



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #129 — MAY 2, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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## **The Founding Fathers Supported Mandates**

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

This guy is undoubtedly a genius whose public morality far exceeds his private, but when you're right, you're right!

There are a lot of valuable insights in the Comments section below the article in the original source.

"Originalist Sin" by Eliot Spitzer, Slate

Apr. 30, 2012, ([link](#))

(A brilliant article shows that the Founding Fathers not only supported mandates, they passed laws imposing them. Take that, Scalia!)

The five conservative justices on the Supreme Court—Thomas, Alito, Scalia, Roberts and Kennedy—cloak themselves in the myth that they are somehow channeling the wisdom and understanding of the Founding Fathers, the original intent that guided the drafting of the Constitution. I believe the premise of their argument is itself suspect: It is not clear to me how much weight should be given to non-textually based intent that is practically impossible to discern more than 200 years later. Most of the issues over which there is constitutional dispute today could not even have been envisioned when the document was drafted.

Even so, it would be an even better response to the conservative wing's claim of perceived understanding of original intent to be able to refute their claims by showing them to be historically and indisputably wrong. So once again let's venture into the world of the health care debate. The consensus view is that existing Commerce Clause doctrine clearly authorizes the type of mandate passed in the act—see in particular the affirmation of the statute by ultraconservative Judge Silberman of the D.C. Circuit Court.

Nonetheless, those opposing the bill insist that an individual mandate has never been done and the framers would simply not permit such an encroachment on liberty and freedom.

Some spectacular historical reporting by Professor Einer Elhauge of Harvard Law School in the *New Republic* thoroughly rebut the argument. He has found three mandate equivalents passed into law by the early Congresses—in which a significant number of founders served—and reports that these bills were signed into law by none other than Presidents George Washington and John Adams. As Founders go, one might consider them pretty senior in the

hierarchy. Their acts can probably be relied upon to give us a reasonable idea what the Founders intended to be the scope of congressional and governmental power.

Amazingly, the examples of individual mandates passed by the founders are so directly applicable that the claim that original intent precludes affirming the health care act should become almost laughable:

- **In 1790, a Congress including 20 Founders passed a law requiring that ship owners buy medical insurance for their seamen. Washington signed it into law.**
- **In 1792, another law signed by Washington required that all able-bodied men buy a firearm. (So much for the argument that Congress can't force us to participate in commerce.)**
- **And in 1798, a Congress with five framers passed a law requiring that all seamen buy hospital insurance for themselves. Adams signed this legislation.**

In aggregate, these laws show that the Founders and the Congress of the time were willing to force all of us to participate in a particular act of commerce and were comfortable requiring both the owner of a business and the individual employee to buy insurance in order to assure that health costs would be covered at a societal level. That is a pretty complete rebuttal to all the claims being made by the originalists as they relate to the health care act.

But what is so powerful about these historical finds is not just that they rebut the specific argument about original intent as applied to the health care act. This history lays bare the ahistorical nature of the justices' claims at another and deeper level. For the types of bill passed in 1790, 1792, and 1798 show the Founders to have been doing exactly what congress did especially well in the era of FDR---experimenting with solutions and approaches to resolving social issues in ways that made government part of creative problem solving.

These examples show the fallacy and the false rigidity that the originalists seek to impose on our government. In their effort to cabin and restrain the government—their ideology of the moment—they seek to have the benefit of the claim that the founders shared such a limited approach to governing. In fact, the approach to governing that these acts demonstrate is more nuanced and thoughtful. As with so many of the claims of the originalists, **a slight understanding of the true history shows that the originalists' view is mere ideology being imposed on a false understanding of history.**

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[20120501-01](#) 08:42 Pam "Why Does Religion Always Get a Free Ride?"

"Why Does Religion Always Get a Free Ride?" by Greta Christina, AlterNet

Apr. 29, 2012, ([http://www.alternet.org/story/155158/why\\_does\\_religion\\_always\\_get\\_a\\_free\\_ride](http://www.alternet.org/story/155158/why_does_religion_always_get_a_free_ride)

Why should religion, alone among all other kinds of ideas, be free from attempts to persuade people out of it?

We try to persuade people out of ideas all the time. We try to persuade people that their ideas about science, politics, philosophy, art, medicine, and more, are wrong: that they're harmful, ridiculous, repulsive, or simply mistaken. But when it comes to religion, trying to persuade people out of their ideas is somehow seen as horribly rude at best, invasive and bigoted and intolerant at worst. Why? Why should religion be the exception?

I've been writing about atheism for about six years now. In those six years, I've asked this question more times and not once have I gotten a satisfying answer. In fact, only once do I recall getting any answer at all. Besides that one exception, what I've gotten in response has been crickets chirping and tumbleweeds blowing by. I've been ignored, I've had the subject changed, I've had people get personally nasty, I've had people abandon the conversation altogether. But only once have I ever gotten any kind of actual answer. And that answer sucked. (I'll get to it in a bit.) I've heard lots of people tell me, at length and with great passion, that trying to persuade people out of their religion is bad and wrong and mean... but I haven't seen a single real argument explaining why this is such a terrible thing to do with religion, and yet is somehow perfectly okay to do with all other ideas.

So I want to get to the heart of this matter. Why should religion be treated differently from all other kinds of ideas? Why shouldn't we criticize it, and make fun of it, and try to persuade people out of it, the way we do with every other kind of idea?

In a free society, in the marketplace of ideas, we try to persuade people out of ideas *all the time*. We criticize ideas we disagree with; we question ideas we find puzzling; we excoriate ideas we find repugnant; we make fun of ideas we think are silly. And we think this is acceptable. In fact, we think it's positively good. We think this is how good ideas rise to the surface, and bad ideas get filtered out. We might have issues with exactly how this persuasion is carried out: is it done politely or rudely, reasonably or hysterically, did you really have to bring it up at Thanksgiving dinner, etc. But the basic idea of trying to convince other people that your ideas are right and theirs are wrong... this is not controversial.

Except when it comes to religion.

Why?

Religion is an idea about the world. Thousands of different ideas, really, but with one basic idea at the core of them all: the idea of the supernatural. Religion is the hypothesis that the world is the way that it is, entirely or in part,

because of supernatural beings or forces acting on the natural world. It's an idea about how the world works -- every bit as much as the germ theory of disease, or the theory that matter is made up of atoms, or the wacky notion that the Earth revolves around the Sun.

And religion is a very specific kind of idea about the world. Religion is a truth claim. It's not a subjective matter of personal experience or opinion, like, "I'm a one-woman man," or "*Harry Potter* is better than *Lord of the Rings*." It is a statement about what is and is not literally true in the non-subjective world.

So if we think it's a mistaken idea, why shouldn't we try to convince other people of that?

We do this with every other kind of truth claim. If people think that disease is caused by demonic possession, or that global climate change is a hoax, or that deregulating the financial industry will lead to a robustly healthy economy for all levels of society -- and we think these people are wrong -- we try to change their minds. Why should religion be any different?

Now, of course, religion is more than just an idea. People build communities, personal identities, support systems, coping mechanisms, entire life philosophies, around their religious beliefs.

But people build identities around other ideas, too. People have intense political identities, for instance: people are often deeply attached to their identity as a progressive, a Republican or a libertarian. People build communities around these ideas, and support systems, and coping mechanisms, and life philosophies. And we still think it's entirely valid, and even positively worthwhile, to try to change people's minds about these ideas if we think they're wrong.

Why should religion be any different?

It's also the case that letting go of religious beliefs can be upsetting, even traumatic. In the short term anyway. Most atheists say that they're happy to have let go of their religion... but many do go through a short period of trauma while they're letting go.

But it can be upsetting, and even traumatic, to let go of all kinds of ideas. It can be upsetting and traumatic to learn that the clothes and chocolate and electronics you're buying are made by slave labor; that the food you're feeding your children is bad for them; that you have unconscious racist or sexist attitudes; that driving your car is contributing to global climate change and the possible permanent destruction of the environment.

And yet we still think it's valid, and even positively worthwhile, to try to change people's minds about these ideas if we think they're wrong.

Why should religion be any different?

Yes, there's a tremendous diversity of religious ideas -- a diversity that makes up a large part of our complex cultural tapestry. But we have a tremendous diversity of ideas about politics, too... and about science, and race, and gender, and sexuality, and more. When we look at our history, our complex cultural tapestry has included alchemy, and Jim Crow laws, and preventing women from voting, and curing the "disease" of masturbation, and treating yellow fever epidemics by shooting cannonballs into the air. The world is better off without those ideas. We still have a rich cultural tapestry of diverse lifestyles and worldviews without them. And we still think it was entirely valid, and even positively worthwhile, to try to change people's minds about these ideas when we thought they were wrong.

Why should religion be any different?

It's also true that persuading people out of their religion is often seen as proselytizing or evangelizing. Proselytizing or evangelizing about religion has a bad reputation. And there are good reasons for that. Religious evangelists have an ugly history of fearmongering, deception, outright lying, applying economic pressure, using law or force or even violence, to "persuade" people out of their religious beliefs. Not to mention the little matter of knocking on people's doors at eight o'clock on Saturday morning. It's no wonder people are resistant to it.

But if that's not what atheists are advocating? If we're not advocating any sort of force or coercion, or even any sort of pressure apart from the mild social pressure created by people not wanting to look foolish by hanging onto bad ideas? If what we're advocating is writing blog posts, writing magazine articles, writing books, wearing T-shirts, putting up billboards, getting into conversations with our friends and families, getting into debates on Facebook? If what we're advocating is getting our atheist ideas more widely disseminated and understood, and creating atheist communities so people who share our ideas feel safer expressing them? If what we're advocating is essentially standing up and saying, "The emperor has no clothes" -- and offering the best evidence and arguments we can for the emperor's nakedness?

What is so terrible about that? We do that with every other kind of idea. Why shouldn't we do it with religion?

Why should religion be any different?

And it's certainly true that, throughout history, many attempts to "persuade" people out of their religion have resulted in persecution -- or have provided the rationalization for it. Human beings have an ugly, bloody, terrible history of persecuting each other over religious differences: anti-Catholic hostility in America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, anti-Muslim hostility in much of Europe today, the Crusades, the Holocaust... the list goes on. And religious persecution often goes hand-in-hand with classism, jingoistic nationalism, ethnic hatreds, and racism -- rendering it even uglier. A lot of people can only see persuading people out of religion in this context of persecution, and are horrified by it. And while I disagree with their ultimate analysis, I can certainly understand their horror.

But religion isn't the only idea whose adherents have historically been targeted with persecution. Political ideas certainly have been. To take an obvious example: Look at Communism. People who thought Communism was a good idea had their lives utterly destroyed. Even if they weren't actually trying to overthrow the government. Even if all they were doing was writing, or creating art, or gassing on in cafes with their friends. Even if they weren't really Communists. McCarthyism and other Red scares destroyed the lives of countless people who were simply suspected of being Communists. And like religious persecution, anti-Communist fervor has often been closely tied with nationalism, ethnic hostilities, and more. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, for instance, were often feared and despised as "dirty Commies," with the political hostility becoming inextricably tangled with the xenophobic nationalism, and each form of hostility feeding the other.

Does that mean we shouldn't criticize Communism? Does that mean that, if we think Communism isn't a particularly good system for structuring an economy, we should just keep our mouths shut?

When we criticize religion -- just as when we criticize any other kind of idea -- we do need to make sure that criticism of the idea doesn't turn into persecution of its adherents. We need to draw a careful line between criticizing ideas and marginalizing people. We need to remember that people who disagree with us are still people, deserving of basic compassion and respect.

But we need to draw that line with every kind of idea. Political, scientific, artistic ideas -- all of them. And we don't exempt any other kind of idea from criticism, just because that kind of idea has often been targeted with persecution.

Why should religion be any different?

Why should religion be treated any differently from any other kind of idea about the world? Why, alone among all other ideas, should it be protected from criticism, questions, mockery when it's ridiculous, excoriation when it's appalling? Why, alone among all other ideas, should we not try to persuade people out of it if we think it's mistaken?

Why should religion be the exception?

I've asked this question more times than I can remember. And I've only ever gotten one straight answer. In one argument on Facebook (which was ages ago, so unfortunately I can't find it and link to it), the person I was

debating argued that religious debates and disagreements have a bad history. All too often, they've led to hostility, hatred, tribalism, bigotry, even violence and wars. Therefore, he argued, it was best to just avoid debates about the topic altogether.

You know what? He's right. When it comes to the divisiveness of religion, he's totally right.

And that's an argument for my side -- not his.

I completely agree with his basic assessment. Religion does tend to be more divisive than other topics. It's a point Daniel Dennet made in his book, *Breaking the Spell*: In a weird but very real psychological paradox, people tend to defend ideas more ferociously when we don't have very good evidence supporting them.

Look at it this way. If people come over the hill and tell us that the sky is orange, we can clearly see that the sky is blue... so we can easily shrug off their ridiculous idea, and we don't feel a powerful need to defend our own perception. But if people come over the hill and tell us that God comes in three parts, one of whom is named Jesus, and this three-in-one god really wants us not to eat meat on Fridays -- and we think there is no god but Allah, and he really wants us to never eat pork or draw pictures of real things -- we don't have any way to settle the disagreement. The only evidence supporting our belief is, "My parents tell me," My religious leader tells me," "My holy book tells me," or "I feel it in my heart." And if we care about our belief -- if it's not some random trivial opinion, if it's central to our personal and social identity -- we have a powerful tendency to double down, to entrench ourselves more deeply and more passionately in our belief. We can't have a rational, evidence-based debate about the matter. The only way to defend our own belief is with bigotry, tribalism, and violence.

But if religious differences really are more likely to lead to bigotry, tribalism, violence, etc.... doesn't that show what a bad idea it is? If the ideas of religion are so poorly rooted in reality that there's no way to resolve differences other than forming battle lines and screaming or shooting across them... doesn't that strongly suggest that this is a truly crappy idea, and humanity should let go of it? Doesn't that suggest that persuading people out of it is a really good thing to do?

So yeah. This wasn't such a great answer. But at least it was an answer. At least it wasn't a changing of the topic, a moving of the goalposts, a deterioration into personal insult, a complete abandonment of the conversation altogether. Every other time that I've asked, "Why should religion, alone among all other kinds of ideas, be free from attempts to persuade people out of it?" I've been met with what was essentially silence.

I've gotten tremendous hostility over the years for my attempts to persuade people out of religion. I've been called a racist and a cultural imperialist, trying to stamp out the beautiful tapestry of human diversity and make everyone in the world exactly like me. I've been called a fascist, have been compared to Stalin and Glenn Beck. My atheist activism has been compared to the genocide of the Native Americans. I've even been called "evil in one of its purest forms" -- as have many other atheist writers; I'm hardly the only target of this. All this, for trying to persuade people that their idea is mistaken, and our idea is correct. The atheism itself gets hostile opposition as well, of course: it gets called immoral, amoral, hopeless, meaningless, joyless, and more. But the very idea of presuming to engage in this debate -- the very idea of putting religion on one side of a chessboard and atheism on the other, and seeing which one gets check-mated -- is regularly treated as a bigoted and intolerant violation of the basic principles of human discourse.

And yet when I ask why -- why it's okay to persuade people out of other ideas but not this one, why religion alone should be exempt from the vigorous criticism that every other idea is expected to stand up to, why religion alone should get a free ride in the marketplace of ideas (and a free ride in an armored car at that), why religion should be the sole exception -- I've only ever gotten one crappy answer, one time.

Does anyone have a better answer?

Or any answer at all?

"Welcome to the Asylum" by Chris Hedges, TruthDig/NationofChange

May 1, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/welcome-asylum-1335878448>)

("A society that loses the capacity for the sacred, that lacks the power of human imagination, that cannot practice empathy, ultimately ensures its own destruction.")

When civilizations start to die they go insane. Let the ice sheets in the Arctic melt. Let the temperatures rise. Let the air, soil and water be poisoned. Let the forests die. Let the seas be emptied of life. Let one useless war after another be waged. Let the masses be thrust into extreme poverty and left without jobs while the elites, drunk on hedonism, accumulate vast fortunes through exploitation, speculation, fraud and theft. Reality, at the end, gets unplugged. We live in an age when news consists of Snooki's pregnancy, Hulk Hogan's sex tape and Kim Kardashian's denial that she is the naked woman cooking eggs in a photo circulating on the Internet. Politicians, including presidents, appear on late night comedy shows to do gags and they campaign on issues such as creating a moon colony. "At times when the page is turning," Louis-Ferdinand Celine wrote in *Castle to Castle*, "when History brings all the nuts together, opens its Epic Dance Halls! hats and heads in the whirlwind! Panties overboard!"

The quest by a bankrupt elite in the final days of empire to accumulate greater and greater wealth, as Karl Marx observed, is modern society's version of primitive fetishism. This quest, as there is less and less to exploit, leads to mounting repression, increased human suffering, a collapse of infrastructure and, finally, collective death. It is the self-deluded, those on Wall Street or among the political elite, those who entertain and inform us, those who lack the capacity to question the lusts that will ensure our self-annihilation, who are held up as exemplars of intelligence, success and progress. The World Health Organization calculates that one in four people in the United States suffers from chronic anxiety, a mood disorder or depression—which seems to me to be a normal reaction to our march toward collective suicide. Welcome to the asylum.

When the most basic elements that sustain life are reduced to a cash product, life has no intrinsic value. The extinguishing of "primitive" societies, those that were defined by animism and mysticism, those that celebrated ambiguity and mystery, those that respected the centrality of the human imagination, removed the only ideological counterweight to a self-devouring capitalist ideology. Those who held on to pre-modern beliefs, such as Native Americans, who structured themselves around a communal life and self-sacrifice rather than hoarding and wage exploitation, could not be accommodated within the ethic of capitalist exploitation, the cult of the self and the lust for imperial expansion. The prosaic was pitted against the allegorical. And as we race toward the collapse of the planet's ecosystem we must restore this older vision of life if we are to survive.

The war on the Native Americans, like the wars waged by colonialists around the globe, was waged to eradicate not only a people but a competing ethic. The older form of human community was antithetical and hostile to capitalism, the primacy of the technological state and the demands of empire. This struggle between belief systems was not lost on Marx. "The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx" is a series of observations derived from Marx's reading of works by historians and anthropologists. He took notes about the traditions, practices, social structure, economic systems and beliefs of numerous indigenous cultures targeted for destruction. Marx noted arcane details about the formation of Native American society, but also that "lands [were] owned by the tribes in common, while tenement-houses [were] owned jointly by their occupants." He wrote of the Aztecs, "Commune tenure of lands; Life in large households composed of a number of related families." He went on, "... reasons for believing they practiced communism in living in the household." Native Americans, especially the Iroquois, provided the governing model for the union of the American colonies, and also proved vital to Marx and Engel's vision of communism.

Marx, though he placed a naive faith in the power of the state to create his workers' utopia and discounted important social and cultural forces outside of economics, was acutely aware that something essential to human dignity and independence had been lost with the destruction of pre-modern societies. The Iroquois Council of the Gens, where Indians came together to be heard as ancient Athenians did, was, Marx noted, a "democratic assembly where every adult male and female member had a voice upon all questions brought before it." Marx lauded the active participation of women in tribal affairs, writing, "The women [were] allowed to express their wishes and opinions through an orator of their own election. Decision given by the Council. Unanimity was a fundamental law of its action among the Iroquois." European women on the Continent and in the colonies had no equivalent power.

Rebuilding this older vision of community, one based on cooperation rather than exploitation, will be as important to our survival as changing our patterns of consumption, growing food locally and ending our dependence on fossil fuels. The pre-modern societies of Sitting Bull and Crazy Horse—although they were not always idyllic and performed acts of cruelty including the mutilation, torture and execution of captives—did not subordinate the sacred to the technical. The deities they worshipped were not outside of or separate from nature.

Seventeenth century European philosophy and the Enlightenment, meanwhile, exalted the separation of human beings from the natural world, a belief also embraced by the Bible. The natural world, along with those pre-modern cultures that lived in harmony with it, was seen by the industrial society of the Enlightenment as worthy only of exploitation. Descartes argued, for example, that the fullest exploitation of matter to *any* use was the duty of humankind. The wilderness became, in the religious language of the Puritans, satanic. It had to be Christianized and subdued. The implantation of the technical order resulted, as Richard Slotkin writes in "Regeneration Through Violence," in the primacy of "the western man-on-the-make, the speculator, and the wildcat banker." Davy Crockett and, later, George Armstrong Custer, Slotkin notes, became "national heroes by defining national aspiration in terms of so many bears destroyed, so much land preempted, so many trees hacked down, so many Indians and Mexicans dead in the dust."

The demented project of endless capitalist expansion, profligate consumption, senseless exploitation and industrial growth is now imploding. Corporate hustlers are as blind to the ramifications of their self-destructive fury as were Custer, the gold speculators and the railroad magnates. They seized Indian land, killed off its inhabitants, slaughtered the buffalo herds and cut down the forests. Their heirs wage war throughout the Middle East, pollute the seas and water systems, foul the air and soil and gamble with commodities as half the globe sinks into abject poverty and misery. The Book of Revelation defines this single-minded drive for profit as handing over authority to the "beast."

The conflation of technological advancement with human progress leads to self-worship. Reason makes possible the calculations, science and technological advances of industrial civilization, but reason does not connect us with the forces of life. A society that loses the capacity for the sacred, that lacks the power of human imagination, that cannot practice empathy, ultimately ensures its own destruction. The Native Americans understood there are powers and forces we can never control and must honor. They knew, as did the ancient Greeks, that hubris is the deadliest curse of the human race. This is a lesson that we will probably have to learn for ourselves at the cost of tremendous suffering.

In William Shakespeare's "The Tempest," Prospero is stranded on an island where he becomes the undisputed lord and master. He enslaves the primitive "monster" Caliban. He employs the magical sources of power embodied in the spirit Ariel, who is of fire and air. The forces unleashed in the island's wilderness, Shakespeare knew, could prompt us to good if we had the capacity for self-control and reverence. But it also could push us toward monstrous evil since there are few constraints to thwart plunder, rape, murder, greed and power. Later, Joseph Conrad, in his portraits of the outposts of empire, also would expose the same intoxication with barbarity.

The anthropologist Lewis Henry Morgan, who in 1846 was "adopted" by the Seneca, one of the tribes belonging to the Iroquois confederation, wrote in "Ancient Society" about social evolution among American Indians. Marx noted approvingly, in his "Ethnological Notebooks," Morgan's insistence on the historical and social importance of "imagination, that great faculty so largely contributing to the elevation of mankind." Imagination, as the Shakespearean scholar Harold C. Goddard pointed out, "is neither the language of nature nor the language of man, but both at once, the medium of communion between the two. ... Imagination is the *elemental speech* in all senses, the first and the last, of primitive man and of the poets."

All that concerns itself with beauty and truth, with those forces that have the power to transform us, is being steadily extinguished by our corporate state. Art. Education. Literature. Music. Theater. Dance. Poetry. Philosophy. Religion. Journalism. None of these disciplines are worthy in the corporate state of support or compensation. These are pursuits that, even in our universities, are condemned as impractical. But it is only through the impractical, through that which can empower our imagination, that we will be rescued as a species. The prosaic world of news events, the collection of scientific and factual data, stock market statistics and the sterile recording of deeds as history do not permit us to understand the *elemental speech* of imagination. We will never penetrate the mystery of

creation, or the meaning of existence, if we do not recover this older language. Poetry shows a man his soul, Goddard wrote, "as a looking glass does his face." And it is our souls that the culture of imperialism, business and technology seeks to crush.

Walter Benjamin argued that capitalism is not only a formation "conditioned by religion," but is an "essentially religious phenomenon," albeit one that no longer seeks to connect humans with the mysterious forces of life. Capitalism, as Benjamin observed, called on human societies to embark on a ceaseless and futile quest for money and goods. This quest, he warned, perpetuates a culture dominated by guilt, a sense of inadequacy and self-loathing. It enslaves nearly all its adherents through wages, subservience to the commodity culture and debt peonage. The suffering visited on Native Americans, once Western expansion was complete, was soon endured by others, in Cuba, the Philippines, Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. The final chapter of this sad experiment in human history will see us sacrificed as those on the outer reaches of empire were sacrificed. There is a kind of justice to this. We profited as a nation from this demented vision, we remained passive and silent when we should have denounced the crimes committed in our name, and now that the game is up we all go down together.

20120501-03 16:29 Pam Common Sense or Political Correctness? (privacy)

I just read a blog entry by Sam Harris--neuroscientist, psychologist, writer, atheist--in which he discusses the absurdities of the way the TSA conducts its searches for suspected terrorists. Patting down little old ladies and disabled children in wheelchairs is a waste of time that could be better spent and an invasion of privacy for no just cause. It is Muslims who have sworn to destroy us, Muslims who brought down the twin towers, Muslims who call us infidels and hate our way of life. Doesn't it make sense to check out Muslim-type people? This isn't unfair, racial profiling; it's common sense. If I saw a man break into my house, I would not go searching for a teenage girl to arrest. Apparently Mr. Harris has been swamped with negative comments, calling him everything from a racist to I-don't-know-what. I say, he's simply speaking the truth. We live in a dangerous world, and we must protect ourselves. If 60-something white women were smuggling contraband aboard planes, I'd gladly go through a body scan. Until that day, keep your grimy hands off me--and everyone else who is obviously no terrorist.

That brings me to my next question. I don't quite have the answer for this one, so I'm asking for opinions. This new bill that's been proposed to allow private internet dealers to share consumer info. with the gov't has me a bit concerned. I understand that the only way we're going to identify and capture terrorists is if we can spy on them, but it does seem a bit Big Brotherish. I feel as if everything about us is out there for anyone to snag, the government included, along with advertisers and, now, people who want me to follow them on Twitter. I just signed up for a Twitter account so I could respond to Sam Harris, and now Rhiannon wants to be my BFF. I have no cover left, I guess. Is our privacy, our autonomy, being gradually eroded in such subtle ways that we don't even notice it? On TV cop shows, the police are always using GPS to track people and going through suspects' computers. I guess this is legal. It certainly seems commonplace.

20120501-04 17:16 SteveG Re: Common Sense or Political Correctness? (reply to Pam, above)

It seems to me that anyone may be out to bomb the US – I am not certain what a Muslim looks like versus a Catholic or Christian. Middle Eastern residents may actually be a variety of religions. The Oklahoma City bombing was home grown and that may happen again. I don't like being patted, don't like my bags being searched, don't like my carry on being emptied in front of everyone, and don't like the body scans – but that is what I have gotten and will always get body scanned if the rules stay the way they are – makes me feel violated.

What amazes me is that a few years ago we took a train ride from Crawfordsville, IN to Pasco, WA and back – no searches, no nothing. We did see a couple of police in Chicago with dogs, but that was it.

I think we have given away a lot of civil liberties years ago and we may be tracked through computer usage, black boxes on autos, cell phone GPS/usage, library books checked out, etc.

20120501-05

19:41 Dick

Fw: Congressional Reform Act

THIS IS THE ANSWER...SO SIMPLE!!! YEA!

[Source of original email unknown, but, unfortunately, getting a little dated. -SteveB]

Could this be an idea whose time has come?

Warren Buffett, in a recent interview with CNBC, offers one of the best quotes about the debt ceiling:

"I could end the deficit in 5 minutes," he told CNBC. "You just pass a law that says that anytime there is a deficit of more than 3% of GDP, all sitting members of Congress are ineligible for re-election."

The 26th amendment (granting the right to vote for 18 year-olds) took only 3 months & 8 days to be ratified! Why? Simple! The people demanded it. That was in 1971 - before computers, e-mail, cell phones, etc.

Of the 27 amendments to the Constitution, seven (7) took one (1) year or less to become the law of the land - all because of public pressure.

Warren Buffet is asking each addressee to forward this email to a minimum of twenty people on their address list; in turn ask each of those to do likewise.

In three days, most people in The United States of America will have the message. This is one idea that really should be passed around.

#### Congressional Reform Act of 2012

1. No Tenure / No Pension. A Congressman/woman collects a salary while in office and receives no pay when they're out of office.
2. Congress (past, present & future) participates in Social Security. All funds in the Congressional retirement fund move to the Social Security system immediately. All future funds flow into the Social Security system, and Congress participates with the American people. It may not be used for any other purpose.
3. Congress can purchase their own retirement plan, just as all Americans do.
4. Congress will no longer vote themselves a pay raise. Congressional pay will rise by the lower of CPI or 3%.
5. Congress loses their current health care system and participates in the same health care system as the American people.
6. Congress must equally abide by all laws they impose on the American people.
7. All contracts with past and present Congressmen/women are void effective 1/1/12. The American people did not make this contract with Congressmen/women. Congress made all these contracts for themselves.

Serving in Congress is an honor, not a career. The Founding Fathers envisioned citizen legislators, so ours should serve their term(s), then go home and back to work.

If each person contacts a minimum of twenty people then it will only take three days for most people (in the U.S. ) to receive the message. Don't you think it's time?

THIS IS HOW YOU FIX CONGRESS!

If you agree, pass it on. If not, delete. You are one of my 20+ - Please keep it going, and thanks.

20120501-06 21:54 SteveG "Inside Edition' Investigates Congressional Cars"

Wonder if "Inside Edition" is right on the above? If so – it stinks!!

"Inside Edition' Investigates Congressional Cars" Original Airdate: May 1, 2012

(<http://www.insideedition.com/news/8119/inside-edition-investigates-congressional-cars.aspx>)

In these tough times Americans are looking for ways to save. So it may surprise you that many members of congress are driving around in luxury cars that are paid for with your tax dollars and its perfectly legal. Inside Edition's Lisa Guerrero and the I-squad spent two months investigating congressional car leases.

When Congressman Gregory Meeks of Queens, New York makes the rounds in his home district, he does it in style - in a Lexus 450 hybrid. This kind of luxury doesn't come cheap. His Lexus costs a whopping \$1,289 a month to lease. But that's no problem for Congressman Meeks because he's not paying for it. You are.

And his colleague, Congressman Edolphus Towns of Brooklyn, NY also has a taste for an expensive set of wheels. We found him zipping around town in a luxurious Lincoln MKZ hybrid, costing \$957/month - and you paid for that too.

Taxpayers we spoke with were outraged. "I can't afford a luxury vehicle, I don't know why they should have one," said a New York City woman.

"It just doesn't make sense that taxpayers would be paying for that," said another.

"I find it outrageous and a misuse of funds," a young woman fumed.

Joe Barton, the fiscally conservative congressman from Texas cruises around in an impressive Chevy Tahoe that costs you \$999 a month. "It drives real well," Barton told Inside Edition.

Barton says he sees nothing wrong with the hefty price tag and even offered to take an Inside Edition reporter for a ride. He says he leased the car because it's manufactured in his district, at the GM assembly plant in Arlington, Texas. "It's an official vehicle paid for by the taxpayers and it's used in my official duties," said Barton.

Inside Edition found at least 82 out of 435 U.S. representatives lease cars for use in their home District.

Some have taste for luxury, like Congressman Bobby Rush, of Illinois, who represents President Obama's home district in Chicago. Rush rides around in a \$1,027/month Lexus hybrid.

Inside Edition's findings are getting a lot of attention, including the O'Reilly Factor.

"C'mon congressmen. I lease a car and pay about \$600 a month and it's a nice car," said O'Reilly on his popular cable news program.

Most of the congressmen we observed riding around in those expensive leases were not eager to talk about their leases, so Inside Edition Chief Investigative Correspondent, Lisa Guerrero went to Washington to get some answers.

Lisa Guerrero asked Rep. Meeks, "Do you realize you lease one of the most expensive cars in congress?"

Meeks responded, "All I know is that I go by the rules, look at the list, it has to be approved, I go by the rules to serve the people of my district."

Congressman Towns of New York didn't want to talk about his \$957 Lincoln hybrid lease. Maybe that's because he's on a committee that's investigating the notorious GSA scandal involving that notorious \$800,000 convention in Las Vegas.

"You are spending almost \$1000 dollars a month on the taxpayer dime, do you think that's appropriate?" asked Guerrero.

"Which car are you talking about?" replied Towns.

"Your most recent car. I know before you were leasing something for more than 1200 a month, right now it's a Lincoln."

"You tell me what car you're talking about," Towns asked

"It's a Lincoln hybrid."

"I have to talk to my staff; they handle all that kind of stuff, that's not something I'm involved in," Towns replied.

While we were looking for Congressman Towns' car, we also noticed his wife driving another luxury vehicle, an Infiniti, with congressional tags. She was observed day after day - driving to the carwash, the dry cleaners and back and forth to work at a local hospital. But Towns doesn't pay for that car either. We found records showing the \$602 lease on the Infiniti is paid for with the congressman's campaign funds. Experts say that is an apparent violation of campaign finance rules.

Guerrero said, "Your wife has been driving a car that's paid for with campaign funds, is that appropriate?"

Towns said, "I have no idea what you are talking about"

All the Congressmen say they are just abiding by the rules and doing nothing wrong

Members of the House who lease tax payer-funded vehicles (Source: Statement of Disbursements – House of Representatives – 4th Quarter 2011)

44 Democrats and 38 Republicans:

<u>Representative</u>	<u>State</u>	<u>Monthly Payment</u>	<u>Additional Info</u>
1. Dan Burton – Rep. (two leases)	Indiana	\$600 + \$684.78	2 vehicles
2. Mary Bono Mack – Rep.	California	\$682.94	
3. Rodney Alexander – Rep.	Louisiana	\$167.99	\$20,000 dn.
4. Xavier Becerra – Dem.	California	\$271.80	
5. Adam Schiff – Dem.	California	\$489.24	
6. Adrian Smith – Rep.	Nebraska	\$629.52	
7. Al Green – Dem.	Texas	\$436.89	
8. André Carson – Dem.	Indiana	\$657.99 to \$748.65 per month	
9. Anna Eshoo – Dem.	California	\$389.60	
10. Barbara Lee – Dem.	California	\$898.55	
11. Bill Flores – Rep.	Texas	\$455.55	
12. Bill Johnson – Rep.	Ohio	\$370.13	
13. Bill Shuster – Rep.	Pennsylvania	\$392.00	
14. Bobby Rush – Dem.	Illinois	\$1,027.53	
15. Brad Miller – Dem.	North Carolina	\$431.87	
16. Chip Cravaack – Rep.	Minnesota	\$1,008.22	
17. Cliff Stearns – Rep.	Florida	\$789.25	
18. Collin Peterson – Dem.	Minnesota	\$362 + \$290.00	2 vehicles

19. Cory Gardner – Rep.	Colorado	\$910.82
20. Dana Rohrabacher – Rep.	California	\$918.63
21. David Dreier – Rep.	California	\$598.92
22. David Scott – Dem.	Georgia	\$519.40
23. Dennis Rehberg – Rep.	Montana	\$499 + \$799.00
24. Don Young – Rep.	Alaska	\$748.73
25. Donald Manzullo – Rep.	Illinois	\$619.19
26. Ed Pastor – Dem.	Arizona	\$294.33
27. Edolphus Towns – Dem.	New York	\$1,285.06
28. Edward Royce – Rep.	California	\$509.98
29. Eleanor Holmes Norton – Dem.	D.C.	\$807.55
30. Emanuel Cleaver – Dem.	Missouri	\$1,900.00
31. George Miller – Dem.	California	\$520.10
32. Gregory Meeks – Dem.	New York	\$1,289.40
33. Gus Bilirakis – Rep.	Florida	\$899.20 + \$1348.80
34. Heath Shuler – Dem.	North Carolina	2 vehicles \$485.31
35. Hank Johnson Jr. – Dem.	Georgia	\$725.79
36. Henry Cuellar – Dem.	Texas	\$594.28
37. Howard Berman – Dem.	California	\$382.78
38. Howard "Buck" McKeon – Rep.	California	\$662.83
39. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen – Rep.	California	\$479.86
40. James Clyburn – Dem.	South Carolina	\$1,139.26
41. Jim McDermott – Dem.	Washington	\$346.46
42. Joe Baca – Dem.	California	\$732.86
43. Joe Barton – Rep.	Texas	\$998.89
44. Joe Donnelly – Dem.	Indiana	\$450.00
45. John Abney Culberson – Rep.	Texas	\$880.00
46. John Conyers Jr. – Dem.	Michigan	\$1,251.66
47. John Garamendi – Dem.	California	\$910.82
48. John Lewis – Dem.	Georgia	\$578.21
49. John Carter – Rep.	Texas	\$880.96
50. John Sullivan – Rep.	Oklahoma	\$258.30
51. José Serrano – Dem.	New York	\$485.31
52. Kenny Merchant – Rep.	Texas	\$899.67
53. Kevin McCarthy – Rep.	California	\$716.25
54. Laura Richardson – Dem.	California	\$852.96
55. Linda Sanchez – Dem.	California	\$861.87
56. Louie Gohmert – Rep.	Texas	\$466.40
57. Lynn Woolsey – Dem.	California	\$647.97
58. Mario Diaz-Balart – Rep.	Florida	\$722.02
59. Melvin Watt – Dem.	North Carolina	\$431.81
60. Michael Simpson – Rep.	Idaho	\$698.13
61. Michael Michaud – Dem.	Maine	\$795.00
62. Mike Coffman – Rep.	Colorado	\$671.51
63. Mike McIntyre – Dem.	North Carolina	\$430.82
64. Mike Pence – Rep.	Indiana	\$282.68
65. Mike Pompeo – Rep.	Kansas	\$486.00
66. Mike Ross – Dem.	Arkansas	\$851.28
67. Nick Rahall – Dem.	West Virginia	\$671.41
68. Pedro Pierluisi – Dem.	Puerto Rico	\$1,400.00
69. Peter Welch – Dem.	Vermont	\$425.68
70. Phil Gingrey – Rep.	Georgia	\$470.88
71. Randy Neugebauer – Rep.	Texas	\$333.33
72. Raul Grijalva – Dem.	Arizona	\$709.28
73. Sam Johnson – Rep.	Texas	\$758.65
74. Sean Duffy – Rep.	Wisconsin	\$1,350.00

75. Sheila Jackson Lee – Dem.	Texas	\$751.99
76. Silvestre Reyes – Dem.	Texas	\$655.46
77. Steve Womack – Rep.	Arkansas	\$565.61
78. Steven LaTourette – Rep.	Ohio	\$502.24
79. Theodore "Ted" Deutch – Dem.	Florida	\$301.17
80. Wally Herger – Rep.	California	\$650.00
81. William "Lacy" Clay Jr. – Dem.	Missouri	\$779.08
82. William Keating – Dem.	Massachusetts	\$968.85

20120501-07

23:58 SteveG

Quote: Helen Keller on The Care of All People

**The test of a democracy is not the magnificence of buildings or the speed of automobiles or the efficiency of air transportation, but rather the care given to the welfare of all the people.**

**~ Helen Keller**

**April, 1935**

20120501-08

23:59 SteveB

Photo: Crystal Cave of Giants, Naica, Mexico

<http://atlasobscura.com/place/giant-crystals-naica>



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

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