



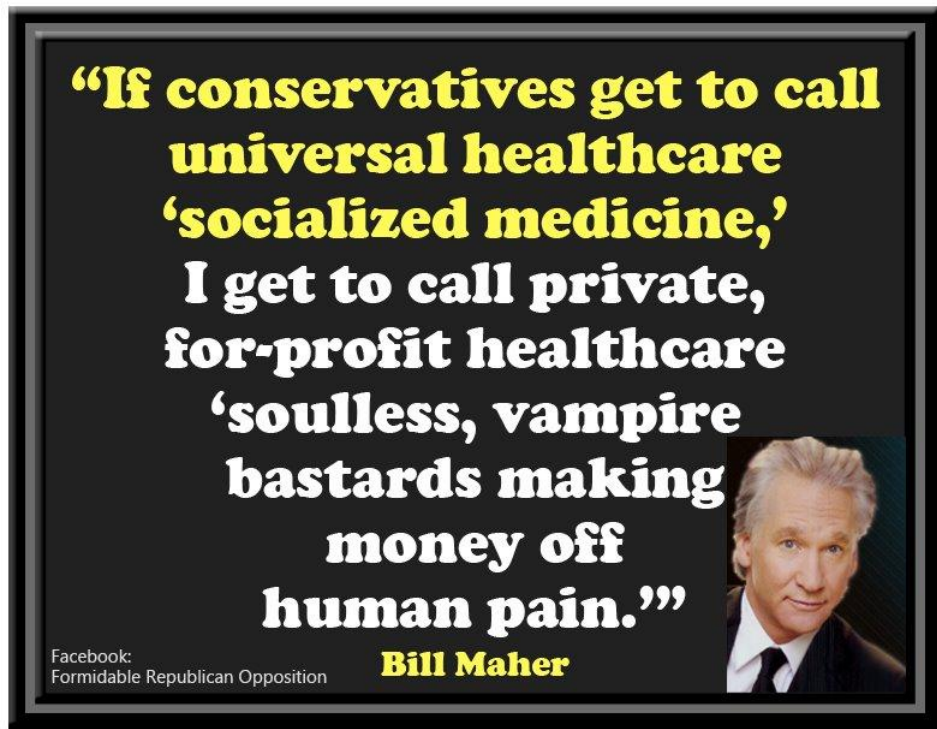
FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #131 — MAY 4, 2012

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

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Hey, Maybe Somebody Needs to Channel Ayn Rand!

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, May 4, 2012)



Oh, I forgot, after talking to the Catholics, Paul Ryan has suddenly decided he’s no longer a follower of Ayn Rand (see FotM Newsletter #127, “Paul Ryan Suddenly Does Not Embrace Ayn Rand's Teachings”). It is beginning to become apparent that none of Mr. Ryan’s plans are workable, even for reducing the deficit, nor can they be passed into law. Isn’t it time to get rid of the radical trash, our Republican friends?

“Henry Aaron, Inventor of Paul Ryan's Medicare Reform Concept, Explains Why It's Wrong” by Michael McAuliff, Huffington Post

May 3, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/05/03/henry-aaron-paul-ryan-medicare_n_1466826.html)

(WASHINGTON) The co-creator of the concept that Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) is relying upon to reform Medicare no longer thinks it will work. Henry Aaron, now of the Brookings Institution, got the chance to tell Ryan exactly why at a recent Capitol Hill hearing.

Aaron and former Urban Institute president Robert Reischauer came up with the idea of "premium support" in 1995, after the failure of then-First Lady Hillary Clinton's bid to reform the health care system.

The basic idea is simple: let people pick their health insurers in the private market, subsidize the premiums, and competition will drive down costs. That's the theory behind Ryan's plan, recently endorsed by Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) in a white paper the two wrote.

It differs from Aaron's original vision -- in part because it has fewer protections for beneficiaries -- but the essential concept is the same. Aaron said this isn't the time to test it out.

"In the years since Bob Reischauer and I put this Idea forward, I've changed my mind," Aaron said at a hearing of the House Ways and Means Committee last week.

The big reason is that Aaron has seen no evidence since the two men came up with the idea that their assumptions have been borne out.

A key assumption was that the insurance industry or government would figure out how better to adjust risk among companies so that if one insurer suddenly was saddled with an unusually expensive population, it would share the costs with other insurers or the government. That would keep costs down because it removes some of the incentive to cherry-pick healthier customers or shun sicker ones.

But in the case of Medicare Advantage, similar to premium support in that Medicare pays a private insurer to cover someone, the attempts at risk adjustment have raised costs by about 8 percent, Aaron noted. On top of that, although there are many Medicare Advantage plans in existence, they are not cheaper than traditional Medicare, and there's little to suggest they will get cheaper.

"The evidence to date is not encouraging," Aaron said, noting a recent study that isolated the effects of competition on Medicare Advantage costs from government-related influences. "After controlling for all those factors, Medicare Advantage plans are more expensive than is traditional Medicare."

Aaron has not abandoned the idea of premium support for Medicare, if it can be figured out. He argued that rather than trying to do it right away, as Ryan and other proponents insist, policymakers should first see how it works for younger people -- as it is beginning to be applied in the health care reform law.

"The passage of the Affordable Care Act means we have put in place a key element of the premium support idea for the rest of the population, namely health insurance exchanges," Aaron said. "The Medicare population is vastly more difficult to deal with than the population under the Affordable Care Act. We should prove that the health insurance exchanges work, get them up and running before we take seriously, in my view, calls to put the Medicare population through a similar system."

Aaron also has a major problem with the way Ryan's plan contains costs -- by mandating that Medicare inflation be capped at no more than the growth of the Gross Domestic Product, plus 0.5 percent or 1 percent. Health care costs have escalated much faster than that, so premium support plans capped at a little more than GDP growth would buy smaller and smaller benefits.

Aaron also argued that there's another problem with trying to ensure a premium support model works -- it requires stringent regulation to make sure companies don't game the system. Aaron said he can't see that happening with a Congress fired by anti-regulatory zeal.

"The regulatory climate has changed," Aaron said. "It is far more hostile to the kinds of regulatory intervention that Bob Reischauer and I thought were essential."

Ryan, chairman of the House Budget Committee, did not engage Aaron in debate at last week's hearing, instead relying on one of Aaron's Brookings Institution colleagues, former White House Office of Management and Budget head Alice Rivlin to argue why premium support can work. (She said she believes strict oversight and risk adjustment can be done.) Ryan's office did not answer a request for comment.

Aaron's full testimony is here: <http://1.usa.gov/IFby6t>.

Video where he can be seen detailing his change of heart:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IYdwMn1UA0s.

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"Common Core Standards' Drive Wedge in Education Circles" by Greg Toppo, USA TODAY

Apr. 28, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/education/story/2012-04-28/common-core-education/54583192/1>)

(WASHINGTON) When did fractions and non-fiction become so controversial?

A high-profile effort by a pair of national education groups to strengthen, simplify and focus the building blocks of elementary and secondary education is finally making its way into schools. But two years ahead of its planned implementation, critics on both the right and left are seizing upon it. A few educators say the new standards, supported by the U.S. Department of Education, are untested, and one Republican governor wants to block the measure, saying it's a federal intrusion into local decisions.

How did something so simple become so fraught?

The story begins in 2009, when the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers announced an effort to create voluntary national standards in math and reading. All but four states — Alaska, Nebraska, Texas and Virginia — quickly signed on to the standards, known as the Common Core, agreeing to help create then implement them by 2014. Their decision was helped partly by President Obama, who has tied "college and career-ready standards" to billions in federal grants. Last September, he all but required adoption of the Common Core or similar standards approved by state higher education officials if states want to receive federal waivers from the 2002 No Child Left Behind law. One of the four states, Virginia, applied for a waiver without adopting Common Core and is in negotiations with the administration over its plan.

That angered conservatives, who point out that even though adopting the Common Core is voluntary, Obama's moves make it all but obligatory. In February, Republican South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley said she'd support a state legislative effort to block Common Core implementation — her predecessor had adopted the standards in 2010.

"Just as we should not relinquish control of education to the Federal government," she wrote in a letter to a state lawmaker, "neither should we cede it to the consensus of other states."

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan shot back with unusual candor, saying in a statement that Haley's fear of losing control is "a conspiracy theory in search of a conspiracy."

Also in February, Brookings Institution scholar Tom Loveless issued research calling into question whether the Common Core would have much of an effect. He noted that state standards have done little to equalize academic achievement within states. The reaction, he says, was "like putting my hand in a hornet's nest — people do have a strong reaction to the Common Core."

Last month, New York University education historian Diane Ravitch, a vocal Duncan critic, blasted the standards, writing in *The New York Review of Books* that they've never been field-tested. "No one knows whether these standards are good or bad, whether they will improve academic achievement or widen the achievement gap," she said.

Neal McCluskey of the libertarian Cato Institute, said concerns of lawmakers like Haley may have seemed far-fetched a few years ago — states voluntarily signed on to the standards, after all — but Obama's insistence on tying the Common Core to No Child waivers and billions in federal grants shows that "it is not the least bit paranoid" to say the federal government wants a national curriculum.

American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten called those fears "ridiculous." Guidelines around core subjects don't constitute a national curriculum, she said, but are a simple way to boost skills. "We do our kids a disservice when we do not teach (them) to compete in a global economy," she said.

Weingarten said many teachers approve of the new standards, which "offer students the ability to think and persuade and communicate" rather than just fill in blanks on standardized tests. She and others point to recent surveys that show nearly two-thirds of teachers say it's better for states to have common math and English standards. But she frets that teachers won't get adequate training — and that they'll be judged harshly if their students don't measure up at first. "It has to be implemented with integrity so teachers can get their arms around it," she said.

David Coleman, one of the standards' authors, admits that they'll be "a major shift," requiring more history, arts and science in English and reading classes, for instance, and less fiction. But he says it's needed to correct a decade of watered-down lessons. The biggest problem with No Child's requirement that schools raise test scores each year was that it was "content-free," he said. The law "was merely saying, 'Test whatever you got.'"

Chester Finn, a former Reagan administration education official who now leads the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, a Washington education think tank, said Common Core "sets a worthy destination for kids and teachers, which most states have failed to do on their own for many years." He actually thinks it could ease conservatives' fears of federal intrusion, because common goals and tests might prompt Washington to "back off on telling people how to run their schools."

But he said it's "a pity" that Obama insisted upon the Common Core, especially leading up to the 2012 elections. "The best thing the administration, or the Congress, for that matter, could do is to pretend that the Common Core doesn't exist."

Barbara Dzwonek, an elementary school English coach in Daly City, Calif., said the standards are "a step in the right direction because they are state-driven and based on the highest-quality research the field of education has to offer."

David Riesenfeld, a history teacher who has been using the standards since 2010, said they've "pretty significantly pushed me to think about how much I cover" each school year. Because they require more depth in just a few areas, he said, they've forced him to focus more on teaching students to read and write about a handful of "significant topics" in world history.

Riesenfeld, who teaches 10th-grade world history at Robert F. Wagner Jr. Secondary School for Art and Technology in Long Island City, N.Y., said he often relies on shorter passages and pushes students to read more closely and analytically — occasionally a class will spend an entire period breaking down a single paragraph. "In effect, they're learning how to use materials rather than just answer question a, b, c and d," he said.

As a result, Riesenfeld said, his history students often look and sound as if they're in an English class.

"What they're starting to do is begin to think, 'Well, he's really not going to give me the answer, so I've really got to figure out what's going on here.' "

A taste of newfangled word problems

New Common Core standards are due to roll out in 46 states by 2014. They're designed to get students ready for college and careers by requiring them to think, write and explain their reasoning. They also de-emphasize multiple-choice test questions in favor of written responses. Here's an example for New York City fifth-graders:

Old question: Randa ate $\frac{3}{8}$ of a pizza, and Marvin ate $\frac{1}{8}$ of the same pizza. What fraction of the pizza did Randa and Marvin eat?

- a. $\frac{5}{8}$
- b. $\frac{3}{8}$
- c. $\frac{1}{4}$
- d. $\frac{1}{2}$

(Answer: d)

New question: Tito and Luis are stuffed with pizza! Tito ate one-fourth of a cheese pizza. Tito ate three-eighths of a pepperoni pizza. Tito ate one-half of a mushroom pizza. Luis ate five-eighths of a cheese pizza. Luis ate the other half of the mushroom pizza. All the pizzas were the same size. Tito says he ate more pizza than Luis because Luis did not eat any pepperoni pizza. Luis says they each ate the same amount of pizza. Who is correct? Show all your mathematical thinking.

(Answer: Luis is right — both ate $1 \frac{1}{8}$ of a pizza).

Source: New York City Department of Education

20120503-02	09:18	Art	Re: "Why Is the Conservative Brain More Fearful?" (reply to Dennis, May 2, 2012)
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On the other hand they could just be stupid. Just say'n.

20120503-03	10:18	SteveG	Ultra Violet Action: Support Rachel Maddow
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from Ultra Violet:

Do you watch Meet the Press? If you do, you probably saw a stunning exchange on Sunday between Rachel Maddow and two Republicans--strategist Alex Castellanos and Rep. McMorris Rodgers (R-WA). Basically, Castellanos and McMorris Rodgers argued that women are not paid less than men--despite numerous studies showing that we are. Then Castellanos even argued that women are paid less because we don't work as hard.¹

It was really sad to see an exchange like this go down on what many people see as the single most revered political news show in history.

MSNBC host, Rachel Maddow, did not let them get away with it. Despite the fact that Castellanos was shouting her down and constantly interrupting her, she presented the facts, called out their hypocrisy on the issue and laid bare their sexist views. It was energizing and inspiring to see her speak out so forcefully about the truth and take on two people who're dangerously misrepresenting the plight of women today.

When women fearlessly speak truth to power, it's important to get their backs. Especially when political shows are dominated by men, and so few women are given an opportunity to appear. If enough of us take action and get her

back, we can not only encourage her to keep speaking out--we also can show NBC that viewers everywhere want to see more strong women fighting for fairness and equality on TV. Can you sign this Thank You card to Rachel Maddow? We'll deliver it to her this week:

<http://act.weareultraviolet.org/sign/maddow/>

Encouraging women who speak out is important--more often than not, they are attacked and denigrated for doing so, take for example, Sandra Fluke.

And a new report from Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting shows that political talk shows are a particularly hostile environment for women. FAIR found that in an eight-month period, "men overwhelmingly dominated one-on-one interviews, at 86 percent: 228 male guests compared to 36 women. Meet the Press featured the fewest women, with just six female interviewees--three of whom were Rep. Michele Bachmann (R.-Minn.), the presidential candidate."²

Speaking out to support Maddow is important to show her we support her--but also to send a strong message to the producers of news shows like this.

And here's a great excerpt of Maddow taking on Castellanos from Sunday's Meet the Press:¹

Maddow: "The interruption is important, I think, because now we know, at least from both of your [Castellanos and McMorris Rodgers] perspectives, that women are not faring worse than men in the economy, that women aren't getting paid less for equal work. I think that's a serious difference in factual understanding of the world. But given that, some of us believe that women are getting paid less than men for doing the same work, there's something called the Fair Pay Act. There was a court ruling that said the statute of limitations, if you're getting paid less than a man, if you're subject to discrimination, starts before you know that discrimination is happening, effectively cutting off your recourse to the courts. You didn't know you were being discriminated against, you can't go.

"The first law passed by this administration is the Fair Pay Act to remedy that court ruling. The Mitt Romney campaign put you [McMorris Rodgers] out as a surrogate to talk -- to shore up people's feelings about this issue after they could not say whether or not Mitt Romney would've signed that bill. You're supposed to make us feel better about it. You voted against the Fair Pay Act. It's not about whether or not you have a female surrogate. It's about policy and whether or not you want to fix some of the structural discrimination that women really do face that Republicans don't believe is happening."

Please sign the Thank You card to Maddow today and we'll deliver before the week is over.

Thanks!

--Nita and Shaunna, UltraViolet

¹"The Problem of 'Working from Different Facts'" The Maddow Blog, April 30, 2012, <http://maddowblog.msnbc.msn.com/news/2012/04/30/11469316-the-problem-of-working-from-different-facts>.

²(Democratic) Women Remain Scarce On Sunday Talk Show Interviews, Media Matters, April 20, 2012, <http://mediamatters.org/blog/201204200004>.

20120503-04	13:14	SteveB	"Why Obama's Bin Laden Ad Drives Republicans Crazy"
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"Why Obama's Bin Laden Ad Drives Republicans Crazy" by Joe Conason, NationofChange

May 3, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/why-obama-s-bin-laden-ad-drives-republicans-crazy-1336052350>)

("Obama's cool order to kill bin Laden, in a moment of considerable risk to his presidency, finally debunked the decade of smears against Democrats as unpatriotic, wimpish, and unreliable.")



Nothing aggravates Republicans like seeing nasty, effective tactics upon which they have so long relied being turned against one of their candidates. So when Barack Obama's re-election campaign aired an ad celebrating the anniversary of Osama bin Laden's death — and suggesting that Mitt Romney wouldn't have achieved that objective — the right exploded with outraged protests.

Evidently, the feelings of longtime hatchet men like Bush-era party chair Ed Gillespie, ex-Bush flack Ari Fleischer and the editorial writers at *The Wall Street Journal*, to name a few, were really, really hurt — because the Obama campaign exploited a moment of national unity for partisan advantage.

"This is one of the reasons President Obama has become one of the most divisive presidents in American history," said Gillespie, now a Romney adviser.

To anyone with a functioning memory, however, this whining is implausible. So are the dire predictions that the president will somehow offend voters by claiming credit for whacking bin Laden (or by smacking Romney). During the Bush presidency, Republicans used precisely the same approach and worse, over and over, without fretting whether their words and ads were "divisive."

It began weeks after the 9/11 attacks, amid sincere pledges of patriotic cooperation from congressional Democrats, when Karl Rove told the Republican National Committee that their party would "go to the country on this issue" to win the midterm elections in 2002. They won a historic victory by sliming wounded Vietnam hero Max Cleland and former Air Force intelligence officer Tom Daschle as stooges of al-Qaida.

Bush's 2004 re-election campaign amplified the same themes, with advertising and pageantry at the Republican convention in New York City grossly exploiting 9/11, a series of conveniently timed terror "alerts" leading up to Election Day and repeated warnings by Vice President Dick Cheney that a Democratic victory would signal weakness to America's enemies.

And it persisted into the 2006 midterm, with Rove falsely portraying Democrats as limp-wristed "liberals" trying to "understand" Osama bin Laden.

Until that election, the rough Rovian style succeeded brilliantly — despite the fact that Bush and Cheney had actually allowed bin Laden and Mullah Omar to escape at Tora Bora. Obama's cool order to kill bin Laden, in a moment of considerable risk to his presidency, finally debunked the decade of smears against Democrats as unpatriotic, wimpish and unreliable.

By contrast, the Obama ad's brief rebuke of Romney is at least factual and accurate: Not only did he say what the ad quotes, but he also said that he wouldn't go into Pakistan to get bin Laden, which is what the mission required. Had the president followed Romney's policy recommendation, bin Laden would almost certainly still be at large.

"Even Jimmy Carter would have given that order," scoffed Romney in response. But he shouldn't be so quick to denigrate the former Democratic president, who entered the Navy during World War II and then served as a submarine officer until his honorable discharge in 1953. Somebody may compare Carter's service with Romney's own military record, which doesn't exist — and remind voters that he avoided the Vietnam draft with a pampered stint as a Mormon missionary, in France.

20120503-05	14:12	Charis	"19 Indigenous Communities Join Protest Against Road Through National Park in Bolivia"
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"19 Indigenous Communities Join Protest Against Road Through National Park in Bolivia", <http://www.erbol.com.bo/>

May 3, 2012, (<http://www.boliviabella.com/19-indigenous-communities-join-protest-against-road-through-national-park-in-bolivia.html>)

Natives of the TIPNIS (Isiboro Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park) have begun a 700+ kilometer march from their communities in the northern state of Beni to the city of La Paz in protest against a road the Bolivian government plans to construct through their land. Today 19 additional communities announced they will join them.

This march is being undertaken by entire families including numerous babies and children. They expect to walk for 60 days or more in order to reach the seat of government. By law, the Bolivian government must consult native communities prior to making decisions regarding infrastructure in their territories. The TIPNIS natives claim they were not consulted prior to construction of this road, which began last year. In response, the government passed a "post-consultation" law (Law No. 222). This is the 9th protest march they have undertaken against the road, which is being funded by Brazil.

The protesters are enduring hardship, lack of food, cold and rainy weather, muddy roads, river crossings, and illness including severe colds and several cases of dengue. Children and babies are affected the most. Last year, 2 children died during the march and many children and adults became ill. Often they sleep in tents along the side of the road. They depend on donations of food, medications, clothing and blankets from nearby communities and supporters in cities such as Trinidad and Santa Cruz. Last year the marchers were violently repressed by government troops.

[A little tougher conditions for our local protesters than most Occupy Wall Streeters, though most are also, perhaps, more used to living outside. —SteveB]

20120503-06	15:05	SteveB	"Deport the GOP Establishment"
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"Deport the GOP Establishment" by Ann Coulter, *Human Events*

May 2, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/article.php?id=51255>)

On no issue is the elite/American divide so great as on immigration. For decades, a majority of Americans have wanted to decrease immigration. Not just illegal immigration -- all immigration.

Nearly three times as many Americans support reducing immigration as want it to stay the same, according to Gallup polls. A grand total of 5 percent of the population want to increase legal immigration -- 10 times less than want to decrease it. I myself would like to deport the people responsible for our current immigration policies.

Our official policy is to turn away scientists in order to make room for illiterate Pakistani peasants who will drop out of high school to man coffee carts until deciding to plot a terrorist attack against the United States. That's this week's immigration poster boy, Najibullah Zazi.

Zazi's own step-uncle said of him: "He was a dumb kid, believe me." Our immigration officials said, WELCOME, ZAZI!... Oops, sorry Swedish scientists and nuclear engineers -- no room for you.

In February, Zazi pleaded guilty in a plot to bomb the New York City subway.

One of his co-conspirators, Zarein Ahmedzay, was welcomed from Afghanistan to America because he was willing to do a job no American would: drive a cab. Where are you going to find an American with a driver's license?

This week, a third accomplice, Adis Medunjanin, was convicted in the subway conspiracy. Medunjanin came from Bosnia and became an American citizen -- a priceless gift to *The New York Times*, which was then able to begin its article on his convictions: "An American citizen was convicted of a host of terrorism charges on Tuesday ..."

For this we can thank the late, lamented Teddy Kennedy, who altered our immigration laws in 1965 to ensure massive immigration from the Third World while severely limiting the number of Europeans who could come here.

And that's legal immigration. When it comes to illegal immigration, Americans are in a sputtering rage about politicians' obtuse refusal to address the problem.

Democrats look at immigration as a way to increase their voter rolls, and Republicans look at immigration as a way to get cheap labor for big business. Any Americans who disagree with our all-Third World immigration flow are called "racists."

This is why Democrats and establishment Republicans are desperate to talk Mitt Romney into flip-flopping on his immigration positions. He's with Americans.

In a novel thought, Romney proposes that we grant citizenship to people who would make America a better place, repeatedly saying that he would like to "staple a green card" to the diplomas of foreigners who receive Ph.D.s in math or the hard sciences. He may be the first national politician in two generations who thinks we should use legal immigration to get our average up.

It would be as if the University of North Carolina recruited only the top basketball players in the county, instead of - out of fairness -- taking players of all skill levels, and their relatives. What? They do that? Way to go, Carolina!

Romney is also one of the few politicians who acknowledge the danger of creating magnets for more illegal aliens streaming across the border.

During a primary debate last September, Romney said simply: "Of course we build a fence, and of course we do not give in-state tuition credits to people who come here illegally. That only attracts people to come here and take advantage of America's great beneficence." (These are the positions he took and enforced as governor of one of the most liberal states in the country.)

I would add that the absolute worst thing we could do is grant citizenship to illegal immigrant children brought here by their parents -- as the various DREAM acts do. What stronger magnet could we devise than offering citizenship to a person's children? (The parents will then become citizens, anyway, under our phony "family reunification" policy.)

Instead of drafting bills, such as the DREAM act, to give illegal aliens benefits, can't we all agree that the very first thing we have to do is seal the border? Otherwise, it's like mopping the floor before turning off the bathtub spigot.

First, turn off spigot; second, mop floor.

And surely no one wants any immigrants coming here and immediately going on welfare. (That would be like North Carolina actively recruiting the blind for their basketball team.) Can't we all agree not to give immigrants government handouts?

Starting with those two policies is not only logical, but will force Democrats to admit they have no intention of ever blocking the border. Their dearest desire is for immigrants to arrive, become dependent on government and start voting Democratic.

20120503-07	16:57	Pam	"Why Won't They Listen?"
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I could argue some of his points, but I think this guy is onto something. Emotion IS what rules us, but that doesn't make it infallible. We must educate our emotions, just as we educate our intellects. You might say, this is one of my core beliefs.

"Why Won't They Listen?" by William Saletan, *NYT Sunday Book Review* (review of *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion*, by Jonathan Haidt)

Mar. 23, 2012, (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/25/books/review/the-righteous-mind-by-jonathan-haidt.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

(You're smart. You're liberal. You're well informed. You think conservatives are narrow-minded. You can't understand why working-class Americans vote Republican. You figure they're being duped. You're wrong.)

This isn't an accusation from the right. It's a friendly warning from Jonathan Haidt, a social psychologist at the University of Virginia who, until 2009, considered himself a partisan liberal. In *The Righteous Mind*, Haidt seeks to enrich liberalism, and political discourse generally, with a deeper awareness of human nature. Like other psychologists who have ventured into political coaching, such as George Lakoff and Drew Westen, Haidt argues that people are fundamentally intuitive, not rational. If you want to persuade others, you have to appeal to their sentiments. But Haidt is looking for more than victory. He's looking for wisdom. That's what makes *The Righteous Mind* well worth reading. Politics isn't just about manipulating people who disagree with you. It's about learning from them.

Haidt seems to delight in mischief. Drawing on ethnography, evolutionary theory and experimental psychology, he sets out to trash the modern faith in reason. In Haidt's retelling, all the fools, foils and villains of intellectual history are recast as heroes. David Hume, the Scottish philosopher who notoriously said reason was fit only to be "the slave of the passions," was largely correct. E. O. Wilson, the ecologist who was branded a fascist for stressing the biological origins of human behavior, has been vindicated by the study of moral emotions. Even Glaucon, the cynic in Plato's *Republic* who told Socrates that people would behave ethically only if they thought they were being watched, was "the guy who got it right."

To the question many people ask about politics — Why doesn't the other side listen to reason? — Haidt replies: We were never designed to listen to reason. When you ask people moral questions, time their responses and scan their brains, their answers and brain activation patterns indicate that they reach conclusions quickly and produce reasons later only to justify what they've decided. The funniest and most painful illustrations are Haidt's transcripts of interviews about bizarre scenarios. Is it wrong to have sex with a dead chicken? How about with your sister? Is it O.K. to defecate in a urinal? If your dog dies, why not eat it? Under interrogation, most subjects in psychology experiments agree these things are wrong. But none can explain why.

The problem isn't that people don't reason. They do reason. But their arguments aim to support their conclusions, not yours. Reason doesn't work like a judge or teacher, impartially weighing evidence or guiding us to wisdom. It works more like a lawyer or press secretary, justifying our acts and judgments to others. Haidt shows, for example, how subjects relentlessly marshal arguments for the incest taboo, no matter how thoroughly an interrogator demolishes these arguments.

To explain this persistence, Haidt invokes an evolutionary hypothesis: We compete for social status, and the key advantage in this struggle is the ability to influence others. Reason, in this view, evolved to help us spin, not to help us learn. So if you want to change people's minds, Haidt concludes, don't appeal to their reason. Appeal to reason's boss: the underlying moral intuitions whose conclusions reason defends.

Haidt's account of reason is a bit too simple — his whole book, after all, is a deployment of reason to advance learning — and his advice sounds cynical. But set aside those objections for now, and go with him. If you follow Haidt through the tunnel of cynicism, you'll find that what he's really after is enlightenment. He wants to open your mind to the moral intuitions of other people.

In the West, we think morality is all about harm, rights, fairness and consent. Does the guy own the chicken? Is the dog already dead? Is the sister of legal age? But step outside your neighborhood or your country, and you'll discover that your perspective is highly anomalous. Haidt has read ethnographies, traveled the world and surveyed tens of thousands of people online. He and his colleagues have compiled a catalog of six fundamental ideas that commonly undergird moral systems: care, fairness, liberty, loyalty, authority and sanctity. Alongside these principles, he has found related themes that carry moral weight: divinity, community, hierarchy, tradition, sin and degradation.

The worldviews Haidt discusses may differ from yours. They don't start with the individual. They start with the group or the cosmic order. They exalt families, armies and communities. They assume that people should be treated differently according to social role or status — elders should be honored, subordinates should be protected. They suppress forms of self-expression that might weaken the social fabric. They assume interdependence, not autonomy. They prize order, not equality.

These moral systems aren't ignorant or backward. Haidt argues that they're common in history and across the globe because they fit human nature. He compares them to cuisines. We acquire morality the same way we acquire food preferences: we start with what we're given. If it tastes good, we stick with it. If it doesn't, we reject it. People accept God, authority and karma because these ideas suit their moral taste buds. Haidt points to research showing that people punish cheaters, accept many hierarchies and don't support equal distribution of benefits when contributions are unequal.

You don't have to go abroad to see these ideas. You can find them in the Republican Party. Social conservatives see welfare and feminism as threats to responsibility and family stability. The Tea Party hates redistribution because it interferes with letting people reap what they earn. Faith, patriotism, valor, chastity, law and order — these Republican themes touch all six moral foundations, whereas Democrats, in Haidt's analysis, focus almost entirely on care and fighting oppression. This is Haidt's startling message to the left: When it comes to morality, conservatives are more broad-minded than liberals. They serve a more varied diet.

This is where Haidt diverges from other psychologists who have analyzed the left's electoral failures. The usual argument of these psycho-pundits is that conservative politicians manipulate voters' neural roots — playing on our craving for authority, for example — to trick people into voting against their interests. But Haidt treats electoral success as a kind of evolutionary fitness test. He figures that if voters like Republican messages, there's something in Republican messages worth liking. He chides psychologists who try to "explain away" conservatism, treating it as a pathology. Conservatism thrives because it fits how people think, and that's what validates it. Workers who vote Republican aren't fools. In Haidt's words, they're "voting for their moral interests."

One of these interests is moral capital — norms, practices and institutions, like religion and family values, that facilitate cooperation by constraining individualism. Toward this end, Haidt applauds the left for regulating corporate greed. But he worries that in other ways, liberals dissolve moral capital too recklessly. Welfare programs that substitute public aid for spousal and parental support undermine the ecology of the family. Education policies that let students sue teachers erode classroom authority. Multicultural education weakens the cultural glue of assimilation. Haidt agrees that old ways must sometimes be re-examined and changed. He just wants liberals to proceed with caution and protect the social pillars sustained by tradition.

Another aspect of human nature that conservatives understand better than liberals, according to Haidt, is parochial altruism, the inclination to care more about members of your group — particularly those who have made sacrifices for it — than about outsiders. Saving Darfur, submitting to the United Nations and paying taxes to educate children in another state may be noble, but they aren't natural. What's natural is giving to your church, helping your P.T.A. and rallying together as Americans against a foreign threat.

How far should liberals go toward incorporating these principles? Haidt says the shift has to be more than symbolic, but he doesn't lay out a specific policy agenda. Instead, he highlights broad areas of culture and politics — family and assimilation, for example — on which liberals should consider compromise. He urges conservatives to entertain liberal ideas in the same way. The purpose of such compromises isn't just to win elections. It's to make society and government fit human nature.

The hardest part, Haidt finds, is getting liberals to open their minds. Anecdotally, he reports that when he talks about authority, loyalty and sanctity, many people in the audience spurn these ideas as the seeds of racism, sexism and homophobia. And in a survey of 2,000 Americans, Haidt found that self-described liberals, especially those who called themselves "very liberal," were worse at predicting the moral judgments of moderates and conservatives than moderates and conservatives were at predicting the moral judgments of liberals. Liberals don't understand conservative values. And they can't recognize this failing, because they're so convinced of their rationality, open-mindedness and enlightenment.

Haidt isn't just scolding liberals, however. He sees the left and right as yin and yang, each contributing insights to which the other should listen. In his view, for instance, liberals can teach conservatives to recognize and constrain predation by entrenched interests. Haidt believes in the power of reason, but the reasoning has to be interactive. It has to be other people's reason engaging yours. We're lousy at challenging our own beliefs, but we're good at challenging each other's. Haidt compares us to neurons in a giant brain, capable of "producing good reasoning as an emergent property of the social system."

Our task, then, is to organize society so that reason and intuition interact in healthy ways. Haidt's research suggests several broad guidelines. First, we need to help citizens develop sympathetic relationships so that they seek to understand one another instead of using reason to parry opposing views. Second, we need to create time for contemplation. Research shows that two minutes of reflection on a good argument can change a person's mind. Third, we need to break up our ideological segregation. From 1976 to 2008, the proportion of Americans living in highly partisan counties increased from 27 percent to 48 percent. The Internet exacerbates this problem by helping each user find evidence that supports his views.

How can we achieve these goals? Haidt offers a Web site, civilpolitics.org, on which he and his colleagues have listed steps that might help. One is holding open primaries so that people outside each party's base can vote to nominate moderate candidates. Another is instant runoffs, so that candidates will benefit from broadening their appeal. A third idea is to alter redistricting so that parties are less able to gerrymander partisan congressional districts. Haidt also wants members of Congress to go back to the old practice of moving their families to Washington, so that they socialize with one another and build a friendly basis on which to cooperate.

Many of Haidt's proposals are vague, insufficient or hard to implement. And that's O.K. He just wants to start a conversation about integrating a better understanding of human nature — our sentiments, sociality and morality — into the ways we debate and govern ourselves. At this, he succeeds. It's a landmark contribution to humanity's understanding of itself.

But to whom is Haidt directing his advice? If intuitions are unreflective, and if reason is self-serving, then what part of us does he expect to regulate and orchestrate these faculties? This is the unspoken tension in Haidt's book. As a scientist, he takes a passive, empirical view of human nature. He describes us as we have been, expecting no more. Based on evolution, he argues, universal love is implausible: "Parochial love . . . amplified by similarity" and a "sense of shared fate . . . may be the most we can accomplish." But as an author and advocate, Haidt speaks to us rationally and universally, as though we're capable of something greater. He seems unable to help himself, as though it's in his nature to call on our capacity for reason and our sense of common humanity — and in our nature to understand it.

You don't have to believe in God to see this higher capacity as part of our nature. You just have to believe in evolution. Evolution itself has evolved: as humans became increasingly social, the struggle for survival, mating and progeny depended less on physical abilities and more on social abilities. In this way, a faculty produced by evolution — sociality — became the new engine of evolution. Why can't reason do the same thing? Why can't it emerge from its evolutionary origins as a spin doctor to become the new medium in which humans compete, cooperate and

advance the fitness of their communities? Isn't that what we see all around us? Look at the global spread of media, debate and democracy.

Haidt is part of this process. He thinks he's just articulating evolution. But in effect, he's also trying to fix it. Traits we evolved in a dispersed world, like tribalism and righteousness, have become dangerously maladaptive in an era of rapid globalization. A pure scientist would let us purge these traits from the gene pool by fighting and killing one another. But Haidt wants to spare us this fate. He seeks a world in which "fewer people believe that righteous ends justify violent means." To achieve this goal, he asks us to understand and overcome our instincts. He appeals to a power capable of circumspection, reflection and reform.

If we can harness that power — wisdom — our substantive project will be to reconcile our national and international differences. Is income inequality immoral? Should government favor religion? Can we tolerate cultures of female subjugation? And how far should we trust our instincts? Should people who find homosexuality repugnant overcome that reaction?

Haidt's faith in moral taste receptors may not survive this scrutiny. Our taste for sanctity or authority, like our taste for sugar, could turn out to be a dangerous relic. But Haidt is right that we must learn what we have been, even if our nature is to transcend it.

(William Saletan, Slate's national correspondent, is the author of *Bearing Right: How Conservatives Won the Abortion War*.)

20120503-08	22:54	SteveG	"Lawmakers Push for Vote to Limit Post Office Closures"
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The post office is running in the red, the post office receives no tax money to operate, the post office is trying to get out of the red and the federal government is trying to keep them from cost cutting measures. Did I get something wrong?

[Remember too, that the Postal Service is losing money mainly because of the ridiculous retirement funding mandates Congress has saddled them with—in order to do the same thing Congress does with Social Security money—ROBBERY!. I say, let's get rid of Saturday delivery and let as many people keep their jobs and paying taxes, for now, as we can. —SteveB]

"Lawmakers Push for Vote to Limit Post Office Closures" by Emily Stephenson, Reuters/Yahoo! News

May 3, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/lawmakers-push-vote-limit-post-office-closures-002027964.html>)

(WASHINGTON) A bipartisan group of lawmakers is trying to drum up support in the House of Representatives to vote on a Senate-passed bill that would make it tougher for the Postal Service to close some facilities, in part by targeting representatives who may lose postal facilities and jobs in their districts.

The group hopes representatives who are concerned about the planned closures of post offices or mail processing sites under the Postal Service's own cost-cutting plan will join them in pressing House leadership to hold a vote on the Senate bill.

The new push comes as the Postal Service intends on May 15 to lift its months-long moratorium on postal closings. The closures would eliminate middle-class jobs at a time when the United States is still struggling with high unemployment.

Officials had put that moratorium in place to give Congress more time to pass a restructuring of the Postal Service, which has been losing billions of dollars each year. The postal service does not receive taxpayer dollars but relies on the sale of postage and other products to pay for its operations.

Democratic Representative Peter Welch said he and Republican Michael Grimm will begin when Congress returns from recess next week by talking with House members from states with Republican senators who voted for the Senate bill last week.

"There were 13 Republican senators who voted for this, and we think many of them represent rural areas," Welch said.

"That obviously indicates that the senators from those districts see the importance of rural delivery and the jobs."

The Postal Service lost more than \$3 billion in the last three months of 2011 due to low mail volumes, as consumers send more email, and to high labor and other costs. Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe has said the agency needs to cut \$20 billion in annual costs by 2015.

The Postal Service wants to close thousands of post offices and about 220 mail processing sites, but it has said it also needs congressional relief to get its costs under control.

The Senate last week passed a bipartisan bill that would boost protections for rural post offices, allow USPS to end Saturday mail delivery after two years, and let it use a surplus of about \$11 billion in a retirement account to offer retirement incentives to older workers.

The bill's authors, Independent Joe Lieberman, Democrat Thomas Carper, and Republicans Scott Brown and Susan Collins, wrote a letter this week to House Speaker John Boehner and other leaders urging them to bring a Postal Service bill to the floor.

House leaders have not scheduled a vote on postal legislation, and a bill from Republican Darrell Issa that passed his Oversight Committee more than six months ago is significantly different from the Senate version.

Supporters of the Senate bill hope lawmakers feeling pressure from coming closures will demand a vote on postal legislation.

Welch, a Vermont Democrat, said he is worried about the loss of service for rural residents if post offices close. A spokeswoman for Grimm, a New York Republican, said the potential closure of a mail processing site on Staten Island could cost jobs in his district.

Democrats in the House would likely back the Senate bill, Welch said. Representative Gerry Connolly said Thursday he had joined Welch's and Grimm's effort and had signed onto a letter to Speaker Boehner and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi urging a vote on the bill.

"Our challenge in the House is to get Republican support," Welch said. The letter to Boehner and Pelosi admits the Senate bill is "far from perfect" but says the legislation's changes would help the Postal Service avert layoffs and service cuts.

Issa, whose bill would create oversight groups to cut costs and close post offices, was critical of the Senate bill after it passed. Spokesmen for House Republican leadership have indicated that they do not think the Senate's reforms are sufficient.

"The House, led by Chairman Issa, is committed to passing legislation that offers the Postal Service a pathway to long-term solvency, not simply a bailout," Boehner spokesman Kevin Smith said in an email.

(Reporting by Emily Stephenson; Editing by Lisa Shumaker)

20120503-09	23:58	SteveG	America Has Been at War a Lot
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[But there's something wrong with the math here! –SteveB]

Lets be Honest!

The Revolutionary War - 1775-1783

The War of 1812 -1812-1814

The Mexican American War - 1836-1848

The American Civil War -1861-1865

The Spanish American War - 1897-1898

The Indian American Wars - 1775-1918

World War I -1914-1918

World War II - 1941-1945

Cold War 1945-1992

The Vietnam War - 1962-1973

The Invasion of Grenada - 1983-1984

The Invasion of Panama - 1989

Operation Desert Storm 1991-1992

Operation United Shield 1992-1995

Operation Determined Falcon 1998-1999

Operation Enduring Freedom 2001-2011

Operation Iraqi Freedom 2003-2011

Operation Freedom Falcon 2011-

We have been a country for 235 years.

&

WE HAVE BEEN AT WAR FOR

209 YEARS

FREE YOUR MIND and THINK

<http://www.kingfishermanor.com/Wildlife.html>



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

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