



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #107 — APR. 2, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Index to Friends of the Middle Newsletter #107 — Apr. 2, 2012

The Corruption of Government by Big \$\$\$ Must End!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Apr. 2, 2012)

At least we win sometimes in the lower courts...

"Koch Brothers, Chamber of Commerce Face Possible Campaign Donation Disclosure after Ruling" by Paul Blumenthal, Huffington Post

Mar. 30, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/30/koch-brothers-rove-fec-campaign-donations_n_1392838.html?ref=politics&ref=politics)

(David Koch is major funder of independent groups, like Americans for Prosperity, that would be forced to disclose their donors for "electioneering communications" under the District Court's ruling in *Van Hollen v. Federal Election Commission* (FEC).)

(WASHINGTON) On Friday evening, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia issued a ruling that could begin the process of revealing the identities of secret donors to groups connected to Karl Rove and the Koch brothers.

The court ruled in *Van Hollen v. Federal Election Commission* that the FEC rules that restricted campaign donor disclosure are not valid and must be changed to provide for disclosure.

"We are very happy to see the judge got it right," says Paul Ryan, a lawyer for the Campaign Legal Center, a campaign finance watchdog that was a part of the team challenging the FEC rules.

Those rules state that donors to groups spending money on "electioneering communications," or advertisements that do not specifically call to elect or defeat a candidate, must only be disclosed if they specifically earmarked their donation to that particular expenditure. Since few, if any, donors to these groups ever earmark their donation for a specific election expense there was no disclosure.

That FEC rule came in the wake of the 2007 Supreme Court ruling in *Wisconsin Right to Life v. FEC*. That ruling overturned a ban, instituted by the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law, regarding direct corporate and union contributions to electioneering communications.

Friday's court ruling could reverse a trend started by the FEC rules, and aggravated by the Supreme Court's 2010 *Citizens United* decision, that led to an explosion in undisclosed contributions to electoral efforts. The percentage of

independent spending that went undisclosed jumped from 1 percent in 2006 to 43.8 percent in 2010, according to the Center for Responsive Politics.

Advertisements falling under the rubric of "electioneering communications" include those run against President Barack Obama by the American Energy Alliance and Americans for Prosperity, both non-profits linked to the Koch brothers. All ads run by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce are classified as "electioneering communications." The ruling would require for the first time that contributions to these groups, and many more, be disclosed.

Crossroads GPS, a non-profit linked to Karl Rove, has run millions of electioneering communications against Obama and Democratic senators this election cycle without disclosing any of their donors.

Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) challenged these FEC rules in 2011, arguing that the rules preventing disclosure were an unlawful interpretation of the plain language of the McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform law, which mandated disclosure of these donors. Therefore, he said, they should be tossed out by the court.

"This is good news for our democracy and for voters - this victory will compel the FEC to require enhanced disclosures of the funders of campaign-related advertisements," Van Hollen said in a statement.

Judge Amy Berman Jackson stated Friday in her ruling that, "there is no question that the regulation promulgated by the FEC directly contravenes the Congressional goal of increasing transparency and disclosure in electioneering communications."

"In sum, the Court finds that Congress spoke plainly, that Congress did not delegate authority to the FEC to narrow the disclosure requirement through agency rulemaking, and that a change in the reach of the statute brought about by a Supreme Court ruling did not render plain language, which is broad enough to cover the new circumstances, to be ambiguous," the ruling continued. "The agency cannot unilaterally decide to take on a quintessentially legislative function; if sound policy suggests that the statute needs tailoring in the wake of *WRTL* or *Citizens United*, it is up to Congress to do it."

Fred Wertheimer, the president of campaign finance watchdog group Democracy 21 and another one of the lawyers representing Van Hollen, said in a statement, "Now it is the FEC's turn to act. Democracy 21 calls on the FEC to conduct an immediate rulemaking procedure. The FEC must get new rules in place promptly to ensure that outside spenders making electioneering communications disclose the donors funding these campaign related expenditures."

While the ruling unambiguously states that the FEC's rules on electioneering communications are in contravention of congressional intent and should be invalidated, the next step remains murky.

"If this ruling stood and this was the end of it, we'd have much more disclosure," explained University of California-Irvine law professor Rick Hasen. "I don't think that this is going to be the end of it."

On his Election Law Blog, Hasen laid out five possibilities of what could transpire in the wake of this decision, including the FEC immediately writing new, appropriate rules or an appeal from the FEC, prolonging the court challenge. The FEC requires four votes from its six commissioners to appeal a decision.

"This is a good day for those who want to shine light on who's funding our elections," Hasen said. "These things are years in the making. People who think that this is going to solve all the problems immediately are probably going to be disappointed."

The efforts by the Van Hollen team will also continue, according to the statement from Wertheimer. He explained that the legal team will now consult on "a potential second lawsuit challenging the FEC disclosure regulations that have gutted the contribution disclosure requirements for outside groups making independent expenditures."

Independent expenditures are election expenses that do call for the election or defeat of a candidate. This type of spending is what corporations and unions were freed to spend money on in the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* ruling.

FotM NEWSLETTER #107 (Apr. 2, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
20120402-00		SteveB	The Corruption of Government by Big \$\$\$ Must End! by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Koch Brothers, Chamber of Commerce Face Possible Campaign Donation Disclosure after Ruling")
20120330-06	08:52	SteveB	Friends of the Middle Website Publications
20120330-09	10:08	SteveB	Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications
20120330-10	11:06	Pam	Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications (reply to SteveB, above)
20120330-11	11:20	SteveB	Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications (reply to Pam, above)
20120330-12	11:42	Pam	Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications (reply to SteveB, above)
20120330-03	06:55	SteveB	"Four Big Myths About Revelation"
20120330-04	07:00	SteveB	"A National ID Card That Protects Voting Rights"
20120330-05	07:14	MarthaH	"Anti-Government 'Sovereign Movement' on the Rise in U.S."
20120330-01	02:04	SteveG	Fw: 50's Car Test
20120330-02	03:03	SteveB	Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveG, above)
20120330-07	09:25	SteveG	Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveB, above)
20120330-08	09:30	SteveB	Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveG, above)
20120330-13	13:48	SteveG	Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveB, above)
20120331-01	06:53	MarthaH	More Hoosier Humor
20120331-02	08:50	SteveB	Re: More Hoosier Humor (reply to MarthaH, above)
20120331-04	11:07	SandyI	Re: More Hoosier Humor (reply to MarthaH & SteveB, above)
20120331-03	09:02	MarthaH	Fw: And Health Care Doesn't Need Fixing?
20120331-06	21:23	Jim	Video: Flower Opening Miracles
20120331-07	23:39	Pam	Why Labels Can Be Misleading
20120401-01	10:47	Art	Re: Why Labels Can Be Misleading (reply to Pam, above)
20120401-02	14:13	Pam	Re: Why Labels Can Be Misleading (reply to Pam, above)
20120331-05	16:58	Tom	Video: What Really Goes On in the Forest at Night
20120401-03	18:05	SteveB	"Pink Slime Economics"
20120401-04	23:35	Charis	"Living Under Dictatorship Taught Me About Democracy"
20120401-05	23:59	SteveB	Video: Optical Illusion

20120330-06	08:52	SteveB	Friends of the Middle Website Publications
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The following compilations of FotM Materials and Newsletters are available on the website:

1. Archive (2007-2011, up to the starting of the Newsletters) — 1573 pages (at this moment, in progress but unfinished):

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/archives/FotM-Archive-1.pdf>

2. FotM Newsletters (2011) — 708 pages:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2011-newsletters/2011-FotM-Newsletters.pdf>.

3. FotM Newsletters (Jan., 2012) — 358 pages:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/201201-FotM-Newsletters.pdf>.

4. FotM Newsletters (Feb., 2012) — 402 pages:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/201202-FotM-Newsletters.pdf>.

5. FotM Newsletters (Mar., 2012) — 365 pages:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/201203-FotM-Newsletters.pdf>.

That's a total of 3406 fairly dense pages in easily-read PDF format. More than 2,000,000 words, very largely irredundant. Much of this is source material, but the equivalent of a large book's worth is original stuff written by the past and present FotM group members.

Together, these files represent a veritable "Small Encyclopedia of Current Events Seen Through a Unique Lens, 2007 to Now", rich with resources that I hope we can keep intact and available. I'll do what I can to preserve the integrity of all our source materials, the things that make our commentary make sense and are necessary to the continuity of the whole. The articles that have all had a special meaning to at least one group member that compelled them to share.

But I recommend that you download these files while you have an opportunity. I will honor intellectual property rights every step of the way. If any copyright holder asks that we not reprint material, I will immediately take that piece down from the website.

Here is a little further explanation of my copyright thinking:

Almost all of our source materials are advocacy pieces, mainly political. The authors are happy to have their views disseminated as widely as possible. All the materials we republish are freely available on the internet. We display sources, links to sources, and copyright notices prominently and invariably. We never sell or charge for content in any way. Many of our materials are licensed through: <http://creativecommons.org/>. And if, at any time, any author or publisher of any of our republished articles requests that we remove their material because of copyright concerns, we will do so immediately. All these steps are those that should be taken by any responsible blog or website interested in protecting intellectual property rights.

Have a great weekend, everybody! Take care. As IBM used to say, "Think." And as Pam says, "Feel and love."

20120330-09	10:08	SteveB	Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications
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Let me clarify one point.

When someone, already an FotM Member or not, fills out the "SUBSCRIBE OR COMMENT" form on the homepage, an email comes to me immediately.

I might not get it right away, but it's just the same as sending only me an email.

It might contain instructions like:

- "Forward immediately to Pam."
- "For Publication."
- "Not For Publication."
- "To Pam."
- "Please give Pam this message and my email address."
- "Please reply personally."
- "Please forward to the Group."
- "See this link."

I try to follow these instructions as closely as I can and pass along what I can. I'm kinda like one of those operators you used to talk to when you picked up the phone, connecting everybody.

So the two (email or webform) are roughly equal at the front end of things, except that your email goes out to whomever you want immediately and you are comfortable with it.

Have a great weekend, Mom!

Oh, and guess what? I might as well tell you. I just learned yesterday that my youngest daughter, sweet Marissa, is pregnant! I'm so excited. Three grandkids! I know that's not really a lot, but it seems like a lot to me, and I love it. Maybe it will be twins, a boy and a girl (in my fantasies)? I'm so happy for her. And she just got a new job not long ago, working for the government (it pays to be a Democrat, sometimes, haha), so she'll have good insurance.

[20120330-10](#) 11:06 Pam Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications (reply to SteveB, above)

Congratulations, Grandpa. A new baby is always exciting.

You are doing a terrific job with FotM. I'm so glad to be part of it. It's become a big part of my life, and I can imagine it's taken over yours. :-)

[20120330-11](#) 11:20 SteveB Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications (reply to Pam, above)

It's definitely taken over my early mornings, but I don't mind, I'd be reading and writing emails then anyway, at least part of the time. I actually get to do a little less of that now... Thank you for your sweet encouragement and enormous contribution.

My #1 project is finishing the Archive, with its cool hyperlink indexing. I'm trying an experiment and building an Index to the Index, in an attempt to bring simplicity to chaos. That version is not online yet, but will appear in the near future, so everyone can see how it works. Then I'm going to introduce indexing to the Newsletter and probably go back and add it to the monthly Newsletter compilations. Then all the work on "old" stuff will be finished, and I can concentrate on the 2012 Election in real time with FotM.

The Acrobat Reader's full search capabilities and variable text size will continue to be valuable tools for readers.

How the hell did men ever get by when they kept women "down on the farm" Muslim-style? I guess that's at least part of the reason Muslim societies don't seem to be succeeding very well—all that talent going to waste in the harem. At least we've finally made a little progress in that area, though hard-won, and now they want to take it away again, it seems.

In 2013, Marci and I are taking a "Farewell Trip" around the entire U.S. – Florida, up the East Coast to Maine, by Toronto and Niagara Falls to Indiana, Michigan, Chicago to Montana, to Washington, down the West Coast, through Arizona, Texas, New Orleans, and back to Florida. I want to see all my friends from every part of life along the way, and I especially want to see all my Friends of the Middle friends, even if it's just for a lunch or cup of coffee. With some of you, we plan on moving in for a couple of weeks. (Just kidding!) We're planning about two months for the whole trip

I hate to be a flip-flopper like Mitt, but we're putting the cookie business back on hold for another 4-6 months. Marci's working about half time for a well-paying, easy-to-work-for client, and I'm lazy to do the cookie biz all by myself, so I'll just be sitting here reading, writing, and editing most of the time. I'm very happy with either alternative universe. I usually am.

My baby's baby! Strange. Time.

[20120330-12](#) 11:42 Pam Re: Friends of the Middle Website Publications (reply to SteveB, above)

That sounds like a serious trip.

:-) Your baby's baby. That's how I felt when Saskia had Jonas. I'm pretty sure they're the only grandchildren I'm going to have. Dabbs has three girls, but I don't know how to count them. I never see them, and they're not related by blood. I wish them well, of course, but we don't have a relationship. I don't want to disown them, but they're not grandchildren the way Jonas and Atty are. I don't think David will have kids, and I doubt Tanner will. I'm grateful for the two I've got. They're terrific, and that's not just because I'm their Grandmommy. That is a totally objective opinion.

20120330-03	06:55	SteveB	"Four Big Myths About Revelation"
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Just a reminder...so we all know. Now...what you may choose to believe is another matter entirely.

"Four Big Myths About Revelation" by John Blake, CNN

Mar. 31, 2012, (http://religion.blogs.cnn.com/2012/03/31/four-big-myths-about-the-book-of-revelation/?hpt=hp_c1)

The anti-Christ. The Battle of Armageddon. The dreaded Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

You don't have to be a student of religion to recognize references from the Book of Revelation. The last book in the Bible has fascinated readers for centuries. People who don't even follow religion are nonetheless familiar with figures and images from Revelation.

And why not? No other New Testament book reads like Revelation. The book virtually drips with blood and reeks of sulfur. At the center of this final battle between good and evil is an action-hero-like Jesus, who is in no mood to turn the other cheek.

Elaine Pagels, one of the world's leading biblical scholars, first read Revelation as a teenager. She read it again in writing her latest book, *Revelations: Visions, Prophecy & Politics in the Book of Revelation*.

Pagels' book is built around a simple question: What does Revelation mean? Her answers may disturb people who see the book as a prophecy about the end of the world.

But people have clashed over the meaning of Revelation ever since it was virtually forced into the New Testament canon over the protests of some early church leaders, Pagels says.

"There were always debates about it," she says. "Some people said a heretic wrote it. Some said a disciple. There were always people who loved and championed it."

The debate persists. Pagels adds to it by challenging some of the common assumptions about Revelation.

Here are what she says are four big myths about Revelation:

1. It's about the end of the world.

Anyone who has read the popular "Left Behind" novels or listened to pastors preaching about the "rapture" might see Revelation as a blow-by-blow preview of how the world will end.

Pagels, however, says the writer of Revelation was actually describing the way his own world ended.

She says the writer of Revelation may have been called John – the book is sometimes called "Book of the Revelation of Saint John the Divine" but he was not the disciple who accompanied Jesus. He was a devout Jew and mystic exiled on the island of Patmos in present-day Turkey.

"He would have been a very simple man in his clothes and dress," Pagels says. "He may have gone from church to church preaching his message. He seems more like a traveling preacher or a prophet."

The author of Revelation had experienced a catastrophe. He wrote his book not long after 60,000 Roman soldiers had stormed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., burned down its great temple and left the city in ruins after putting down an armed Jewish revolt.

For some of the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus, the destruction of Jerusalem was incomprehensible. They had expected Jesus to return "with power" and conquer Rome before inaugurating a new age. But Rome had conquered Jesus' homeland instead.

The author of Revelation was trying to encourage the followers of Jesus at a time when their world seemed doomed. Think of the Winston Churchill radio broadcasts delivered to the British during the darkest days of World War II.

Revelation was an anti-Roman tract and a piece of war propaganda wrapped in one. The message: God would return and destroy the Romans who had destroyed Jerusalem.

"His primary target is Rome," Pagels says of the book's author. "He really is deeply angry and grieved at the Jewish war and what happened to his people."

2. The numerals 666 stand for the devil.

The 1976 horror film *The Omen* scared a lot of folks. It may have scared some theologians, too, who began encountering people whose view of Revelation comes from a Hollywood movie.

The Omen depicted the birth and rise of the "anti-Christ," the cunning son of Satan who would be known by "the mark of the beast," 666, on his body.

Here's the passage from Revelation that *The Omen* alluded to: "This calls for wisdom: let anyone with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. Its number is six hundred sixty-six."

Good movies, though, don't always make good theology. Most people think 666 stands for an anti-Christ-like figure that will deceive humanity and trigger a final battle between good and evil. Some people think he's already here.

Pagels, however, says the writer of Revelation didn't really intend 666 as the devil's digits. He was describing another incarnation of evil: The Roman emperor, Nero.

The arrogant and demented Nero was particularly despised by the earliest followers of Jesus, including the writer of Revelation. Nero was said to have burned followers of Jesus alive to illuminate his garden.

But the author of Revelation couldn't safely name Nero, so he used the Jewish numerology system to spell out Nero's imperial name, Pagels says.

Pagels says that John may have had in mind other meanings for the mark of the beast: the imperial stamp Romans used on official documents, tattoos authorizing people to engage in Roman business, or the images of Roman emperors on stamps and coins.

Since Revelation's author writes in "the language of dreams and nightmares," Pagels says it's easy for outsiders to misconstrue the book's original meaning.

Still, they take heart from Revelation's larger message, she writes:

...Countless people for thousands of years have been able to see their own conflicts, fears, and hopes reflected in his prophecies. And because he speaks from his convictions about divine justice, many readers have found reassurance in his conviction that there is meaning in history – even when he does not say exactly what that meaning is – and that there is hope.

3. The writer of Revelation was a Christian.

The author of Revelation hated Rome, but he also scorned another group – a group of people we would call Christians today, Pagels says.

There's a common perception that there was a golden age of Christianity, when most Christians agreed on an uncontaminated version of the faith. Yet there was never one agreed-upon Christianity. There were always clashing visions.

Revelation reflects some of those early clashes in the church, Pagels says.

That idea isn't new territory for Pagels. She won the National Book Award for "The Gnostic Gospels," a 1989 book that examined a cache of newly discovered "secret" gospels of Jesus. The book, along with other work from Pagels, argues that there were other accounts of Jesus' life that were suppressed by early church leaders because it didn't fit with their agenda.

The author of Revelation was like an activist crusading for traditional values. In his case, he was a devout Jew who saw Jesus as the messiah. But he didn't like the message that the apostle Paul and other followers of Jesus were preaching.

This new message insisted that gentiles could become followers of Jesus without adopting the requirements of the Torah. It accepted women leaders, and intermarriage with gentiles, Pagels says.

The new message was a lot like what we call Christianity today.

That was too much for the author of Revelation. At one point, he calls a woman leader in an early church community a "Jezebel." He calls one of those gentile-accepting churches a "synagogue of Satan."

John was defending a form of Christianity that would be eclipsed by the Christians he attacked, Pagels says.

"What John of Patmos preached would have looked old-fashioned – and simply wrong to Paul's converts...", she writes.

The author of Revelation was a follower of Jesus, but he wasn't what some people would call a Christian today, Pagels says.

"There's no indication that he read Jesus' Sermon on the Mount or that he read the gospels or Paul's letters," she says. "...He doesn't even say Jesus died for your sins."

4. There is only one Book of Revelation.

There's no other book in the Bible quite like Revelation, but there are plenty of books like Revelation that didn't make it into the Bible, Pagels says.

Early church leaders suppressed an "astonishing" range of books that claimed to be revelations from apostles such as Peter and James. Many of these books were read and treasured by Christians throughout the Roman Empire, she says.

There was even another "Secret Revelation of John." In this one, Jesus wasn't a divine warrior, but someone who first appeared to the apostle Paul as a blazing light, then as a child, an old man and, some scholars say, a woman.

So why did the revelation from John of Patmos make it into the Bible, but not the others?

Pagels traces that decision largely to Bishop Athanasius, a pugnacious church leader who championed Revelation about 360 years after the death of Jesus.

Athanasius was so fiery that during his 46 years as bishop he was deposed and exiled five times. He was primarily responsible for shaping the New Testament while excluding books he labeled as hearsay, Pagels says.

Many church leaders opposed including Revelation in the New Testament. Athanasius's predecessor said the book was "unintelligible, irrational and false."

Athanasius, though, saw Revelation as a useful political tool. He transformed it into an attack ad against Christians who questioned him.

Rome was no longer the enemy; those who questioned church authority were the anti-Christians in Athanasius's reading of Revelation, Pagels says.

"Athanasius interprets Revelation's cosmic war as a vivid picture of his own crusade against heretics and reads John's visions as a sharp warning to Christian dissidents," she writes. "God is about to divide the saved from the damned – which now means dividing the 'orthodox' from 'heretics.'"

Centuries later, Revelation still divides people. Pagels calls it the strangest and most controversial book in the Bible.

Even after writing a book about it, Pagels has hardly mastered its meaning.

"The book is the hardest one in the Bible to understand," Pagels says. "I don't think anyone completely understands it."

20120330-04	07:00	SteveB	"A National ID Card That Protects Voting Rights"
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And this is a conservative Republican calling for national ID cards. I want verifiable paper ballots too, even if they are tabulated or read by computer. We need paper trails for something as important as elections. And, as we recently learned, at least some of the current voting software has already been hacked. The Chinese are getting excellent at this sort of thing. Not good.

"A National ID Card That Protects Voting Rights" by David Frum, CNN

Mar. 26, 2012 (http://us.cnn.com/2012/03/26/opinion/frum-identity-cards/index.html?hpt=po_r1)

(Voter ID efforts in South Carolina and other states have created controversy.)

Editor's note: David Frum, a CNN contributor, is a contributing editor at *Newsweek* and The Daily Beast. He was a special assistant to President George W. Bush from 2001 to 2002 and is the author of six books, including *Comeback: Conservatism That Can Win Again*.

In December, the U.S. Department of Justice intervened under the Voting Rights Act to stay a South Carolina voter ID law.

Controversy rages over similar laws in Georgia and Texas. Many expect Justice Department action against the Texas law. (The Georgia law was approved in 2005 by the Bush administration Justice Department.)

The argument against voter ID goes as follows: The most common form of ID in the United States is a driver's license. Nonwhite registered voters are somewhat less likely than whites to have driver's licenses. In South Carolina, for example, the gap is nearly 20%. Therefore, voter ID will have a discriminatory effect.

But then we're left with a question: What happens when those minority South Carolinians need social services? How do they identify themselves then? Then, of course, they rely on a Social Security number. But Social Security numbers are notoriously prone to theft, fraud and tampering.

The IRS counted more than 400,000 cases of theft of Social Security numbers in the 18 months from mid-2009 to the end of 2011. Surely that is only the tip of the iceberg. You don't sustain a population of 10 million to 12 million illegal aliens without lots and lots of fake Social Security numbers.

In other words, the U.S. has created two forms of de facto ID: one (Social Security) that is universal, but not reliable; another (state-issued driver's licenses) that is reliable, but not universal.

Obvious question: **Why can't we have a system of personal identification that is universal and reliable?**

Modern technology enables the design of just such a card while also protecting and even enhancing personal privacy.

Imagine you are a 22 year old who wants to buy a case of beer. (Or a 66 year old who wants to buy a discount movie ticket.) You present your driver's license that shows on its face your date of birth, and the cashier computes whether you qualify. But that card actually discloses more information than the cashier requires. The cashier is asking a "yes" or "no" question: 21 or older? 65 or older?

Or imagine that you are an employer who wants to check a job applicant's eligibility for work. Again, the card the employer will see presents more information than required. The employer doesn't care whether you are a citizen or a permanent resident or where you were born or when you became a resident alien. He just wants a "yes" or "no" to the question: Eligible to work?

Same thing at the polls. The poll watchers don't need to know whether today is your birthday. They don't need to know your height or weight. They just need to know: Are you who you say you are? And are you eligible to cast a ballot?

On its face, it would carry only your name and image. That's all most people need most of the time to confirm your identity; for example, when checking the name on your airline ticket against the person bearing the ticket.

But none of the other information that now appears on your driver's license needs to appear there. Not the address. Not the date of birth. No the height or weight.

Information beyond face and name would be encrypted inside the card and would be divulged only to specific scanners. Liquor store owners would have machines that could read only the answer to the "21 or older?" question. Employers would have machines that could read only the "eligible to work?" question. Voting places would read only "eligible to vote?"

Departments of Motor Vehicles in each of the states could encrypt motorist information onto the card. If you moved to another state, you would not need a new card. A visit to the DMV in the new state would wipe out the obsolete motorist information and substitute the new.

Police might have more sophisticated scanners that could read more exactly your address or date of birth or citizenship status.

The card would have encrypted information useful to prevent social service fraud; for example, the number of children you have so you can't enroll for more benefits than for which you qualify.

The card might also carry encrypted medical information useful in case of emergency such as blood type and allergies to medicines.

None of this information would be visible to the casual observer. None would be available except to those with a right and need to access it.

The card need not be compulsory. Even in France, supposedly the homeland of Big Government statism, the national ID card is noncompulsory. But the card would add so much convenience to life that most people would want it: one ultrasecure document that smoothed your way through the modern world -- and guaranteed no-questions asked about your rights to vote, work, drive and purchase alcohol.

Such a card, available for free to all, should obviate all objections to the seemingly common sense requirement that we not just "take your word for it" when you vote or apply for social benefits.

20120330-05	07:14	MarthaH	"Anti-Government 'Sovereign Movement' on the Rise in U.S."
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Hey, Republicans, come and pick-up your trash...

"Anti-Government 'Sovereign Movement' on the Rise in U.S." by Kevin Johnson, *USA Today*.

Mar. 30, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-03-30/anti-government-militia-groups-freeman/53873496/1>)

(TRINIDAD, Texas) Gary Thomas will never forget the letter he received in early 2000. It was from John Joe Gray, a suspect in a felony assault case, offering a not-so-subtle warning to the area's chief criminal investigator: He had no intention of answering charges that he had attacked a state trooper.

"What he said was this: 'If y'all come to get me, bring body bags,' " said Thomas, now a local justice of the peace.

Thomas remembers the message clearly, not because of its unvarnished threat, but because — after 12 years — Gray, who doesn't acknowledge the authority of any government, continues to dare police to come and get him.

Sequestered on a 50-acre, wooded compound in East Texas since jumping bail more than a decade ago, Gray and his clan have effectively outlasted the administrations of four local sheriffs, all of whom have decided that John Joe's arrest is not worth the risk of a violent confrontation.

"The risk of loss of life on both ends is far too great," said Anderson County District Attorney Doug Lowe, who first sought to prosecute Gray for the alleged Christmas Eve 1999 assault of Texas Trooper Jim Cleland. "I believed it then; I still feel that way."

The stalemate, perhaps the longest-running standoff in the U.S. between law enforcement and a fugitive living in plain sight, is also emblematic of what the FBI believes is a troubling re-emergence of an anti-government movement that vaulted to notoriety in 1995. Then, one of its disaffected sympathizers, Timothy McVeigh— angered by the government's botched 1993 raid of the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas — detonated a truck bomb outside the Oklahoma City federal building, killing 168 people in what was at the time the deadliest terrorist attack on U.S. soil.

In the past three years, there has been growing concern over activities of so-called "sovereign citizens," who like the Grays and many of their anti-government predecessors "claim to exist beyond the realm of government authority," according to a January FBI bulletin to state and local law enforcement officials warning of the potential for violence.

The sovereign movement, estimated by the Southern Poverty Law Center to number 100,000 ardent followers and about 200,000 sympathizers across the country, is rooted in an ideology that rejects government authority at its most basic levels, from its power to tax to the enforcement of criminal laws, including common traffic regulations.

The law center, which tracks extremist groups in the USA, based its estimates partly on its reviews of tax disputes and court documents involving people who do not recognize government authority.

Although the FBI does not track sovereigns by number, the bureau does not dispute the law center's estimates, which have swelled dramatically within a national anti-government network of related "patriot" and "militia" groups. Since 2008, the number of groups surged from 149 to 1,274 in 2011, the law center reported this month.

The rapid growth, according to the law center, has been fueled by a collision of factors, from the troubles related to the struggling economy and foreclosure crisis to the election of President Obama, the nation's first black president. Obama's election prompted a "backlash" from extremist groups who were further angered by decisions to provide government assistance to Wall Street banks and automakers, the law center found.

Stuart McArthur, deputy assistant director of the FBI's Counterterrorism Division, said the sovereigns have become more active in seeking retaliation against government officials by filing fraudulent lawsuits and liens, seeking billions of dollars in judgments. The actions often follow arrests, evictions, court rulings and other interactions with authorities.

At its most extreme, McArthur said, sovereigns have been linked to threats of violence and the murders of six police officers since 2002, including the slayings of officers Brandon Paudert and Bill Evans in West Memphis, Ark., in 2010.

Militia groups swelling

The anti-government patriot/militia movement, marked by a deep distrust of the government, has grown dramatically in the past four years. (Source: The Southern Poverty Law Center.)

"There are people at war with this country who are not international terrorists," said Robert Paudert, the former chief of the West Memphis Police Department and the father of one of the slain officers. "I had never heard of the sovereign citizen movement before May 20, 2010 (the day of his son's murder). But these are people who are willing to kill or be killed for their beliefs."

At Gray's property line

At the end of a rutted, dirt-gravel road, about 70 miles southeast of Dallas, sits John Joe Gray.

It doesn't take long to learn that Gray and his family, after more than 12 years of living in isolation without electricity and modern plumbing, have no intention of surrendering to local authorities or engaging in much discussion about their plight.

A heavily armed patrol of three men — each carrying holstered handguns, knives and rifles — meets visitors one late February afternoon at the family's property line, a fence line festooned with weathered placards bearing anti-government slogans.

"When people fear the government, there is tyranny. When government fears the people, there is freedom," reads one. Another: "Vaccinations equal Annihilation."

Although the three confirm to *USA Today* during a recent visit that they are members of the Gray family, they refuse to provide their full names. The oldest — a bearded man with a mane of long, wiry hair who most resembles Gray's 12-year-old booking photo — said the family is not interested in discussing why they continue to defy authorities. Nor are they inclined to say how long they can hold out.

"We're doing all right," the older man said curtly, adding that the family tends a sizable garden on the property that yields much of their food. A herd of goats, fish from the adjacent Trinity River and wild game help fill their pantry.

For the duration of the brief exchange, a stilted conversation at the fence line, the older bearded man does much of the talking as the others look on, their weapons hanging from worn gun belts and shoulder slings. The weapons, he

said, are necessary to keep "trespassers" off their land, suggesting that would include unwelcome visits from law enforcement. He is most adamant, though, in his refusal to discuss the circumstances that have resulted in his unusual standoff with local law enforcement.

"Everybody knows the government controls the media," he said.

Gray fled here, according to Thomas, Lowe and Henderson County Sheriff Ray Nutt, after the now-63-year-old man was released on bond in connection with the 1999 alleged assault on Trooper Cleland. During a routine traffic stop in neighboring Anderson County, Thomas said Cleland saw a .357-caliber handgun in the car and reached for it, sparking a struggle with Gray that spilled onto the roadway. During the struggle, Thomas said, Gray "bit a plug" of flesh out of Cleland's arm.

A search of the vehicle produced some rambling anti-government writings, including references to setting off a bomb on a highway overpass near Dallas.

Gray denied any part in a bomb plot; he was indicted, instead, for the alleged assault. Gray was released on bond, partly on his promise that he would have no access to weapons while free awaiting a hearing. Gray never returned to answer the charge.

Nutt, the fourth sheriff to hold office in the county where Gray is holed up, said he is comfortable not forcing Gray's hand. That decision, he said, is largely informed by the consequences of the federal raid on a Waco compound housing the Branch Davidian religious sect and its leader, David Koresh. Federal agents stormed the property in search of weapons in February 1993, leading to a 51-day standoff, ending in a conflagration that left 80 dead and inspired McVeigh. The specter of that tragedy still looms large here, where the Gray property lies about 80 miles east of Waco.

"I'm reluctant to talk about (the Gray case) much," said Nutt, a former Texas Ranger who was dispatched to Waco at the time. "I just don't want to stir things up."

That's not to say Nutt has ignored the current standoff. A thick file holds a pile of documents related to the Grays. It's believed that seven children live among the 15 people on the property, the sheriff said. Nutt won't discuss any law enforcement surveillance of the compound, although they know sympathizers occasionally drop off food and supplies. The sheriff also believes the family has access to a ham radio, maybe a generator.

The sheriff is not comfortable discussing much more, except to emphasize the strong belief that his department would not have the "firepower" to sustain a prolonged siege to forcibly remove Gray. "Some of our officers would be killed, mostly likely," he said.

No taxation

Mark Potok, editor of the Southern Poverty Law Center's Intelligence Report, which has closely examined the Gray case, said the family adheres to sovereign beliefs, an ideology that is attracting an increasing number of followers in the U.S.

The sovereigns are regarded as a subset of the patriot groups and share much of the same ideology, including a rejection of the government's taxing authority. The Grays, according to local court records, owe nearly \$20,000 in back property taxes. Citing the same fears expressed by law enforcement officials, the county has stopped attempts at collection.

"This is a widespread ideology," the FBI's McArthur said.

Potok and other analysts believe the financial crisis, triggered partly by the collapse of the housing market, is chiefly responsible for the movement's expansion.

This notion is based on a flurry of federal prosecutions against so-called "tax defiers," suspects in debt elimination schemes and others who have sought to enrich themselves or retaliate against local government officials by filing false property liens and lawsuits seeking outrageous monetary judgments.

Last summer, two New York men, Ed Parenteau, 54, and Jeffrey Burfeindt, 48, pleaded guilty in federal court to attaching fraudulent liens against personal and public property, totaling \$135 billion. The motive, according to court records: The pair was "displeased" after local police arrested them on simple trespassing charges.

This week, David Stone, 47, and his son, Joshua Stone, 23, both members of the Hutaree militia, pleaded guilty in a Michigan federal court to possessing illegal machine guns, after a judge dismissed more serious charges that they and other militia members had plotted to attack federal government officials.

The danger ahead

In wake of his son's murder, Paudert, the former West Memphis police chief, is now assisting the Justice Department in a national campaign to prepare law enforcement officials for potential violent encounters with sovereign followers.

Had such information been available in 2010, Paudert said his officers might have recognized the looming danger when avowed sovereign Jerry Kane and his son, Joe, presented them with unusual paperwork indicating the vehicle was registered to the "Kingdom of Heaven."

Minutes later, the Kanes opened fire on the officers and sped away, leaving young Paudert's body on a freeway exit ramp and Evans in a nearby ditch. The Kanes were later killed in a confrontation with police.

"I wish I could have done more to prepare them for what they faced that day," Paudert said.

[Hey, Republicans, I believe these are your guys. This is what your leadership leads to. And you're afraid to arrest them? Whatever happened to "Law and Order"? More BS? -SteveB]

20120330-01 02:04 SteveG Fw: 50's Car Test

I got 94% - let me know how you do!

50's Car Test

Alright you young & older whipper-snappers, let's see how you do. Be honest & no cheating.

The average score is 73%. This will really rattle the cobwebs in the 'old brain.

"Car Show Game - 1950s", AmericanTorque.com — <http://www.americantorque.com/game/car-show-50s/>.

20120330-02 03:03 SteveB Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveG, above)

75%, pr*ck. I couldn't get those Chrysler products.

Hey, Mark, Ben, Gary F, Bill, how'd you guys do?

20120330-07 09:25 SteveG Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveB, above)

Edsel was a little tough too.

[20120330-08](#) 09:30 SteveB Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveG, above)

I sure wish I owned an Edsel. Even though it was an awful car. Worth, now, maybe...well...more than they cost then.

Actually, I'd be happy just to have my '48 Plymouth or my '60 Corvair back.

[20120330-13](#) 13:48 SteveG Re: 50's Car Test (reply to SteveB, above)

The Corvair got you run out of Terre Haute. Back seat of the Plymouth was nice

[20120331-01](#) 06:53 MarthaH More Hoosier Humor

Only Hoosiers truly understand the humor.

The year is 2036 and the United States has just elected the first woman as President of the United States.

A few days after the election, the president-elect calls her father in Indiana and asks, "So, Dad, I assume you will be coming to my inauguration?"

"I don't think so. It's a long drive; your mom isn't as young as she used to be, we'll have the dog with us, and my arthritis is acting up in my knee."

"Don't worry about it, Dad, I'll send Air Force One or another support aircraft to pick you up and take you home, and a limousine will pick you up at your door," she says.

"I don't know. Everybody will be so fancy. What would your mother wear?"

"Oh, Dad," she replies, "I'll make sure she has a wonderful gown custom-made by one of the best designers in New York."

"Honey," Dad complains, "You know we can't eat those rich foods you and your friends like to eat."

The President-elect responds, "Don't worry, Dad. The entire affair is going to be handled by the best caterer in D.C. and I'll ensure your meals are salt-free. Dad, I really want you to come."

So her parents reluctantly agree, and on January 20, 2037, arrive to see their daughter sworn in as President of the United States. The parents of the new President are seated in the front row.

The President's dad notices a Senator sitting next to him and leans over and whispers, "You see that woman over there with her hand on the Bible, becoming President of the United States?"

The Senator whispers in reply, smiling broadly, "Yes, sir, I certainly do!"

Dad says proudly, "Her brother played basketball at Purdue."

[20120331-02](#) 08:50 SteveB Re: More Hoosier Humor (reply to MarthaH, above)

Shame on you, Martha, but that is so true.

Now, my Mom was an incredible woman, but she was a little like that, in a slightly different Hoosier way. I could come home from, say, college: "Mom, I'm doing so well, I'm first in my class, but my girlfriend's pregnant, so I'm going to drop out of school, get married, and work in a steel mill."

"That's nice, Dear. Did I tell you who I ran into downtown at the Royal Café? Your fourth cousin Willy from Cloverdale! Why, I bet I hadn't seen him for a month! And he said... So I told him... Blah...blah...blah..." for 15 minutes.

"Mmmmmmmmm...!"

"Now, what was it you were saying, my Son?"

Ya know?

20120331-04 11:07 SandyI Re: More Hoosier Humor (reply to MarthaH & SteveB, above)

Yep, that's a true picture.

Don' spend your precious time asking, "Why isn't the world a better place?" It will only be time wasted. The question to ask is: "How can I make it better?". To that there is an answer.

—Leo Buscaglia

20120331-03 09:02 MarthaH Fw: And Health Care Doesn't Need Fixing?

Methinks the politicians don't listen very well either! Below is an email I received from the mother of a gravely ill ALS patient with their plight of yesterday. It makes a hangnail seem soooooo minute:

I got up around two. Megan picked us up at 5:20. Got to Miami at 7:15. R--- was prepped and dressed in the lovely gown and stuck in a freezing room until 10. As they were wheeling her to surgery, they talked about putting her under. She freaked out and I had to explain the reason we were sent here was to have a local. She was wheeled to another cold room until 1:30. Mind you she has had nothing to eat or drink since 7 last night, she is freezing in a hospital gown and they have scared her to death. She goes through the surgery fine. We are supposed to spend the night for observation since we are so far away. They tell us to go home. So we had to call Megan to pick us up at 5:30 this evening. No pain pills, no food to use in the tube, no nothing. Arrive home around 7:30 after terrible rush hour traffic. R--- is in terrible pain and starving. Why in the hell go through all of that if they are not going to give her the food for the tube.

The plan had been 9 a.m./local anesthetic as general would put her on the vent until she [she's 39 and her dad and 8 other family members have died with ALS] dies, and she can't talk and be understood as the ALS struck her there...spend the night to check on the tube and the nourishment before sending her to the Keys, a 2-hour drive IF there was an issue. And health care doesn't need fixing???? MY BP is going to be up all day over this--guess I will get more done!

MY PARENTS HAD ME TWENTY YEARS TOO LATE so I have to put up with THIS...

SteveB, I will get around to a book list one of these days. Right now life intervenes...

20120331-06 21:23 Jim Video: Flower Opening Miracles

You don't have to be a biologist to appreciate these. These are beautiful, turn on your speakers.

Each flower is filmed for two days, then the photos are collated to get this effect:

This morning I read a review in the *TLS* of a book by a British conservative named Roger Scruton (sounds to me like a "Monty Python" moniker), whose latest work deals with ecology and the environment from a conservative perspective. I saw the word "conservative" and thought, Why not? I always like to know what the "other side" is up to, and this Brit seems to be a pretty big deal across the pond. Scruton makes the case that the real environmentalists are, in fact, conservatives, not liberals, and I find his arguments compelling. (Edmund Burke (18th c.) is, most agree, the father of British conservatism. He opposed the French Revolution not because of its reformist agenda but for its excesses and wanted needed reform to be undertaken gradually and with sufficient forethought. I don't agree with everything Burke said, but he was a justly important figure in the Enlightenment. Scruton is one of his philosophical descendants.) Conservatives favor "an approach to environmental problems in which local affections are made central ... and in which homeostasis and resilience, rather than social reordering and central control" are primary. I can buy that.

His criticism of liberals, like Al Gore, is that their solutions are wildly idealistic, unreasonably global, and utopian in vision. Liberals want instant change, imposed if necessary, with a naive disregard for human motivation in the real world. Scruton says that "liberalism" is an "existential" or "psychological" description of a "temperament" manifested by "those who need to belong to a 'movement' with a 'world-transforming' goal." If this is a common understanding of liberalism, no wonder avowed conservatives are wary.

Scruton argues for an environmentalism grounded in "oikophilia," from the Greek work for "household."

The ancient Greek household included family members, slaves, relatives, anyone who lived under the aegis of what the Romans called the "paterfamilias." "Oikophilia" refers, according to Scruton, to "a 'family of motives' at whose centre is love of one's home." It is a limited sympathy with those whose lives touch immediately upon our own and does not extend much beyond that. We "honour" our ancestors, who bequeathed the oikos to us, and we are mindful of the descendants who will follow us--an essentially Confucian attitude that, in fact, presupposes a cosmic unity with nature that is grounded in place, not in abstractions. Abstractions lead to single-issue advocacy, which all too often mistakes the mouse for the mountain. Scruton cites the example of activists who sought to preserve an endangered small fish at the expense of alternative responses to nature that would have benefited other plants and animals, as well as human beings.

(Digression: this reminds me of the Republican disavowal of the health care mandate that they supported not so long ago. The Supreme Court will probably rule that mandated private health insurance is unconstitutional and coercive, forcing people to take an action against their interests--encroaching on their freedom, in other words. Ironically, a universal, single-payer system would force nothing on anyone, thus preserving individual freedom. Republicans are getting smacked by the swinging door both coming and going, and they apparently don't even realize it.)

I believe we are embracing the idea of "oikos." The "eat local" and "slow food" movements, the prevalence of organic produce in even big chain supermarkets, the proliferation of community gardens at schools, on public land outside government buildings, and on apartment-block rooftops are all evidence of "oikos". You don't have to be a conservative or a liberal to enjoy a delicious meal of grass-fed beef, freshly picked vegetables, and warm-from-the-oven homemade bread. Converts to good, healthy food don't need convincing, and they don't need to be persuaded that their actions are beneficial to the whole world and all its creatures. People tend to do what is natural, relatively easy, and rewarding. Jamie Oliver is doing more good for the world than anything the international conferences on global warming have managed to do.

I have come to believe that size matters, but it involves a paradox. Huge oil companies exploit the earth's resources so that millions of people can be productive and live comfortably. Agribusiness creates efficient monocultures that feed masses of hungry kids on ersatz chicken and cheap starch. The McDonald's model is popular because it is easy, cheap, and universal, not because it's the best place to eat in town. Support a population on mass-produced food and eliminate hunger, or stay small and go for the gold that only the rich can

afford? Community gardens, farm markets, and CSAs are one solution. Increased food independence is a goal for more and more families. It's time we found ways to achieve energy independence, not just for the nation but for the individual family or community unit. Indigenous energy--a possibility? Let West Virginians burn coal, let Arizonans build solar panels, let Mainers harness wind power. Make it efficient and affordable for every household to produce enough energy to be self-sustaining. There is a hotel in my city that does this already. There is a solar array on the roof, the elevators use their own power to operate, everything is recyclable, and its marvelous restaurant serves locally produced food. I've noticed that both conservatives and liberals eat there.

[20120401-01](#) 10:47 Art Re: Why Labels Can Be Misleading (reply to Pam, above)

Hi Pam, Hmmmmmm. This seems a bit long on theory but maybe short on substance. Of course, I have a feeling being a conservative in The United Kingdom may well be far different from being a conservative in the United States. He may have a point that liberals look for the grand solution, where as conservatives stick closed to home but the problem these days is that we are our brother's keepers. Air pollution in West Virginia threatens my health and well being in Virginia.. Polluting the oceans in Mexico may well threaten fisheries in the United States and so on. So what one group does today may impact many others.

That is I think one of the fundamental differences between those who call themselves conservatives and those who call themselves liberals. Fossil fuel production of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere and the impact on global warming is a worldwide issue caused fundamentally by the fact that there are 7 billion humans on this planet, all wanting to live the good life. Any solutions are going to take governmental effort at the national and international level, and that very thought is an anathema to conservatives who despise big government. The response in this country has been for conservatives to deny the global warming problem. Trouble is, that won't make it go away. I think that conservatives can be ecologically conscios but there are limits to that approach, and that is the problem. Driving your HUMVEE to the local Fresh Foods store to buy free range chicken may not be enough.

Just a thought.

[20120401-02](#) 14:13 Pam Re: Why Labels Can Be Misleading (reply to Pam, above)

Once again you show me the error of my wayward thinking. Of course I realize we will have to have the national and international will to pull ourselves back from the brink. I was undoubtedly conflating two arguments: ecological rescue and the fluidity of categories. I don't see how anyone can deny the climate problem unless they are willfully putting themselves in a state of denial. What's her name Duggar, the one with all the kids, says she doesn't believe there's such a thing as a problem with overpopulation, so she's going to go on having more babies. Cripes. I read that if the earth was home to 10 m. people, we would be able to sustain ourselves. We're a long way from that. My point is, we have to come up with a scheme that will bring people on board, not because it is the "right" thing to do--only a minority will do that--but because it's the easy, affordable thing to do. That's where government intervention comes in. I don't think there's anything sacred about big govt. or small govt. The issue is, what works best in particular circumstances. Our government makes it worthwhile for oil companies and corn growers and processors to flourish, but it could just as easily decide to support solar power and spinach. Big money rules, as always. I wish I knew what to do about that problem.

What's in a definition? I agree that British and American conservatives (small "c") are not the same, but I imagine they would both say that "government is best which governs least." Up to a point, I can agree with that. Up to a point. Things that have to do with our food supply, water, medical care, security of all kinds, and education all require a certain amount of government participation and/or oversight. Other matters, like what to do in the privacy of your own home, where to go to church or not, what you say or write (stopping short of slander or libel), whom you associate with, should be strictly hands off so far as government is concerned. If we break these issues down and consider them one by one, I would be surprised to see much difference between conservatives and liberals. Everyone wants clean water. Everyone wants an effective, uncorrupt police force and military. Everyone wants to know that when they take a pill it's going to do what it claims and do it safely. Where I see conservatives and liberals diverging the most is regarding religion and sex, including marriage law. Conservatives squawk when their "rights" are ostensibly threatened, increasingly see law as grounded in morality/Christianity, and, keeping to

type, want to impose the missionary position on everyone over 18 and married. All others step to the back of the line. About these matters government should permit the greatest latitude.

I'm trying to figure out a way to talk to conservatives, figuring that if I can do it, there might be a chance that others could too, and I'd like to see the same effort coming from conservatives instead of all the name-calling and deliberate lying. Let's call each other out when we get our facts wrong, but let us at least be honest about what the facts are. If it's a fact, it's not up for debate, whatever your wishes might be. If we disagree about policy, let's discuss our differences rationally, not simply assume our opponent has nothing to bring to the table. In the best of all possible worlds, conservatives and liberals would be in the same camp, both wanting the good and differing only about how to achieve it. What is the good? Hemingway said it's whatever you feel good after. Not bad for a starting point, unless you're a psychopath.

20120331-05	16:58	Tom	Video: What Really Goes On in the Forest at Night
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<http://m.wimp.com/forestnight/>

[<http://www.wimp.com> is a great site, Tom. I love their random video feature. Something good almost always comes up. Like:

<http://www.wimp.com/gomachine/>

<http://www.wimp.com/gearheart/>

<http://www.wimp.com/wigglyworld/>

<http://www.wimp.com/handdancing/>

—SteveB]

20120401-03	18:05	SteveB	"Pink Slime Economics"
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More worthless lying slime from Paul Ryan...

"Pink Slime Economics" by Paul Krugman, *New York Times*

Apr. 1, 2012, (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/opinion/krugman-pink-slime-economics.html?_r=1)

The big bad event of last week was, of course, the Supreme Court hearing on health reform. In the course of that hearing it became clear that several of the justices, and possibly a majority, are political creatures pure and simple, willing to embrace any argument, no matter how absurd, that serves the interests of Team Republican.

But we should not allow events in the court to completely overshadow another, almost equally disturbing spectacle. For on Thursday Republicans in the House of Representatives passed what was surely the most fraudulent budget in American history.

And when I say fraudulent, I mean just that. The trouble with the budget devised by Paul Ryan, the chairman of the House Budget Committee, isn't just its almost inconceivably cruel priorities, the way it slashes taxes for corporations and the rich while drastically cutting food and medical aid to the needy. Even aside from all that, the Ryan budget purports to reduce the deficit — but the alleged deficit reduction depends on the completely unsupported assertion that trillions of dollars in revenue can be found by closing tax loopholes.

And we're talking about a lot of loophole-closing. As Howard Gleckman of the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center points out, to make his numbers work Mr. Ryan would, by 2022, have to close enough loopholes to yield an extra \$700 billion in revenue every year. That's a lot of money, even in an economy as big as ours. So which specific loopholes has Mr. Ryan, who issued a 98-page manifesto on behalf of his budget, said he would close?

None. Not one. He has, however, categorically ruled out any move to close the major loophole that benefits the rich, namely the ultra-low tax rates on income from capital. (That's the loophole that lets Mitt Romney pay only 14 percent of his income in taxes, a lower tax rate than that faced by many middle-class families.)

So what are we to make of this proposal? Mr. Gleckman calls it a "mystery meat budget," but he's being unfair to mystery meat. The truth is that the filler modern food manufacturers add to their products may be disgusting — think pink slime — but it nonetheless has nutritional value. Mr. Ryan's empty promises don't. You should think of those promises, instead, as a kind of throwback to the 19th century, when unregulated corporations bulked out their bread with plaster of paris and flavored their beer with sulfuric acid.

Come to think of it, that's precisely the policy era Mr. Ryan and his colleagues are trying to bring back.

So the Ryan budget is a fraud; Mr. Ryan talks loudly about the evils of debt and deficits, but his plan would actually make the deficit bigger even as it inflicted huge pain in the name of deficit reduction. But is his budget really the most fraudulent in American history? Yes, it is.

To be sure, we've had irresponsible and/or deceptive budgets in the past. Ronald Reagan's budgets relied on voodoo, on the claim that cutting taxes on the rich would somehow lead to an explosion of economic growth. George W. Bush's budget officials liked to play bait and switch, low-balling the cost of tax cuts by pretending that they were only temporary, then demanding that they be made permanent. But has any major political figure ever premised his entire fiscal platform not just on totally implausible spending projections but on claims that he has a secret plan to raise trillions of dollars in revenue, a plan that he refuses to share with the public?

What's going on here? The answer, presumably, is that this is what happens when extremists gain complete control of a party's discourse: all the rules get thrown out the window. Indeed, the hard right's grip on the G.O.P. is now so strong that the party is sticking with Mr. Ryan even though it's paying a significant political price for his assault on Medicare.

Now, the House Republican budget isn't about to become law as long as President Obama is sitting in the White House. But it has been endorsed by Mr. Romney. And even if Mr. Obama is reelected, the fraudulence of this budget has important implications for future political negotiations.

Bear in mind that the Obama administration spent much of 2011 trying to negotiate a so-called Grand Bargain with Republicans, a bipartisan plan for deficit reduction over the long term. Those negotiations ended up breaking down, and a minor journalistic industry has emerged as reporters try to figure out how the breakdown occurred and who was responsible.

But what we learn from the latest Republican budget is that the whole pursuit of a Grand Bargain was a waste of time and political capital. For a lasting budget deal can only work if both parties can be counted on to be both responsible and honest — and House Republicans have just demonstrated, as clearly as anyone could wish, that they are neither.

20120401-04	23:35	Charis	"Living Under Dictatorship Taught Me About Democracy"
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The treasure of democracy...

"Living Under Dictatorship Taught Me About Democracy" by Charis Barks, Bolivia Bella

Mar. 31, 2012, (<http://www.facebook.com/notes/charis-barks/living-under-dictatorship-taught-me-about-democracy/10150634108022984>)

I wrote my college grad paper on Nobel Peace Prize nominee Domitila Barrios de Chungara, and the appalling living conditions in Bolivia's mining communities. When I was 11 years old and living in La Paz in 1978, she initiated the protests that ended Bolivia's last military dictatorship.

I still remember the shooting, nighttime helicopter flyovers, 9 p.m. curfews, militarized zones and soldiers on every street corner, massive food shortages, power outages, water rationing in some neighborhoods and other frightening things that took place over the next few years. Getting up at 4 a.m. to stand in line to buy food was a daily routine at times.

I remember driving all over the city with my dad in search of military trucks to buy flour, sugar, rice and other staples that had been donated by other countries. The military confiscated and sold the goods for outrageous prices from their trucks, which they would park on random street corners.

I remember feeling lucky because my grandfather was a Chaco War veteran and therefore we had the privilege of being allowed to purchase some foods at the military commissary that the general public did not have access to. It was at the commissary that I had my first American Grape Crush soda in a can. At that time, anything imported was a luxury, so for my grandfather to buy me one was a pretty major gift and something to be really thankful for.

I remember the 13,000% inflation rates in 1983 that drove the value of the Bolivian peso down from 12 pesos per dollar to 3,300,000 pesos per dollar. I have a photo of myself holding stacks and stacks of money, about 100 million pesos – equivalent to \$33 dollars. People lost their life savings overnight. You had to check the newspaper each day to see what your money was worth from one day to the next. We used to take suitcases full of cash to the money exchange houses to buy dollars as soon as we could. At that time no one bothered to steal your Bolivian money because it wasn't worth anything, and your dollars were safer under the mattress than in the bank.

I remember the numerous short-lived governments that came and went over the next few years, election after election, and protest after protest as the country attempted to find its democratic footing. Elections were often accompanied by curfews. I remember praying fervently with my mom that my dad would make it home safely one night because he had gone to vote (voting is obligatory in Bolivia) and had not returned by 9:00 p.m.

On the day I flew to the US for college, in June of 1984, I was on the last plane out because the latest president had been kidnapped and all national borders were closed, although I didn't find that out until I saw it on the news when I arrived at the airport in Miami. It took place while I was in flight. My family had stayed behind in La Paz and I was 16 and scared. Back then no one knew where Bolivia was on the map and it rarely ever made the international news - unless it was something really catastrophic.

We had no cell phones, internet or email to keep in touch. Letters took weeks or months to arrive and phone calls cost nearly \$2 a minute. I didn't see my family again for another 3 years. We've become accustomed to everything being so easily accessible and immediate now, that we have little patience or tolerance. We are a society that seeks instant gratification.

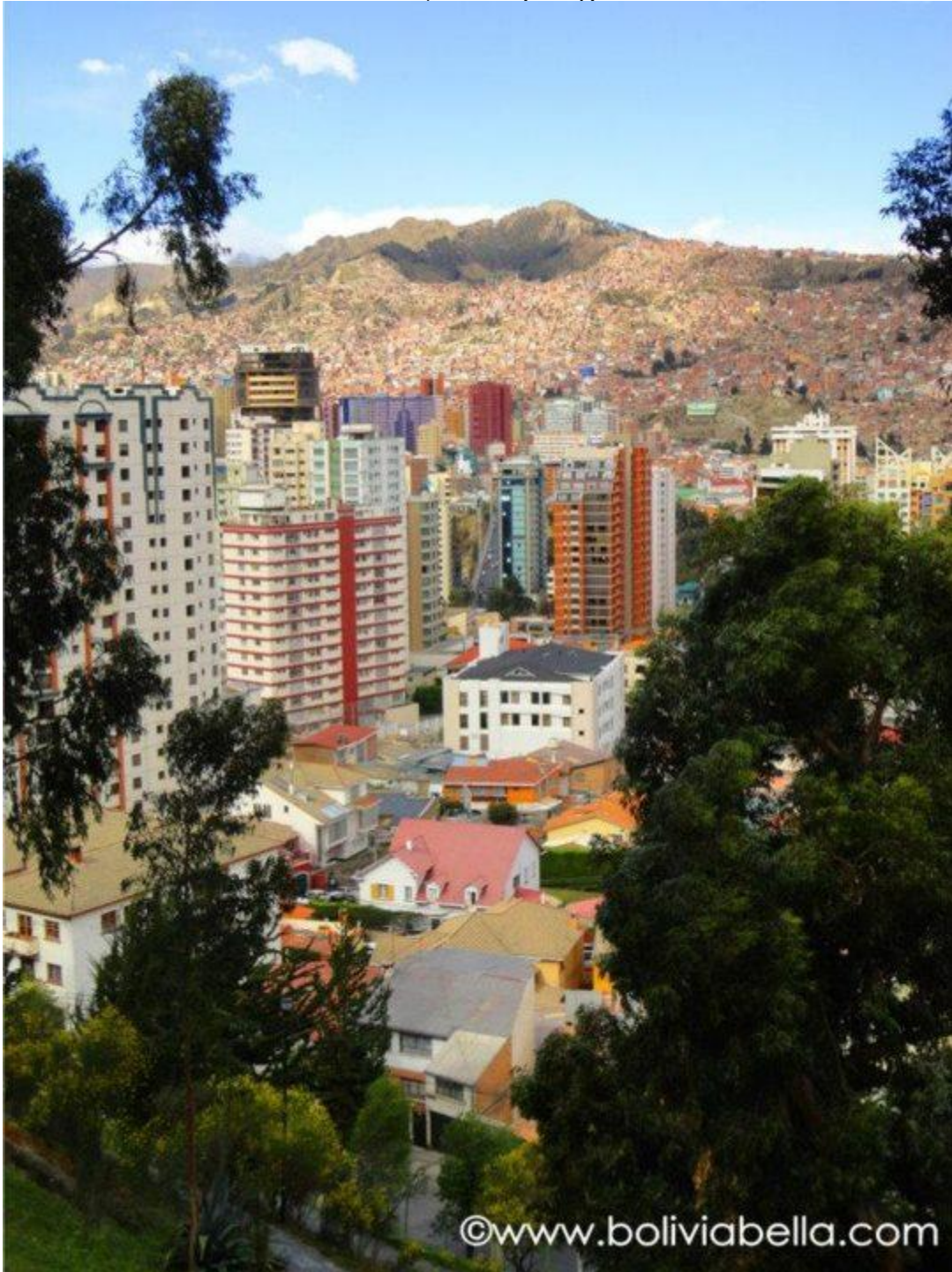
It was a very hard time and many people like Domitila took valiant chances with their lives by speaking out. She was jailed, tortured and exiled and returned to Bolivia in 1982. Finally, by the end of 1984, shortly after I graduated from high school and left La Paz, the country achieved relative stability. Because of her efforts, we have enjoyed democracy for the past 25 years. She died on March 13th, 2012 in Cochabamba.

Domitila Barrios de Chungara was an indigenous woman from the mining communities of Potosí. From the age of 10, she raised her 5 younger siblings on her own. She became a union leader and fought for the rights of all Bolivians to live freely. During and after her exile, she traveled to many countries to share her story. This virtually illiterate woman, a product of extreme poverty, went on to be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize and upon her death two weeks ago, was given the highest national honor a Bolivian citizen can receive, the Condor of the Andes.

As an American I'm paying close attention to our upcoming elections. It worries me to see a nation so disheartened and it causes me to seriously question what our leaders and potential leaders actually stand for. But Domitila's life story, and recent death here in Bolivia, remind me of how important it is to not ever think a single voice cannot make a difference.

I've seen Bolivia go from dictatorship to democracy and I appreciate the freedoms I have today. Because of this, I also recognize when those freedoms are in danger of being curtailed. If you live in a country that allows you to exercise your rights freely, don't take them for granted. Think hard about what is important to you, what you value or do not, what you are truly willing to live with, and live without. Remind your leaders (and those who want to be) that they work for you, not you for them. And don't be complacent. Exercise your right to express yourself, to speak your mind, and to vote even if it's optional. Because if you live in a country where you are still free to do so, someone had to fight for it. Someone had to sacrifice their personal safety, freedom, or life... for you to enjoy what you have. As with anything in life, don't wait until you lose what you have, to decide you want it.

La Paz, Bolivia (today)

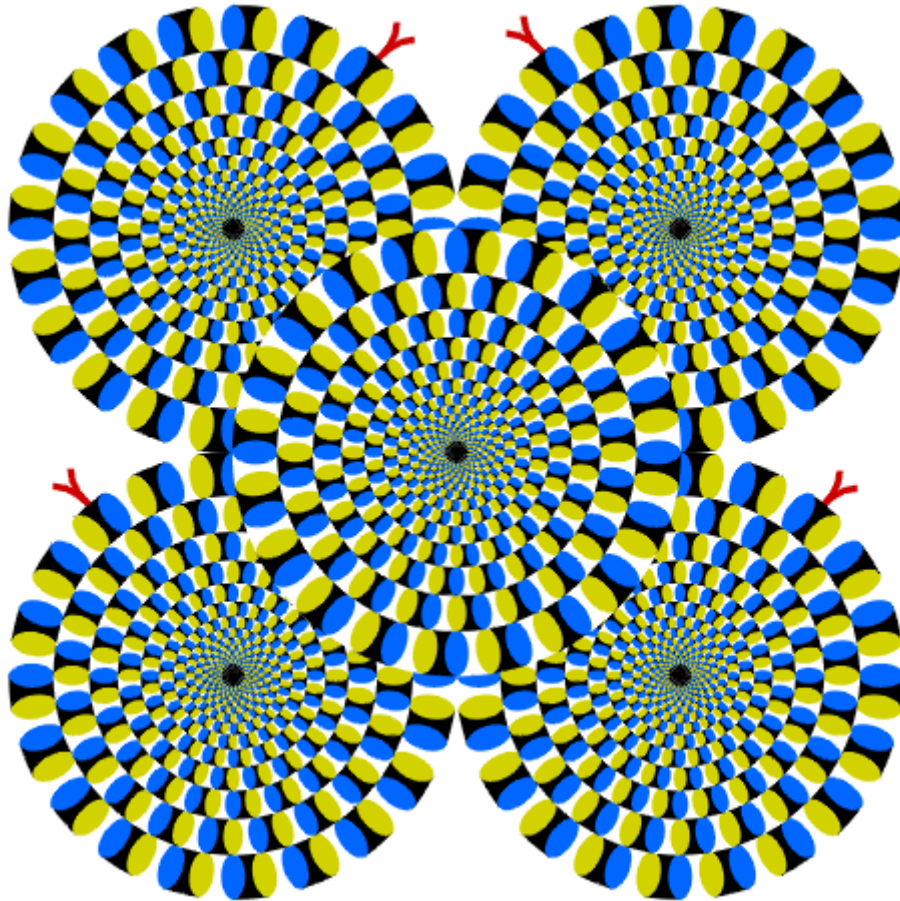


From SteveB (Apr. 1, 2012, 12:59 pm)—Video: Optical Illusion

Stare at one of the 5 wheels. It will appear to be motionless, but the other four will seem as though they are turning. Whichever one you stare at will appear to suddenly stop rotating. Also try staring at any of the white spaces near the spinning wheels. In reality, none of the wheels are turning at all (so, of course it's not a video, after all).

<http://katiec13.wordpress.com/tag/optical-illusion/>

<http://www.maniacworld.com/optical-illusions.html>



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

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