



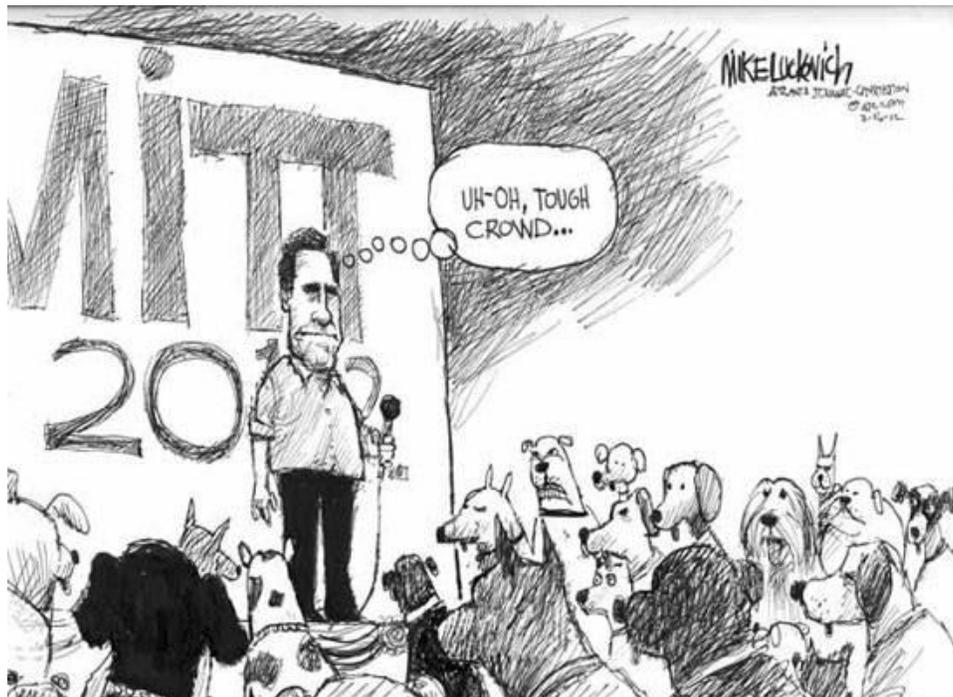
# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #142 — MAY 21, 2012

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

## Index to Friends of the Middle Newsletter #142 — May 21, 2012

### The War on Jobs Continues

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, May 21, 2012)



**"Mitt Romney is saying his comments about liking to fire people were taken out of context. Yeah, what he actually said was he likes to set poor people on fire." —Conan O'Brien**

"The Austerity Trap and the Jobs Deficit" by Robert Borosage, OpEdNews

May 19, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/The-Austerity-Trap-and-the-by-Robert-Borosage-120519-495.html>)

The dire threat facing America, according to Mitt Romney and Republicans this week, is debt, not mass unemployment.

We face "a prairie fire of debt," Mitt Romney warned in Iowa. Debt is "a grave threat to freedom," intoned House Speaker John Boehner in Washington, while threatening to hold the country hostage again over raising the debt ceiling in December.

In the Senate, Republicans forced votes on the House Republican budget that would gut Medicaid, cut all of the domestic services of government by one-third, enact deep cuts in food stamps, college grants and loans and more. (Even five Republican senators -- including two in competitive races -- couldn't stomach that).

### First Things First

There are only two problems with this. Reducing deficits isn't actually the first priority of Romney or Republicans. And the plans they champion will surely cost jobs, and most likely add to the debt burden.

Before dealing with the "prairie fire" that threatens the nation, Romney and Republicans want to add fuel to the flames. Their first priority is spending more money on the military and collecting less money from the rich and the corporations.

Romney's tax plan would cut revenue by some \$4.9 trillion over a decade, less some unspecified loophole closings. Millionaires would pocket an average tax cut of \$250,000 and those making \$10,000 to \$20,000 per year would end up paying an average \$174 more in taxes.

If Social Security and Medicare were protected for those near retirement, as Romney sometimes suggests, then the domestic side of government -- everything from the FBI to food safety to Medicaid and food stamps -- would have to be cut by over one half in 10 years. Romney can sell that plan only by denying its effects.

### The Austerity Temptation

This Republican extremism tempts Democrats to offer alternative plans for austerity. Because Democrats are prepared to raise taxes on the rich and put a lid on military spending, they can reduce deficits without ending Medicare or eviscerating all government services.

Their position of "shared sacrifice" is much more popular in the polls. Two-thirds of Republicans support a mix of spending cuts and tax hikes to reduce the deficit. And in any "grand bargain," the President can put everything on the table, and expose Republican hypocrisy on deficits and extremism on taxes. Many Democrats relish a face-off on austerity.

### The Austerity Trap

But arguing about austerity is a trap -- because what the economy needs is jobs and growth.

The best deficit-reduction program is to put people to work. Americans would prefer to cash paychecks and pay taxes than to collect unemployment insurance and rely on food stamps. When people go back to work, government revenues go up and expenditures go down. No measure will do more to reduce deficits. A full employment economy erases more than a third of the deficit. With a stronger workforce, we could focus on the real source of our long-term debt problem: the soaring costs of our broken health care system.

But when Democrats focus on the austerity debate, they get tongue-tied about jobs.

With the Federal Reserve already keeping interest rates near zero, there are only two major theories about how to generate job growth.

One view is what has infamously become known as the oxymoronic "expansionary austerity." The argument is that if you cut spending, taxes and deficits and roll back regulations, businesses will gain the confidence to invest and hire.

The alternative suggests that business owners don't lack confidence; they lack customers. With mass unemployment, businesses sit on profits; the rich move money elsewhere. So the government must act to put people to work.

With money "cheaper than free," (that is, the government is able to borrow at interest rates lower than the rate of inflation), there will never be a better opportunity to rebuild America, launch a major program to renovate our decrepit public infrastructure and put a construction industry that is flat on its back to work. Add to that revenue sharing so the states can rehire teachers and cops, and a Veteran's Corps and Urban Corps to directly employ veterans and young people. Accelerate refinancing and mortgage relief for underwater homeowners. Keynesians would pay for this by borrowing the money, but even if we taxed the wealthy and corporations to use the money they are sitting on, we'd still generate more jobs, and then more revenue and less spending--and in this way lower deficits.

Romney and the Republicans champion expansionary austerity. But we've had a real-world experiment in such austerity in Europe. While Obama resisted Republican calls for drastic budget cuts, Britain's conservative coalition government embraced them. This approach drove Britain back into a recession, increased misery and will likely end up raising, not lowering, its deficits and debt burden. Across Europe, we've seen that austerity in a weak economy is like bleeding a patient just recovering from an operation. It's dangerous to your health.

But Democrats are virtually silent about their jobs agenda. Obama put a decent one out last fall and campaigned for Republicans to pass it, but hasn't said much about it recently. When Republicans failed even to pass a decent transportation bill -- traditionally a bipartisan jobs bill -- the White House barely took note.

At present, the Obama campaign seems intent on selling the growth we have. "We're on the way back." But with mass unemployment, wages still not keeping up, and home prices still in the pits, momentum is not an answer.

Americans are naturally skeptical about Romney's trickle-down promises. We've been there, done that. A few made out like bandits; 99 percent didn't share in the rewards.

Democrats need to lay out a big argument on jobs first as part of building a new strategy for the economy. They must challenge Romney's hysteria and hypocrisy on debt not with a better austerity plan, but with a plan for an economy that works for working people. A mandate from voters for jobs first will be vital when the lame-duck Congress confronts the fiscal train wreck after the election, and jobs first is the only sensible way to begin getting our books in order.

**FotM NEWSLETTER #142 (May 21, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<a href="#">20120521-00</a>		SteveB	<b>The War on Jobs Continues</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Austerity Trap & the Jobs Deficit")
<a href="#">20120518-01</a>	08:50	Pam	Re: Video: "13 Investigates: IRS Tax Loophole" (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #141)
<a href="#">20120518-02</a>	08:53	Pam	Re: "GOP Super PAC Rejects Plan to Invoke Jeremiah Wright" (reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #141)
<a href="#">20120518-08</a>	12:26	Art	Re: "GOP Super PAC Rejects Plan to Invoke Jeremiah Wright" (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20120518-03</a>	09:18	MarthaH	"College Graduation: Weighing the Cost...and the Payoff"
<a href="#">20120518-04</a>	09:58	Dale	Re: FotM Newsletter #141 (to SteveB)
<a href="#">20120518-05</a>	10:09	SteveB	Re: FotM Newsletter #141 (reply to Dale, above)
<a href="#">20120518-06</a>	10:46	SteveB	FotM Newsletters — April, 2012 Edition
<a href="#">20120518-07</a>	11:30	SteveB	Fw: From the Right: Human Events Petition: Bypass <i>Roe vs. Wade!</i>
<a href="#">20120518-10</a>	13:36	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Petition: Support a Constitutional Amendment to Reverse <i>Citizens United!</i>
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<a href="#">20120520-02</a>	15:51	Dale	Re: Ban on Farm Chores — Really? (reply to SteveB, above) & "Latest Word On Child Labor Law Most Encouraging News Yet"
<a href="#">20120520-03</a>	16:30	SteveB	Re: Ban on Farm Chores — Really? (reply to Dale, above)
<a href="#">20120518-12</a>	18:59	Charis	"Air Travel Tips: How to Get Cheap Tickets & Best Flights"
<a href="#">20120519-01</a>	07:13	MarthaH	"Want to End Partisan Politics? Here's What Won't Work & What Will."
<a href="#">20120519-02</a>	17:07	SteveB	Re: "Want to End Partisan Politics? Here's What Won't Work & What Will." (reply to Martha, above)
<a href="#">20120519-03</a>	18:47	SteveB	"How to Fix the Deficit"
<a href="#">20120520-01</a>	12:30	SteveB	"The European Stabilization Mechanism, or How the Goldman Vampire Squid Just Captured Europe"
<a href="#">20120520-04</a>	23:58	SteveG	Quote: Mitt R0mney on Stay-at-Home Moms
<a href="#">20120520-05</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Jane Fonda at 74

<a href="#">20120518-01</a>	08:50	Pam	Re: Video: "13 Investigates: IRS Tax Loophole" (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #141)
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This doesn't look good.

<a href="#">20120518-02</a>	08:53	Pam	Re: "GOP Super PAC Rejects Plan to Invoke Jeremiah Wright" (reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #141)
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I have to give Romney credit for putting a stop to his PAC's plan, but this incident raises a disturbing question. How is a candidate to be sure "his" PAC isn't undermining him or doing things he doesn't like? If there's no communication between PAC and candidate, the PAC is off the hook. There's no oversight for these things, is there?

<a href="#">20120518-08</a>	12:26	Art	Re: "GOP Super PAC Rejects Plan to Invoke Jeremiah Wright" (reply to Pam, above)
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Personally I think they all got caught with their hands in the cookie jar. The *NYT* article preempted the strike and the Republicans are all now running for cover. They would all have loved to have the adds come out and then claim "Oh to bad", after the damage has been done.

Just call me cynical.

20120518-03 09:18 MarthaH "College Graduation: Weighing the Cost...and the Payoff"

"College Graduation: Weighing the Cost...and the Payoff" by Pew Research Center

May 17, 2012 (<http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2261/college-university-education-costs-student-debt>)

(This year's college graduation season comes against a backdrop of rising concern over the costs of higher education, the burdens of student debt and the challenges graduates face in a difficult job market.)

The issue of costs and rising student debt have have touched off a national debate about the cost and value of a college education. Surveys by the Pew Research Center present a portrait of the views of the general public and college graduates.

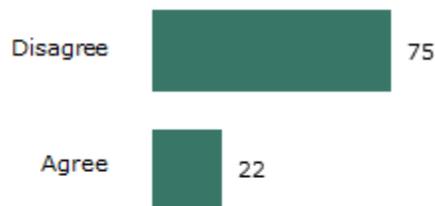
The Cost of College Raises Questions with Public About its Value

- 94% of parents expect their child to go to college.
- 57% of Americans say colleges fail to provide students with good value for money spent.
- 75% of public says college too expensive for most Americans to afford.

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### Is College Affordable?

*Agree or disagree: College costs in general are such that most people can afford to pay for a college education. (%)*



Note: "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER GP/14

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More than nine-in-ten parents (94%) who have at least one child under 18 say they expect their child to attend college. But even as college enrollments have reached record levels, most young adults in this country still do not attend a four-year college. The main barrier is financial.

Despite parents' belief that their children should go to college, a majority of Americans (57%) say the higher education system in the United States fails to provide students with good value for the money they and their families spend. An even larger majority -- 75% -- says college is too expensive for most Americans to afford.

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## Is College a Good Value?

*% who rate the job the higher education system is doing in providing value for the money spent by students and their families as ...*



Note: Views from the general public (GP) are based on a Pew Research Center survey of 2,142 adults, March 15-29, 2011

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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Concern about the cost of college, while widespread throughout the population, is felt more acutely by some groups than others. Adults ages 50 and older are more likely than those under age 50 to question the affordability of college. Among those ages 50 and older, more than eight-in-ten disagree with the notion that most people are able to afford to pay for college. This compares with roughly seven-in-ten among those under age 50. Men ages 50 and older (many of whom may be in the midst of paying for their children's college education) are especially concerned about college costs: 83% doubt that most people can afford to pay for college.

Women, who have made substantial gains in educational attainment in recent decades, have a more favorable view of the higher education system overall than do men. This gender gap is based solely on differences between men and women under the age of 50. Among women in that age cohort, nearly half (46%) say the higher education system is doing an excellent or good job providing value for the money spent. This compares with only 36% of men under age 50.

### Despite Cost Concerns, Graduates See a Payoff

- 86% of college graduates say their schooling has been a good investment.
- Adults with a college degree believe they earn \$20,000 a year more because of it.
- A typical college graduate earns an estimated \$650,000 over a work life than a high school graduate.

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## The Annual College Payoff: \$20,000

*How much more/less do you think you would earn annually if you did/didn't have a college degree?*

### The Public's Estimates

High school graduates (If I had a college degree) \$20,000 more

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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### Census Data

*2009 median annual earnings, all workers, March 2010 CPS*

College graduates \$46,931

High school graduates \$27,381

**Median annual difference \$19,550**

Note: "College graduates" refers to people with a four-year college degree and no advanced degrees. The public's estimates are based on median estimates of Q.39, Q.40 in the general population survey (GP).

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

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The negative assessments of the job the higher education system is doing generally do not appear to be tied to one's personal experience with college.

When asked whether college has been a good investment for them personally, considering how much they or their family paid for it, fully 86% of college graduates say it has been a good investment. Only 6% say college has not been a good investment for them, and 7% say they are not sure.

Likewise, those who are currently enrolled in college express a strong belief that they are making a worthwhile investment. Among current college students, 84% think college will be a good investment, considering what they or their families are paying for it. Some 14% say they are not sure if it will be a good investment, and only 2% think it will not be a good investment. Adults with a college degree estimated, on average, that they earn \$20,000 a year more by virtue of having gotten that degree. Likewise, the survey finds, adults with only a high school diploma believe, on average, they earn \$20,000 a year less as a result.

An analysis of census and college cost data by the Pew Research Center finds that a typical college graduate earns an estimated \$650,000 more than the typical high school graduate over the course of a 40-year work life.

This average figure masks wide variations in the financial returns to a college education, such as field of study -- work-life earnings tend to be much higher for undergraduate majors requiring numerical competencies (computers and engineering) than fields such as education and liberal arts.

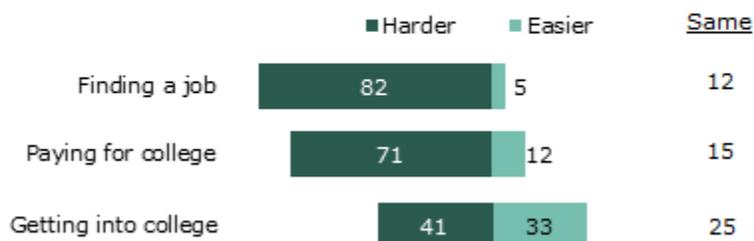
### Student Debt and Financial Challenges

- 48% of students who took out college loans and are no longer in school say repaying the debt has made it harder to make ends meet.
- 71% of adults say it's harder for today's young people to pay for college than it was for their parents' generation.
- 82% of all adults say it's harder for young people to find a job than it was for their parents' generation.

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## Times Are Tougher for Today's Young Adults

*% saying ... is harder/easier/about the same for today's young adults than it was for their parents' generation*



Notes: Based on all adults, N=2,048. "Don't know/Refused" responses not shown.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER Q10

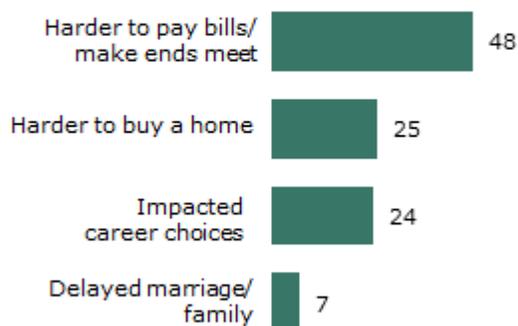
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A growing share of undergraduates take out student loans, and a rising share of families have outstanding student loans they are paying back. In 2007, 15% of families had outstanding student loan obligations, up from 9% in 1989. The average balance was \$21,500 in 2007, up from \$8,700 in 1989 (all figures in 2007 dollars). Outstanding student loan debt is now about 5% of all outstanding debt in the household sector -- more than double its share a decade ago.

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## How Student Debt Affects Borrowers

*% of student borrowers who say having to pay back student loans had this impact on them*



Note: Based on those who took out loans for postsecondary education and are not currently enrolled in school, n=332.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER GP/29

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Among respondents in the March 2011 Pew Research Center survey who say they took out college loans and are no longer in school, about half (48%) report that paying back the loan has made it harder to make ends meet; 25% say it has made it harder to buy a home; 24% say it has had an impact on the kind of career they are pursuing; and 7% say it has delayed their getting married or starting a family.

The combined challenges of paying for college, and finding a job after graduation, has made times tougher for today's young adults. Paying for college is also viewed as a greater challenge today than it was in the past. Fully 71% of all adults say it's harder for today's young people to pay for college than it was for their parents' generation.

Among adults of all ages, 82% say it's harder for today's young adults to find a job than it was for their parents' generation. Only 5% say it's easier now to find a job, and 12% say finding a job is about the same as it was a generation ago.

[20120518-04](#) 10:58 Dale Re: FotM Newsletter #141

Unfortunately my extreme attention to business isn't allowing me to participate as much as I'd like to, but I still open the newsletter and quickly scan at least the opening commentary. It seems this newsletter, curiously named Friends of the Middle, has pretty much morphed into a Romney bashing session. Day after day, there are negative diatribes, followed by laments about ... almost everything.

Was this the purpose you had in mind? Are there no positive aspects, from any political perspective, worth commenting on? I know you put a lot of time and effort into the project and I respect your energy, even if I disagree with many of the conclusions and claims. I get that the editor controls the content, but being so close to the day to day act creation of the product, I'm wondering if you realize this overview of what you are putting out?

This is not intended to be a mean spirited question, but why didn't you name the newsletter, Friends of the Progressive Movement, or Friends of Liberal Thought Advancement? When looking at the full political/economic/social spectrum, it doesn't seem much like "the middle" to me. Just an observation.

[20120518-05](#) 10:09 SteveB Re: FotM Newsletter #141 (reply to Dale, above)

Thanks for your comments, Dale.

I believe very much that the Republican party, unfortunately now including a formerly more moderate Mitt Romney, has taken a dangerous and destructive turn to the far Right. They and their rigid positions have radicalized greatly. Every thinking person in America knows that. Look at Lugar in Indiana.

When I can't simply talk about more taxes for the rich—which anyone would have to agree has been the norm in our more prosperous past—I'm yelled at and repeatedly called a socialist and a communist and guilty of consorting with Castro, etc. If one questions the anti-abortion movement, that person must be Satan.

This behavior is far, far from the middle, my brother. It is radical! Let's not kid ourselves about all this.

You certainly raise an important subject here!

So I see me sitting here smack dab in the middle of American politics, opposed to extremism on any side. Despite all the screaming emails from the Right (of which you might notice I publish maybe way too many, as a service to my contributors) about how Obama is a radical socialist out to destroy America, I see no evidence of anything in him but a mildly effectual moderate.

I.e., I see no threat of radicalism from the Left, but it is rampant on the Right. (Let us not forget the Republican primaries so soon.)

So I might appear further from the middle than you assume. I always make sure the legitimate, moderate Right is represented here when I can find it. It seems to have nearly disappeared, swallowed up in the dogma.

Now, as to your comments on my editorial selection of my daily lead piece, I think I probably agree with you. I usually start thinking about it the night before unless something before that really strikes my fancy. Sometimes I wait until early the morning the issue will come out. Lately, I've been too busy responding to people and finishing the template, monthly, and archive work to really do much real writing in the Newsletter, so I'm focused on what I see in the news that looks most important to me and fits into our areas of interest, etc. It's a seat-of-the-pants value judgment at that moment. I guess my first love is trying to point out lies.

Mitt is certainly important and is certainly a colossal, world-class liar, but he has probably dominated our cover with his bland, robotic façade too often.

But we have had a ton of stuff other than what you characterize. I'm sorry you didn't have the free time to find it, though I can understand, for sure. I guess you missed our "Gay Feature" the other day...that was a change of pace. :-)

You have a good weekend. Don't be too busy. Life is for living and will never come again. Take care.

20120518-06 10:46 SteveB FotM Newsletters — April, 2012 Edition

Here you can see the awesome power of the FotM Newsletter indexing:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/201204-FotM-Newsletters.pdf>.

Take a look.

The file may require a little time to load or download because it's 443 pages. If it fails the first time, simply click "reload" in your browser and the file will appear immediately, no problem.

There is at least one "secret" for now — after you click on an issue's cover (if you choose to use the Cover Index 1 rather than use the Subject Indexes 2 or 3), the first page FotM logo will return you to the Cover Index 1. The "INDEX: Click here." link on the first page of every issue leads to the headline article in Subject Index 3.

Now that I have my templates built, everything is much quicker and easier. I have already finished the May compilation through today's issue, so it will be available a day or two after the end of the month.

Have a great weekend everybody. Enjoy spring! We're certainly enjoying fall.

20120518-07 11:30 SteveB Fw: From the Right: Human Events Petition: Bypass *Roe vs. Wade!*

Here's something we don't see very often—an advocacy email from the Right.

Attack! Attack! Attack! How tragically wrong can one party be? Very, very scary!

Quick! Where can I sign the anti-petition petition?

from Sen. Rand Paul:

Tragically, over 4,000 babies are aborted every day in our nation.

That's over 1.6 million every year! **[And you Republicans are going to pay to feed and educate them, a\*s-hole?]**

But by passing a Life at Conception Act you and I can end abortion in America!

The Supreme Court itself admitted in *Roe* that once Congress establishes the personhood of unborn children, they must be protected by the 14th Amendment to the Constitution which explicitly says: "nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property."

Since the Supreme Court is waiting for someone to tell them who the law counts as persons, let's not wait another minute!

Your petition will let your Senators and Congressman know that their constituents support full protection for the unborn and that they must stand for life in Washington.

After signing the petition, please consider chipping in with a donation of \$10, \$25 or more to NPLA. No matter the amount you give, your donation will be matched by a generous supporter!

[http://nationalprolifealliance.com/rlacd\\_petition.aspx?pid=he2&npla=I1ABAW12I](http://nationalprolifealliance.com/rlacd_petition.aspx?pid=he2&npla=I1ABAW12I) [Any hackers out there? --SteveB]

Sincerely, Rand Paul, United States Senator (R-KY)

Life at Conception Act Petition to Your U.S. Senators and Representative

Whereas: Because of Roe v. Wade, more than 56 million unborn children have died through abortion; and

Whereas: In Roe v. Wade, the U.S. Supreme Court declared it could not resolve "the difficult question of when life begins" – and on the basis of this unresolved question, declared a new "right to abortion" based on a "right of privacy"; and

Whereas: The 14th Amendment to the Constitution states: "nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty or property, without due process of law, nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the law"; and

Whereas: In Roe, the Supreme Court admitted: "If . . . personhood [for the unborn] is established, the appellant's case, of course, collapses, for the fetus' right to life is then guaranteed specifically by the [Fourteenth] Amendment..." (Roe v. Wade [410 US 113 at 156-7]); and

Whereas: Science is clear that human life begins at conception when a new human being is formed; and

Whereas: The American people oppose abortion-on-demand and want innocent human life to be protected especially when it is most defenseless; and

Whereas: It belongs to Congress to resolve the question the Supreme Court said IT cannot resolve; and

Whereas: A Life at Conception Act, by declaring that unborn children are persons legally entitled to constitutional protection, will rescue millions of unborn children from dying by abortion-on-demand;

Therefore: I urge you to cosponsor and cast every vote for a Life at Conception Act, and to do everything necessary to win ultimate passage in the United States Congress.

[20120518-10](#)

13:36 SteveB

Fw: MoveOn Petition: Support a Constitutional Amendment to Reverse  
*Citizens United!*

Now, this is a little better. Whew!

from MoveOn:

Corporations already have so much power. But what happens to our democracy when ExxonMobil, the oil baron Koch brothers, Bank of America, and all of Wall Street can spend unlimited amounts to influence a presidential election?

We're about to find out in our first presidential election year since Citizens United. And because the limitless spending has been protected by the Supreme Court, the only way we can stop it is by amending the Constitution to reverse Citizens United and get big money out of politics for good.

Passing an amendment isn't easy—we need to get overwhelming support at both the state and federal levels. But we have a powerful opportunity right now, in an election year, to flex our political muscle as MoveOn members. We can use the election to help convince politicians up and down the ballot to get on board if they want to earn our votes.

So we're starting today by launching a new petition asking every state legislator, governor, and member of Congress who hasn't yet declared their support for a constitutional amendment to undo Citizens United and permanently get big money out of politics.

Will you add your name?

<http://pol.moveon.org/amend/?id=41692-20195165-fVxGRwx&t=2>

The plan is to deliver the petitions to state capitols and governors' mansions in all 50 states and to the local offices of every member of Congress who hasn't yet joined the call for an amendment.

And we aren't, by any means, starting from scratch. MoveOn members and our allies have been working hard ever since Citizens United to build a movement for an amendment—and there's already a lot of grassroots momentum.

President Obama is on board, along with more than 25 U.S. senators, at least 80 members of the U.S. House, and hundreds of state-level lawmakers.

It's an impressive start, and this year, we have the opportunity to help massively increase those numbers. Polling shows that Americans are fed up with the 1% flooding our political system with cash and getting get lax regulation, rollbacks of workers' rights, huge bailouts, and tax giveaways in return.

Nearly all of the economic impacts that the 99% movement has mobilized around are tied to the overwhelming influence of big money in our democracy. So once we know who's with us, we're going make the issue personal, confront politicians who won't take a stand with stories of the real-world consequences of a system run by corporations and the 1%, and demand that every last one of them chooses a side.

When President Obama announced his support for marriage equality last week, we all saw how powerful it can be when our political leaders stand behind an idea that—just a short time ago—seemed "unrealistic" or "politically impossible."

It's time, again, to change what's "politically possible" in America.

Will you sign the petition and ask every one of your state and federal lawmakers who isn't on board yet to declare their support for a constitutional amendment to reverse Citizens United and get big money out of our democracy?

Thanks for all you do. –Robin, Elena, Victoria, Emily, and the rest of the team

<a href="#">20120518-09</a>	13:16	Tom	Video: Aimee Allen Sings the "Ron Paul" Anthem!
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Good Video! @ 593,000 + Views.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qikh9Ko3mw4&sns=em>

[20120518-11](#)

13:47

SteveB

Re: Ban on Farm Chores — Really? (reply to Dale, FotM Newsletter #126) & "Over 100 Children a Year Die Working on Farms: Why Do Prominent Right-Wingers Fight Safety Regulations?"

"Over 100 Children a Year Die Working on Farms: Why Do Prominent Right-Wingers Fight Safety Regulations?" by Mariya Strauss, AlterNet

May 13, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/155410/>)

Norma Flores López has a calm, musical voice that frequently bubbles over with laughter, but she speaks with electrifying urgency when it comes to the plight of kids who work in agriculture. She knows firsthand about the brutal heat, dizzyingly high ladders, dangerous equipment and lack of safety protections they face: Flores López spent much of her teen years picking crops alongside her family as a migrant farmworker.

"When I was asked to go up on a ladder to pick apples, I wasn't given any safety training, any safety equipment, I was told just to go over there and get that ladder," said Flores López, who now directs the Children in the Fields campaign at the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs (AFOP) in Washington, DC. Flores López, who went on to earn a bachelor's degree, also serves as chair of the Domestic Issues committee for the Child Labor Coalition. Helping to protect farmworker kids is her vocation--but it's a particularly tough one these days.

On April 26, the US Department of Labor announced that it was scrapping what Flores López and other child farmworker advocates thought was going to be "a natural process" of updating the safety rules for kids working in agriculture. These rules had been proposed without fanfare in September 2011 as a farm labor version of the safety rules for kids in non-agricultural industries the Labor Department put out in 2010.

Sally Greenberg, co-director of the National Consumer League's Child Labor Coalition, a network of organizations pushing to protect children in the workplace, is still fuming at the Labor Department's decision to withdraw the rules. Calling it "a devastating setback," Greenberg said, "The forces of misinformation and distortion won out," and "riled up a lot of people and got them very frightened--falsely--about the impact of these rules." Greenberg is referring to what a Labor Department spokesperson described as "an overwhelming number of comments on this, largely folks pushing back" on the rules.

The comments came, Greenberg said, mainly from growers' groups like the American Farm Bureau (a right-wing growers' association) expressing fear that the new rules would be so hard to put into practice that they would effectively keep farmers' kids from working on their own parents' farms.

That was never a real threat, says Flores López, who adds that the updates were intended to protect children and teens of migrant farmworkers in rural communities who "are out there out of necessity and are pushing themselves harder than any child should, all out of the need to help make ends meet."

A May 11 *Washington Post* article about the political forces that led to the rules being yanked confirms that the so-called "parental exemption" allowing kids of any age to work on their family's own farm would have remained intact under the new rules. The growers' groups' main objection to the rules, then—which led to the intervention of high-profile members of Congress like Sen. Kelly Ayotte (R-NH), who the same article suggests may be on Mitt Romney's short list for running mate—was based on false information.

[As I stated in Newsletter #126. –SteveB]

In fact, said Mary E. Miller, child labor specialist for the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries, the rules would have updated existing safety rules for kids working in agriculture that have not seen an update since 1970. NIOSH, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's workplace safety and health arm, "came out with a fabulous report in 2002 with lots of updates for the child labor regulations," said Miller. "A bunch had to do with non-agricultural labor," she added, and those updated rules took effect in July of 2010. So, Miller continued, "The next obvious item was to update the agricultural child labor safety rules."

The existing safety rules allow 16- and 17-year-olds to work in hazardous conditions in agriculture, but not in other industries. They allow kids as young as 12 to work in the fields, picking crops like tobacco, which can cause serious health problems. "So we don't allow them to buy cigarettes until they are 18, yet we allow them to work in those fields as young as 12," Flores López said.

The updates would have included preventing kids aged 12-17 from working in hazardous conditions--like up on the high ladders Flores López had to use--and with heavy equipment like tractors. Miller explains that tractors "cause the most deaths for workers of all ages" in agriculture. Yet, Miller said, she routinely sees kids aged 14 or 15 driving tractors after receiving "one single training course."

And kids do die while working in agriculture. "Between 1995 and 2002 there were an estimated 907 youth that died on American farms," said Flores López, citing NIOSH's data. "That's well over 100 preventable deaths each year." For young workers under the age of 16, agriculture production accounted for almost 60 percent of deaths in this age group, and 79 percent of all work-related deaths for youth ages 10 or younger occurred in agriculture, according to a 2006 report in the *Journal of Agromedicine*.

Many of these deaths occurred while the kids worked in some of the hazardous environments the new rules would have made off-limits, said Flores López. The updated rules would, among other things, "keep kids from working in manure pits, in grain silos," said Flores López. Grain silos are particularly deadly places to work for workers of all ages: in one high-profile case from 2010, two youths, Wyatt Whitehead, 14, and Alejandro Pacas, 19, were trapped and asphyxiated inside a grain silo in Mount Carroll, IL. In another case in 2009, 17-year-old Cody Rigsby died after being buried alive in a grain silo in Haswell, CO. The proposed rule updates would have prohibited working in and around grain silos at any time for youth under 16 on farms and for all youth in commercial grain handling.

Why aren't these deaths and grievous injuries causing much public outcry? "Farmworker kids are kept in the shadows and forgotten," said Greenberg, "and nobody cares all that much about them." Human Rights Watch is one watchdog group that does care about them. It has put together a comprehensive report on the subject, called *Fields of Peril*, that documents the problem of kids under 17 working unsafely in agriculture in the US. On May 7, nearly two weeks after the updated rules were withdrawn, Human Rights Watch published a scathing op-ed in *The Hill* that re-stated the problem in concrete terms:

"Nationwide," it said, "hundreds of thousands of kids this year will cut the roots off onions, hoe cotton, climb tall ladders to pick oranges and apples, and drive tractors. If the past is a guide, some will be injured, some will be maimed, and some will die."

In the absence of updated safety rules, Flores López and her fellow advocates say they will have to fall back on their long-term strategy: promoting best practices in child safety in agriculture, building a grassroots movement to protect farmworker kids and working to get the CARE Act passed.

CARE, or Children's Act for Responsible Employment, would change and update the regulations governing child labor in agriculture to make them more closely match those governing child labor in all other industries. Right now, explained Miller, child labor regulations for agriculture are a jumble of outdated safety rules, enforcement, and penalties for negligent growers and farmers. "Historically, anyone can see that the protections for kids in agriculture have lagged behind the ones for non-agricultural [sectors]," she said.

The CARE Act, which features increased fines for child safety violations, stronger safety rules and raised age minimums for working in hazardous conditions and with heavy equipment, would "help better protect farmworker kids by making sure that all kids receive the same protections whether they work in agriculture or not," said Flores López.

"We need a groundswell" of support to help protect farmworker kids, said Greenberg. "We need parents whose kids have been injured and killed to come forward and say this is not how children in America should be treated and we should be taking every step possible to keep them safe."

Flores López agrees. "We need for there to be more discussion and more conversation around this issue," she said, especially among consumers buying food at the market. "It's very difficult right now for us to be able to trace whether food includes child labor--it's not part of the American consciousness. People don't think to ask."

The Labor Department spokesperson said the Department does intend to work with "those on both sides" to "develop public education programs that will hope to meet the initial objectives of ensuring the safety of young people working in agriculture."

As frustrating as the safety rules update setback was for Flores López, she is not giving up on the process. "We're going to continue to find ways to work with the administration on ways to protect kids," she said. "Our work is not done--as long as there are children out there that continue to be put in a vulnerable position."

"I'm totally in favor of kids working," said Miller, "but it has to be age-appropriate and well-supervised. It's about finding a balance—we are the adults that have to look after the children. They have no voice, they can't vote. We have to keep them from becoming an issue related to political self-interest."

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[20120520-02](#)

15:51 Dale

Re: Ban on Farm Chores — Really? (reply to SteveB, above) & "Latest Word On Child Labor Law Most Encouraging News Yet"

Yes, there is more to the story, but before reading about the bi-partisan rational move to scrap this ill-conceived rule making, think carefully about these next questions, if a so-called CARE act were to be passed:

1. How is it going to be enforced? What new army of federal employees will be hired to do inspections, accompanied by the administrative staff to oversee it all? Or, is this another federal law dumped on the states to enforce?
2. How much is it going to cost? Does anyone have any estimate of what the cost is for the government, for privately funded businesses and for family businesses?

Before you give a knee-jerk reaction, "Isn't saving children's lives important? We need to do whatever is necessary to protect the little ones," know that the conditions have been improving without any new legislation. There are thousands injured by sunburn and hundreds hit by lightning every year, some even killed, but we don't craft laws forcing people to stay indoors during dangerous periods, for obvious reasons. One reason is the cost to enforce such a rule is completely disproportionate to the possible value. This is known as Common Sense, a concept lost on those dedicated to running other people's lives.

Critics of the DOL, however, are now pointing to a new study published by the USDA's National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS) showing a downturn in farm accidents without the DOL changes. Looking at injuries to youth in 2001, 2004, 2006 and 2009, NASS found that "agriculture-related injuries to youth under 20 years of age on United States farms have decreased from 13.5 injuries per 1,000 farms in 2001 to 7.2 injuries per 1,000 farms in 2009. ... An injury was defined as any condition occurring on the farm operation resulting in at least four hours of restricted activity or requiring professional medical attention."

So, why was the DOL and the Obama administration introducing the rules, really a backdoor way of usurping legislative power instead of having the Congress enact legislation, at this time? My answer would be, because they know they won't be around next year.

Read what farmers say about "...Encouraging News..." that the Obama administration is dropping the regulation changes forever. By the way, when he flip-flops, if he is reelected, no one will be surprised.

The below article comes from "Farm Progress" e-newsletter:

Farm Progress Companies, Inc. is the largest U.S. media company serving the agricultural market. The company is headquartered in the suburban Chicago area and publishes 18 state and regional farm publications, such as NEBRASKA FARMER in Nebraska and PRAIRIE FARMER in Illinois.

Our rich history, tradition and reputation for quality and editorial integrity date back nearly 200 years to 1819 with AMERICAN FARMER magazine. Additionally, PRAIRIE FARMER, first published in 1841, holds the distinction of being the nation's oldest, continuously published magazine.

The ground swell already happened from those most affected by the proposed rule changes - America's farmers. We don't need a ground swell from liberal progressives in New York, Boston and LA.

Ms. Strauss, the author of this fine article you sent is a graduate of Haverford College, BA Sociology and The School of the Fine Art Institute Chicago, Master Fine Arts. Among her accomplishments are being an instructor in sculpture and a "digitizer" of documents. What great credentials for postulating on Child Labor laws related to agriculture.

"Latest Word On Child Labor Law Most Encouraging News Yet" by Tom Bechman, *Farm Progress*

May 2, 2012, (<http://farmprogress.com/story-latest-word-child-labor-law-encouraging-news-yet-0-59414>)

(Pledge not to bring back rule during Obama Administration defies predictions by some.

Official word is out that the Department of Labor has withdrawn its' proposed standards for changes in child labor laws. The laws as proposed last fall would have severely hampered the ability of youth under 18 to work on farms and in many ag businesses, and might have even made it difficult for kids to work on their own parent's farm.

The fact that it is withdraw is not news. Bill Field, Purdue University safety specialist, reported a couple of weeks ago that it was to be withdrawn. However, Field was confident that another rule would be proposed in its place as early as this summer. He believed that the rule makers were starting to understand that they would need to reword the exemption for kids working on their own farms since many family farms are incorporated. However, he was less optimistic that they understood how such a rule could cripple FFA programs and vocational agriculture instruction, and at the same time deny young people a chance for meaningful employment that has helped shaped the work ethic and led to many careers in various fields related to agriculture in the past.

Now comes news that the Obama Administration has no intention of reintroducing any such rule as long as it is in power. DOL issues this statement on April 26:

The Obama Administration is firmly committed to promoting family farmers and respecting the rural way of life, especially the role that parents and other family members play in passing those traditions down through the generations. The Obama Administration is also deeply committed to listening and responding to what Americans across the country have to say about the proposed rule. As a result, the Department of Labor is announcing today the withdraw of the proposed rule dealing with children under the age of 16 working in agricultural vocations. The decision to withdraw the rule- including provisions to define the parental exemption- was made in response to thousands of comments expressing concerns about the effect of the rule on small, family-owned farms. To be clear, this regulation will not be pursued for the duration of the Obama Administration. Instead, the DOL will work with rural stakeholders to develop an educational program to reduce accidents to young workers and promote safer agricultural working practices.

20120520-03	16:30 SteveB	Re: Ban on Farm Chores — Really? (reply to Dale, above)
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Since children on the farm were not affected by the proposed change, this whole affair has proven to be nothing but an attempt to slander the President. The Right has misrepresented the whole thing, the sissy liberals backed-off, and children are no more safe than they were before.

Oh my, and this would have been the death knell of the family farm...finance and economics would have nothing to do with it. President Obama, personally, would be solely to blame.

Maybe Republicans think the farmers are just lazy, like everyone else in our society who is not rich and/or failing?

20120518-12 18:59 Charis "Air Travel Tips: How to Get Cheap Tickets & Best Flights"

"Air Travel Tips: How to Get Cheap Tickets and Best Flights" BoliviaBella

May 18, 2012 (<http://networkedblogs.com/xOVTu>)

Read these air travel tips to be sure you get the best flights and cheapest tickets.

1. Remember that the deals you get on flights are based on the number of seats available at the time you book your flight. When airlines can't fill seats prices drop.
2. Book your flights as far in advance as you can, a minimum of 21 days prior. However, by booking 60-90 days in advance you can save even more! If you can plan ahead that far.
3. Last minute deals are a good deal - for the airline! Even if their prices have gone down from their initial prices they usually won't be as low as what you can get if you book way in advance.
4. Fly during off-peak times of the week. Airlines have the hardest time filling their seats on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. That's when you hone in for a discount!
5. Usually airlines post new discounted prices on Monday mornings. By the evening, and Tuesday morning, other airlines are working hard to match those discounts. So Tuesday morning is one of the best times to book a great deal.
6. An exception to point 5 may be really large cities. Big cities get a LOT of business travelers. So you may not find great Tuesday or Wednesday discounts on flights to and from really big cities because airlines have so many business passengers flying to these cities on weekdays that they don't need to offer discounts. In the case of big cities, your best bet for discounts may be weekends.
7. If you fly during the week and not on a weekend, you may have a more pleasant experience at the airport. Air terminals tend to be way more crowded on weekends.
8. A travel tip I use myself a LOT is "take the red-eye!" You can get the best prices on really early morning (dawn) flights and really late evening flights. Even on holidays you can get better prices if you take the "unpopular" flights (and great sunrise photos).
9. Direct non-stop flights usually cost more than flights with one or more stops. Not all flights with stops require you to change planes and in most cases you can check your luggage all the way through to your final destination at your point of origin (some exceptions apply for international flights). But you'll get a better price because airlines know that's an inconvenience to you. Also there is the chance your luggage will get lost or delayed when it changes planes. Airlines know that.
10. Stand-by isn't always bad. If you have the time to chance it this almost always works with late afternoon and evening flights pretty well: you see when you purchase an evening flight chances are it cost you less than a day flight. BUT find out the times earlier flights leave. Go and ask the counter personnel to put you on the stand-by list for one of those. If a seat on an earlier flight opens up, you'll have gotten a peak-hour flight at an off-peak price! Added bonus: during day flights, when business travelers fly, sometimes a cancellation will happen in first class or business class.

11. Stand-by is not a good idea if you're traveling with kids. If there are several cancellations, chances are the seats won't be together. Flight attendants often do ask other passengers if they'd be willing to change seats, but they often aren't. (By the way if you travel often, travel stand-by, or travel with children, Priority Pass is a great idea).

12. If your flights are late or if the airlines inconvenience you in any other way, let them know you expect something in return! Most airlines have great customer service rules (although it often doesn't seem like it) and airlines would much rather give you vouchers or discounts than leave you unsatisfied and mad. So don't be mean or rude, but do be persistent and firm. After all, you are paying for their services. Letting you on their planes is not a favor they are doing you. See information for Bolivia air travelers.

13. If you book your flight online through one of the many well-known travel sites, you'll almost always get a better deal if you book a flight+hotel or a flight+hotel+car or other package deals they offer. We've got the Latest Offers from some of the major travel booking sites here.

14. Travel lightly. Risk living a few days without your curling iron, computer, 12 pairs of shoes and other heavy stuff. Mix and match your wardrobe so you can use the same pieces several times. In general, travel lightly and avoid paying excess luggage fees. Besides, the less luggage you take, the less you risk losing.

15. Many people rack up miles and points when they fly and then never use them because they can't find a convenient time or way to use them before they expire! There's one site where you can buy, trade, share, or redeem them so you get the most out of your points and miles. Manage all your rewards programs in one place. In short, you should make use of all the tools available to travelers. Today, there are a lot of them! So use them to your advantage.

Disclaimer (cuz you know you can't please everyone): This is all based on my own experience. I don't work for an airline and I'm not a travel agent. So just use what works for you and ignore the rest.

20120519-01 07:13 MarthaH "Want to End Partisan Politics? Here's What Won't Work & What Will."

"Want to End Partisan Politics? Here's What Won't Work — and What Will." by Thomas E. Mann and Norman J. Ornstein, *The Washington Post*

May 17, 2012, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/want-to-end-partisan-politics-heres-what-wont-work--and-what-will/2012/05/17/gIQA5jqcWU\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/want-to-end-partisan-politics-heres-what-wont-work--and-what-will/2012/05/17/gIQA5jqcWU_story.html))

(Political dysfunction. Partisanship at record levels. Attack politics run amok. And public approval of Congress scraping the single digits (Sen. John McCain is fond of saying it's down to blood relatives and paid staff).)

We've all heard the laments — we've made some of them ourselves — that Washington is broken, that our political system can't grapple with the nation's big, long-term problems. So what can be done about it? Unfortunately, the cures that get tossed around are often misguided, sometimes even worse than the disease. Here are five much-praised solutions we should avoid, followed by four that have a chance to make a meaningful difference.

### 1. A third party to the rescue

Ah, if only we had a third force, an independent movement that could speak plain truths to the public and ignite the silent, centrist majority around common-sense solutions.

Sound familiar? In recent decades, Ross Perot, John Anderson and George Wallace have pursued a serious third-party route, although only Wallace managed to win any electoral votes. But that hasn't stopped high-profile columnists such as Tom Friedman of the *New York Times* and Matt Miller of *The Washington Post* from singing this siren song, along with former elected officials such as Republican Christine Todd Whitman, Democrat David Boren and many others. The much-hyped Americans Elect group — which was to harness

the democratic spirit of the Internet to find a centrist third-party presidential candidate for the 2012 race — is a prime example of this approach.

One problem: Despite Americans' disgust with our politics, about 90 percent of us identify with — or at least lean toward — one of the two major parties. Among Americans who call themselves independent, two-thirds lean to one of the parties, and behave at the polls just like the partisans. So the core audience for a third party is perhaps 10 percent of the electorate. So-called independents are classic referendum voters; when times are bad, they want to throw the bums out rather than carefully attribute responsibility or parse alternatives.

The third-party fantasy is of a courageous political leader who could persuade Americans to support enlightened policies to tax carbon; reform entitlements; make critical investments in education, energy and infrastructure; and eliminate tax loopholes to raise needed revenue. But there is simply no evidence that voters would flock to a straight-talking, independent, centrist third-party candidate espousing the ideas favored by most third-party enthusiasts. Consensus is not easily built around such issues, and differences in values and interests would not simply disappear in a nonpartisan, centrist haze.

Just ask Americans Elect, which was unable to coalesce around a single candidate, despite spending \$35 million.

## 2. Term limits will save us

This is the quintessential bromide for curing American democracy. The case seems self-evident: Career politicians in safe seats lose touch with their constituents, become beholden to the Washington establishment and stop acting in the public interest. Term limits, we're told, would replace them with citizen-lawmakers who cared less about reelection and more about acting on behalf of their fellow citizens — thus restoring Congress to its intended role as the citadel of deliberative democracy.

Does it work? Term limits of some sort have been implemented in 21 states since 1990 (in six of them, the limits were ultimately overturned), and the experience has given scholars time and opportunity to evaluate them. But instead of channeling ambition in the right, public-interest direction, term limits have the opposite effect: New lawmakers immediately begin planning for ways to reach the next level, or to find lucrative lobbying jobs when they are term-limited out. They have no incentive to do things for the long-term and no regard for maintaining their own institutions. With the loss of expertise among senior lawmakers, power devolves to permanent staff members and to lobbyists.

If anything, voters should look to candidates with a stake in the regular order, an understanding of the need to compromise, a willingness to build expertise in important policy areas, and an incentive to listen to constituents — all features that are more likely among politicians with longer horizons.

## 3. A balanced-budget amendment can fix the economy

Another hardy perennial is the notion that a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget would end Washington's rapacious habits and force politicians to make tough fiscal decisions. After all, 49 states have such an amendment in their constitutions, so why not Washington?

In fact, the states' balanced budgets are the best reason to avoid one at the federal level. When a downturn occurs, basic economic theory tells us that we need "counter-cyclical" policies to inject adrenaline into a fatigued economy — meaning more government spending and/or lower taxes. States do the opposite: A downturn means less revenue and more demands from unemployed residents, so they cut spending and raise taxes to preserve their balanced budgets. The fiscal drag from states in the recent Great Recession amounted to \$800 billion, which the Obama administration's stimulus plan barely offset. A federal balanced-budget amendment would only have aggravated the downturn — the economic equivalent of bleeding an anemic patient.

The latest House Republican proposals for a balanced-budget amendment would limit spending to 19.9 percent of gross domestic product and make any tax increases contingent on a two-thirds majority vote in both chambers of Congress. Because federal revenue is now at barely more than 15 percent of GDP and spending is at 24 percent, balancing the budget under these conditions would essentially eliminate all of the government other than the big entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare — or would require cutting those programs severely.

Maintaining fiscal flexibility is critical in the American political system, particularly in a globalized economy where less and less of our destiny is under our control. And the experience of the 1990s demonstrates that the White House and Congress together can take the steps needed to balance the budget under existing rules.

#### 4. Public financing of elections will restrain special interests

Certainly, in the post-*Citizens United* world, the financing of political campaigns is a nightmare — a Wild West of secret big money and a new Gilded Age of influence peddling by special interests.

But full public financing of campaigns is not the answer. We understand the appeal, but short of an unlikely constitutional amendment or a reconstituted Supreme Court placing limits on private money in political campaigns, public funding simply cannot provide candidates enough resources to overcome hugely expensive “independent” campaigns against them by super PACs. Even then, the influence of organizations such as the National Rifle Association, AARP, the Chamber of Commerce and the AFL-CIO is not defined simply by the money they spend on campaigns. They also mobilize powerful collections of single-minded members and followers to pressure lawmakers; and they hire former lawmakers or congressional staff members to gain access to power and boost policy expertise on key issues. Campaign donations are a relatively small part of the resources they invest in influencing government.

Whether or not campaign money is the key, restricting the flow of private money in politics has proven devilishly difficult, and the actions of the Roberts Supreme Court and the feckless Federal Election Commission have made it virtually impossible.

#### 5. Stay calm — things will get back to normal eventually

Finally, there are some analysts who do not think that our times are particularly exceptional, that under economic stress, advanced democracies grapple with dysfunction, and that as life calms down, so will our politics. They also point out that the 111th Congress (the last one) was extremely productive, passing health-care reform, financial regulation and an economic stimulus package.

David R. Mayhew, a political scientist at Yale and the author of books such as *Divided We Govern* and *Partisan Balance*, is a prominent adherent of this view. Most of the political imbalances of our era “have not been major, permanent systemic problems,” he argues. “More precisely, at least during recent generations, many alleged problems have proven to be nonexistent, short term, limited, tolerable, or correctable.”

No doubt, acrimony and gridlock are built-in features of our political system, and it is true that we have had several eras of intense stress and polarization, including the period right before the Civil War and around the turn of the 20th century.

Yet, it is not exactly comforting to compare what’s going on now to the years leading up to the Civil War. And an examination of the Obama presidency suggests that we are experiencing neither politics as usual nor an odd blip. We are witnessing unprecedented and unbalanced polarization of the parties, with Republicans acting like a parliamentary minority party opposing almost everything put forward by the Democrats; the near-disappearance of the regular order in Congress; the misuse of the filibuster as a weapon not of dissent but of obstruction; and the relentless delegitimization of the president and policies enacted into law.

Given the defeat of problem-solvers such as Sen. Richard G. Lugar (R-Ind.) and the emergence of take-no-prisoners partisans such as Richard Mourdock, there is no reason to think the system will correct itself anytime soon.

So, if these solutions won't work, what will? There is a more sensible and promising reform agenda, one more focused on fixing the party system and addressing the roots and the weapons of political partisanship.

### 1. Realistic campaign finance reform

So, if these solutions won't work, what will? There is a more sensible and promising reform agenda, one more focused on fixing the party system and addressing the roots and the weapons of political partisanship.

Without a different Supreme Court, serious problems with money in politics will endure. But there are fruitful reform possibilities outside the public financing of elections; namely, restoring the effectiveness of two provisions of the law the court affirmed in *Citizens United*: disclosure and the separation of independent spending groups (such as super PACs) from the candidates and campaigns they support.

Passage of straightforward disclosure legislation requiring the timely identification of all significant donors to independent campaign ads (say, of \$5,000 or more) would be a big step. Combine that with real efforts by the Internal Revenue Service to simply enforce its own regulations on nonprofit 501(c)4 entities to keep sham organizations from exploiting the law to hide political donors, and we would be on a path to real disclosure.

Congress could also pass a measure to sharply tighten the anti-coordination provisions that require unlimited donations to be totally independent of candidates and their campaigns. Even absent such legislation, the Justice Department could prosecute those who violate the coordination bans in cases where the brazen behavior has been most evident. (The fact that Foster Friess, who bankrolled the "independent" effort to back Rick Santorum's presidential candidacy, sat next to Santorum on his campaign plane and stood behind him at campaign rallies shows how farcical the practice has become.) Justice does not need to wait for the Federal Election Commission to act — it would be waiting a long time.

### 2. Converting votes into seats

With the partisan redrawing of congressional district lines skewing American politics, we support a redistricting process that — like several states have done — uses independent commissions to draw the lines based on respect for communities' boundaries and for real political competitiveness. It is no cure-all (none of these solutions is), but such an effort could contain and possibly reduce our escalating partisanship.

Another option that would help make votes more accurately reflect the electorate's real feelings is instant runoff voting, where voters can rank their candidate preferences. Such a system produces majority winners, eliminates the spoiler role and reduces the "wasted vote" calculation for minor-party candidates, allowing them to participate more fully in the election process. Building more legitimate majorities in this fashion could extend the electoral reach of the major parties and thereby reduce their polarization.

### 3. Restoring majority rule in the Senate

Restoring the filibuster to its traditional role of allowing an intense minority to temporarily hold up action on issues of great national import — and away from its new use as a regular weapon for obstruction — should be a top priority. Senate rules should allow only one filibuster on any bill (now there can be two or more). Currently, the burden is on the majority to provide the 60 votes to break a filibuster; instead, the minority party should have to take the floor and hold it via debate, and provide the 41 votes needed to maintain the filibuster.

Senate rules should guarantee an up-or-down vote on executive and judicial nominations reported out of the relevant committees, with a time limit for holds on the nominations.

In return for allowing true majorities to ultimately prevail, finding a way to allow a minority to offer a respectable number of relevant amendments on most bills is a reasonable trade-off.

#### 4. Expanding the electorate

Consider the Australian system of mandatory attendance at the polls, where not showing up results in a fine of \$15 or so. This modest penalty has spurred participation of more than 90 percent since the 1925 reform. Australian politicians can count on their bases turning out, so they focus on persuadable voters in the middle. Instead of campaigning on marginal wedge issues, they talk about the economy, jobs, education — and they seek to attract a majority from the entire citizenry.

In the United States, such near-universal voting could eliminate the parties' incentive to diminish the turnout of their opponents' supporters and to mobilize the ideological extremes. Boosting overall turnout would help tilt the balance back toward where most Americans actually are: closer to the middle.

Other promising avenues to expand the electorate include automating the registration process (so voters can register online and carry their documentation with them when they move from one state to another) and to open up the primaries, as California has done, to all voters. Over time, open primaries could produce more moderate elected officials.

Finally, if we can't persuade more Americans to vote with the threat of a fine, how about the promise of untold riches? Millions lined up — sometimes wasting all night — for a shot at the Mega Millions lottery in March. How about another lottery, where your vote stub is a ticket, and where the prize is the money collected from the fines of those who didn't vote? The odds of the mega-jackpot were about 1 in 176 million — we'd like to believe that the chances of fixing American politics are a bit better than that.

[I love the lottery idea. I think it would work great! Republicans would hate it! —SteveB

<a href="#">20120519-02</a>	17:07 SteveB	Re: "Want to End Partisan Politics? Here's What Won't Work & What Will." (reply to Martha, above)
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This is a super article that sums up so many things I've come to believe. Thanks, Martha!

The piece seems right-on about the Third party. When you look at the math as the authors do, you can see why third parties have gone nowhere for so long. I don't know what could or should significantly change that math...

Term limits seem like a really, really bad idea to me. There is proof. Surely we can figure out a way to control these scoundrels short of keeping Washington full of even more short-sighted people.

I'd like to see us do something to come closer to balancing the budget. Defense would have to take most of the cuts, which doesn't help jobs right now, but there would be compensations. Why don't we conduct a "War of Trade" and make some money off the world? Upper income levels need to be taxed more, there needs to be a **big tax** on gasoline, marijuana, being in the country illegally, leaving the country or shipping money out, and transferring jobs overseas. The revolving regulatory doors and lobbyist abuses must be shut-down. If intelligent, reasonable minds could prevail, all discussion of a balanced budget amendment would become moot.

Somehow, someday, campaigns and elections have to be reformed to remove undue influence by big money. It's a totally corrupt system we have now. There are some good suggestions presented here. I like the idea of dividing the problem into little pieces that could possibly be passed...if Democrats sweep in November... I like the idea of implementing the Australian voting system. It works excellently here in Bolivia too, along with the national ID system, which makes doing so many things—including voting—so much easier.

<a href="#">20120519-03</a>	18:47 SteveB	"How to Fix the Deficit"
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"How to Fix the Deficit" by Dave Johnson, NationofChange

May 19, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/how-fix-deficit-1337441906>)

The public is demanding jobs, jobs, jobs so DC's wizards and geniuses are gathered at a "Fiscal Summit" -- put on by a hedge-fund billionaire -- to not talk about jobs. This summit takes place at the seat of our representative government but none of the speakers will be unemployed or homeless or poor or retired or even middle class. The premise of the discussion is framed as "we need to find a way to cut entitlements" - to cut the benefits that democracy entitles citizens to receive so that the 1% can have even more. Speakers knowingly say they "need to get away from the reporters and the glare of the camera lights" so they "don't have to worry about public backlash" -- i.e. the transparency and accountability of democracy -- and "come up with a deal." They even talk about "coming out of a room with a deal" after the elections and before those we elect take office! This entire arrogant, anti-democracy display further erodes people's faith in their leaders.

No Jobs 25 million Americans either don't have a job, don't have a job that pays enough to live on or have given up even bothering to look for a job and these people are gathered to talk about how to cut back the things democracy does for We, the People. People who once thought of themselves as middle class are eating at churches, living with their parents or relatives or sleeping in cars, going through trash bins but the "solutions" offered by the remote wizards and geniuses take even more money out of the economy and give it to the 1%ers.

How To Actually Fix The Deficits Here are some clues for the wizards and geniuses at the "Fiscal Summit:"

1. JOBS fix deficits. Because so many people are out of work we aren't bringing in tax revenue and we're paying out huge amounts for unemployment, healthcare assistance, food stamps, etc. Unemployed people don't have the disposable income to spend at clothing stores, etc.
2. Investment grows the economy, and that fixes deficits. We have an aging, crumbling national infrastructure while our international competitors have modern, efficient infrastructure. Our businesses are trying to compete but have to depend on 1950's road and rail, etc. Fixing the infrastructure has to be done at some point and right now millions of people need the work, and financing costs have never been lower.
3. A trade deficits bleeds money out of the economy and our trade deficit is HUGE. The trade deals have benefited the 1%ers and Wall Street, but they have devastated our industrial regions and their supply chains, cost millions of jobs and sucked trillions from our economy.
4. The top tax rate is low and that encourages a scam economy. When you can make a fortune overnight and keep it it makes no sense to take the time to grow a solid business. Instead of look for quick-buck schemes. Growing a solid business over time requires solid communities with good infrastructure and educated people around those businesses and we have thrown that away.
5. A democracy tariff on goods that come from countries where people have no say would remove the competitive advantage from exploitation. We have allowed countries where workers and the environment are mistreated to have a competitive advantage over our democracy where people demand good wages, good working conditions and a clean environment. Use the revenue from that tariff to make our goods competitive elsewhere.
6. Our huge, bloated, incredible, wasteful, unbelievable military budget is equal to all the rest of the world combined. Obviously this drains our economy. The Soviet Unions is gone.

Those are just a few of the things that would fix the deficit problem. Don't forget, just 12 years ago we were paying off the debt.

[20120520-01](#)

12:30 SteveB

"The European Stabilization Mechanism, or How the Goldman Vampire Squid Just Captured Europe"

"The European Stabilization Mechanism, or How the Goldman Vampire Squid Just Captured Europe" by Ellen Brown, NationofChange

May 20, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/european-stabilization-mechanism-or-how-goldman-vampire-squid-just-captured-europe-1337519246>)

The Goldman Sachs coup that failed in America has nearly succeeded in Europe—a permanent, irrevocable, unchallengeable bailout for the banks underwritten by the taxpayers.

In September 2008, Henry Paulson, former CEO of Goldman Sachs, managed to extort a \$700 billion bank bailout from Congress. But to pull it off, he had to fall on his knees and threaten the collapse of the entire global financial system and the imposition of martial law; and the bailout was a one-time affair. Paulson's plea for a **permanent bailout fund**—the Troubled Asset Relief Program or TARP—was opposed by Congress and ultimately rejected.

By December 2011, European Central Bank president Mario Draghi, former vice president of Goldman Sachs Europe, was able to approve a **500 billion Euro bailout** for European banks without asking anyone's permission. And in January 2012, a permanent rescue-funding program called the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) was **passed in the dead of night** with barely even a mention in the press. The ESM imposes an open-ended debt on EU member governments, putting taxpayers on the hook for whatever the ESM's Eurocrat overseers demand.

The bankers' coup has triumphed in Europe seemingly without a fight. The ESM is cheered by Eurozone governments, their creditors, and "the market" alike, because it means investors will keep buying sovereign debt. All is sacrificed to the demands of the creditors, because where else can the money be had to float the crippling debts of the Eurozone governments?

There is another alternative to debt slavery to the banks. But first, a closer look at the nefarious underbelly of the ESM and Goldman's silent takeover of the ECB . . .

### The Dark Side of the ESM

The ESM is a permanent rescue facility slated to replace the temporary European Financial Stability Facility and European Financial Stabilization Mechanism as soon as Member States representing 90% of the capital commitments have ratified it, something that is expected to happen in July 2012. A December 2011 YouTube video titled "The shocking truth of the pending EU collapse!", originally posted in German, gives such a revealing look at the ESM that it is worth quoting here at length. It states:

The EU is planning a new treaty called the European Stability Mechanism, or ESM: a treaty of debt . . . The authorized capital stock shall be 700 billion euros. Question: why 700 billion? [Probable answer: it simply mimicked the \$700 billion the U.S. Congress bought into in 2008.] . . .

[Article 9]: ". . . ESM Members hereby irrevocably and unconditionally undertake to pay on demand any capital call made on them . . . within seven days of receipt of such demand." . . . If the ESM needs money, we have seven days to pay. . . . But what does "irrevocably and unconditionally" mean? What if we have a new parliament, one that does not want to transfer money to the ESM? . . .

[Article 10]: "The Board of Governors may decide to change the authorized capital and amend Article 8 . . . accordingly." Question: . . . 700 billion is just the beginning? The ESM can stock up the fund as much as it wants to, any time it wants to? And we would then be required under Article 9 to irrevocably and unconditionally pay up?

[Article 27, lines 2-3]: "The ESM, its property, funding, and assets . . . shall enjoy immunity from every form of judicial process . . ." Question: So the ESM program can sue us, but we can't challenge it in court?

[Article 27, line 4]: "The property, funding and assets of the ESM shall . . . be immune from search, requisition, confiscation, expropriation, or any other form of seizure, taking or foreclosure by executive, judicial, administrative or legislative action." Question: . . . [T]his means that neither our governments, nor

our legislatures, nor any of our democratic laws have any effect on the ESM organization? That's a pretty powerful treaty!

[Article 30]: "Governors, alternate Governors, Directors, alternate Directors, the Managing Director and staff members shall be immune from legal process with respect to acts performed by them . . . and shall enjoy inviolability in respect of their official papers and documents." Question: So anyone involved in the ESM is off the hook? They can't be held accountable for anything? . . . The treaty establishes a new intergovernmental organization to which we are required to transfer unlimited assets within seven days if it so requests, an organization that can sue us but is immune from all forms of prosecution and whose managers enjoy the same immunity. There are no independent reviewers and no existing laws apply? Governments cannot take action against it? Europe's national budgets in the hands of one single unelected intergovernmental organization? Is that the future of Europe? Is that the new EU – a Europe devoid of sovereign democracies?

### The Goldman Squid Captures the ECB

Last November, without fanfare and barely noticed in the press, former Goldman exec Mario Draghi replaced Jean-Claude Trichet as head of the ECB. Draghi wasted no time doing for the banks what the ECB has refused to do for its member governments—lavish money on them at very cheap rates. French blogger Simon Thorpe reports:

On the 21st of December, the ECB "lent" 489 billion euros to European Banks at the extremely generous rate of just 1% over 3 years. I say "lent", but in reality, they just ran the printing presses. The ECB doesn't have the money to lend. It's Quantitative Easing again.

The money was gobbled up virtually instantaneously by a total of 523 banks. It's complete madness. The ECB hopes that the banks will do something useful with it - like lending the money to the Greeks, who are currently paying 18% to the bond markets to get money. But there are absolutely no strings attached. If the banks decide to pay bonuses with the money, that's fine. Or they might just shift all the money to tax havens.

At 18% interest, debt doubles in just four years. It is this onerous interest burden, not the debt itself that is crippling Greece and other debtor nations. Thorpe proposes the obvious solution:

Why not lend the money to the Greek government directly? Or to the Portuguese government, currently having to borrow money at 11.9%? Or the Hungarian government, currently paying 8.53%. Or the Irish government, currently paying 8.51%? Or the Italian government, who are having to pay 7.06%?

The stock objection to that alternative is that Article 123 of the Lisbon Treaty prevents the ECB from lending to governments. But Thorpe reasons:

My understanding is that Article 123 is there to prevent elected governments from abusing Central Banks by ordering them to print money to finance excessive spending. That, we are told, is why the ECB has to be independent from governments. OK. But what we have now is a million times worse. The ECB is now completely in the hands of the banking sector. "We want half a billion of really cheap money!!" they say. OK, no problem. Mario is here to fix that. And no need to consult anyone. By the time the ECB makes the announcement, the money has already disappeared.

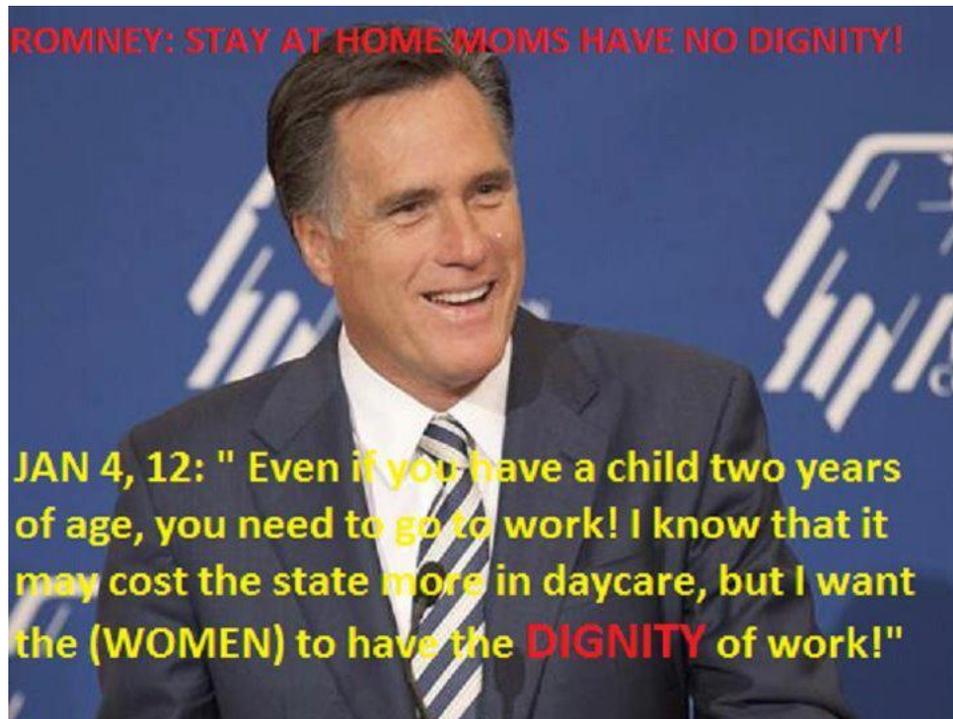
At least if the ECB was working under the supervision of elected governments, we would have some influence when we elect those governments. But the bunch that now has their grubby hands on the instruments of power are now totally out of control.

Goldman Sachs and the financial technocrats have taken over the European ship. Democracy has gone out the window, all in the name of keeping the central bank independent from the "abuses" of government. *Yet the government is the people*—or it should be. A democratically elected government represents the people. Europeans are being hoodwinked into relinquishing their cherished democracy to a rogue band of financial pirates, and the rest of the world is not far behind.

Rather than ratifying the draconian ESM treaty, Europeans would be better advised to reverse article 123 of the Lisbon treaty. Then the ECB could issue credit directly to its member governments. Alternatively, Eurozone governments could re-establish their economic sovereignty by reviving their publicly owned central banks and using them to issue the credit of the nation for the benefit of the nation, effectively interest-free. This is not a new idea but has been used historically to very good effect, e.g. in Australia through the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and in Canada through the Bank of Canada.

Today the issuance of money and credit has become the private right of vampire rentiers, who are using it to squeeze the lifeblood out of economies. This right needs to be returned to sovereign governments. Credit should be a public utility, dispensed, and managed for the benefit of the people.

[20120520-04](#) 23:58 SteveG Quote: Mitt R0mney on Stay-at-Home Moms



<http://movies.yahoo.com/photos/2012-cannes-film-festival-slideshow/>

2012 Cannes Film Festival



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