



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #111 — APR. 6, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Mr. Etch-A-Sketch Romney Erased Himself—Oops!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Apr. 6, 2012)

One more thing, Mitt, the Russians are our natural friends and allies. Don't blow it, stupid.

"To Win GOP Nomination, Mitt Romney Erased His Only Credential" by Joe Conason, *The National Memo*

Apr. 5, 2012. (<http://www2.nationalmemo.com/romney-erased-credentials/>)

Mitt Romney raised eyebrows by delivering a speech on Wednesday suggesting that President Obama is an unreliable figure, devoid of principle, program, and purpose. "He wants us to re-elect him," the presumptive GOP nominee practically sneered, "so we can find out what he will actually do." Someone clearly advised him that an audacious attack on Obama's character would please the partisan base, distract voters from his own opportunistic gyrations, and create space for him to draw a new, flattering, resolute portrait of himself.

But as a presidential nominee who spent most of the primary season erasing his own political record, Romney may already have eliminated any positive rationale for his candidacy. After disowning the most important programs and positions he advocated as Massachusetts governor, what can he present as his qualifications for the presidency? Please don't say Bain Capital, because the nation is in no mood to elevate a ruthless private equity mega-millionaire into the Oval Office. And don't say Summer Olympics, because that doesn't sound quite big enough for a would-be leader of the free world.

Adopting the favored cliché of conventional politics, Romney's friends and advisors — even his wife Ann — assure us that he will now pivot toward the broader electorate, returning to positions that once marked him as an acceptably moderate Republican. When everyone learns his true views, we won't have to worry about his pandering to the Tea Party, the religious extremists and the corporate right. But even if he can persuasively distance himself from the far right on such issues as contraception — the surprise controversy that reopened the partisan gender gap — he will not be able to retrieve the gubernatorial record he has discarded.

Romney's obsessive erasure of his own achievements began before the last presidential cycle, while he prepared to enter the 2008 Republican primary. During those years, he notoriously shifted long-held positions on abortion, stem cell research, gay rights, illegal immigration, and other key issues in an effort to outflank John McCain on the right. The makeover went well beyond social issues. Having vowed in 2003 that he would never sign Grover Norquist's anti-tax pledge as governor, he signed the same pledge with a flourish four years later. And having spent millions of taxpayer dollars in the pursuit of alternative energy sources to replace fossil fuels as a hedge against climate

change in 2003, he spun around to denounce such notions in a 2007 press release. His enthusiasm for fossil fuels — and his disdain for “green jobs” — can scarcely be matched today by Sarah “Drill Baby” Palin.

If Romney can convince voters of his newfound right-wing orthodoxy, that won't help him explain why he should be president. Given the partisan gridlock that has confronted the inexperienced Obama, a candidate boasting of success as Republican governor of a Democratic state could arguably offer an alternative. But while Romney often talks about his role in working with legislators of the other party, he can no longer describe what they did without eroding his own party's enthusiasm. Certainly he cannot “pivot” back to the universal health coverage that became his signature accomplishment — a bill that inspired the Obama administration's insurance mandate and required substantial state spending (and taxes) to achieve its worthy objective. Indeed, he hasn't been able to talk about the goal of universal coverage, which is simply unacceptable to the “let 'em die” ideologues of the Tea Party. He can't even brag too loudly about eliminating the state's budget deficit because that too involved increasing taxes — or hiking fees and closing loopholes for the wealthy, viewed with equal contempt in his party.

Reforming health care and balancing budgets frame the entirety of Romney's single term as governor. The final blow to any bipartisan credibility that Romney might still retain came when he endorsed the “marvelous” Ryan budget, a plan that undermines both of those goals while symbolizing the dysfunctional divisiveness of the Republican Congressional majority.

Maybe he should start talking about the Olympics after all. It isn't an impressive credential for the American presidency — but when the summer games begin, at least he won't have to pretend that he never supported them.

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<u>20120405-01</u>	10:18	SteveG	"Frustrated and Desperate, Bankers Form Super PAC"
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"Frustrated and Desperate, Bankers Form Super PAC" by Matt Taylor, *The National Memo*

Apr. 4, 2012, (<http://www2.nationalmemo.com/frustrated-and-desperate-bankers-form-super-pac/>)

Though most of us don't think of bankers as struggling to make their voices heard in Washington, they felt compelled to form a Super PAC last September to launch "surgical" strikes on enemies and reward friends who look out for their interests.

"Congress isn't afraid of bankers," Roger Beverage, the president and CEO of the Oklahoma Bankers Association, told American Banker. "They don't think we'll do anything to kick them out of office. We are trying to change that perception."

Apparently the no-strings-attached bailout of America's major financial institution, a decade of lax regulation, and tepid attempts at reigning in their most abusive practices in the wake of the economic collapse is just too much for these folks to handle. They're being bullied, and they won't have it.

"Clearly there are Members of Congress who have absolutely no reservations about kicking traditional banks in the teeth, and we are tired of it," said Howard Headlee, the president and chief executive officer of the Utah Bankers Association. "We've got to be able to defend the folks who have the courage to stand up for us as well."

He has a point about courage. With polls showing banks (and the people who run them) not exactly beloved in America, it takes a certain amount of chutzpah to trumpet the cause. And complaining that key members of Congress aren't listening closely enough won't make these guys any more popular.

The big question going forward is who gets targeted most aggressively. Elizabeth Warren, the populist consumer champion basing her Massachusetts Senate campaign on lingering resentment against Wall Street banks, is a good bet.

20120405-02	10:25	SteveG	Fw: Credo Action Petition: Fight Against Voter Suppression
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from Credo Action:

For years, the right wing has been trying to stop people of color, young people, and seniors from voting in order to help Republicans get elected — and now some of America's biggest companies are helping them do it.

These companies have helped pass discriminatory voter ID legislation by funding a rightwing policy group called the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). Voter ID bills linked to ALEC have already passed in seven states, and similar voter ID bills have been introduced in 27 other states.

That's why we're joining our friends at Color of Change and calling on "ALEC corporations" to remove their support of this rightwing organization.

Tell these companies to stop funding ALEC and its attempt to disenfranchise millions of voters.

<http://act.credoaction.com/r/?r=5545775&id=37830-3891339-M6CL9Cx&t=10>

And momentum is on our side. Coca-Cola, an ALEC Corporation, announced yesterday that it will no longer support ALEC because of its support for discriminatory policies like voter ID bills.

Supporters of discriminatory voter ID laws claim they want to reduce voter fraud (individuals voting illegally, or voting twice). But such fraud almost never actually occurs, and never in amounts large enough to affect the result of elections. What is clear is that voter ID laws prevent large numbers of eligible voters from casting a ballot, and could disenfranchise up to 5 million people.

ALEC's voter ID laws are undemocratic, unjust and part of a longstanding right wing agenda to weaken the voting blocs that historically oppose Republican candidates. We have to expose the major companies who are helping ALEC suppress the votes of millions of Americans before it's too late.

Tell these companies to stop funding ALEC and its attempts to disenfranchise millions of voters.

The truth is that voter ID laws are discriminatory — African Americans, Latinos, seniors, students, and the poor are all less likely to have the photo IDs necessary to vote under these laws. For example, if you've recently moved because of foreclosure or some other economic circumstance, you're more likely to have an address that is not your current residence on your license. If you don't have a car, you're less likely to have a driver's license in the first place.

In many states, it can be expensive and time consuming to secure the proper ID. Even when the ID itself is free, it often requires supporting documents like a birth certificate which cost money to achieve. There are already stories of voters who have been eligible to vote for years who are now struggling to navigate a frustrating bureaucratic maze in order to vote.

Requiring ID to vote amounts to a modern day poll tax. And that's the real purpose of voter ID laws — they are an important part of the modern effort to suppress the votes of groups that usually vote against rightwing politicians.

Some of the companies supporting ALEC may simply be unaware that the group is involved in voter suppression. Others might think that voter suppression will benefit their political interests, and hope that they can get away with supporting it because so few people have even heard of ALEC.

Our friends at Color of Change have already started reaching out to these companies to make sure they know what they're supporting, and to demand that they stop. Adding your voice to this campaign will help us convince these companies that continuing to support ALEC will hurt their reputation with consumers.

We hope that many of them will simply do the right thing and stop supporting ALEC. If they don't, we'll be prepared to shine a spotlight on them and make sure the world understands what they're involved in.

Tell these companies to stop funding ALEC and its attempt to disenfranchise millions of voters.

Thank you for standing up against voter suppression.

Becky Bond, Political Director, CREDO Action from Working Assets

[20120405-03](#)

10:50

Pam

Re: Powerful Speech on Climate Change (reply to Dennis, FotM Newsletter #109)

The young lady is brave, smart, and absolutely correct. My guess is the vast majority of Americans (or anyone) who listened to her speech would be engaged and inspired. Certainly the vast majority of scientists would concur with her remarks. Will her speech affect policy? I very much doubt it. We can be inspired all we want, but until "the people" take it upon themselves to exert irresistible pressure on the higher-ups, five years will pass, and we will have passed the point of no return. I do not believe masses of people will go down without a fight. The deposed president of the Maldives is begging the international community to address climate change or else his nation will disappear beneath the waves. As the earth heats up, and water supplies shrink, oil will be the least of our worries. We're already used to paying a dollar or more for a bottle of the stuff. As the super-wealthy everywhere retreat further and further into their gated communities and privileged access to the earth's limited resources, they risk plunging the rest of the world population into barbarism, and it won't be long before the barbarians are at the gates.

I feel like that young woman: passionate and committed. But I know she does more in a week to address climate change than I have in a lifetime. It is her generation that will save us, and we should listen carefully to what they have to say. The only thing that keeps me from utter despair is belief in the smart young people who know no other world than an endangered one. Our generation was focused on space; theirs will be focused on something much closer. Our generation (the '60s--in both senses, time and age) was idealistic. Idealism belongs to the young; they don't yet know just how f---d up the world actually is and haven't given up. They have energy, and they have less to lose than a retiree on a fixed income. I spent my career working with young adults. To be sure, there were plenty of dunderheads among them. But even at my mid-size, mid-level university there were brilliant,

ambitious, highly moral kids who were ready to take on any challenge. One of my students started a campus organization to "Save Darfur." It was very effective in making people aware of the crisis and raising money to help alleviate it. I was fortunate to end my career teaching Honors students, who are admittedly in a special category, but I know there are enough like them to make a difference. I'm going to trust them and hope for the best.

[20120405-04](#) 10:53 Pam Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #101)

Obama better spell all this out for the public when he campaigns. I'm tired of slogans about hope and change and American values and "real" conservatism. I want to hear the Democrats spell out exactly why the Republicans are wrong and exactly what it is they're trying to do. Why isn't this sort of information all over the mainstream news?

[20120405-07](#) 11:14 Art Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare (reply to Pam, above)

I think part of the problem is that some of us, me for one, think the eligibility age for Medicare and Social Security should be gradually raised. Those age limits were set some time ago when life expectancy was much shorter and people were not nearly as healthy as they are today. "50 is the new 30, 60 is the new 40"??? As near as my personal experience can tell "70 is still 70" but that's another story.

I think the President knows this and knows that any path to get out of the deficit bind leads to an increase in the age eligibility levels for Medicare and Social Security, so best to not get to holier than thou on this particular subject. What I do resent is the Republican's obvious duplicity in carefully trying to hide that fact in their goofy budget plan. What is even more egregious is the tax breaks for the rich, which eat up any deficit reduction opportunities, then the weak (and probably dishonest) claim that they will make this up but eliminating tax loopholes. But, when asked what loopholes, they suddenly can't name any just now. It's the same crap with Bonehead back before the 2010 election when he claimed he would reduce spending by \$100B in the budget but, when asked where he would cut, refused to provide any details. In other words, he never really had a plan. Do all of these guys think we are all that stupid?

[20120405-08](#) 11:28 Pam Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to Art, above)

Yeah, they do think we're that stupid. Romney keeps saying that Obama has been a disaster for the economy (he saved us from a Great Depression and a complete meltdown of the financial system, whether or not you admire what Wall St. did) and that he, Romney, knows how to fix it. And.... That's it. He "knows how." If he knows so much, why doesn't he let the rest of us in on it? If he has ideas, let us hear them. "I know what it's like to run a company," is not a reason to be President.

I agree, Art, that the age for retirement and SS should be raised, though I'm grateful as all get out that I was able to retire at 62, thanks to my sweet husband. I also agree that 60 is the new 40, but I beg to differ about 70 still being 70. Now that that milestone looms closer and closer (are you 70, Art?), I think of 70 as only the VERY early stages of getting old. I think it was V.S. Pritchett who said that one nice thing about getting older was that so many more women were attractive to you. Twenty-five year olds have pretty limited choices generally, when you come to think about it. But a 60 year old man can have his pick if he plays his cards right. Besides, that picture of you on the slopes doesn't look like a 70 year old to me.

[20120405-13](#) 12:08 SteveB Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to Pam & Art, above)

Well...before we start lowering the age...let's remember:

Social Security is actually pretty solid. It only needs modest changes and Congress to stop raiding it to be fine for quite some time, based on what I've been reading (see FotM Newsletter #108, ref: Myths Conservatives Tell Each Other):

Beyond the fact that we're 'entitled' to Social Security and Medicare because we pay for them[!!!!], these two government-run programs have been largely self-sustaining while supporting the needs of millions of Americans.

Medicare is much less costly than private health care. Social Security, which functions with a surplus, would not be in danger of a long-term shortfall if the richest 10% (those making over the \$106,800 cutoff) paid their full share.

Medicare...well...the whole system needs fixing, right? Let President Obama do that. I mean, please allow him to do that, my Republican friends. Let him use his gigantic brain and the resources available to him to craft his historical legacy, a working, reasonable health care system that includes ALL Americans and legal immigrants. No one else. Period. All others pay top dollar.

We only need to Democratize Congress by electing Democrats (oh, and re-elect President Obama), then let the Supreme Court strike down Obamacare, which I'm afraid is going to happen, then let the big, dark guy have at it. I think he would do as good a job as can be done. I believe he is a smart, just, fair man. That's what this problem needs. Not the ignoramuses on the Right side of the SCOTUS.

Then let's get to work on this damned energy crap. Get 'er done! Private enterprise can never solve a problem like this alone. Correct government action is essential. Any other view is idiotic. Excuse me.

See how simply everything is when you make it sound simple? What...? But, seriously...there is much at stake, is there not?

20120405-14 12:18 SteveB Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to all, above)

There have been no gains at all in life expectancy since the last eligibility ages were put into effect...when...a few years ago?

In fact, with what we eat, what lazy pigs we are, global warming, GMOs, increasing pollution and background radiation levels, and our rapidly declining health care system, isn't life expectancy about due to decrease?

I'm in favor of calling the Republicans' bluff, digging our heels in, and saying, "Read my lips. No more conservatism! It nearly killed us!"

I'm not in favor of increasing the retirement age any more than I am in favor of reducing the minimum wage. And if the silver-haired block can't win this one, all is lost.

From the SS website (<http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice/IncRetAge.html>)

- The 1983 Amendments phased in a gradual increase in the age for collecting full Social Security retirement benefits. The retirement age will increase from 65 to 67 over a 22-year period, with an 11-year hiatus at which the retirement age will remain at 66.
- The original Social Security Act of 1935 set the minimum age for receiving full retirement benefits at 65.
- Congress cited improvements in the health of older people and increases in average life expectancy as primary reasons for increasing the normal retirement age.
- Since the program first began paying monthly Social Security benefits in 1940 the average life expectancy for men reaching age 65 has increased nearly 4 years to age 81; for women reaching age 65, their average life expectancy has increased nearly 6 years to age 84.
- The average age for men retiring in 1998 was 64. The average age for women retiring in 1998 was 64. In 1998, nearly 69% of men and women retired and started taking Social Security benefits before age 65.

[20120405-15](#) 13:07 Pam Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to SteveB, above)

I'd be willing to compromise at, say, 66, but I guess that's where the retirement age already is, at least for people my age. I've been retired for three years, and I can't imagine still working today. People should go out while they're still ahead, before they inevitably decline. Ten years ago I was an energetic, enthusiastic teacher. The last couple of years, I'd lost my oomph. It was time to go. We should also move over and give the young ones a chance. It's very hard to find a job as a college professor. If more of the older ones would retire, there would be room for the next generation, or at least more room.

[20120405-17](#) 13:33 Art Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to Pam & SteveB, above)

<u>Year of birth</u>	<u>Normal retirement age</u>
1937 and prior	65
1938	65 and 2 months
1939	65 and 4 months
1940	65 and 6 months
1941	65 and 8 months
1942	65 and 10 months
1943 to 1954	66
1955	66 and 2 months
1956	66 and 4 months
1957	66 and 6 months
1958	66 and 8 months
1959	66 and 10 months
1960 and later	67

[This represents the phasing in of the 1983 changes. Prior to that, it was 65 period. –SteveB]

Well, I'm probably outnumbered here but I think the age for retirement was 65 in 1937 and went up to 67 in 1970, so not a lot of change for the 75 years it's been around. To get out of the deficit mess, we will have to address social security and medicare/medicaid. I'll leave it at that.

[20120405-18](#) 13:46 SteveB Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to Art & Pam, above)

But social security contributes not one penny to the deficit, so how bad can it be, even if it might contribute in the distant future, only because the Congress forgot the "insurance" part of Social Security. It's all a guess and a crap shoot based on economic forecasts...much worse than weather forecasts, especially when you get out a few years.

And, actually, the Social Security retirement age went up recently. I don't think you can retire at 62 any longer, or not for much longer. But all the more reason not to raise it again, with life expectancy possibly falling.

And I agree with Pam. If any of you aren't retired and don't absolutely love your job to death, get out, do something different, you'll be happy you did. Life is short.

[20120405-20](#) 14:31 Pam Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to SteveB, above)

I like your last paragraph. Maybe I'm wrong, but I have the feeling that retiring is harder for men than for women. Our work defines us in so many ways, and women, having multiple roles throughout their lives, find it easier to let one of them go. My theory anyway. Maybe it's like jumping into a swimming pool: at first you're reluctant, then you make the leap and it's shocking, and finally you feel comfortable in a new element and don't want to get out.

20120405-25	19:43	SteveB	Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to Pam, above)
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"I'm gonna tell you how it's gonna be!..." (Buddy Holly)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DOE-oGX8BA&feature=relmfu>

Don't fade away. "Rage!" "Courage!"

But I like the idea of the old stepping aside for the young, when they can...though there'd always be a lot of individual considerations there...

Most importantly, as you know and as the song says, "Love will not fade away." It is the one thing that will not. Not necessarily because of any Heaven or Afterlife, but because of what you have an opportunity to leave in the world, in the hearts of those who know you.

20120405-16	13:26	SteveG	Re: The Republican Plan for Medicare/Social Security (reply to all, above)
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In 2009 you could retire at 62, but I waited until I was 63. Good decision, left some money on the table for the next guy.

20120405-05	10:54	Art	Re: The Obligations of American Companies Like Apple (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #110)
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Interesting article on Apple but not sure I agree. Apple is a corporation. It's sole purpose is to make money, period. How it does and where it does it is all secondary to the only real goal, 'to make money'. We need to recognize that and quite fooling ourselves that any corporation has any "obligation" other than that. Once we establish that as a fact (I always hesitate at these absolutes but this is pretty much one) then we can see what we as citizens and humans can do to make sure we don't get run roughshod over. There is a lot we could do with tax structure for overseas production, personal income taxes, which is where so much of the money goes, tax incentives for production in America, etc etc that would address these issues. Of course, that requires governmental actions and that is what separates from our conservative brethren. Hmmm?

20120405-09	11:30	SteveB	Re: The Obligations of American Companies Like Apple (reply to Art, above)
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I agree with you. Corporations are things we invented to produce and make money as efficiently as possible. Like a robot or any common machine. And I think we want this monomaniacal nature of the beasts to continue.

But, just as with seatbelts, nutritional labeling, ingredients in medicines, or even paying modest taxes, corporations have to be dragged out into the public square and horse-whipped to get them to do anything beneficial to anyone but their investors.

Hence, correct action must be made to be beneficial to investors, and hence, your "government actions". So warranted. So necessary.

And, at the same time, we, as consumers, have the power of the marketplace at our disposal, should we care to use it. In the case of a company like Apple, with great products, that becomes a little more sacrificial, especially personally.

BUY AMERICAN! (Whenever humanly possible!) If that's not PC, sorry!

[20120405-06](#) 11:04 SteveB Gomez

The most underrated band in the world. As one of the comments says:

Gomez= 5 amazing songwriters, 3 amazing vocalists, 13 yrs together, great live shows & gorgeous acoustic renditions of any song in their catalog.....they fly just under the radar whilst being true to their art.....GREAT BAND!!!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LvKGt05DOE0&feature=related> ("Whatever's on Your Mind" — live)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOeD6Rqn_y0&feature=related ("How We Operate" — live)

[20120405-22](#) 15:16 Norm Re: Gomez (reply to SteveB, above)

Pretty nice! I heard them somewhere else. Yet I cannot remember where. I would place them with my Blues Traveler. Hoping for setting 'da mood'. :)

[20120405-24](#) 16:01 SteveB Re: Gomez (reply to Norm, above)

Hey, I like Blues Traveler too. And for setting the mood you might like this Gomez cover:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_0bv9ifdhTc&feature=related

Enjoy your listening. Ain't music great?

[20120405-10](#) 11:46 SteveG Fw: Daily Kos Petition: No Feces in My Food, Please!

from Daily Kos:

In an attempt to keep the American people from eating sh*t (literally), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) currently inspects all chicken and turkey carcasses for things like bruises, bile and feces before they are sent to further processing.

However, the UDSA is now considering a pilot program that would eliminate that inspection and allow private poultry processing plants to do whatever they want. The USDA is holding a public commenting period on this proposed change through April 26.

Please, click here to sign our petition opposing the privatization of poultry inspection. We will submit your signatures and comments to the USDA before the April 26 deadline.

http://campaigns.dailykos.com/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=109

Why is the USDA considering this change? To cut government jobs and allow private companies to make millions:

In an article from early March, *Food Safety News* dug up a study [PDF] showing the program is projected to save FSIS up to \$95 million over three years, and to give a \$250 million boost to poultry companies.

And the result of this will be Americans eating shit, literally. When a privatization program like this was tried out in the 1990s, the crap that ended up in the food was gag-worthy:

The inspection category that had the highest error rate was for dressing defects such as feathers, lungs, oil glands, trachea, and bile still on the carcass. The average error rate for this category in the chicken slaughter facilities was 64 percent and 87 percent in turkey slaughter facilities.

Keep fighting, Chris Bowers, Daily Kos

20120405-11	11:48	SteveG	Fw: Consumers Union Petition: Speak-Up for Medical Implant Tracking
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Undeniable!

from Consumers Union:

Last week you showed the nation that consumers want fair, affordable health care, and that you will fight for your new rights. This week, show the lobbyists that you won't stand for their loopholes that make your health care less safe!

We recently asked Americans if medical implants should be tested for safety before they're put into our bodies. The results are undeniable – 91 percent of you want them to be safety tested first.

And 95 percent want implants tracked, so if they go bad or get recalled, Americans who have them can be quickly notified.

But are your leaders listening to what you want? Draft bills just released in Congress to revamp our medical device safety laws do neither. Instead, they keep many of our current safety loopholes, continuing to put us all at risk.

Tell your Senators to listen to the people! Your voice can help shape this law:

<https://secure.consumersunion.org/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=2643&JServSessionIdr004=128nrg1ip1.app244a>

You may not think this issue impacts your life, but think again. Some 47 percent of people Consumer Reports recently polled say a family member or friend has an implant. Yet lap bands, knee and hip replacements, pacemakers and heart stents aren't held to the same safety standards as prescription drugs – and you can stop taking those if there is a problem!

Congress' decision will dictate safety over the next five years as more of these products flood the market. Industry wants the status quo – which includes no pre-market safety testing of most medical devices, and no national registry so patients with implants can be notified if they go bad.

We must change this. The Senate bill is stronger than the House version, but still needs a lot of work. Your Senator sits on the committee shaping it. Industry lobbyists are knocking on their doors every day. We need you to do the same by sending a quick message now.

Send an email – your Senator is working on this bill, and what you say matters!

Numbers also matter in Washington, D.C., which is why it's so important we get as many consumers to weigh in as possible. If you have friends and family in your state who could lend their voice, please forward this to them. Thank you!

Sincerely, Lisa McGiffert, SafePatientProject.org

from The Daily Share:

Here are the three hottest progressive videos and graphics that we found on the web today:

Video: "A Message from Willie Nelson We Can't Afford to Ignore"

<http://front.moveon.org/a-message-from-willie-nelson-we-can%25E2%2580%2599t-afford-to-ignore/?rc=daily.share&id=38698-18997482-WnnF9Jx>.

Graphic: "These Five Guys Bribed Congress and Got \$20 Billion Dollars for It"

<http://front.moveon.org/these-five-guys-bribed-congress-and-got-20-billion-dollars-for-it/?rc=daily.share&id=38698-18997482-WnnF9Jx>.

Graphic: "The Secret That Colonel Sanders Gets But Women Who Vote Republican Don't"

<http://front.moveon.org/the-secret-that-colonel-sanders-gets-but-women-who-vote-republican-dont/?rc=daily.share&id=38698-18997482-WnnF9Jx>.



"The Assault on Public Education" by Noam Chomsky, NationofChange

Apr. 5, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/assault-public-education-1333634007>)

Public education is under attack around the world, and in response, student protests have recently been held in Britain, Canada, Chile, Taiwan and elsewhere.

California is also a battleground. The Los Angeles Times reports on another chapter in the campaign to destroy what had been the greatest public higher education system in the world: "California State University officials announced plans to freeze enrollment next spring at most campuses and to wait-list all applicants the following fall pending the outcome of a proposed tax initiative on the November ballot."

Similar defunding is under way nationwide. "In most states," *The New York Times* reports, "it is now tuition payments, not state appropriations, that cover most of the budget," so that "the era of affordable four-year public universities, heavily subsidized by the state, may be over."

Community colleges increasingly face similar prospects – and the shortfalls extend to grades K-12.

"There has been a shift from the belief that we as a nation benefit from higher education, to a belief that it's the people receiving the education who primarily benefit and so they should foot the bill," concludes Ronald G. Ehrenberg, a trustee of the State University system of New York and director of the Cornell Higher Education Research Institute.

A more accurate description, I think, is *Failure by Design*, the title of a recent study by the Economic Policy Institute, which has long been a major source of reliable information and analysis on the state of the economy.

The EPI study reviews the consequences of the transformation of the economy a generation ago from domestic production to financialization and offshoring. By design; there have always been alternatives.

One primary justification for the design is what Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz called the "religion" that "markets lead to efficient outcomes," which was recently dealt yet another crushing blow by the collapse of the housing bubble that was ignored on doctrinal grounds, triggering the current financial crisis.

Claims are also made about the alleged benefits of the radical expansion of financial institutions since the 1970s. A more convincing description was provided by Martin Wolf, senior economic correspondent for *The Financial Times*: "An out-of-control financial sector is eating out the modern market economy from inside, just as the larva of the spider wasp eats out the host in which it has been laid."

The EPI study observes that the *Failure of Design* is class-based. For the designers, it has been a stunning success, as revealed by the astonishing concentration of wealth in the top 1 percent, in fact the top 0.1 percent, while the majority has been reduced to virtual stagnation or decline.

In short, when they have the opportunity, "the Masters of Mankind" pursue their "vile maxim [**all for ourselves and nothing for other people**]," as Adam Smith explained long ago.

Mass public education is one of the great achievements of American society. It has had many dimensions. One purpose was to prepare independent farmers for life as wage laborers who would tolerate what they regarded as virtual slavery.

The coercive element did not pass without notice. Ralph Waldo Emerson observed that political leaders call for popular education because they fear that "This country is filling up with thousands and millions of voters, and you must educate them to keep them from our throats." But educated the right way: Limit their perspectives and understanding, discourage free and independent thought, and train them for obedience.

The "vile maxim" and its implementation have regularly called forth resistance, which in turn evokes the same fears among the elite. Forty years ago there was deep concern that the population was breaking free of apathy and obedience.

At the liberal internationalist extreme, the Trilateral Commission – the nongovernmental policy group from which the Carter Administration was largely drawn – issued stern warnings in 1975 that there is too much democracy, in part due to the failures of the institutions responsible for "the indoctrination of the young." On the right, an important 1971 memorandum by Lewis Powell, directed to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the main business lobby, wailed that radicals were taking over everything – universities, media, government, etc. – and called on the business community to use its economic power to reverse the attack on our prized way of life – which he knew well. As a lobbyist for the tobacco industry, he was quite familiar with the workings of the nanny state for the rich that he called "the free market."

Since then, many measures have been taken to restore discipline. One is the crusade for privatization – placing control in reliable hands.

Another is sharp increases in tuition, up nearly 600 percent since 1980. These produce a higher education system with “far more economic stratification than is true of any other country,” according to Jane Wellman, former director of the Delta Cost Project, which monitors these issues. Tuition increases trap students into long-term debt and hence subordination to private power.

Justifications are offered on economic grounds, but are singularly unconvincing. In countries rich to poor, including Mexico next-door, tuition remains free or nominal. That was true as well in the United States itself when it was a much poorer country after World War II and huge numbers of students were able to enter college under the GI bill – a factor in uniquely high economic growth, even putting aside the significance in improving lives.

Another device is the corporatization of the universities. That has led to a dramatic increase in layers of administration, often professional instead of drawn from the faculty as before; and to imposition of a business culture of “efficiency” – an ideological notion, not just an economic one.

One illustration is the decision of state colleges to eliminate programs in nursing, engineering and computer science, because they are costly – and happen to be the professions where there is a labor shortage, as The New York Times reports. The decision harms the society but conforms to the business ideology of short-term gain without regard for human consequences, in accord with the vile maxim.

Some of the most insidious effects are on teaching and monitoring. The Enlightenment ideal of education was captured in the image of education as laying down a path students follow in their own ways, developing their creativity and independence of mind.

The alternative, to be rejected, is the image of pouring water into a vessel – and a very leaky one, as all of us know from experience. The latter approach includes teaching to test and other mechanisms that destroy students’ interest and seek to fit them into a mold, easily controlled. All too familiar today.

Copyright 2012 Noam Chomsky

20120405-21 14:54 Charis “US Man Sits 10 Months in Bolivian Jail, Uncharged”
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The future of the U.S.? Or the present?

[From the “You Think You’ve Got It Bad Department”. –SteveB]

“US Man Sits 10 Months in Bolivian Jail, Uncharged” by Frank Bajak, AP

Apr. 5, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/us-man-sits-10-months-bolivian-jail-uncharged-155902559.html>)

(SANTA CRUZ, Bolivia) Jacob Ostreicher, a New York businessman, has been confined for 10 months in one of Bolivia's most unruly prisons without being charged. He has shed more than 30 pounds, helpless to do anything as, he alleges, the multimillion-dollar rice farming venture he managed has been plundered.

At more than two dozen hearings, prosecutors have presented no evidence to back their allegations that the 53-year-old American may have been laundering drug money.

And this week, the presiding judge quit the case, likely meaning more weeks of delay.

"This is the scam of the century," Ostreicher said by telephone afterward. "I feel Iike I've been hijacked and kidnapped by people who are hiding behind the law."

The prosecutor would not discuss Ostreicher's complaints with The Associated Press. Nor would senior Bolivian officials, though U.S. diplomats have appealed to them to try to extract Ostreicher from the legal labyrinth.

The troubles began when Ostreicher and a group of Swiss partners decided to invest \$25 million to grow rice in Bolivia's eastern lowlands four years ago.

Andre Zolty, one of the Swiss investors, said the idea came from a Colombian lawyer, Claudia Liliana Rodriguez, who had done some work for him in Geneva while a student.

"I made a big mistake to trust that woman," Zolty said.

Some of the land that Rodriguez bought for the venture turned out to belong to the brother of a drug trafficker who had escaped from a Brazilian prison and who, the investors say, became romantically and financially entwined with her.

When the investors suspected they were being defrauded, they dispatched Ostreicher to investigate. He wound up firing and suing Rodriguez.

The drug trafficker, Maximiliano Dorado, was deported in early 2011 to Brazil, where he is back in prison. Rodriguez was subsequently jailed in Bolivia, accused of money laundering.

The 32-year-old woman would not agree to an interview, though her lawyer, Oswaldo Flores, said her relationship with Dorado was strictly commercial and she did not know he was a drug trafficker when she bought the property.

Dorado's connection to the rice venture, led authorities to Ostreicher.

During the June 4 hearing at which he was ordered jailed, prosecutor Jeanette Velarde said the American had made investments with "capital of dubious origin."

But as the months have stretched out, officials have never produced enough evidence to warrant formal charges — and have ignored information to the contrary, the investors say.

According to a court transcript, Velarde said Zolty was under "investigation in Switzerland and other countries for the alleged laundering of money from illicit drug sales."

Zolty obtained a letter from Swiss federal police last year saying he faced no criminal investigations. The Associated Press confirmed its authenticity and also checked with New York police on Ostreicher, who said they found no record of wrongdoing.

Velarde told the AP last month that the case remained in a "preparatory phase" because she was waiting for bank records from Switzerland, Argentina and the United States detailing the investors' holdings.

Ostreicher and Zolty say they have provided all requested banking records, in Ostreicher's case more than 1,000 documents.

The New Yorker said that since his imprisonment, nearly 40 million pounds (18,000 metric tons) of his venture's rice was seized in the name of Dircabi, the government agency that manages assets frozen in criminal investigations.

"And nobody knows where it is and nobody knows who got the money and for how much money it was sold," Ostreicher said.

Arrest warrants were issued in January for three men accused of falsifying documents in the case. They include a former Dircabi employee who allegedly forged a letter allowing the rice to be taken. The agency's regional director has been suspended and is under investigation.

Ostreicher says his only guilt is in being naive about doing business in the poor, landlocked South American nation.

He has been through five lawyers and two judges, had more than 30,000 acres (15,000 hectares) of land frozen and has been unable to prevent rice worth more than \$4 million being confiscated and sold. Ostreicher says his attorneys fees have reached \$500,000.

"The injustice that was done to him here is consuming him," said his wife, Miriam Ungar, 47. "He cannot sit still. He paces back and forth in a five-foot space in his cell all day. He doesn't sleep nights."

He chain smokes and says he often stares blankly at a single page for several hours when he tries to read. At least he has a cell to himself in a prison teeming with 3,500 inmates. He does his best to avoid the hoodlums who run things inside Palmasola, where he says he is the only U.S. citizen.

As an Orthodox Jew, Ostreicher keeps a kosher diet, which is not an option in the prison cafeteria. So he often goes days without meat. He says he plans to begin a hunger strike April 14, when Passover ends.

"He is slowly losing his mind," his wife said.

A few other countries in the region rank lower than Bolivia on Transparency International's index of perceived corruption, but human rights groups say bribes and case-fixing are common in Bolivia's legal system. Last year, five Bolivian prosecutors were dismissed for irregularities including alleged corruption, the Interior Ministry says. Currently, 15 prosecutors are under investigation.

The judiciary also suffers from disorganization and a shortage of judges.

In September, a judge ordered Ostreicher freed, only to retract his order a week later, saying he had erred. That judge was later promoted and a new judge was named to the case.

Then, on Monday, the new judge removed himself from the case, saying Rodriguez accused him in court papers of favoring Ostreicher at her expense. Another problem adds to delays: the court's judges are handling double their normal caseload because so many judicial posts are unfilled.

The U.S. government has tried to help Ostreicher but doesn't have much influence, being without an ambassador since its last one was expelled in 2008 for allegedly inciting opponents of leftist President Evo Morales.

The U.S. Embassy said there has been "frequent contact with Bolivian officials at the highest possible level regarding the case (and seeking) to ensure that Mr. Ostreicher is afforded due process." Its statement said U.S. officials had visited Ostreicher and were concerned for his health.

Bolivian Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca acknowledged receiving diplomatic notes from the U.S. State Department but would not say whether the Bolivian government was acting on them.

When Interior Minister Carlos Romero was asked about the case, he said only that he would look into it.

While investment in big Bolivian energy and mining projects has risen recently, investment in agriculture has suffered because of disputes over land ownership and government confiscations of several major tracts.

"Domestic and international investors alike are afraid," said Ronald Nostas, vice president of the Bolivian Federation of Private Businessmen.

Another American who ran into trouble over land is longtime Bolivia resident Ronald Larsen, who was stripped in 2010 of his 58-square-mile (15,000-hectare) cattle ranch after authorities accused him of exploiting his workers. Larsen called the charges trumped up. He now lives mostly in Brazil, where his son Dustin says he is fixing up a seaside hotel.

Dustin Larsen expresses sympathy for Ostreicher, but says the New Yorker clearly was not prepared for doing business in Bolivia.

"Americans take everyone at face value. Unfortunately, down here you can't do that," he said. "A lot of deals have gone bad down here."

(Associated Press writer Paola Flores reported from Santa Cruz and Frank Bajak from Lima, Peru. AP writers Carlos Valdez in La Paz, Bolivia, and Ian James, in Caracas, Venezuela, contributed to this report.)

[20120405-23](#) 15:58 Art Fw: Video: Moscow University Flashmob

From Art (Apr. 5, 2012, 3:58 pm)—Fw: Moscow University Flashmob

Little change of pace. I was actually at this overlook. Always fun to recognize some exotic place when you see it on film. :-)

from: Mac:

This is huge. When the young folks of Russia have embraced our culture the old commies are dead.....

Could we ever imagine in the old days of the Cold War that we would see something like this (video link below) in Russia? (Ans. No way!)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oacelnX3VSQ>

[20120405-26](#) 21:43 Jim Fw: *New York Times* U.S. Census Map

From Jim (Apr. 5, 2012, 9:43 pm)—Fw: *New York Times* U.S. Census Map

Check out where you live.

Subject: 2010 U.S. Census Map

Remember about a year ago you filled out a census form? Well ---- here are the result of this process. What you will see is a Map of the US - not just the 48 states but all of the 50 states. Territories are not in the census - but they did provide information during this process.

So let us say you are in Virginia , you can go by county and as you zoom in by city to see the increase or decrease and then you can see the changes of the various races within these cities.

Look at places you know and also look at the map at the darker brown location. You can zoom in and out to get the information on the places you know.

Use your cursor can move map around and you can zoom in on specific counties to get current stats. It is very interesting!

Fascinating!!! Just glide your cursor over the map and it displays every county. Can't imagine how long it took to create this map!! Amazzzzzing!!!

2010 U.S. CENSUS MAP: <http://projects.nytimes.com/census/2010/map?nl=todaysheadlines&emc=thab1>.

<http://klap4music.com/tag/gomez/>

<https://www.facebook.com/gomez>

NOT Selena Gomez—The BAND, Gomez! (British self-effacement, get it?)



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

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