and growing our economy. The oil and gas boom in Eastern Montana is boosting our state's economy and will help us use traditional energy resources to reduce consumption of foreign energy and as a bridge to cleaner fuels in the future.

I'm proud of the work Montanans are doing to secure our energy future, and proud to support responsible development of the Keystone Pipeline. Earlier this month, I voted to move the Keystone Pipeline forward now, without delay. Over the past three years, our domestic oil production has risen and our dependence on foreign oil has been on the decline. Development of the Keystone Pipeline will keep us on this path to a more sustainable energy future.

We also must make sure Montana and America lead the world in renewable energy development. Diversifying our sources of energy will stabilize prices and create jobs. Since 2008, renewable electricity generation has doubled. With abundant wind and geothermal resources, Montana wins when we develop renewable energy resources.

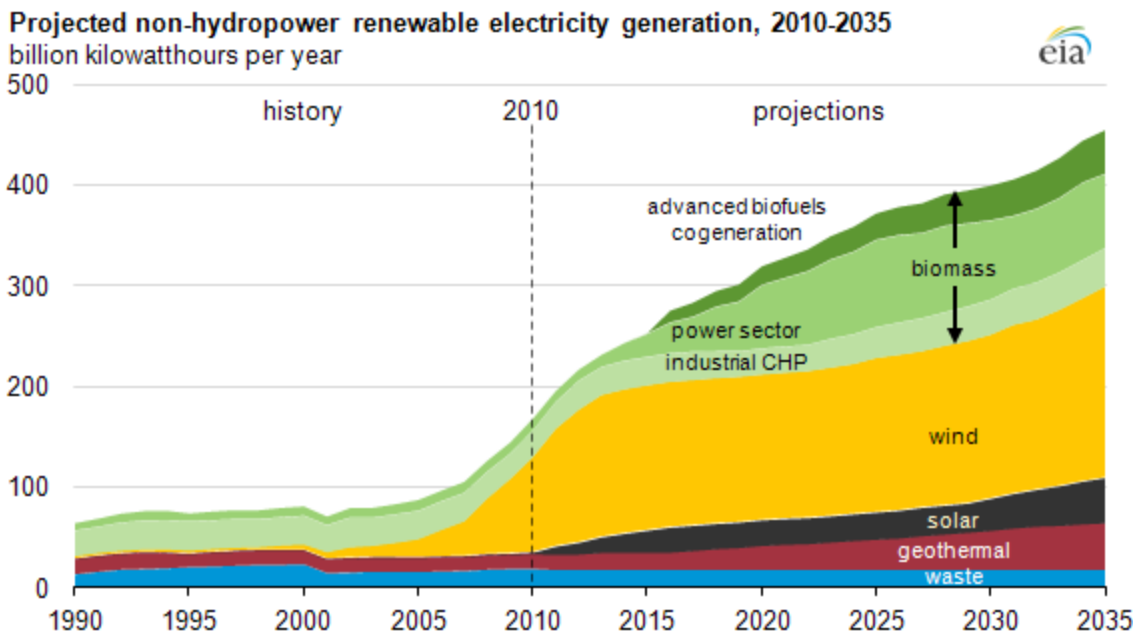
Just last week I met with the CEO of NaturEner, the company developing cutting edge wind energy projects in Glacier and Toole Counties in northcentral Montana. These projects will put hundreds of Montanans to work and provide clean energy today and for years into the future. To help keep these projects on track and attract further development to our state, I'm working hard to get the Production Tax Credit reauthorized.



Montana wins with an all-of-the-above energy plan. We have the resources. We have a dedicated, well-trained workforce. We have innovators leading the way to new energy sources at our colleges and universities. I'm working to make sure these ingredients add up to jobs and economic growth in the years ahead.

["EIA Projects U.S. Non-Hydro Renewable Power Generation Increases, Led by Wind and Biomass" by U.S. Energy Information Administration](#)

Feb. 28, 2012, (<http://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.cfm?id=5170>)



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Annual Energy Outlook 2012 Early Release Reference case.
Note: Data from the Annual Energy Outlook 2012 (AEO2012) Early Release Reference case are subject to change with the release of the full AEO in spring 2012.

Wind and biomass dominate projected increases in U.S. renewable electricity generation, excluding hydropower, in EIA's Annual Energy Outlook 2012 (AEO2012) Early Release Reference case. Increased generation from non-hydro renewable energy resources in the electric power sector accounts for 33 percent of the overall growth in electricity generation from 2010 to 2035. The non-hydro renewable share of total generation in the projection increases from 4% in 2010 to 9% in 2035.

Biomass generation increases nearly 4-fold, driven by two main factors: Federal requirements to use more biomass-based transportation fuels (see Renewable Fuels Standard), which leads to increased electricity generation as a co-product from liquid fuel facilities such as cellulosic ethanol refineries. Also, co-firing of biomass with coal increases over the projection period, induced partially by State-level Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS) as well as favorable economics in regions with significant forestry residues. Traditional Industrial combined-heat-and-power generation in sectors such as the pulp and paper industry continue to contribute to overall biomass generation.

The AEO2012 Reference case assumes implementation of current laws and regulations as specified, including the scheduled expiration of some tax credits at the end of 2012. Wind generation nearly doubles between 2010 and 2035, but the growth slows following the expiration of the production tax credit. The full Annual Energy Outlook, to be released in spring 2012, will analyze a number of sensitivities, including one assuming that incentives such as the production tax credit do not expire.

Solar grows rapidly, increasing nearly 7-fold by 2035, as near-term market growth is projected to result in lower system costs. The majority of the growth in solar is with photovoltaics, a significant portion of which comes from the end-use sector (i.e., rooftop solar). However, even with this strong growth, solar still accounts for a relatively small amount of total electricity generation in 2035. The projection reflects the expiration of the 30% solar investment tax credit in 2016, as provided by current law, continuing at 10% thereafter.

Growth in geothermal generation is projected to be robust relative to recent history for the industry, tripling over the projection period, but geothermal remains a small portion of overall generation. Geothermal resources suitable for centralized electricity production are concentrated in the west, and like other renewables, development is driven by State RPS policies.

A key downside uncertainty in the projections for non-hydro renewables is whether States will strictly enforce their RPS requirements, particularly if the current Federal tax credits that make RPS compliance less costly for consumers are not extended. Near-term growth in many renewable technology types is largely used to satisfy State-level RPS

requirements. However, over the long term, renewable technologies may continue to be built as they become increasingly competitive with other electricity generation options.

20120324-01 09:02 SteveB Fw: 2012 Republican Political Survival Total Ideological Immersion Suit

Boy, I sure would like to have dodo (not "doodoo", Art!) for lunch...what? You say I can't because they're extinct? You say they couldn't bend and adapt? Mmmmmm...



20120324-08 19:40 Larry War

In school I always wanted to take a course so I could understand war.

I knew that every so many years (now it's months) we sent armies to Europe or Asia and they yelled a lot and they shot guns a lot and they came back home to brag a lot, but I didn't understand it. I checked the little Golden Books for *The Kids Guide to War*, but I never found it.

I had so many questions, like where do two countries go to conduct a war? If there was such a place, how old did the guys have to be to go there? How often did they check your age? What would happen if you lied about your age? Could a guy go to war even if his mom didn't like it? Is that why they had the secret service? I could just imagine these thousands of guys in the SS dodging bullets and their mothers.

If two countries agreed to go to war and changed their minds what was the penalty? War would be a lot easier to understand if the guys made up their own rules, like stop all penalties, but I think the only important rule would be that nobody could ever get hurt, and if a guy started crying everything had to go into freeze mode until the details were clear to everybody. Maybe I could like war, but not very much.

20120324-02 11:19 SteveG Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell the FDA: No BPA in Food Packaging!

from CREDO Action:

The FDA decides on March 31st if it will ban BPA in food packaging.

The toxic chemical bisphenol A (BPA) was recently banned in California from being used in baby bottles and sippy cups.

But thanks to the lobbying of the American Chemistry Council and other chemical manufacturers, BPA continues to be allowed in food and beverage packaging including the lining in most canned food and soup.

The FDA can put a stop to it. The agency will decide on March 31st whether or not to continue allowing bisphenol A (BPA) to be used in food packaging. It needs to stand up to industry pressure and protect us from this dangerous chemical.

Tell the FDA: No BPA in food packaging!

<http://act.credoaction.com/r/?r=5542065&id=37220-3891339-gBu9dx&t=7>

BPA is a hormone disruptor that has been linked to a long list of serious health issues, including breast cancer, prostate cancer, early puberty, miscarriages and brain and heart disorders.¹ It's so ubiquitous, it's even used in things like store receipts and plastic bags, and it is estimated that BPA can be found in 90% of our bodies.²

FDA's deadline comes in response to a formal petition filed in 2008 by the Natural Resources Defence Council. FDA failed to respond, and finally in December, a federal judge said it must make a final decision on BPA in food packaging by March 31st.³

Early last year, FDA admitted that BPA use raised "some concern," reversing a long maintained position that BPA was safe in low doses, as evidence mounted rapidly of BPA's health risks, which in addition to increased propensity for some diseases, include infertility and behavioral problems in children.

The science on BPA is clear, and its health impacts are far reaching, and deeply concerning. BPA isn't safe to be used in food packaging and the FDA needs to take action to protect us from BPA.

Thank you for fighting to keep us safe from toxic chemicals.

Elijah Zarlin, Campaign Manager, CREDO Action from Working Assets

¹"A Survey of Bisphenol A in U.S. Canned Foods," Environmental Working Group, March 2007.

²"High BPA levels found in at least 90% of moms-to-be," USA Today, October 11, 2010.

³"FDA agrees to determine safety of BPA," Washington Post, December 7, 2011.

20120324-04	13:48	SteveG	Shipping Container Homes (to SteveB)
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Sometime ago we had a conversation about shipping containers – would love to have one of these homes:

<http://realestate.yahoo.com/promo/dream-homes-that-come-in-a-crate.html>

20120324-06	17:11	SteveB	Re: Shipping Container Homes (reply to SteveG, above)
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I really love the idea. It needs to be done on a large scale so homeless people can have housing.

These are particularly nice. Thanks!

20120324-07	18:29	SteveG	"U.S. Rep. Brad Miller: 'If Duke Was Playing the Taliban, I'd Have to Pull for the Taliban'"
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"U.S. Rep. Brad Miller: 'If Duke Was Playing the Taliban, I'd Have to Pull for the Taliban'" by Graham Watson, The Dagger/Yahoo! Sports

Mar. 24, 2012, (<http://sports.yahoo.com/blogs/ncaab-the-dagger/us-rep-brad-miller-duke-playing-taliban-d-191910616.html>)

20120324-09	20:48	SteveG	"Wall Street Confidence Trick: The Interest Rate Swaps That Are Bankrupting Local Governments"
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from "Wall Street Confidence Trick: The Interest Rate Swaps That Are Bankrupting Local Governments" by Ellen Brown, NationofChange

Mar. 24, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/wall-street-confidence-trick-interest-rate-swaps-are-bankrupting-local-governments-1332571419>)

Far from reducing risk, derivatives increase risk, often with catastrophic results.
—Derivatives expert, Satyajit Das, *Extreme Money*(2011)

20120325-01	10:02	MarthaH	"As Supreme Court Justices Review Health-Care Law, Stakes Will Be Hard to Ignore"
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"As Supreme Court Justices Review Health-Care Law, Stakes Will Be Hard to Ignore" by Robert Barnes, *The Washington Post*

Mar. 24, 2012, (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/special/politics/supreme-court-health-care-law/?v=casehistory>)

(A look at how the law got to the Supreme Court and the issues in play.)

The Supreme Court on Monday joins the nation's vitriolic debate over the landmark health-care law and the limits of federal power. And though thousands of pages of legal arguments about the Constitution's history and the court's precedents have landed on justices' desks, the outcome may also hinge on less tangible factors.

Experts say all of those go into the mix as justices consider the extraordinary step of striking down — for the first time since the New Deal — a monumental domestic program proposed by the president and passed by Congress.

The three days of arguments that begin Monday are the inevitable result of a legal battle that began the moment the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act became law two years ago. And the court's conclusion will land in the summer heat of a presidential campaign in which each of President Obama's Republican challengers have made opposition to the law an unshakable pledge.

Such a charged political atmosphere is not the court's favored environment. The justices are protective of their charge as neutral arbiters of the law, what Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. described as umpires calling balls and strikes.

But some see other factors at work in the court's decisions — and they say there should be nothing surprising or even particularly negative about that.

"You don't have to view them as junior varsity politicians to see that their political views and economic predilections have some influence on what they do," said Jeff Shesol, whose most recent book chronicled the New Deal battles between the Supreme Court and President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Certainly the presidents who appointed the nine justices — Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama — took ideology into consideration in making their selections.

Roberts and the court have gone to some lengths to show the nation the seriousness and evenhandedness of their inquiry.

They have scheduled six hours of arguments over three days, the most in 45 years. They will examine the law in detail, even parts that no judges below them have found constitutionally questionable. And while cameras are still forbidden, the court has changed its rules to release audiotape and transcripts of the arguments each day.

Roberts even made something of a preemptive strike this year when he defended his colleagues against criticism that some come to the arguments with agendas.

"We are all deeply committed to the common interest in preserving the court's vital role as an impartial tribunal governed by the rule of law," Roberts wrote in his annual report on the state of the judiciary.

But the case sets up a classic problem for the court: when to defer to the political branches as the elected representatives of the people and when to blow the whistle when those politicians have intruded on the Constitution's protection of the people.

The Obama administration points to the arc of decisions stretching back to the New Deal in which the court has said the Commerce Clause and other constitutional provisions provide Congress authority to deal with national economic problems.

The uninsured consumed about \$116 billion in health-care services in 2008, Solicitor General Donald B. Verrilli Jr. told the court in the government's brief. The amount was absorbed by providers or passed along to others in increased health insurance premiums, about \$1,000 a year per family.

"Because health insurance is the principal mechanism for meeting these unpredictable and often expensive liabilities, it was reasonable for Congress to invoke that same mechanism to address the problem of uncompensated care," Verrilli wrote.

Paul D. Clement, representing Republican officials in 26 states who have challenged the law, warns the court that the mandate "rests on a claim of federal powers that is both unprecedented and unbounded."

Only by "checking" the government now, he wrote, can the court make clear that this "uncabined authority is not among the limited and enumerated powers granted the federal government."

A *Washington Post*-ABC News poll showed that two-thirds of respondents want the court to invalidate the entire law or the mandate that all individuals purchase health insurance by 2014.

But those who have chronicled how public opinion affects the court said such immediate concerns have little impact on the justices.

"I hope the justices aren't sitting around reading public opinion polls," said Barry Friedman, a New York University law professor and author of *The Will of the People: How Public Opinion Has Influenced the Supreme Court and Shaped the Meaning of the Constitution*. "Something has gone seriously off the rails if that is true."

The court has shown it is unafraid to buck public opinion to protect constitutional principles, particularly in free-speech cases. But Friedman says the court eventually aligns itself with public opinion on controversial issues, such as civil rights and gun ownership.

Shesol, the author of the Roosevelt book *Supreme Power*, said there are obvious parallels to the Supreme Court's consideration of the progressive New Deal legislation.

Both concern the scope of federal authority and how “the national government is empowered to deal with national problems,” he said.

But the stakes were considerably higher in Roosevelt’s time, and public opinion shifted overwhelmingly to endorse the necessity of the New Deal programs, Shesol said. The string of Roosevelt’s programs reviewed by the court gave the justices a way to adjust to that new reality.

Lee Epstein, a political scientist and lecturer at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law who studies public opinion and the court, says the case will not have lasting impact on the court’s reputation no matter the outcome.

“I think it’s one of those cases where they have the freedom to do what they want,” she said.

But she noted the court’s partisan divide, which fits neatly into its usual ideological lineup. Roberts and Justices Antonin Scalia, Anthony M. Kennedy, Clarence Thomas and Samuel A. Alito Jr. were appointed by Republican presidents, Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Stephen G. Breyer, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan by Democrats.

Since those appointed by Democrats seem likely to uphold a broad reading of government’s powers, a 5 to 4 decision would highlight the partisan divide.

When Epstein considers the court and reads the arguments in the case, she said she sees a conflict between the justices’ personal ideologies and what the court’s precedents seem to forecast.

“The political-scientist side of me sees it 5 to 4” to strike the law, she said. “The law professor side of me sees it 6 to 3 to uphold.”

Somewhat presciently, as Washington lawyer Adam J. White noted recently in the Weekly Standard, Obama talked as a senator about how Supreme Court justices might decide difficult cases.

He set as examples cases where “the constitutional text will not be directly on point” and cases looking at “whether the Commerce Clause empowers Congress to speak on those issues of broad national concern that may be only tangentially related to what is easily defined as interstate commerce.”

In such tough cases, he said, “the critical ingredient is supplied by what is in the judge’s heart.”

Unfortunately for Obama, as his signature domestic achievement goes before the Supreme Court, that missing ingredient was the reason he gave for voting against the confirmation of Roberts.

20120325-02	12:35	SteveB	“Ryan Budget Plan Would Cut Income Taxes for Millionaires by at Least \$187,000 Annually & Facilitate Corporate Tax Avoidance”
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[“Ryan Budget Plan Would Cut Income Taxes for Millionaires by at Least \\$187,000 Annually and Facilitate Corporate Tax Avoidance” by Citizens for Tax Justice](#)

Mar 22, 2012

http://ctj.org/ctjreports/2012/03/ryan_budget_plan_would_cut_income_taxes_for_millionaires_by_at_least_187000_annually_and_facilitate.php

PDF: <http://www.ctj.org/pdf/ryanplan.pdf>

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan has introduced a budget plan that, if implemented, would reduce revenues so significantly that they would be inadequate to pay for the federal spending under the Reagan administration, let alone the spending required in the years ahead. The Ryan budget would provide income tax cuts for millionaires averaging *at least* \$187,000 in 2014. The plan would also reduce corporate income taxes and would

increase the (already considerable) incentives for corporations to shift profits and jobs overseas. Each of these three problems is described in detail below.

Impacts of Ryan FY2013 Budget Tax Provisions on Millionaires in 2014					
Compared to current law					
Income Group	Average Income	Percent w/tax cut	Percent w/tax hike	Average Tax Change in Dollars	Average Tax Change as % Change
\$1 million - \$5 million	1,861,000	92.5%	6.1%	-111,100	-18.2%
\$5 million to \$10 million	6,846,300	92.0%	6.6%	-450,700	-19.6%
\$10 million and over	25,274,500	89.1%	9.1%	-1,406,400	-13.1%
all over \$1 million	3,158,200	92.3%	6.3%	-187,100	-17.0%

Citizens for Tax Justice, March 2012

Estimates assume that the Ryan plan would:

- Replace income tax rates of 25% and higher with one 25% rate
- Replace lower income tax rates with one 10% rate
- Maintain 15% rates for capital gains and dividends
- Repeal all itemized deductions (all taxpayers take standard deduction)
- Repeal all tax credits
- Repeal exclusion for employer-provided health care
- Repeal deduction for health insurance for the self-employed
- Repeal PEP and Pease (upper-income phase-outs for exemptions and itemized deductions)
- Repeal Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT)

Tax Revenue Would Not Be Enough to Pay for Reagan-Era Spending

First, the Ryan budget would lock in the low revenue levels that are the result of the Bush tax cuts, which will expire at the end of this year if Congress simply does nothing.

The Ryan budget plan indicates that this level of revenue would equal 18 or 19 percent of GDP (that is, 18 or 19 percent of our overall economy) in the following decades. Federal spending has been greater than this for most of the past 50 years.

In fact, even during the Reagan administration, federal spending ranged from 21.3 percent to 23.5 percent of GDP. And that was at a time when America was not fighting any wars, the baby-boomers were not retiring, and health care costs had not yet skyrocketed the way they have today.¹

Millionaires Would Receive Average Income Tax Cut of at Least \$187,000 in 2014

Second, the Ryan budget would replace the existing personal income tax with a personal income tax that has just two rates, 10 percent and 25 percent, repeal the Alternative Minimum Tax (AMT), and offset the costs by closing unspecified tax loopholes and tax expenditures. The table on the first page illustrates that taxpayers with adjusted gross income (AGI) exceeding \$1 million would enjoy a tax cut of *at least* \$187,000 under this plan no matter how it is implemented.

The figures in the table were calculated under the assumption that taxpayers with AGI exceeding \$1 million would have to give up *all* the major tax loopholes and tax expenditures that Rep. Ryan could conceivably target for repeal. While Rep. Ryan does not specify which tax provisions he would repeal, these calculations assume he would repeal *all* itemized deductions, all tax credits, the exclusion for employer-provided health insurance, and the deduction for health insurance for the self-employed.²

Even under these assumptions, over 92 percent of these very high-income taxpayers would enjoy a net tax cut, and the average income tax change for these taxpayers would be a reduction of \$187,000 in 2014.

The reason is that reducing the top personal income tax rate (which will be 39.6 percent in 2014 under current law) to 25 percent would provide a benefit to millionaires that would far exceed their loss of any deductions, credits, or breaks for health care.

By way of comparison, millionaires would receive an average income tax cut of \$115,000 in 2014 if the Bush tax cuts are extended through that year.³

The Ryan budget document calls for closing enough tax loopholes and tax expenditures to ensure that this simplified personal income tax would collect as much revenue as the current system would collect if the Bush tax cuts were made permanent for everyone. This is a very low revenue goal, but Rep. Ryan's tax proposals would almost certainly fail to meet it nonetheless.

Budget Plan Would Slash Corporate Taxes and Exempt Profits Shifted Overseas

Third, the Ryan budget would replace the statutory corporate income tax rate of 35 percent — which Rep. Ryan criticizes as one of the world's highest — with a statutory rate of just 25 percent. The budget document comes close to admitting that the *effective* corporate income tax rate — the percentage of profits that corporations actually pay after accounting for the loopholes they enjoy — is far lower than 35 percent. (CTJ recently found that the 3-year effective tax rate for consistently profitable *Fortune* 500 corporations averaged just 18.5 percent.)⁴

It's unclear if the Ryan budget is intended to repeal enough corporate tax subsidies to offset the cost of reducing the statutory corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 25 percent, but the non-partisan Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) has already concluded that this is impossible in any case.

Last year, House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Dave Camp (who Ryan cites as involved in his budget overhaul effort) proposed to reduce the statutory corporate income tax rate to 25 percent and offset the costs by repealing tax subsidies. Around the same time, the Joint Committee on Taxation (JCT) concluded that repealing *all* corporate tax subsidies would raise enough revenue to offset the cost of reducing the corporate income tax rate to 28 percent, and no lower, for a decade. Beyond the first decade, repealing all corporate tax subsidies would raise even less revenue, meaning the corporate income tax rate would have to be higher than 28 percent to be part of any revenue-neutral corporate tax reform.⁵

Another idea that Ryan's budget borrows from Camp's proposal is the introduction of a "territorial" tax system, which is a euphemism for exempting the offshore profits of U.S. corporations from the corporate income tax.

A territorial system would increase the existing incentives for U.S. corporations to move their operations offshore or use accounting gimmicks to make their U.S. profits appear to be "foreign" profits generated in offshore tax havens.⁶

The tax system already encourages corporations to engage in these abuses because it allows them to "defer" (delay) paying U.S. corporate income taxes on any profits that are generated offshore or made to appear that they were generated offshore.

If allowing corporations to defer their U.S. taxes on offshore profits encourages these abuses, then exempting those offshore profits from U.S. taxes entirely would logically increase this incentive.

The only way to prevent these abuses is for Congress to enact a tax reform that repeals "deferral." This would mean that U.S. corporations would not pay lower taxes on profits that they generate (or appear to generate) in

countries with lower corporate income taxes than the U.S. And, just as in the current system, U.S. corporations would be allowed a credit for taxes paid to foreign governments, to prevent double-taxation.⁷

Why the Ryan Budget Plan Does Not Specify How It Would Pay for Tax Rate Reductions

As explained already, the Ryan budget plan calls for closing tax loopholes and tax subsidies to offset the costs of reducing tax rates (beyond the rate reductions that are part of the Bush tax cuts) but does not name any particular tax loophole or tax subsidy to be repealed.

There may be a very specific reason for this vagueness. Two years ago, when Rep. Ryan offered a budget plan that would allow individuals to pay income taxes at a top rate of 25 percent and repeal the corporate income tax, he did propose a specific way to offset the costs — a regressive value-added tax (VAT).

Citizens for Tax Justice analyzed the tax components of that plan and found that, on average, taxpayers among the richest ten percent would pay less in taxes while taxpayers among the bottom 90 percent would pay more. We also found that the plan would reduce revenues by \$2 trillion over ten years.⁸

The truth is that it is very difficult to lower the top income tax rate to 25 percent and offset the costs simply by eliminating or reducing tax expenditures. That's why Ryan's previous plan relied on a regressive VAT. Rep. Ryan probably (correctly) decided the budget plans he would present last year and this year would seem more appealing if he left that detail out of it.

Sources:

¹Office of Management and Budget, Historical Tables, Table 1.2.
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/Historicals/>.

²Other major tax expenditures are supposedly incentives for savings and investments and would surely not be repealed because the Ryan budget plan specifically objects to "raising taxes on investing." For example, the preferential rates for capital gains and stock dividends and various breaks for retirement savings are clearly not among those tax expenditures Ryan would repeal, given that language in the budget document.

³These figures refer to federal personal income taxes. Millionaires would receive other types of tax cuts under the Ryan budget plan. For example, the plan does not specify what would be done with the federal estate tax, but it strongly implies that it would not allow the estate tax cut in effect this year to expire. The Ryan budget plan would also repeal a reform of the Medicare tax (which was included in President Obama's health care reform) that increases the Medicare tax from 2.9 percent to 3.8 percent for wages of high-income individuals and applies the 3.8 percent Medicare tax to investment income as well.

⁴Citizens for Tax Justice, "Corporate Taxpayers & Corporate Tax Dodgers, 2008-2010," November 3, 2011.
<http://ctj.org/corporatetaxdodgers>.

⁵Letter from Thomas A. Barthold, Joint Committee on Taxation, October 27, 2011.
<http://democrats.waysandmeans.house.gov/media/pdf/112/JCTRevenueestimatesFinal.pdf>.

⁶A CTJ fact sheet explains why Congress should reject any proposal to exempt offshore corporate profits from U.S. taxes. Citizens for Tax Justice, "Why Congress Should Reject A 'Territorial' System and a 'Repatriation' Amnesty: Both Proposals Would Remove Taxes on Corporations' Offshore Profits," October 19, 2011.
<http://www.ctj.org/pdf/corporateinternationalfactsheet.pdf>.

⁷For more, see Citizens for Tax Justice, "Congress Should End 'Deferral' Rather than Adopt a 'Territorial' Tax System," March 23, 2011. <http://www.ctj.org/pdf/internationalcorptax2011.pdf>.

⁸Citizens for Tax Justice, "Rep. Ryan's House GOP Budget Plan: Federal Government Would Collect \$2 Trillion Less Over a Decade and Yet Require Bottom 90 Percent to Pay Higher Taxes," March 9, 2010.
<http://www.ctj.org/pdf/ryanplan2010.pdf>.

"116 Billion Reasons to Be For the Health Care Mandate" by Ruth Marcus, NationofChange

Mar. 25, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/116-billion-reasons-be-individual-mandate-1332687807>)

The most compelling sentences in the Obama administration's brief defending the constitutionality of the health-care law come early on. "As a class," the brief advises on Page 7, "the uninsured consumed \$116 billion of health-care services in 2008."

On the next page, the brief drives the point home: "In 2008, people without insurance did not pay for 63 percent of their health-care costs."

Those figures amount to a powerful refutation of the argument that the individual mandate — the requirement that individuals obtain insurance or pay a penalty — exceeds the government's authority to regulate interstate commerce. To me, \$116 billion seems like a whole lot of commerce.

But let's leave the Supreme Court justices to hack their way through the underbrush of the Commerce Clause. Because those numbers are not only relevant to Commerce Clause jurisprudence, they illuminate the fundamental irrationality of public opposition to the individual mandate.

The mandate is by far the most unpopular feature of a law on which Americans are otherwise evenly divided. A Kaiser Family Foundation poll this month found that two-thirds of those surveyed disliked the mandate. Even among Democrats, a majority (53 percent) opposed the requirement; independents (66 percent) and Republicans (77 percent) were even more hostile.

Yet this is a provision that the overwhelming majority — those with insurance — should support, for the simple reason that these people currently end up footing the bill for much of that \$116 billion.

As the government's brief notes, "Congress found that this cost-shifting increases the average premium for insured families by more than \$1,000 per year."

In other words, those worried about having to pay ever-higher premiums should be clamoring for the individual mandate, not agitating for repeal.

Indeed, for all the bristling over the mandate, it will be irrelevant to the 80 percent of non-elderly Americans who already have insurance, either through their employers, government programs, or purchased on their own.

The biggest real-world risk to these people would be if the court were to overturn the mandate yet allow the rest of the health-care law to remain in place, driving premiums ever upward.

Amazingly, Republicans have managed to transform the mandate from an exemplar of personal responsibility into the biggest public policy bogeyman of all time.

The irony of the fight over the mandate is that President Obama was against it before he was for it. During the 2008 campaign, one of the signature differences between Obama and Hillary Clinton was that Clinton's health plan included an individual mandate whereas Obama's mandate covered only children.

Once elected, Obama quickly recognized the inescapable truth: An individual mandate was essential to make the plan work. Without that larger pool of premium-payers, there is no feasible way to require insurance companies to cover all applicants and charge the same amount, regardless of their health status.

In part, hostility to the mandate reflects a broader uneasiness with the perceived encroachment of big government.

In the Kaiser poll, 30 percent of those who opposed the mandate cited government overreach as the biggest reason. Not surprisingly, twice as many Republicans (40 percent) cited that reason as did Democrats (18 percent).

But opposition to the mandate also stems from the public's failure to understand — or, alternatively, the administration's failure to communicate — basic facts.

For example, Kaiser found that when people were told that most Americans "would automatically satisfy the requirement because they already have coverage through their employers," favorability toward the mandate nearly doubled, to 61 percent.

Favorable attitudes rose to nearly half when people were told that without the mandate, insurance companies would still be allowed to deny coverage to those who are sick; that without the mandate people would wait until they were sick to purchase insurance, driving up premium costs; or that those unable to afford coverage are exempt.

"People don't understand how the mandate works at all and they don't understand why it's there," Kaiser's polling director, Mollyann Brodie, told me.

Brodie suspects that it's too late to change minds. "This law as a whole has really become a symbolic issue to people and they really aren't open to information," she said.

Maybe, but the administration must keep trying — not only to sell the law's goodies but also to explain how the mandate makes them possible. Otherwise, they could end up winning the minds of the justices, yet losing the hearts of the people whose votes they need to keep the law in place.

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20120325-04	16:21	SteveB	Music from the Friends of the Middle Website
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<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/links.html>

FRIENDS of the MIDDLE – MUSIC

Collective Soul – *Youth* (2004)

don Omar - *The Last Don* (2003)

Dube, Lucky – *Slave* (1989)

Fonsi, Luis - *Abrazar La Vida* (2003)

Gomez - "Ain't No Sunshine When She's Gone" (2009 live single B-side)

Gomez - *How We Operate* (2006)

Leontiou, Kristian - *Some Day Soon* (2005)

Little Feat - *Sailin' Shoes* (1972)

Reik - *Un Día Más* (2008)

Shakira - *Fijación Oral*/Vol. 1 (2005)

20120325-05	18:11	Dennis	Fw: Internet Warning
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**Internet Warning: If you get an email
with the title "Nude photo of
Newt Gingrich" don't open it!
It's a nude photo of Newt Gingrich.**

20120325-06	19:37	Art	"5 Myths About the Health-Care Law"
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As the Supreme Court begins its discussions the Health Care Act, for those who are interested in facts, it might be of interest to review the below.

"5 Myths About the Health-Care Law" by Walter Dellinger, *Washington Post*

Mar. 23, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/5-myths-about-the-health-care-law/2012/03/19/gIAHJ6JWS_story.html)

1. The "individual mandate" forces everyone to buy health insurance.

The law states that, beginning in 2014, individuals must ensure that they and their dependents are covered by health insurance. Taxpayers who do not meet this requirement will have to pay a penalty that the law calls a "shared responsibility payment." It begins at \$95 for the first year and never exceeds 2.1 percent of anyone's annual taxable income.

A large majority of Americans, of course, have health insurance through their employers, Medicare or Medicaid and are already in compliance with this requirement. Given the relatively modest payment required of those who choose not to maintain insurance, no one is being forced to buy a product they don't want.

The challengers argue that the mandate is a binding requirement that makes anyone who goes without insurance a lawbreaker. The government has determined, however, that those who pay the penalty, like those who are exempt from the penalty, are not lawbreakers. As a practical matter, the so-called mandate is just a relatively modest financial incentive to have health insurance.

2. Only the individual mandate is at stake in the Supreme Court case.

The mandate is not a stand-alone provision that can be invalidated without affecting the rest of the law. In fact, it is merely an ancillary measure that makes two more-fundamental provisions of the law workable: "guaranteed issue" and "community rating."

A significant problem with our nation's health-care system has been that insurance companies can reject applicants who have had health problems, including minor ones. The guaranteed issue provision prevents companies from turning down applicants because of their medical conditions or history. The community rating measure bars insurers from charging higher premiums to those who have had illnesses or accidents.

Experience in the states has shown that if people can't be turned down for health insurance, there must be an incentive for them to sign up for it before they have an accident or illness. The individual mandate was enacted to ensure that the central, nondiscrimination provisions can work as they were intended — to provide everyone access to affordable health care, regardless of their medical history or current conditions. If the court were to strike down the mandate, the law's popular provisions on preexisting conditions would fall as well.

3. If the court upholds the health-care law, it means Congress has the power to require Americans to purchase any product.

The health-care case is a test of Congress's power under the Constitution to regulate commerce among the states. One way to defend the law is simply to say that a requirement to purchase insurance or any other product sold in interstate commerce is obviously a regulation of that commerce. President Ronald Reagan's solicitor general, Charles Fried, and conservative judge Laurence Silberman have adopted this view.

The Obama administration is not relying upon such a sweeping argument, however, and its more limited claim would not justify any law that required Americans to buy products such as cars or broccoli.

The mandate does not force people into commerce who would otherwise remain outside it. Instead, it regulates the consumption of health care, an activity in which virtually everyone will engage. Right now,

people who go without insurance often shift the costs of their health care to other patients and taxpayers. That situation is different from what happens with any other type of purchase.

Would the government's defense of the mandate also support a law requiring Americans to buy broccoli or a car? The answer is a simple and emphatic no.

4. The law is socialist.

Actually, the opposite is true. The principal reason the Affordable Care Act has been called unprecedented is that it declines to follow the New Deal approach of having a monolithic government agency be the single provider of a good or service. Instead, the law adopts a new approach, one conservatives have long supported, of using providers in the private market to deal with social and economic problems.

In defending his "Massachusetts mandate" as a conservative model for national health-care legislation, former governor Mitt Romney editorialized in 2009 that by imposing tax penalties on people who choose to remain uninsured, an individual mandate "encourages 'free riders' to take responsibilities for themselves rather than pass their medical costs on to others." And, as Romney noted, conservatives have never been inclined to favor freeloaders.

5. The law is an extraordinary intrusion into liberty.

Liberty is always said to be fatally eroded, it seems, when great advances in social legislation take place. The lawyers who urged the Supreme Court to strike down the Social Security Act of 1935 argued that if Congress could provide a retirement system for everyone 65 and older, it would have the power to set the retirement age at 30 and force the very young to support everyone else.

It was said that if Congress had the authority to create a minimum wage of \$5 an hour, it would also be a regulation of commerce to set the minimum at \$5,000 an hour. In 1964, critics argued that if Congress could tell restaurant owners not to discriminate on the basis of race, it could tell them what color tablecloths to use. None of these things happened.

Nothing in the health-care law tells doctors what they must say to patients or how those patients are to be treated. It only requires people to either have insurance coverage or pay a modest tax penalty.

Nearly 75 years ago, a Supreme Court dominated by appointees of conservative presidents rejected the challenge to the constitutionality of the Social Security Act. The words of Justice Benjamin Cardozo's 1937 opinion are relevant today:

"Whether wisdom or unwisdom resides in [the statute in question] it is not for us to say. The answer to such inquiries must come from Congress, not the courts."

(Walter Dellinger served as head of the Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel and acting solicitor general from 1993 to 1997. He filed a brief on behalf of the Senate and House Democratic leadership defending the health care law in the Supreme Court.)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0438488/>

Robot from Terminator Salvation (2009)



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

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