



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #153 — JUNE 5, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Is Mitt Fit (to Be President)?

(posted by Friends of the Middle, June 5, 2012)

Who should be elected President this fall is obviously one of our important subjects here at Friends of the Middle. The following discussion started on Sunday, beginning with a reference from Dale, "Poll: Romney Gains 21 Points in Favorability among Female Voters". The first few emails also appeared in FotM Newsletter #152.

Dale: Note that this [the Republican war on women] has been a big stump talking point the last month...a lot of emphasis put on the subject by Democrat surrogates. Instead, it has turned into another Democratic Party failure, another demonstration of lack of leadership by the head of the party. The effort to mislabel Romney as someone who is conducting a "war on women" is exposed for what it is -- BS. The people are brighter than the party leaders thought. Go figure. Trying to pin that label on Walker is just as bogus and the people of Wisconsin know it too. These are desperation tactics and all but the blinded faithful can smell it -- gender warfare, class warfare, race and ethnicity warfare -- all from a politician who said he was going to bring the country together, to be a healer. Inexperience or naivete? Which is it?

Pam: What I really don't understand is why poll numbers change at all. Is there really anyone who hasn't already made a choice between Romney or Obama? If they were more alike, I'd understand how people might have a hard time deciding which one to go for, but as it is they couldn't be more different. How can anyone not know who they prefer?

Art: Hi Dale, Attended a dinner the other night and sat next to two Wisconsiners who are still voting there. They own and operate a small business, so imagine my surprise when I learned they both loath Walker. Go figure. I wouldn't put to much faith in the below. How is it a Democratic Party failure? Romney is the consummate used car salesman, he'll tell you anything he thinks you want to hear to make the sale. Admirable in a used car salesman perhaps, maybe not so much for a President.

Dale: That's an interesting observation, Art. I know lots of people who believe Obama, The Speech Giver In Chief, is the ultimate snake oil salesman. Who else has ever been less qualified to be POTUS? He really had zero leadership experience, yet somehow sold millions of people on the concept that he could manage the country. Everyone gives him style points for charisma, but that's not what the country needs.

Time after time, Obama has promised and not delivered, except to feather his own nest. Now, that is how used car salespeople, male and female, : -), earn the reputation for being untrustworthy. Then, they get fired. I suppose the unscrupulous car salesperson tries to blame the car, and their boss, and the maintenance dept, but eventually, they

are held accountable. This is what we are now observing. If someone has put a lot of emotional dependence on a different outcome, it's painful, I'm sure.

By the way, if he is not re-elected, I'm sure there will be gloaters, but most of the "just plain people" I know will only be relieved that we can move forward from this lost period. Please consider, Obama has had four years to build consensus, or at least cooperation. No one says it was an easy task, but he has been absolutely unsuccessful, finishing with a strife ridden conclusion. Who believes he will have any more success in the next four years? Electing a new President at least offers a chance. I don't expect any devote opponents to Romney to accept this postulation, but many independents are doing this calculation and arriving at the same conclusion. I have not read/heard one pundit say the Democrats are going to win a bunch of congressional seats. The talk is about "can they hold on?". So, if Obama is re-elected we end up with continuing gridlock and confrontation, at best. Or, do you think he will change his approach in a second term? I don't.

SteveB: Dale, I simply have to tell you my honest opinion. What you've written about the Obama situation is one of the biggest bunches of BS I've ever read in my life. No offense intended, seriously. I just can't understand how you could actually "believe" this party-line stuff.

"Change his approach"? To what, to total capitulation? Renounce the Democratic Party and join the GOP? What exactly is there about his "approach" you find inadequate and why?

No experience? No consensus? No cooperation?

None of these bear any relation to reality to President Obama and his actions. It sure does sound like your friends, the GOP, though, doesn't it? GET REAL!

How can you possibly still be harping on the "no experience" issue??? If we're going to vote on experience this time around, I believe your man is completely, positively SUNK! I can't believe you'd even mention the word. That one is left over from the McCain-Palin talking points from four years ago, right?

By the way, did you know President Obama also puts his feet up on the furniture in the White House? What a low-life, huh?

Pam: Dale, I simply don't agree with your conclusion that Obama has done nothing. He has, in fact, done a great deal against great odds. It was the GOP that got us into this mess. To hold Obama solely responsible is absurd. America is still better off than Europe, don't forget. Obama HAS TRIED to be a consensus builder. That's his great strength--or weakness, depending on how you look at it. He tried to reach across the aisle from day one, but McConnell et. al. made it plain they would do absolutely nothing Obama wanted to do. The GOP has stonewalled at every turn, offered no concrete solutions to anything, cast blame on a smart man who is trying to do the right thing, and bided their time until they can have another crack at helping the rich get richer. If working people are suckered into voting for Republicans, all I can say in a few years is, I told you so.

Dale: A predictable reply.

Pam: Well, you're pretty predictable too, you know. Perhaps you could explain the part of your political philosophy that demonstrates compassion.

SteveB: Now THERE's a good question!!!! I guess the answer will be pure, unrestrained capitalism, because that's what will make us all (??? haha) successful, happy, and prosperous! (Instead of slaves, as it did in the 19th and early 20th Centuries.). [I believe Pam's excellent question ultimately, alas, went unanswered. -SteveB]

Dale: [Missing reply to Pam's question about compassion, above. -SteveB]

Pam: It may be true that each of us focuses on information that supports our own point of view, but I maintain that I'm more willing to listen to the other side when compelling evidence is forthcoming. You hate layoffs, fine. That's a value judgment, and you are entitled to it. But to defend real harm to real people as just part of doing business is, well, indefensible. How will keeping taxes low on the super-rich help Joe Plumber? How will massive

budget cuts to social services help my friend who is so disabled she can't move and must breathe through a tube? Cuts to home health care are forcing her out of her home into a facility that will cost more and be a far less happy place for her. Cuts to food stamps leave children with not enough to eat over the weekend. How do tax cuts help them? Fracking isn't dangerous? What about the tap water that catches fire or the contamination of ground water? Domestic energy? You mean blasting the tops of mountains to get at coal, then leaving streams so polluted that nothing can live in them? Putting people to work? By cutting off unemployment benefits to laid-off 55-yr. olds who can't get a job interview? I'm trying to be as specific as I can about what I value and how I believe government should serve its citizens. I am, I think pretty consistently, concerned with others who are less fortunate than I, though I've had my own tough times and know how it feels. You say we need jobs. Indeed we do. But the private sector isn't creating them, and all Obama's efforts to use tax revenue to rebuild infrastructure and invest in research and development have been stifled. I can't think of one single thing Congress has done to improve anything. If Republicans of late have done some good, I'd like to know about it.

When I read your arguments, I try to understand where you're coming from. I can understand impatience with drug dealers, dropouts, moochers, and women who have babies just to get government support for them. Those things make me impatient too. But hungry children, the disabled, the elderly who can't afford their medication-- these are the folks I think about, not someone who might have to sell his million-dollar yacht to pay his taxes.

Art: Hi, Dale. Well, we both know we are pretty much on the opposite side of things political across the board. I will point out that I too, however, was once a Republican, still am technically, but simply couldn't continue to justify the lies and lack of concern for the nation as opposed to the putting the Party first.

One other point on your note above, if you just substitute Walker for Obama in your e-mail, see how it fits. Que?

Finally, while Romney seems to me totally unprincipled and with zero moral courage, OK we've had worse, GW for one. Just tell me the math that by his words says he will increase defense spending and reduce taxes for the super rich, who hold over half the nation's wealth, and still reduce the deficit. On that last part when asked for specifics, he goes very vague and in fact doesn't have a deficit reduction plan he apparently is willing to share with us citizens. He also says he will follow the same general economic policies as the GW Bush Administration. Seems to me that is how we got in this mess in the first place? It just doesn't add up to me.

Dale: Art, I tried ["substitute Walker for Obama in your e-mail, see how it fits"] and it didn't fit well. The only parallel is that both are career politicians; however,

"For eight years as County Executive, Scott Walker cut the county's debt by 30%, reduced the county workforce by more than 25%, and authored nine consecutive budgets without increasing the property tax levy from the previous year. Despite failing national and state economies, Milwaukee County recorded a budget surplus."

WTF did Obama do? He had no direct responsibilities, no accountability in any position and produced virtually nothing. He didn't even show up to vote most of the time.

I also find your cheap shot at GW Bush as having "no moral courage" to be over the top. W didn't come into office for personal gain or to "make a name for himself." He didn't ask for a terrorist attack on US soil and he didn't attack the people who instigated it and/or supported the spread of terrorism out of a desire for personal gain. You can fault him for bad decisions, as I do, but to smear him as someone without values or morality is just plain wrong.

Art: Well, actually I just meant GW was as sorry an individual as we have in the White House maybe ever. I really don't know about his moral courage but I do know he hid out during the Vietnam conflict in the Air National Guard in Alabama or somewhere so he wouldn't have to go. Not a guy I'd follow out the front door, or the back for that matter.

Pam: What you say, Dale, about the Dems having an agenda and a philosophy that they will follow willy-nilly is exactly how I feel about Tea Party Republicans. Obama is not throwing anyone under a bus, but Repubs want to deny women appropriate health care (in pursuit of their anti-abortion agenda), restrict voting (in pursuit of their agenda to cut out African-Americans, college students, and the poor), continue raping the earth in pursuit of "cheap

energy," deny the overwhelming science on climate change, and make religion--the Christian kind--a litmus test for character. That all sounds like an agenda to me.

I do not judge a government as successful because it supports lots of people on welfare. I want more jobs, just like everybody else. Not temporary jobs laying pipe out in North Dakota, but real jobs with futures. The people who are being hurt--and I know this from PERSONAL EXPERIENCE--by all the budget cuts are, of course, the unemployed (where's all that investment money, corps.?), college students (who are being driven into massive debt while losing the right to vote where they go to school), and perhaps most seriously the disabled. Those are the ones I'd like to see compassion for, instead of the continuing draconian budget cuts that are throwing needy families under a bus. Do you really believe that I would rather pay people to sit home and watch Oprah rather than do an honest day's work? Most people want to work, their identity is tied up in their work, as I'm sure yours is. I heard a young woman on NPR say she is a trained scientist but can't find a job. She's working as a fitness trainer. She says she belongs in a lab, a scientist is not just what she is, it's who she is. My daughter works with families with disabled dependents but budget cuts are eliminating her job and crucial services. She just completed training as a personal trainer and hopes to be able to do something with that. Her husband is a high school science teacher (Teacher of the Year last year), but he doesn't get paid during the summer, so he has to scramble every year to find summer employment. Professional educators should not have to resort to such measures. You say we don't have enough tax revenue to support programs like the ARC. Then lets raise taxes a bit and have a fairer tax code that takes from those who have and helps out those who have not? And, NO, I am not a communist! It used to be that the Republican party was respectable and worked to better the country. No more. I respected Bob Dole and Nelson Rockefeller, and even by today's standards Reagan looks good. We are Friends of the Middle, and that's where we should be headed, not to opposite ends of the earth, if we have an earth 100 or 200 years from now.

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20120604-01	06:43	MarthaH	"Religious Rights vs. the Public's Right"
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"Column: Religious Rights vs. the Public's Right" by Oliver Thomas. *USA Today*

June 3, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-06-03/religious-freedom-restoration-court-congress-test/55363988/1>)

(Religious Freedom Restoration Act: The 1993 measure is intended to protect people from U.S. laws that appear to be neutral but can impinge on sacramental practices.)

Religion is a tricky business. It can bring out the best in a person. Think Mahatma Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer or Mother Teresa. But it can also bring out the worst. Think 9/11, the Inquisition or the Salem witch trials. What I'm saying is that religion can short-circuit your ability to think. You sometimes can't see things as they really are because irrational beliefs get in the way. I'll give you a couple of examples.

In New York, ultra-Orthodox Jews are criticizing the Brooklyn district attorney for prosecuting Jewish child sex-abuse cases, according to *The New York Times*. The newspaper reports that a 16-year-old ultra-Orthodox Jewish boy was being molested in a Jewish ritual bathhouse in Brooklyn. After his father reported the crime to police, the father said he was shunned, cursed and kicked out of his apartment by other ultra-Orthodox Jews for trying to protect his son.

In California, inmate Billy Paul Birdwell argued that his religion, Asatru-Odinism, required him to have open space and a fire pit. Prison officials gave him the open space and even built a fence around it. But when officials later replaced that space with a non-denominational outdoor area, Birdwell complained that his religious needs weren't met. Starting to get the picture? To people living within a particular religious tradition, the beliefs always seem reasonable. But there are limits to how far we as a nation can go in protecting the rights of citizens to exercise their faith.

A step too far

Now, North Dakota is getting into the act by pushing for a state constitutional amendment to allow for even more religious freedom. If approved by voters on June 12, the change could result in even more bizarre outcomes over religion.

For decades, the U.S. employed a test for deciding these cases that balanced the religious liberty rights of the individual against the public's right to maintain a civil society. The test went like this. If the government placed a "substantial burden" on a person's religiously motivated behavior, the government must show that the burden was (1) in furtherance of a "compelling" interest, such as health and safety, and (2) was the least burdensome means of accomplishing that interest. The test worked well for years. Religious claimants won some and lost some. Then the Supreme Court changed the rules.

In a case involving the use of peyote by Native Americans, the high court held that it was no longer necessary for government to justify restrictions on religious exercise unless the religion was being singled out for discriminatory treatment.

Of course, legislative bodies generally don't single out particular religions for special burdens. They pass laws that say no one can drink wine in a particular county, and suddenly Catholics have a problem celebrating the Mass. Or they say everyone has to wear a hard hat, and Sikhs — who must wear a turban instead — can no longer get a construction job. Nearly all burdens on religious exercise are caused by laws of general application.

States take priority

So you can guess what happened. Religious groups began having problems. Government, to a large measure, stopped accommodating religious exercise. Congress corrected the problem through the "Religious Freedom Restoration Act" — which returned things to the way they were before the peyote ruling. But the Supreme Court would not allow Congress to correct the states. That had to be done by the states themselves. Some 16 legislatures have done precisely that. In other places, the state Supreme Court has stepped in to provide similar protections by interpreting their own constitutions in ways that protect religious exercise.

Either way, America is the better for it. Orthodox Jewish boys can wear their yarmulkes to school, Muslim girls can wear their head scarves, Jewish prisoners can get a kosher meal and evangelical Christians can home-school their children without fear of reprisal from the state.

But some religious Americans want more. Unsatisfied with the First Amendment balancing test, they now want to tilt the playing field. Several states are considering these more radical remedial measures.

North Dakota's proposed constitutional amendment, for example, would eliminate the requirement that a government-imposed burden be "substantial." Any burden would trigger strict scrutiny. The amendment states that even "indirect" burdens, such as withholding benefits, assessing penalties or excluding people from programs would be prohibited. So not only may you home-school your child, you might even be able to force taxpayers to pay for your child to attend a parochial school.

If this is making you nervous, it should. It carries a faint odor of theocracy. Religious freedom may be the crown jewel of our 236-year-old experiment in liberty, but few of us would like to return to Puritan New England. Perhaps it is time for lovers of liberty, including religionists of all stripes, to say "enough."

20120604-02 07:17 SteveB Friendship (*Amistad*)

Friendship is funny. Sex doesn't matter. Age doesn't matter. Interests and opinions don't matter. Looks don't matter. Even species doesn't seem to be important.

But caring and fun? Vital!





[20120604-03](#) 09:02 MarthaH "Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance"

"Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance" WLFI/WISH

May 30, 2012, (http://www.wlfi.com/dpp/news/local/region_4/controversy-swirls-after-anti-gay-church-performance1338478752659)

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2agsAZcA3fU>.

(GREENSBURG, Ind.) A video of a child singing an anti-gay song in a church is attracting attention on YouTube, and that video appears to have been made in an Indiana church.

24-Hour News 8 research shows the video, which shows a young boy singing "**ain't no homo gonna make it to heaven,**" was captured inside Apostolic Truth Tabernacle in Greensburg. The video first appeared on a Facebook page linked to the church.

The congregation stands to applaud the child moments after he belts the hate-filled phrase. Someone in the crowd shouts, "That's my boy!"

The church's pastor, Jeff Sangl, couldn't be reached for comment. We left messages on his personal cell phone, home phone and at the church. By 1:30 p.m. Sangl's home voicemail was full.

Wednesday, no one was at the church, and the front door was padlocked. A recording at the church's phone number says Bible study takes place at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Community members we found expressed dismay that the church was using a young child to spread such a message.

"Just kind of sad they used a little boy. They don't know what he's going to grow up to be," said Tammy Skyles.

Another area resident echoed those sentiments.

"The child is not old enough to make those decisions and know what he is reciting in front of the congregation," David Hoffman said.

20120604-05	10:21	Pam	Re: "Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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This is sick. And these people have the vote. I know democracy is the best we can do, but sometimes you have to wonder.

20120604-06	10:24	SteveB	Re: "Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance" (reply to MarthaH & Pam, above)
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You thought it was kinds cute though, right? ^_^ (• I love this emoticon, because you just can't tell what the hell it means! It's so kryptyk!)

20120604-10	11:54	MarthH	Re: "Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance" (reply to SteveB, above)
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It makes me cringe, but I KNOW it's not just in Green-something, but a lot of other holier-than-thy-sin places...Along with all other we see, hypocrisy is not a form of governance. But it is becoming one...Where will that take us all--or our descendents.

20120604-22	16:39	SandyI	Re: "Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance" (reply to SteveB, above)
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I think the emoticon looks like someone with eyebrows raised? An OMG moment.

No, it isn't cute. Having that child sing that in church is akin to having small children march outside abortion clinics. Leave the kids at home when you decide to get radical. What is the line from South Pacific "you've got to be taught"?

“Without accepting the fact that everything changes, we cannot find perfect composure. —Shunryū Suzuki

[Sandy, thanks. Your idea about the emoticon sounds right. What I’m after is: “I don’t know what to think about that so I’m not even going to try, but more importantly, you have no idea what I’m thinking.” Do you think there is one like that? :-) I like your quote! Studied Zen in Japan long ago. Take care. —SteveB]

20120604-04 09:37 Bill Women as Explained by Engineers, Part 1

**HAZARDOUS MATERIALS DATA SHEET**

ELEMENT:	Woman
SYMBOL:	○+
DISCOVERER:	Adam
ATOMIC MASS:	Accepted as 55kg, but known to vary from 45kg to 225kg

PHYSICAL PROPERTIES

1. Body surface normally covered with film of powder and paint
2. Boils at absolutely nothing – freezes for no apparent reason
3. Found in various grades ranging from virgin material to common ore

CHEMICAL PROPERTIES

1. Reacts well to gold, platinum and all precious stones
2. Explodes spontaneously without reason or warning
3. The most powerful money reducing agent known to man

COMMON USE

1. Highly ornamental, especially in sports cars
2. Can greatly aid relaxation
3. Can be a very effective cleaning agent

HAZARDS

1. Turns green when placed alongside a superior specimen
2. Possession of more than one is possible but specimens must never make eye contact

20120604-07 10:41 Art “Truth, Lies & Afghanistan”

Good read and pretty much what I have been getting from elsewhere. President is on the right track methinks.

“Truth, Lies and Afghanistan” by Lt. Col. Daniel L. Davis, *Armed Forces Journal*

Feb., 2012, (<http://armedforcesjournal.com/2012/02/8904030>)

(How military leaders have let us down.)

I spent last year in Afghanistan, visiting and talking with U.S. troops and their Afghan partners. My duties with the Army's Rapid Equipping Force took me into every significant area where our soldiers engage the enemy. Over the course of 12 months, I covered more than 9,000 miles and talked, traveled and patrolled with troops in Kandahar, Kunar, Ghazni, Khost, Paktika, Kunduz, Balkh, Nangarhar and other provinces.

What I saw bore no resemblance to rosy official statements by U.S. military leaders about conditions on the ground.

Entering this deployment, I was sincerely hoping to learn that the claims were true: that conditions in Afghanistan were improving, that the local government and military were progressing toward self-sufficiency. I did not need to witness dramatic improvements to be reassured, but merely hoped to see evidence of positive trends, to see companies or battalions produce even minimal but sustainable progress.

Instead, I witnessed the absence of success on virtually every level.

My arrival in country in late 2010 marked the start of my fourth combat deployment, and my second in Afghanistan. A Regular Army officer in the Armor Branch, I served in Operation Desert Storm, in Afghanistan in 2005-06 and in Iraq in 2008-09. In the middle of my career, I spent eight years in the U.S. Army Reserve and held a number of civilian jobs — among them, legislative correspondent for defense and foreign affairs for Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas.

As a representative for the Rapid Equipping Force, I set out to talk to our troops about their needs and their circumstances. Along the way, I conducted mounted and dismounted combat patrols, spending time with conventional and Special Forces troops. I interviewed or had conversations with more than 250 soldiers in the field, from the lowest-ranking 19-year-old private to division commanders and staff members at every echelon. I spoke at length with Afghan security officials, Afghan civilians and a few village elders.

I saw the incredible difficulties any military force would have to pacify even a single area of any of those provinces; I heard many stories of how insurgents controlled virtually every piece of land beyond eyeshot of a U.S. or International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) base.

I saw little to no evidence the local governments were able to provide for the basic needs of the people. Some of the Afghan civilians I talked with said the people didn't want to be connected to a predatory or incapable local government.

From time to time, I observed Afghan Security forces collude with the insurgency.

From Bad to Abysmal

Much of what I saw during my deployment, let alone read or wrote in official reports, I can't talk about; the information remains classified. But I can say that such reports — mine and others' — serve to illuminate the gulf between conditions on the ground and official statements of progress.

And I can relate a few representative experiences, of the kind that I observed all over the country.

In January 2011, I made my first trip into the mountains of Kunar province near the Pakistan border to visit the troops of 1st Squadron, 32nd Cavalry. On a patrol to the northernmost U.S. position in eastern Afghanistan, we arrived at an Afghan National Police (ANP) station that had reported being attacked by the Taliban 2½ hours earlier.

Through the interpreter, I asked the police captain where the attack had originated, and he pointed to the side of a nearby mountain.

"What are your normal procedures in situations like these?" I asked. "Do you form up a squad and go after them? Do you periodically send out harassing patrols? What do you do?"

As the interpreter conveyed my questions, the captain's head wheeled around, looking first at the interpreter and turning to me with an incredulous expression. Then he laughed.

"No! We don't go after them," he said. "That would be dangerous!"

According to the cavalry troopers, the Afghan policemen rarely leave the cover of the checkpoints. In that part of the province, the Taliban literally run free.

In June, I was in the Zharay district of Kandahar province, returning to a base from a dismounted patrol. Gunshots were audible as the Taliban attacked a U.S. checkpoint about one mile away.

As I entered the unit's command post, the commander and his staff were watching a live video feed of the battle. Two ANP vehicles were blocking the main road leading to the site of the attack. The fire was coming from behind a haystack. We watched as two Afghan men emerged, mounted a motorcycle and began moving toward the Afghan policemen in their vehicles.

The U.S. commander turned around and told the Afghan radio operator to make sure the policemen halted the men. The radio operator shouted into the radio repeatedly, but got no answer.

On the screen, we watched as the two men slowly motored past the ANP vehicles. The policemen neither got out to stop the two men nor answered the radio — until the motorcycle was out of sight.

To a man, the U.S. officers in that unit told me they had nothing but contempt for the Afghan troops in their area — and that was before the above incident occurred.

In August, I went on a dismounted patrol with troops in the Panjwai district of Kandahar province. Several troops from the unit had recently been killed in action, one of whom was a very popular and experienced soldier. One of the unit's senior officers rhetorically asked me, "How do I look these men in the eye and ask them to go out day after day on these missions? What's harder: How do I look [my soldier's] wife in the eye when I get back and tell her that her husband died for something meaningful? How do I do that?"

One of the senior enlisted leaders added, "Guys are saying, 'I hope I live so I can at least get home to R&R leave before I get it,' or 'I hope I only lose a foot.' Sometimes they even say which limb it might be: 'Maybe it'll only be my left foot.' They don't have a lot of confidence that the leadership two levels up really understands what they're living here, what the situation really is."

On Sept. 11, the 10th anniversary of the infamous attack on the U.S., I visited another unit in Kunar province, this one near the town of Asmar. I talked with the local official who served as the cultural adviser to the U.S. commander. Here's how the conversation went:

Davis: Here you have many units of the Afghan National Security Forces [ANSF]. Will they be able to hold out against the Taliban when U.S. troops leave this area?

Adviser: No. They are definitely not capable. Already all across this region [many elements of] the security forces have made deals with the Taliban. [The ANSF] won't shoot at the Taliban, and the Taliban won't shoot them.

Also, when a Taliban member is arrested, he is soon released with no action taken against him. So when the Taliban returns [when the Americans leave after 2014], so too go the jobs, especially for everyone like me who has worked with the coalition.

Recently, I got a cellphone call from a Talib who had captured a friend of mine. While I could hear, he began to beat him, telling me I'd better quit working for the Americans. I could hear my friend crying out in pain. [The Talib] said the next time they would kidnap my sons and do the same to them. Because of the direct threats, I've had to take my children out of school just to keep them safe.

And last night, right on that mountain there [he pointed to a ridge overlooking the U.S. base, about 700 meters distant], a member of the ANP was murdered. The Taliban came and called him out, kidnapped him in front of his parents, and took him away and murdered him. He was a member of the ANP from another province and had come back to visit his parents. He was only 27 years old. The people are not safe anywhere.

That murder took place within view of the U.S. base, a post nominally responsible for the security of an area of hundreds of square kilometers. Imagine how insecure the population is beyond visual range. And yet that conversation was representative of what I saw in many regions of Afghanistan.

In all of the places I visited, the tactical situation was bad to abysmal. If the events I have described — and many, many more I could mention — had been in the first year of war, or even the third or fourth, one might be willing to believe that Afghanistan was just a hard fight, and we should stick it out. Yet these incidents all happened in the 10th year of war.

As the numbers depicting casualties and enemy violence indicate the absence of progress, so too did my observations of the tactical situation all over Afghanistan.

Credibility Gap

I'm hardly the only one who has noted the discrepancy between official statements and the truth on the ground.

A January 2011 report by the Afghan NGO Security Office noted that public statements made by U.S. and ISAF leaders at the end of 2010 were "sharply divergent from IMF, [international military forces, NGO-speak for ISAF] 'strategic communication' messages suggesting improvements. We encourage [nongovernment organization personnel] to recognize that no matter how authoritative the source of any such claim, messages of the nature are solely intended to influence American and European public opinion ahead of the withdrawal, and are not intended to offer an accurate portrayal of the situation for those who live and work here."

The following month, Anthony Cordesman, on behalf of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote that ISAF and the U.S. leadership failed to report accurately on the reality of the situation in Afghanistan.

"Since June 2010, the unclassified reporting the U.S. does provide has steadily shrunk in content, effectively 'spinning' the road to victory by eliminating content that illustrates the full scale of the challenges ahead," Cordesman wrote. "They also, however, were driven by political decisions to ignore or understate Taliban and insurgent gains from 2002 to 2009, to ignore the problems caused by weak and corrupt Afghan governance, to understate the risks posed by sanctuaries in Pakistan, and to 'spin' the value of tactical ISAF victories while ignoring the steady growth of Taliban influence and control."

How many more men must die in support of a mission that is not succeeding and behind an array of more than seven years of optimistic statements by U.S. senior leaders in Afghanistan? No one expects our leaders to always have a successful plan. But we do expect — and the men who do the living, fighting and dying deserve — to have our leaders tell us the truth about what's going on.

I first encountered senior-level equivocation during a 1997 division-level "experiment" that turned out to be far more setpiece than experiment. Over dinner at Fort Hood, Texas, Training and Doctrine Command leaders told me that the Advanced Warfighter Experiment (AWE) had shown that a "digital division" with fewer troops and more gear could be far more effective than current divisions. The next day, our congressional staff delegation observed the demonstration firsthand, and it didn't take long to realize there was little substance to the claims. Virtually no legitimate experimentation was actually conducted. All parameters were carefully scripted. All events had a preordained sequence and outcome. The AWE was simply an expensive show, couched in the language of scientific

experimentation and presented in glowing press releases and public statements, intended to persuade Congress to fund the Army's preference. Citing the AWE's "results," Army leaders proceeded to eliminate one maneuver company per combat battalion. But the loss of fighting systems was never offset by a commensurate rise in killing capability.

A decade later, in the summer of 2007, I was assigned to the Future Combat Systems (FCS) organization at Fort Bliss, Texas. It didn't take long to discover that the same thing the Army had done with a single division at Fort Hood in 1997 was now being done on a significantly larger scale with FCS. Year after year, the congressionally mandated reports from the Government Accountability Office revealed significant problems and warned that the system was in danger of failing. Each year, the Army's senior leaders told members of Congress at hearings that GAO didn't really understand the full picture and that to the contrary, the program was on schedule, on budget, and headed for success. Ultimately, of course, the program was canceled, with little but spinoffs to show for \$18 billion spent.

If Americans were able to compare the public statements many of our leaders have made with classified data, this credibility gulf would be immediately observable. Naturally, I am not authorized to divulge classified material to the public. But I am legally able to share it with members of Congress. I have accordingly provided a much fuller accounting in a classified report to several members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, senators and House members.

A nonclassified version is available at <http://www.afghanreport.com/>. [Editor's note: At press time, Army public affairs had not yet ruled on whether Davis could post this longer version.]

Tell the Truth

When it comes to deciding what matters are worth plunging our nation into war and which are not, our senior leaders owe it to the nation and to the uniformed members to be candid — graphically, if necessary — in telling them what's at stake and how expensive potential success is likely to be. U.S. citizens and their elected representatives can decide if the risk to blood and treasure is worth it.

Likewise when having to decide whether to continue a war, alter its aims or to close off a campaign that cannot be won at an acceptable price, our senior leaders have an obligation to tell Congress and American people the unvarnished truth and let the people decide what course of action to choose. That is the very essence of civilian control of the military. The American people deserve better than what they've gotten from their senior uniformed leaders over the last number of years. Simply telling the truth would be a good start.

20120604-08	11:05 Art	"Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (to Dale)
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Hi Dale, Not to barrage you, but is this true?

"Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" by Wisconsin Citizens Media Co-op

June 2, 2012, (<http://wcmcoop.com/members/integrity-the-child-scott-walker-left-behind/>)

First off, let me be clear, set the stage here ... I've had a high level of integrity all the way back to my early days as a kid when I earned the rank of Eagle Scout, and have shown that during my time in the State Assembly, as the County Executive, and now as the Governor of the State of Wisconsin. I will continue to have high integrity long after I'm in this position and long after this whole process is complete. —Gov. Scott Walker

(For an explanation on why our media cooperative chose to run this article, please read our editorial: <http://wcmcoop.com/members/editorial-on-integrity/>.)

(Editor's note: What follows is one woman's account of the Scott Walker she knew at Marquette University. To the extent possible we have verified its accuracy, including the accuracy of details not printed here in order to protect the identities of the people involved. All of the elements are consistent: the principals were at Marquette University when the incidents recounted here allegedly happened, and "Ruth" did have a baby shortly thereafter. However, attempts to reach "Ruth" and her first husband have been unsuccessful, as phone numbers listed for each have been disconnected, and so far we have not been able to independently verify Bernadette's account.)

Bernadette Gillick was a college freshman in 1988 when she first met Scott Walker. It was spring semester, and she had just transferred to Marquette University. She was assigned a room in O'Donnell Hall (then a women's dormitory), which she shared with her new roommate, Ruth (not her real name). Ruth was dating Scott Walker, who was 20 at the time, and, according to Bernadette, Ruth was deeply in love with him.

Midway through that spring semester, Bernadette alleges, Ruth found out she was pregnant. She informed her boyfriend, Scott, and initially he was supportive. That support changed to callous indifference for his girlfriend's predicament after Scott informed his parents of the pregnancy.

Bernadette reports that at this point Scott began denying that he was the father of the baby, and when Ruth said she was considering an abortion, he claimed he didn't care, as he wasn't the father anyway.

Bernadette remembers being present when Ruth was dealing with the wrath of Scott's mother, who allegedly admonished Ruth for trying to "ruin [her son's] reputation."

"I supported her [Ruth] as he [Scott] went from encouraging her to get an abortion, to telling me it was in my best interest to keep my mouth shut, to denying that he was the father and having his own mother call her and tell her to stop erroneously accusing her son of paternity," Bernadette recounts.

It was a "horrible time" for her friend. "Imagine her being 18 years old and pregnant, walking around Marquette's Jesuit Catholic campus with her boyfriend denying he was the father," says Bernadette.

All this was taking place while Walker was running for student body president.

If Bernadette's story is true, Ruth – and eventually their child – were just a few of the people who got in the way of Walker's quest for power.

After consulting with her family, Ruth decided against an abortion. Bernadette was with Ruth in the hospital for the birth of her child later that year (and says Walker was not present), and later stood up as a bridesmaid in Ruth's 1992 marriage to another man. She says Walker eventually had to concede that he was the father, after the birth and paternity test.

Why did Bernadette come forward with this story now?

Dr. Bernadette Gillick is now a college professor at a major Midwestern university. Through her attorney, Mike Fargione, she issued a statement: "It is rare that you will ever hear from me on issues of politics, as I am a firm believer that most politics are local and can be as local as our own kitchen tables. But I'm asking you to consider what I have to share ..."

Over the phone, Bernadette recounted how she watched a recent televised debate between Scott Walker and Tom Barrett. As he talked about his "lifelong integrity" her anger grew. This was a man who had abandoned his pregnant young girlfriend — completely turned his back on her at the most fragile point in her life. She notes his "now-convenient 'pro-life' proclamations" after burying his past "indiscretion." Says Bernadette, "I cannot listen to his lies anymore ... I cannot dream of how anyone would support such an evil man. Once a man shows that he has no soul, there is nothing more."

Despite repeated attempts to contact Walker and his campaign staff for comments, only one person responded to our request. Former campaign staffer Luke Fuller refused to comment, saying he no longer works for the Walker campaign and cannot reveal the source of his current employment.

[20120604-09](#) 11:20 SteveB Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Art, above)

I wonder if Walker was for Bush's "No Child Left behind"?

Don't we know, now, that the purest are the purest hypocrites? Not that any party is exempt. But we all know there is one party in particular that likes to act as if it owns morality and values and wants to dictate to the rest of us. I spit on their lies! Here are the soles of my shoes! ^_^

Integrity, huh? I wonder if Walker puts his feet up on the furniture in the governor's mansion? If so, he should be run out of office, right, like the President?

[20120604-11](#) 11:54 Dale Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Art, above)

Speaking of barrages, the liberal national media mill has unleashed a torrent of negative stories in the last days of the Wisc. campaign. In a despicable last minute "character assassination" attempt they reveal just how desperate the situation is. For those of you who think dirty tricks by republicans are worse than democrats, roll in this pile of crap and tell me how wonderful it is. It is this kind of maneuver that builds animosities that last well after an election.

[20120604-13](#) 12:11 SteveB Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Dale, above)

Well...gee...for someone who labels himself Mr. Integrity, it seems pertinent, to me. With intelligence and judgment, true integrity is what we seek in a candidate. Just those three traits will get my vote most times.

False integrity...? Is there even such a thing? I guess, if there is, Mr. Walker has it.

And, gee, as well, the timing is a little unfortunate but I'm sure it's coincidental. ^_^

[20120604-14](#) 12:20 Pam Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Dale, above)

I see no evidence that disproves what Ruth's roommate, now a university professor, said. Negative? You think the Dems are unfairly negative?! What about all the money and activists pouring into Wis. in support of Walker? I thought this was a state referendum. What about all the garbage coming out of the Donald's mouth, without a whimper of protest from any Republican? What about Fox News? Rush Limbaugh? You've got to be kidding.

[20120604-17](#) 12:48 Dale Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Pam, above)

If you want to gorge on "hate Scott Walker" material, here are just a few of the torrent I was referring to. You can call me an ostrich if you like, but I am not going to waste my time reading all the preposterous stuff being blasted out at the last minute. This is dirty tricks 101.

BTW, his opponent has not given one statement about what he would do if elected.

NOT ONE WORD. [They had a debate. How could Walker be so incompetent as to let Barrett get away with never once in an entire campaign saying one thing he would do? Amazing! I flat out don't believe it! -SteveB]

This is a 100% character assassination, scorched earth campaign. Disgusting.

2 days ago: <http://www.uppitywis.org/scott-walkers-shocking-mental-health-mess>

14 hours ago: <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/06/03/1097123/-What-You-Should-Know-About-Scott-Walker-from-His-College-Newspaper>

last week: <http://thepoliticalcarnival.net/2012/05/26/scott-walkers-campaign-was-one-of-the-dirtiest-in-school-history/>

1 day ago: <http://www.politiscoop.com/us-politics/wisconsin-politics/1436-can-t-trust-scott-walker-smear-ad-based-on-lie.html>

2 days ago: <http://eye-on-wisconsin.blogspot.com/2012/06/revisiting-scottforgov-and-its-open.html>

9 hours ago: <http://www.democraticunderground.com/1002762860>

[20120604-18](#) 13:52 Pam Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Dale, above)

The only item here that I take exception to is perhaps the first. It's probably a stretch to blame Walker for the attack on a pregnant woman in a mental health facility, but even so I don't assume his overall management was stellar. The rest of the items I find reasonable and convincing. If this is what constitutes "torrents of abuse" in your mind, then I'm at a loss. If it weren't so pointless, I'd match you point for point; Republicans were the forerunners of dirty tricks, so I'd be careful if I were you about blaming Democrats for a practice the Republicans are known for.

[20120604-20](#) 15:53 Art Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Dale, above)

Dale, but is it true?

[20120604-31](#) 20:06 Dale Re: "Integrity: The Child Scott Walker Left Behind" (reply to Art, above)

How the Hell do you or I know?

Did Clinton screw all the women who say so and Monica too? Who knows? I mean, this could go on forever.

How do you feel about the ambush tactics? All is fair, as long as its a Republican who is blindsided?

Is this a trial run for the presidential race? What last minute dirt are they going to pull out on Romney?

Believe me, I would feel just as disgusted if this were a Republican trick. Just disgraceful.

[20120604-12](#) 12:09 Ben Re: "Ferrari Builds a Unique Supercar for 'God'" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #152)

Oh, I do believe you. Had I baked my response a bit longer, I might not have sent it.

Still, I find solipsism amusing; it sort of intrinsically defies challenge. Kind of an inverse of "faith", in the religious context.

[20120604-15](#) 12:27 SteveB Re: "Ferrari Builds a Unique Supercar for 'God'" (reply to Ben, above)

Well...it is based on a deep truth. All else is unknowable. "I am," is all I know or can truly know. Even if I am a computer program running somewhere or a figment in the mind of God, I exist in some form, even if not the

apparent one. All else...unknown and unknowable...whether it's like Ben Jonson's table (apparently real), a computer program, or that figment you-know-where.

Let's take a stretch and assume there is a God sort of as we think of him in the West. Let's say he wants or needs to create a universe. How constrained he might be, I don't know and neither did Wikipedia. Now, he could either set up all these incredible dynamics with 11 or 15 dimensions, almost untold particles and quarks, colliding membranes, big bangs, and the incredibly finely tuned weak and strong forces and gravity...all this incredible majesty necessary, apparently, for the stuff we consist of to exist...

Or, on the other hand, maybe he economized, did it the easy way, and this is all an illusion or "software". Or maybe he couldn't do that and had to do it the hard way, for some reason unknown even to Wikipedia—hence, all these frickin' particles, etc.

Or maybe, since I'm all that can be known, I created you all and I am God! Maybe I forgot that part. Alas, I just don't "know".

Have a nice day.

[20120604-19](#) 14:02 Ben Re: "Ferrari Builds a Unique Supercar for 'God'" (reply to SteveB, above)

This was the position of the leader of the Solipsist mercenaries in "Against a Dark Background". He was apparently quite satisfied with that viewpoint, until an observer pointed out to him the contradiction of working with a team, each of whose members also with equal justification saw things the same way. It was an amusing thread.

"Or maybe, since I'm all that can be known, I created you all and I am God!"

[20120604-16](#) 12:46 Charis "Bolivia's Leader Wants OAS to Scrap Rights Body"

"Bolivia's Leader Wants OAS to Scrap Rights Body" by CBS News

June 4, 2012, (http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-501715_162-57446340/bolivias-leader-wants-oas-to-scrap-rights-body/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+CBSNewsPCAnswer+%28PC+Answer%3A+CBSNews.com%29)

(COCHABAMBA, Bolivia) Bolivian President Evo Morales is calling for the elimination of the InterAmerican Commission on Human Rights as foreign ministers from across the Americas gather for an annual meeting.

Along with leftist allies in Venezuela and Ecuador, Morales wants to weaken the independent commission along with a related Organization of American States body that monitors freedom of expression.

Morales contended as the OAS annual assembly opened Sunday that the rights body concerns itself only with countries that don't share a political affinity with the United States. The U.S. is not subject to the commission's oversight.

Venezuela has said it wants to abandon the rights body, and Ecuador has proposed that the OAS restrict the panel's independence.

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is not attending the OAS meeting in Cochabamba, Bolivia.

[20120604-21](#) 16:06 SteveB "5 Facts About the Massachusetts Economy Under Mitt Romney"

"5 Facts About the Massachusetts Economy Under Mitt Romney" by Travis Waldron, Think Progress/NationofChange

June 4, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/5-facts-about-massachusetts-economy-under-mitt-romney-1338824372>)

Republican Mitt Romney's presidential campaign whipped out a new number over the weekend to dispute federal government data that ranked Massachusetts 47th in job creation during Romney's time as governor there. Three campaign surrogates used the Sunday morning news circuit to claim that the state was actually 30th in job growth in Romney's final year in office.

Of course, moving the state to 30th would still mean it was in the bottom half of the nation, a fact that would seem to fit assertions from local experts that the state's economy was "below average and often near the bottom" while Romney was governor. Here are five facts about the Massachusetts economy from Romney's 2003-2007 tenure:

1. Ranked 47th in job growth:

Despite Romney's professed expertise in creating jobs, Massachusetts ranked 47th in job growth during his time as governor. The state's total job growth was just 0.9 percent, well behind other high-wage, high-skill economies in New York (2.7), California (4.7), and North Carolina (7.6). The national average, meanwhile, was better than 5 percent.

2. Suffered the second-largest labor force decline in the nation:

Only Louisiana, which was ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in 2005, saw a bigger decline in its labor force than Massachusetts during Romney's tenure as governor. The US Census Bureau estimated that between July 2002 and July 2006, 222,000 more residents left Massachusetts for other states than came to it. That decline largely explains the state's decreasing unemployment rate (from 5.6 to 4.7 percent) while Romney was in office, according to Northeastern University economics professor Andrew Sum. At the same time, the nation as a whole added 8 million people to the labor force.

3. Lost 14 percent of its manufacturing jobs:

Massachusetts lost 14 percent of its manufacturing jobs during Romney's time in office, according to Sum. The loss was double the rate that the nation as a whole lost manufacturing jobs. In 2004, Romney vetoed legislation that would have banned companies doing business with the state from outsourcing jobs to other countries.

4. Experienced "below average" economic growth and was "often near the bottom":

"There was not one measure where the state did well under his term in office. We were below average and often near the bottom," Sum told the Washington Post in February. As a result, the state was more comparable to Rust Belt states like Illinois, Michigan, and Ohio than it was to other high-tech economies it typically competes with.

5. Piled on more debt than any other state:

Romney left Massachusetts residents with \$10,504 in per capita bond debt, the highest of any state in the nation when he left office in 2007. The state ranked second in debt as a percentage of personal income. Romney regularly omits those statistics from his Massachusetts record, instead touting the fact that he balanced the state's budget (he was constitutionally required to do so). He wouldn't be much different as president: his proposed tax plan adds more than \$10 trillion to the national debt.

20120604-23 16:45 SteveB "The Republican Economy"

Anybody have any problems with this?

Mark my words, austerity is going to lead to titanic problems for the world economy, and maybe even for political systems.

"This Republican Economy" by Paul Krugman, *NY Times*

June 3, 2012, (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/opinion/krugman-this-republican-economy.html?_r=1)

(Krugman: GOP's Economy Strategy Is 'Gigantic Con Game')

What should be done about the economy? Republicans claim to have the answer: slash spending and cut taxes. What they hope voters won't notice is that that's precisely the policy we've been following the past couple of years. Never mind the Democrat in the White House; for all practical purposes, this is already the economic policy of Republican dreams.

So the Republican electoral strategy is, in effect, a gigantic con game: it depends on convincing voters that the bad economy is the result of big-spending policies that President Obama hasn't followed (in large part because the G.O.P. wouldn't let him), and that our woes can be cured by pursuing more of the same policies that have already failed.

For some reason, however, neither the press nor Mr. Obama's political team has done a very good job of exposing the con.

What do I mean by saying that this is already a Republican economy? Look first at total government spending — federal, state and local. Adjusted for population growth and inflation, such spending has recently been falling at a rate not seen since the demobilization that followed the Korean War.

How is that possible? Isn't Mr. Obama a big spender? Actually, no; there was a brief burst of spending in late 2009 and early 2010 as the stimulus kicked in, but that boost is long behind us. Since then it has been all downhill. Cash-strapped state and local governments have laid off teachers, firefighters and police officers; meanwhile, unemployment benefits have been trailing off even though unemployment remains extremely high.

Over all, the picture for America in 2012 bears a stunning resemblance to the great mistake of 1937, when F.D.R. prematurely slashed spending, sending the U.S. economy — which had actually been recovering fairly fast until that point — into the second leg of the Great Depression. In F.D.R.'s case, however, this was an unforced error, since he had a solidly Democratic Congress. In President Obama's case, much though not all of the responsibility for the policy wrong turn lies with a completely obstructionist Republican majority in the House.

That same obstructionist House majority effectively blackmailed the president into continuing all the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, so that federal taxes as a share of G.D.P. are near historic lows — much lower, in particular, than at any point during Ronald Reagan's presidency.

As I said, for all practical purposes this is already a Republican economy.

As an aside, I think it's worth pointing out that although the economy's performance has been disappointing, to say the least, none of the disasters Republicans predicted have come to pass. Remember all those assertions that budget deficits would lead to soaring interest rates? Well, U.S. borrowing costs have just hit a record low. And remember those dire warnings about inflation and the "debasement" of the dollar? Well, inflation remains low, and the dollar has been stronger than it was in the Bush years.

Put it this way: Republicans have been warning that we were about to turn into Greece because President Obama was doing too much to boost the economy; Keynesian economists like myself warned that we were, on the contrary, at risk of turning into Japan because he was doing too little. And Japanification it is, except with a level of misery the Japanese never had to endure.

So why don't voters know any of this?

Part of the answer is that far too much economic reporting is still of the he-said, she-said variety, with dueling quotes from hired guns on either side. But it's also true that the Obama team has consistently failed to highlight Republican obstruction, perhaps out of a fear of seeming weak. Instead, the president's advisers keep turning to happy talk, seizing on a few months' good economic news as proof that their policies are working — and then ending up looking foolish when the numbers turn down again. Remarkably, they've made this mistake three times in a row: in 2010, 2011 and now once again.

At this point, however, Mr. Obama and his political team don't seem to have much choice. They can point with pride to some big economic achievements, above all the successful rescue of the auto industry, which is responsible for a large part of whatever job growth we are managing to get. But they're not going to be able to sell a narrative of overall economic success. Their best bet, surely, is to do a Harry Truman, to run against the "do-nothing" Republican Congress that has, in reality, blocked proposals — for tax cuts as well as more spending — that would have made 2012 a much better year than it's turning out to be.

For that, in the end, is the best argument against Republicans' claims that they can fix the economy. The fact is that we have already seen the Republican economic future — and it doesn't work.

20120604-24	17:03 Pam	Re: "The Republican Economy" (reply to SteveB, above)
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My thoughts exactly, and I'm not even a Nobel Prize winner. Dale, how can you say Obama has done nothing, when the Republican Congress has stymied him at every turn? That simply makes no sense. You are a hard nut to crack, but I'm convinced there's a soul in there somewhere. (Sorry for the mixed metaphor.)

20120604-26	18:56 Dale	From the Middle: "Soros on the Euro" Re: "The Republican Economy" (reply to SteveB, above)
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It was humorous to watch Krugman on one of the Sunday morning political talk shows this week, George Snuffleupagus I think. He repeatedly corrected himself when he went off on a partisan toot, since he tries to portray himself as an economist. The guy has turned himself into a political hack by painting himself into a Keynesian corner.

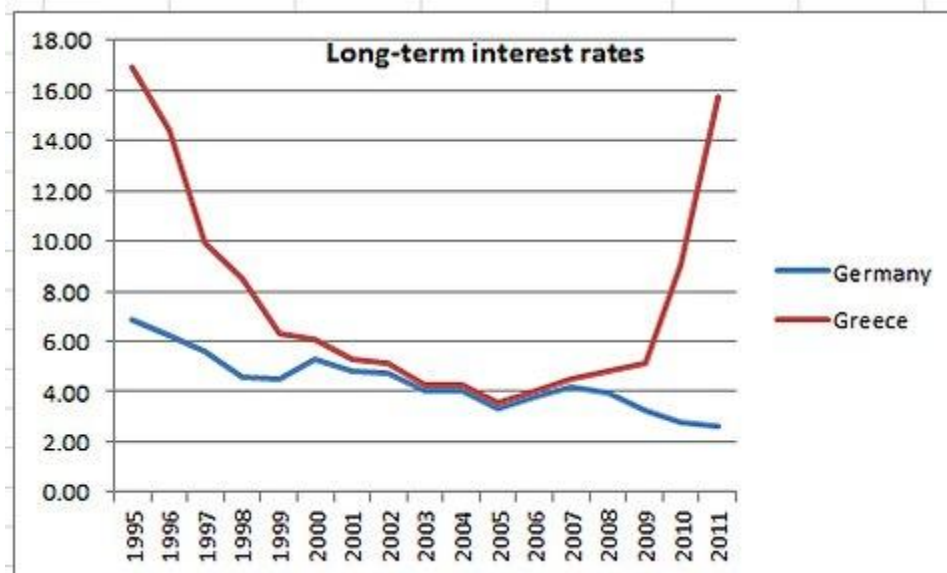
Anyone who gushes the following has given up totally on impartial, scientific (if economics even qualifies as a science) analyst:

"Soros on the Euro" by Paul Krugman, *The New York Times*

June 4, 2012, (<http://krugman.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/06/04/soros-on-the-euro/>)

His speech [See below. –SteveB] is getting a lot of attention, and rightly so. It's not so different from what many of us have been saying, but given the source — and, to be fair, the historical breadth of his perspective — I can see why it's getting people to pay attention in a way they hadn't before.

His point about the euro bubble is particularly well taken. I'd put it this way: it so happened that the euro came into existence at a time when the German economy was in the doldrums. Then the euro made investors believe that southern Europe was safe, causing a huge fall in interest rates there:



This in turn led to vast inflows of capital; the flip side of these inflows was large trade deficits, and large counterpart German surpluses, which was just what the Germans needed. Everyone was happy! For a few years.

And then the bubble burst, leading to the crisis today.

Needless to say, this story bears little resemblance to the morality play of profligacy and its consequences that has dominated European discussion until just about now. If there were any villains, they were the architects of the euro, who waved away warnings about the system's flaws. But never mind the villains: the question is what to do now. And time is running out fast.

George Soros Remarks at the Festival of Economics, Trento Italy

June 2, 2012, (http://www.georgesoros.com/interviews-speeches/entry/remarks_at_the_festival_of_economics_trento_italy/)

Ever since the Crash of 2008 there has been a widespread recognition, both among economists and the general public, that economic theory has failed. But there is no consensus on the causes and the extent of that failure.

I believe that the failure is more profound than generally recognized. It goes back to the foundations of economic theory. Economics tried to model itself on Newtonian physics. It sought to establish universally and timelessly valid laws governing reality. But economics is a social science and there is a fundamental difference between the natural and social sciences. Social phenomena have thinking participants who base their decisions on imperfect knowledge. That is what economic theory has tried to ignore.

Scientific method needs an independent criterion, by which the truth or validity of its theories can be judged. Natural phenomena constitute such a criterion; social phenomena do not. That is because natural phenomena consist of facts that unfold independently of any statements that relate to them. The facts then serve as objective evidence by which the validity of scientific theories can be judged. That has enabled natural science to produce amazing results.

Social events, by contrast, have thinking participants who have a will of their own. They are not detached observers but engaged decision makers whose decisions greatly influence the course of events. Therefore the events do not constitute an independent criterion by which participants can decide whether their views are valid. In the absence of an independent criterion people have to base their decisions not on knowledge but on an inherently biased and to greater or lesser extent distorted interpretation of reality. Their lack of perfect knowledge or fallibility introduces an element of indeterminacy into the course of events that is absent when the events relate to the behavior of

inanimate objects. The resulting uncertainty hinders the social sciences in producing laws similar to Newton's physics.

Economics, which became the most influential of the social sciences, sought to remove this handicap by taking an axiomatic approach similar to Euclid's geometry. But Euclid's axioms closely resembled reality while the theory of rational expectations and the efficient market hypothesis became far removed from it. Up to a point the axiomatic approach worked. For instance, the theory of perfect competition postulated perfect knowledge. But the postulate worked only as long as it was applied to the exchange of physical goods. When it came to production, as distinct from exchange, or to the use of money and credit, the postulate became untenable because the participants' decisions involved the future and the future cannot be known until it has actually occurred.

I am not well qualified to criticize the theory of rational expectations and the efficient market hypothesis because as a market participant I considered them so unrealistic that I never bothered to study them. That is an indictment in itself but I shall leave a detailed critique of these theories to others.

Instead, I should like to put before you a radically different approach to financial markets. It was inspired by Karl Popper who taught me that people's interpretation of reality never quite corresponds to reality itself. This led me to study the relationship between the two. I found a two-way connection between the participants' thinking and the situations in which they participate. On the one hand people seek to understand the situation; that is the cognitive function. On the other, they seek to make an impact on the situation; I call that the causative or manipulative function. The two functions connect the thinking agents and the situations in which they participate in opposite directions. In the cognitive function the situation is supposed to determine the participants' views; in the causative function the participants' views are supposed to determine the outcome. When both functions are at work at the same time they interfere with each other. The two functions form a circular relationship or feedback loop. I call that feedback loop reflexivity. In a reflexive situation the participants' views cannot correspond to reality because reality is not something independently given; it is contingent on the participants' views and decisions. The decisions, in turn, cannot be based on knowledge alone; they must contain some bias or guess work about the future because the future is contingent on the participants' decisions.

Fallibility and reflexivity are tied together like Siamese twins. Without fallibility there would be no reflexivity – although the opposite is not the case: people's understanding would be imperfect even in the absence of reflexivity. Of the two twins, fallibility is the first born. Together, they ensure both a divergence between the participants' view of reality and the actual state of affairs and a divergence between the participants' expectations and the actual outcome.

Obviously, I did not discover reflexivity. Others had recognized it before me, often under a different name. Robert Merton wrote about self-fulfilling prophecies and the bandwagon effect, Keynes compared financial markets to a beauty contest where the participants had to guess who would be the most popular choice. But starting from fallibility and reflexivity I focused on a problem area, namely the role of misconceptions and misunderstandings in shaping the course of events that mainstream economics tried to ignore. This has made my interpretation of reality more realistic than the prevailing paradigm.

Among other things, I developed a model of a boom-bust process or bubble which is endogenous to financial markets, not the result of external shocks. According to my theory, financial bubbles are not a purely psychological phenomenon. They have two components: a trend that prevails in reality and a misinterpretation of that trend. A bubble can develop when the feedback is initially positive in the sense that both the trend and its biased interpretation are mutually reinforced. Eventually the gap between the trend and its biased interpretation grows so wide that it becomes unsustainable. After a twilight period both the bias and the trend are reversed and reinforce each other in the opposite direction. Bubbles are usually asymmetric in shape: booms develop slowly but the bust tends to be sudden and devastating. That is due to the use of leverage: price declines precipitate the forced liquidation of leveraged positions.

Well-formed financial bubbles always follow this pattern but the magnitude and duration of each phase is unpredictable. Moreover the process can be aborted at any stage so that well-formed financial bubbles occur rather infrequently.

At any moment of time there are myriads of feedback loops at work, some of which are positive, others negative. They interact with each other, producing the irregular price patterns that prevail most of the time; but on the rare occasions that bubbles develop to their full potential they tend to overshadow all other influences.

According to my theory financial markets may just as soon produce bubbles as tend toward equilibrium. Since bubbles disrupt financial markets, history has been punctuated by financial crises. Each crisis provoked a regulatory response. That is how central banking and financial regulations have evolved, in step with the markets themselves. Bubbles occur only intermittently but the interplay between markets and regulators is ongoing. Since both market participants and regulators act on the basis of imperfect knowledge the interplay between them is reflexive. Moreover reflexivity and fallibility are not confined to the financial markets; they also characterize other spheres of social life, particularly politics. Indeed, in light of the ongoing interaction between markets and regulators it is quite misleading to study financial markets in isolation. Behind the invisible hand of the market lies the visible hand of politics. Instead of pursuing timeless laws and models we ought to study events in their time bound context.

My interpretation of financial markets differs from the prevailing paradigm in many ways. I emphasize the role of misunderstandings and misconceptions in shaping the course of history. And I treat bubbles as largely unpredictable. The direction and its eventual reversal are predictable; the magnitude and duration of the various phases is not. I contend that taking fallibility as the starting point makes my conceptual framework more realistic. But at a price: the idea that laws or models of universal validity can predict the future must be abandoned.

Until recently, my interpretation of financial markets was either ignored or dismissed by academic economists. All this has changed since the crash of 2008. Reflexivity became recognized but, with the exception of Imperfect Knowledge Economics, the foundations of economic theory have not been subjected to the profound rethinking that I consider necessary. Reflexivity has been accommodated by speaking of multiple equilibria instead of a single one. But that is not enough. The fallibility of market participants, regulators, and economists must also be recognized. A truly dynamic situation cannot be understood by studying multiple equilibria. We need to study the process of change.

The euro crisis is particularly instructive in this regard. It demonstrates the role of misconceptions and a lack of understanding in shaping the course of history. The authorities didn't understand the nature of the euro crisis; they thought it is a fiscal problem while it is more of a banking problem and a problem of competitiveness. And they applied the wrong remedy: you cannot reduce the debt burden by shrinking the economy, only by growing your way out of it. The crisis is still growing because of a failure to understand the dynamics of social change; policy measures that could have worked at one point in time were no longer sufficient by the time they were applied.

Since the euro crisis is currently exerting an overwhelming influence on the global economy I shall devote the rest of my talk to it. I must start with a warning: the discussion will take us beyond the confines of economic theory into politics and the dynamics of social change. But my conceptual framework based on the twin pillars of fallibility and reflexivity still applies. Reflexivity doesn't always manifest itself in the form of bubbles. The reflexive interplay between imperfect markets and imperfect authorities goes on all the time while bubbles occur only infrequently. This is a rare occasion when the interaction exerts such a large influence that it casts its shadow on the global economy. How could this happen? My answer is that there is a bubble involved, after all, but it is not a financial but a political one. It relates to the political evolution of the European Union and it has led me to the conclusion that the euro crisis threatens to destroy the European Union. Let me explain.

I contend that the European Union itself is like a bubble. In the boom phase the EU was what the psychoanalyst David Tuckett calls a "fantastic object" – unreal but immensely attractive. The EU was the embodiment of an open society –an association of nations founded on the principles of democracy, human rights, and rule of law in which no nation or nationality would have a dominant position.

The process of integration was spearheaded by a small group of far sighted statesmen who practiced what Karl Popper called piecemeal social engineering. They recognized that perfection is unattainable; so they set limited objectives and firm timelines and then mobilized the political will for a small step forward, knowing full well that when they achieved it, its inadequacy would become apparent and require a further step. The process fed on its own success, very much like a financial bubble. That is how the Coal and Steel Community was gradually transformed into the European Union, step by step.

Germany used to be in the forefront of the effort. When the Soviet empire started to disintegrate, Germany's leaders realized that reunification was possible only in the context of a more united Europe and they were willing to make considerable sacrifices to achieve it. When it came to bargaining they were willing to contribute a little more and take a little less than the others, thereby facilitating agreement. At that time, German statesmen used to assert that Germany has no independent foreign policy, only a European one.

The process culminated with the Maastricht Treaty and the introduction of the euro. It was followed by a period of stagnation which, after the crash of 2008, turned into a process of disintegration. The first step was taken by Germany when, after the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, Angela Merkel declared that the virtual guarantee extended to other financial institutions should come from each country acting separately, not by Europe acting jointly. It took financial markets more than a year to realize the implication of that declaration, showing that they are not perfect.

The Maastricht Treaty was fundamentally flawed, demonstrating the fallibility of the authorities. Its main weakness was well known to its architects: it established a monetary union without a political union. The architects believed however, that when the need arose the political will could be generated to take the necessary steps towards a political union.

But the euro also had some other defects of which the architects were unaware and which are not fully understood even today. In retrospect it is now clear that the main source of trouble is that the member states of the euro have surrendered to the European Central Bank their rights to create fiat money. They did not realize what that entails – and neither did the European authorities. When the euro was introduced the regulators allowed banks to buy unlimited amounts of government bonds without setting aside any equity capital; and the central bank accepted all government bonds at its discount window on equal terms. Commercial banks found it advantageous to accumulate the bonds of the weaker euro members in order to earn a few extra basis points. That is what caused interest rates to converge which in turn caused competitiveness to diverge. Germany, struggling with the burdens of reunification, undertook structural reforms and became more competitive. Other countries enjoyed housing and consumption booms on the back of cheap credit, making them less competitive. Then came the crash of 2008 which created conditions that were far removed from those prescribed by the Maastricht Treaty. Many governments had to shift bank liabilities on to their own balance sheets and engage in massive deficit spending. These countries found themselves in the position of a third world country that had become heavily indebted in a currency that it did not control. Due to the divergence in economic performance Europe became divided between creditor and debtor countries. This is having far reaching political implications to which I will revert.

It took some time for the financial markets to discover that government bonds which had been considered riskless are subject to speculative attack and may actually default; but when they did, risk premiums rose dramatically. This rendered commercial banks whose balance sheets were loaded with those bonds potentially insolvent. And that constituted the two main components of the problem confronting us today: a sovereign debt crisis and a banking crisis which are closely interlinked.

The eurozone is now repeating what had often happened in the global financial system. There is a close parallel between the euro crisis and the international banking crisis that erupted in 1982. Then the international financial authorities did whatever was necessary to protect the banking system: they inflicted hardship on the periphery in order to protect the center. Now Germany and the other creditor countries are unknowingly playing the same role. The details differ but the idea is the same: the creditors are in effect shifting the burden of adjustment on to the debtor countries and avoiding their own responsibility for the imbalances. Interestingly, the terms "center" and "periphery" have crept into usage almost unnoticed. Just as in the 1980's all the blame and burden is falling on the "periphery" and the responsibility of the "center" has never been properly acknowledged. Yet in the euro crisis the responsibility of the center is even greater than it was in 1982. The "center" is responsible for designing a flawed system, enacting flawed treaties, pursuing flawed policies and always doing too little too late. In the 1980's Latin America suffered a lost decade; a similar fate now awaits Europe. That is the responsibility that Germany and the other creditor countries need to acknowledge. But there is no sign of this happening.

The European authorities had little understanding of what was happening. They were prepared to deal with fiscal problems but only Greece qualified as a fiscal crisis; the rest of Europe suffered from a banking crisis and a

divergence in competitiveness which gave rise to a balance of payments crisis. The authorities did not even understand the nature of the problem, let alone see a solution. So they tried to buy time.

Usually that works. Financial panics subside and the authorities realize a profit on their intervention. But not this time because the financial problems were reinforced by a process of political disintegration. While the European Union was being created, the leadership was in the forefront of further integration; but after the outbreak of the financial crisis the authorities became wedded to preserving the status quo. This has forced all those who consider the status quo unsustainable or intolerable into an anti-European posture. That is the political dynamic that makes the disintegration of the European Union just as self-reinforcing as its creation has been. That is the political bubble I was talking about.

At the onset of the crisis a breakup of the euro was inconceivable: the assets and liabilities denominated in a common currency were so intermingled that a breakup would have led to an uncontrollable meltdown. But as the crisis progressed the financial system has been progressively reordered along national lines. This trend has gathered momentum in recent months. The Long Term Refinancing Operation (LTRO) undertaken by the European Central Bank enabled Spanish and Italian banks to engage in a very profitable and low risk arbitrage by buying the bonds of their own countries. And other investors have been actively divesting themselves of the sovereign debt of the periphery countries.

If this continued for a few more years a break-up of the euro would become possible without a meltdown – the omelet could be unscrambled – but it would leave the central banks of the creditor countries with large claims against the central banks of the debtor countries which would be difficult to collect. This is due to an arcane problem in the euro clearing system called Target2. In contrast to the clearing system of the Federal Reserve, which is settled annually, Target2 accumulates the imbalances. This did not create a problem as long as the interbank system was functioning because the banks settled the imbalances themselves through the interbank market. But the interbank market has not functioned properly since 2007 and the banks relied increasingly on the Target system. And since the summer of 2011 there has been increasing capital flight from the weaker countries. So the imbalances grew exponentially. By the end of March this year the Bundesbank had claims of some 660 billion euros against the central banks of the periphery countries.

The Bundesbank has become aware of the potential danger. It is now engaged in a campaign against the indefinite expansion of the money supply and it has started taking measures to limit the losses it would sustain in case of a breakup. This is creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Once the Bundesbank starts guarding against a breakup everybody will have to do the same.

This is already happening. Financial institutions are increasingly reordering their European exposure along national lines just in case the region splits apart. Banks give preference to shedding assets outside their national borders and risk managers try to match assets and liabilities within national borders rather than within the eurozone as a whole. The indirect effect of this asset-liability matching is to reinforce the deleveraging process and to reduce the availability of credit, particularly to the small and medium enterprises which are the main source of employment.

So the crisis is getting ever deeper. Tensions in financial markets have risen to new highs as shown by the historic low yield on Bunds. Even more telling is the fact that the yield on British 10 year bonds has never been lower in its 300 year history while the risk premium on Spanish bonds is at a new high.

The real economy of the eurozone is declining while Germany is still booming. This means that the divergence is getting wider. The political and social dynamics are also working toward disintegration. Public opinion as expressed in recent election results is increasingly opposed to austerity and this trend is likely to grow until the policy is reversed. So something has to give.

In my judgment the authorities have a three months' window during which they could still correct their mistakes and reverse the current trends. By the authorities I mean mainly the German government and the Bundesbank because in a crisis the creditors are in the driver's seat and nothing can be done without German support.

I expect that the Greek public will be sufficiently frightened by the prospect of expulsion from the European Union that it will give a narrow majority of seats to a coalition that is ready to abide by the current agreement. But no

government can meet the conditions so that the Greek crisis is liable to come to a climax in the fall. By that time the German economy will also be weakening so that Chancellor Merkel will find it even more difficult than today to persuade the German public to accept any additional European responsibilities. That is what creates a three months' window.

Correcting the mistakes and reversing the trend would require some extraordinary policy measures to bring conditions back closer to normal, and bring relief to the financial markets and the banking system. These measures must, however, conform to the existing treaties. The treaties could then be revised in a calmer atmosphere so that the current imbalances will not recur. It is difficult but not impossible to design some extraordinary measures that would meet these tough requirements. They would have to tackle simultaneously the banking problem and the problem of excessive government debt, because these problems are interlinked. Addressing one without the other, as in the past, will not work.

Banks need a European deposit insurance scheme in order to stem the capital flight. They also need direct financing by the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) which has to go hand-in-hand with eurozone-wide supervision and regulation. The heavily indebted countries need relief on their financing costs. There are various ways to provide it but they all need the active support of the Bundesbank and the German government.

That is where the blockage is. The authorities are working feverishly to come up with a set of proposals in time for the European summit at the end of this month. Based on the current newspaper reports the measures they will propose will cover all the bases I mentioned but they will offer only the minimum on which the various parties can agree while what is needed is a convincing commitment to reverse the trend. That means the measures will again offer some temporary relief but the trends will continue. But we are at an inflection point. After the expiration of the three months' window the markets will continue to demand more but the authorities will not be able to meet their demands.

It is impossible to predict the eventual outcome. As mentioned before, the gradual reordering of the financial system along national lines could make an orderly breakup of the euro possible in a few years' time and, if it were not for the social and political dynamics, one could imagine a common market without a common currency. But the trends are clearly non-linear and an earlier breakup is bound to be disorderly. It would almost certainly lead to a collapse of the Schengen Treaty, the common market, and the European Union itself. (It should be remembered that there is an exit mechanism for the European Union but not for the euro.) Unenforceable claims and unsettled grievances would leave Europe worse off than it was at the outset when the project of a united Europe was conceived.

But the likelihood is that the euro will survive because a breakup would be devastating not only for the periphery but also for Germany. It would leave Germany with large unenforceable claims against the periphery countries. The Bundesbank alone will have over a trillion euros of claims arising out of Target2 by the end of this year, in addition to all the intergovernmental obligations. And a return to the Deutschmark would likely price Germany out of its export markets – not to mention the political consequences. So Germany is likely to do what is necessary to preserve the euro – but nothing more. That would result in a eurozone dominated by Germany in which the divergence between the creditor and debtor countries would continue to widen and the periphery would turn into permanently depressed areas in need of constant transfer of payments. That would turn the European Union into something very different from what it was when it was a "fantastic object" that fired peoples imagination. It would be a German empire with the periphery as the hinterland.

I believe most of us would find that objectionable but I have a great deal of sympathy with Germany in its present predicament. The German public cannot understand why a policy of structural reforms and fiscal austerity that worked for Germany a decade ago will not work Europe today. Germany then could enjoy an export led recovery but the eurozone today is caught in a deflationary debt trap. The German public does not see any deflation at home; on the contrary, wages are rising and there are vacancies for skilled jobs which are eagerly snapped up by immigrants from other European countries. Reluctance to invest abroad and the influx of flight capital are fueling a real estate boom. Exports may be slowing but employment is still rising. In these circumstances it would require an extraordinary effort by the German government to convince the German public to embrace the extraordinary measures that would be necessary to reverse the current trend. And they have only a three months' window in which to do it.

We need to do whatever we can to convince Germany to show leadership and preserve the European Union as the fantastic object that it used to be. The future of Europe depends on it.

[20120604-29](#) 19:39 SteveBA Re: "The Republican Economy" (reply to SteveB & Pam, above)

Krugman's answer to the problem is more debt will solve our problems. Having read baker rant we know there is no reason there but pure leftist elitism ideology. Pam, we have no money and are heading the way of Europe. Just because you want to pull in spending doesn't make you a baby killer. These responses show the total lack of intellectual capacity of the far left who hide in their slogans because they have no rational response. Even Obama's own party has voted against his budgets of more and more spending. Government is too large and we can't afford all of our social programs at their current levels. The choices will not be easy especially the likes of Steve baker call anybody who propose a change a baby killer. In the not too distant future the bond vigilantes will start making the choices for us.

[20120604-25](#) 17:12 Pam "How Did Wisconsin Become the Most Politically Divisive Place in America?"

[Now, this reads much more like the truth, to me. –SteveB]

"How Did Wisconsin Become the Most Politically Divisive Place in America?" by Dan Kaufman, *The New York Times*

May 24, 2012, (http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/27/magazine/how-did-wisconsin-become-the-most-politically-divisive-place-in-america.html?_r=1&emc=eta1)

This past March, standing outside a Shell station in Mellen, Wis., in the state's far north, Mike Wiggins Jr. told me about a series of dark and premonitory dreams he had two years earlier. "One of them was a very vivid trip around the North Woods and seeing forests bleeding and sludge from a creek emptying into the Bad River," Wiggins said. "I ended up at a dilapidated northern log home with rotten snowshoes falling off the wall. I stepped out of the lodge, walked through some pine, and I was in a pipeline. There was a big pipe coming in and out of the ground as far as I could see.

"I had no idea what the hell that was all about," Wiggins continued. But he said the dream became clearer when a stranger named Matt Fifield came into his office several months later and handed him his card. Wiggins is the chairman of the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa, and Fifield, the managing director of Gogebic Taconite (GTac), a division of the Cline Group, a mining company based in Florida. He had come to Wiggins's office to discuss GTac's desire to build a \$1.5 billion open-pit iron-ore mine in the Penoque Hills, about seven miles south of the Bad River reservation. The proposed mine would be several hundred feet deep, roughly four miles long and a half-mile wide; the company estimated it would bring 700 long-term jobs to the area. Fearing contamination of the local groundwater and pristine rivers, Wiggins told Fifield he planned to oppose the mine. He didn't know at the time that the company's lawyers would be working hand in hand with Republican legislators to draft a bill that would weaken Wisconsin environmental law and expedite the permitting process.

What followed was a drawn-out fight that resembled other statewide battles over labor, education and voter-registration laws — all of which have been introduced since the election of the Republican governor Scott Walker in 2010. The most bitter of these fights began in early February last year, when Walker proposed eliminating virtually all collective-bargaining rights for a vast majority of the state's public-employee unions. Around the time that Walker announced the measure, similar laws were introduced in Michigan, Ohio and Florida, and a nationwide demonization of public employees caught fire. Within two months, the National Conference of State Legislators had tracked more than 100 bills, initiated across the country, attacking public-sector unions.

From the beginning, Walker, who declined to comment for this article, seemed cognizant that his move to end collective bargaining placed him at the forefront of a national conservative strategy. His attack on public-employee

unions was lauded by Mitt Romney, John Boehner and Karl Rove, and he has received significant financial support from the billionaire conservative donors Charles and David Koch. In a widely publicized prank phone call with Ian Murphy, a blogger impersonating David Koch, Walker described a dinner he held for his cabinet at his Executive Residence on Feb. 10, the night before he announced the collective-bargaining measure. "It was kind of the last hurrah, before we dropped the bomb," he said to the faux-Koch. At the dinner, Walker held up a photograph of Ronald Reagan and told his cabinet that what they were about to do recalled Reagan's breaking of the air-traffic-controllers' union strike in 1981. "This is our time to change the course of history," Walker said.

Act 10, the bill that included the collective-bargaining measure, eventually passed last March despite widespread demonstrations at the State Capitol, an occupation of the building by protesters, the decamping of 14 Democratic state senators to Illinois for three weeks and numerous legal challenges. According to recent polling, Wisconsin, once known for progressive policy and upper-Midwestern civility, is now the most politically polarized state in the nation. Last June, David Prosser, a State Supreme Court justice, was accused of choking a colleague in her office after an argument over the court's deliberations on Act 10. Bill Kramer, the Republican speaker pro tem of the Assembly, recently told a reporter that at times he finds it necessary to bring his Glock semiautomatic handgun to work, owing to the atmosphere in the State Capitol. (A new conceal-and-carry law permits concealed weapons even on the Assembly floor.) The protest movement the bill spawned, which shows no signs of abating, culminates in a June 5 recall election against Walker and four Republican state senators. If Walker loses, he would be only the third governor in American history to be recalled.

"There is tremendous frustration with the influence of out-of-state organizations and out-of-state money," Lisa Graves, the executive director of the Madison-based Center for Media and Democracy, told me when I spoke with her this spring. "Wisconsin has an identity, the Wisconsin Idea, that is based on the notion that legislation should help as many people as possible." In February, David Koch gave \$1 million to the Republican Governors Association, which is spending heavily to fight Walker's recall campaign, and that same month he praised Walker's anti-union legislation in *The Palm Beach Post*. "We're helping him, as we should," Koch said. "We've spent a lot of money in Wisconsin. We're going to spend more." Walker has raised more than \$25 million for his campaign, 60 percent of it from outside the state, while his Democratic opponent, Tom Barrett, the mayor of Milwaukee (whom Walker defeated in a regular election less than two years ago), has raised less than \$1 million. "Wisconsin used to be the beacon of clean and open and honest government," Mike McCabe, the head of the nonpartisan Wisconsin Democracy Campaign, which tracks money in politics, told me. "We are now just a pawn on a national chessboard."

During a late-night session in early March, I sat in the gallery and watched the Assembly debate a bill referred to as the Special Needs Scholarship Act. The bill's lead sponsor, Michelle Litjens, is a freshman representative from the Appleton area and also a member of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a Washington-based organization that brings together corporations, legislators and interest groups to draft and disseminate model legislation for state legislatures around the country. Litjens's bill, AB 110, includes key provisions of an ALEC-model bill that has already passed in Georgia. It would provide up to an estimated \$13,500 in taxpayer-financed scholarships for children with disabilities to attend private schools or schools outside their districts. The scholarships would be available to no more than 5 percent of the state's disabled children. The money for the program, as much as \$80 million if the full 5 percent applied, would be drained from the public-school budget.

Of the 36 sponsors and co-sponsors of Litjens's bill, 25 were ALEC members. Mark Pocan is one of the few ALEC members who did not co-sponsor the bill. A liberal Democrat from Madison, Pocan became a member of ALEC several years ago. He told me he wanted to draw attention to the organization's unseen effect on Wisconsin's legislation. In his floor speech that night, Pocan described an ALEC conference in New Orleans that he attended last summer. "I remember going to a workshop and hearing a little bit about a bill they did in Florida and some other states to dismantle public education," Pocan said. "There was a proposal to provide special-needs scholarships. Lo and behold, all of a sudden I come back to Wisconsin, and what gets introduced? A bill to do just that."

The next day, Pocan outlined a strategy ALEC advises its members to use: "You have to introduce a 14-point platform," he said, "so that you can make it harder for them to focus and for the press to cover 14 different planks." He pointed to several bills introduced in the past two sessions, including one that allows more children to enroll in virtual charter schools. "It sounds good," Pocan said. "Kids could access virtual schools for home schooling. But again," he emphasized, the real purpose is "taking apart public schools, drip by drip."

Scott Suder, the Assembly majority leader and a state co-chairman of ALEC, defended the group's work. "ALEC's basis is free-market, Jeffersonian principles," Suder told me over the phone. "That's my core philosophy: getting government out of the way as much as possible."

Besides education, ALEC maintains seven other wide-ranging task forces, like "Tax and Fiscal Policy" and "Energy, Environment and Agriculture," which promotes, among other things, legislation opposing climate-change initiatives. The group has recently come under scrutiny, largely because of the work of the Center for Media and Democracy. There was widespread outrage over ALEC's role in exporting the "Stand Your Ground" law, at the center of the controversy over the death of Trayvon Martin, to other states — including a related bill that recently passed in Wisconsin. Since the Martin shooting, several large corporations, Coca-Cola and Wal-Mart among them, have ended their affiliation with ALEC. I asked Pocan if the increased exposure has stopped any ALEC-originated bills in the State Assembly. "Not really," he said. "They get really good strategic advice. The head of Shell Oil flew out to New Orleans to meet with legislators."

After signing Act 10, Governor Walker told a reporter for The Associated Press that the bill was "innovative" and "progressive" — words chosen perhaps because they resonate with the enduring pride many Wisconsin citizens still feel about their state's pioneering political history. The current Wisconsin Blue Book contains a 68-page essay extolling the achievements of the 1911 Legislature, which included the establishment of the first workmen's-compensation program, laws limiting labor for women and children and the passage of a forest-conservation act. President Theodore Roosevelt described Wisconsin as a "laboratory for wise, experimental legislation to secure the social and political betterment of the people as a whole." Native icons like the populist senator and governor Robert (Fighting Bob) La Follette and the conservationist Aldo Leopold still loom in the state's collective consciousness and legislative record. More recently, Senator Russ Feingold cast the lone vote against the U.S.A. Patriot Act in 2001.

The law that Act 10 overturned had been in place since 1959, when Wisconsin became the first state to recognize collective-bargaining rights for municipal employees. Senator Fred Risser, who began his legislative career in 1956, is the country's longest-serving state legislator, and he was on the committee that introduced that measure. "That bill was bipartisan, or it would have never gotten through in the first place," he said. In 1967, collective bargaining was expanded under the Republican governor Warren P. Knowles to include state employees. The Senate voted 31-0 in favor of the expansion. "For 50 years we had relative labor peace," Risser said. "Not in 50 years was there ever a partisan vote on those contracts. They were almost always unanimously accepted."

Some Republicans also lamented the end of the long bipartisan consensus on labor rights. Dick Spanbauer, a former Marine and self-described "pro-life, pro-family Christian," was one of four Republican Assemblymen to vote against Act 10. "The leadership told me, 'Dick, we don't need unions anymore,'" he told me. "Really? What's changed? Is a company going to say you don't need to work 12 hours?" Spanbauer, like his father, had worked much of his adult life in factories in Oshkosh. "They don't understand anything about the working class," he said about his Republican colleagues. "They thought you could just go crush somebody's voice and get away with it." Spanbauer is retiring this year.

Like most other states, Wisconsin was hit hard by the 2008 financial crisis and subsequent recession. Walker inherited a budget gap of \$137 million and a potential \$3.6 billion shortfall over the following two years. Before he introduced Act 10, however, he passed a series of future tax cuts worth \$142 million. Shortly after the budget bill was announced, nearly all the unions agreed to implement the financial concessions Walker requested in exchange for keeping their bargaining rights.

When Tracy Fuller, a state patrol officer and the president of the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Association, first heard about the collective-bargaining ban, he was shocked. "It went far beyond what I thought Walker campaigned on," Fuller said. "You want to freeze our pay? It's been frozen for six years. You want to freeze it again? O.K. But don't take away our bargaining rights." Fuller's union, which is self-run and focuses almost entirely on workplace issues, represents the state patrol, Capitol police, University of Wisconsin police and some Department of Motor Vehicles employees. The union faces an unusual predicament: two-thirds of its members lost their bargaining rights, while those in the state patrol retained theirs. "The other members were resentful of the troopers for a while," Fuller said. "Their morale is so down."

The protests against Act 10 inspired opposition to similar laws in Michigan and Ohio and marked the first significant push back to the surging Tea Party. Few in Wisconsin are more identified with the grass-roots resistance than Lori Compas, a 41-year-old wedding photographer and mother of two. With no assistance from the state Democratic Party, Compas led an unlikely yet successful drive to recall the Senate majority leader, Scott Fitzgerald, Walker's most essential and visible ally. Compas lives in Fort Atkinson, a small town 30 miles east of Madison, and has never run for office before. She is now Fitzgerald's improbable opponent in the coming June recall election.

In early March, I met her for lunch at the Cafe Carpe, a sunny restaurant and folk club that doubles as the town's informal community center. Compas majored in agricultural journalism in college and moved to Fort Atkinson five years ago with her husband, a geography professor at a small state university nearby. "I had never paid attention to state politics until about a year ago," she said. "I started paying attention, and I got really upset at what I saw our senator doing."

For Compas, the pivotal moment came when the collective-bargaining measure was passed. On March 9, 2011, Scott Fitzgerald led a hastily called meeting of the Senate and Assembly leadership. A few days earlier, the Assembly voted on the budget-repair bill that included the collective-bargaining measure, but the Senate had been unable to pass it because of a rule requiring a quorum of 20 members to vote on fiscal measures. At that point, the 14 Senate Democrats were still in hiding in Illinois, leaving the Republicans with just 19 votes. After attempts at persuasion and withholding their paychecks failed to bring the Democrats back, Senate Republicans decided to separate the collective-bargaining measure from the budget bill and vote on it immediately.

During the meeting, a heated argument erupted between Fitzgerald and Peter Barca, the Assembly minority leader. "I said I wanted an explanation of what's in this document, so I can at least know what I'm voting on," Barca told me. He had been handed a 37-page summary of the bill, not the bill itself. Fitzgerald ignored his request and, five minutes later, called the roll. By a 4-0 vote the committee separated the measure from the budget bill. It was then passed by both houses within hours. "I said, 'I just want to make you aware that this meeting is a violation of the open meetings law,'" Barca said he told Fitzgerald, who called the meeting less than two hours before. (Under Wisconsin law, a government body is generally required to give 24 hours notice to the public before it meets.) The exchange was captured on WisconsinEye, a local version of C-Span, and went viral.

"Barca's standing there yelling, 'This is a violation of the law!'" Compas said. "I just sat there, and I cried. I've never felt so powerless and so frustrated. Regardless of where you stood on this issue, the complete contempt that Fitzgerald was showing for his legislators was unacceptable. That night I think I tweeted: 'I will recall Scott Fitzgerald if I have to crawl on my hands and knees through the snow to every house in his district.'"

When I met with Fitzgerald in March and asked him if, looking back, he would have done anything differently during the long collective-bargaining fight, he said: "I felt like I was flying by the seat of my pants. We handled events as they evolved."

Wisconsin law allows for the recall of elected officials if they have served at least one year in office and if petitioners gather signatures equaling one-quarter of the total votes cast in the previous election. Despite Fitzgerald's prominent role in shepherding Walker's agenda through the Senate, the Wisconsin Democratic Party chose not to pursue a recall campaign against him. Fitzgerald's district is solidly Republican, and he won his last election with two-thirds of the vote. Most political observers maintained that it would have been a waste of resources to try to get the more than 16,000 signatures required to force a recall election.

"I just decided I'm going to start looking into this," Compas said. "My husband takes the kids to school on Friday, and that's my day to just be home and focus on my business. They all left, and the house got quiet." She decided to call the Government Accountability Board. "I asked: 'What does a person need to file recall papers? Do they need a team of attorneys and accountants and all that?'" She learned that any citizen could file for a recall, and that afternoon, Compas designed her petition and set up a Web site, a Facebook page and a Twitter account. When her husband came home, he was startled to find the change in her. "He was actually a little upset," she said. "He was saying, 'I left for work and it was a normal Friday, and I come home and you're recalling the Senate majority leader.'"

A few days after we met, I watched Compas speak before a large rally at the State Capitol in Madison. The rally marked the one-year anniversary of the passage of Act 10, and organizers estimated that more than 60,000 people attended. Standing halfway up the building's steps, I could see the surrounding streets filled with protesters and signs. The most ubiquitous was a clenched blue fist in the shape of the state map, the movement's unofficial symbol. One of Compas's friends had written her speech, but the day before, Compas decided to start from scratch. She told the crowd that Fitzgerald's recall election had been certified the day before, and then she talked about how she had seen the first sandhill cranes of spring the same day. "Every year their return tells me that even after the most difficult winters, new life is stirring," she said. "Those two things just kind of came together in my mind overnight."

A few days later, Compas appeared at the public library in Fort Atkinson. She'd held eight public meetings over the past two weeks, and one of them, in Lake Mills, was fairly contentious. "I'm not used to hatred being directed at me," she said. "There were 10 people in that room who hated me, and they never met me." She was relieved to be back home, and with the exception of some polite but pointed questions from several College Republicans, the event seemed almost sedate. After the session, Compas and a few of her supporters wandered over to the Cafe Carpe. A community meeting was finishing up in the back, and one of the people leaving was Barbara Lorman, the district's former Republican state senator. In 1994, Lorman lost in a Republican primary to Scott Fitzgerald.

"There's always partisanship," Lorman said, as Compas and her entourage gathered around her. "When I was first elected in 1980, I thought: It's them against us. These Democrats are the enemy, so I need to stay cool about them. Then you see them all going out for dinner together and drinking together and sitting in each other's office, and I thought, What's the deal here? It was quite collegial. You go to the floor, you have your issues, you have your rhetoric and your disagreements, but at the end of the day you leave it behind. Things are not like that now."

Like many other Wisconsinites, Lorman was surprised when the collective-bargaining measure was introduced. "It was like being blindsided," she said. "Walker's agenda, which was always there but nobody knew it, really came from somewhere else, like the Koch brothers, the national party and ALEC. I don't think it was a local agenda, frankly." Lorman used to own a scrap-iron plant and years ago fought an effort by the Teamsters to unionize her small group of drivers. "I might not be a union lover. There's a lot wrong with unions — a lot. But I do believe in a right to bargain collectively. In a lot of cases it's what you need, it's what works." Lorman said she felt that Walker should have accepted the unions' financial givebacks in exchange for keeping their bargaining rights. "He had everything he wanted," she said. "They were making the concessions that everybody was asking for. Pay more for your retirement, pay more for your benefits." Lorman says she is supporting Compas in the coming election.

In March, Fitzgerald told me he wasn't taking Compas's challenge lightly, and he has raised more than \$700,000 to defend his seat. Though he was leading comfortably in the most recent poll, last week he appeared a bit flustered, telling *The Wisconsin State Journal* that he believed Compas's husband and the unions were behind her effort. "I don't for one minute believe she is the organizing force behind this whole thing," he said. In response, Compas posted an irreverent, sepia-toned video featuring herself as an obedient 1950s housewife asking her husband, "What's a senator?"

Over the past year, the mining bill that Mike Wiggins was intent on stopping became increasingly significant to the Walker administration. During his campaign for governor in 2010, Walker promised to create 250,000 private-sector jobs, which he recently reaffirmed. According to the most recent monthly survey from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the state has lost more than 21,000 nonfarm jobs since April of last year. Despite Wisconsin's economic struggles, Walker has defended his decision to turn down \$810 million in federal stimulus money for a proposed high-speed rail link between Madison and Milwaukee. By last summer, the economic situation in the state was continuing to deteriorate, and the mining bill had become a top priority in Walker's jobs program. It also managed to create a rare split in his broad-based opposition.

After GTac promised that most of the mining equipment would be built in Milwaukee with union labor, many of the large private trade unions backed the bill. Randy Bryce, the political coordinator of Milwaukee Iron Workers Local 8 and one of Walker's most tenacious opponents, reluctantly supported the legislation. "They're trying to divide us," he told me, "but my members need work."

To Wiggins, a large open-pit mine in the Penokee Hills was a life-or-death matter for his tribe. The headwaters that feed the river would be in the footprint of the mine, and the Bad River reservation lies downstream. Wiggins was also worried about the tribe's sensitive wild-rice beds, which lie on the coast of Lake Superior. Cyrus Hester, who works for the tribe's Natural Resources Department, raised the possibility that sulfuric acid might contaminate the groundwater and harm fish populations in the area's rivers and streams.

"There's a very good reason this area has never been mined," George Meyer, the director of the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation and former head of the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, told me. "A lot of mining companies looked at it and walked away." For Meyer, one of the biggest problems with the site is that the ore sits at an angle, which when mined generates a much larger amount of "overburden" that needs to be discarded.

When I spoke with him in March, Wiggins detailed several meetings he had with Walker, in which he tried to convey how dire the mine would be for his reservation and the surrounding environment. Their last meeting, in September, turned particularly acrimonious. Beforehand, Wiggins held a news conference inside the Capitol outlining his opposition to the mining legislation. The Assembly bill would impose a 360-day deadline for the permitting process, where before there had been none, and it would eliminate hearings in which citizens or organizations can question mining or government officials under oath about the safety of the mine. Many of the key provisions in the Assembly bill were drafted by lawyers working for GTac.

"Walker saw the news conference as disingenuous," Wiggins said. "When we got to the meeting, he was fixated on his anger with me." After some heated back and forth, Walker told Wiggins he didn't see the need for the meeting, since he had a copy of the tribe's news release. Wiggins got angry. "You know, governor," he recalled, "some of the things that are proposed in the mining initiative represent a catastrophic destruction for my reservation, health impacts to my people, and you think everything that you and I have to talk about is contained on one piece of paper right there?"

On March 6, the Senate narrowly voted to reject the Assembly's mining bill, 17-16. Dale Schultz, who was also the sole Senate Republican to vote against Act 10, joined the 16 Democrats in voting against the bill. Thus far it has been Walker's most significant political defeat. After the vote, GTac issued a brief statement that they were abandoning their interest in the Wisconsin mine. Before he took the vote, Fitzgerald thought he had one Milwaukee Democrat lined up to support the bill, and he still hoped he could persuade one. "I would not rule out calling an extraordinary session," Fitzgerald said, "if we could get a signal from the corporation and a 17th senator."

A few days after the vote, Schultz invited me to his farm about 60 miles west of Madison, land that has been in his family for six generations. Schultz is an avid hunter, and as he poured me coffee, he described some of the animals — grouse, wild turkey, even a bear — that he has hunted throughout the state. A few days earlier, he gave a reading at an event honoring Aldo Leopold. "I'm a guy who believes that the Leopold land ethic makes sense," Schultz said. "It's about stewardship, but using resources wisely is O.K."

Unemployment around Mellen, where the mine would be located, is significantly higher than the statewide average. But last fall, Schultz took part in a town-hall meeting there with Senator Bob Jauch, who represents the area, and a majority of the attendees registered their opposition to the Assembly bill. "We want the mine; we fear the mine," Mellen's mayor, Joseph Barabe, said at the meeting. "We have the most to lose." Schultz says he believes that a mine in the area is feasible, but radically changing long-established environmental law is unwise and contrary to the state's ethos. He developed a compromise bill with Jauch that sought to strike a balance between the state's conservationist traditions and the accommodations GTac sought, but it was described by Fitzgerald as a "nonstarter" and never brought up for a vote. Afterward, Fitzgerald admitted that perhaps the mining company, whose operations are mostly based in West Virginia and Illinois, had pushed too far for Wisconsin. "I think the corporation and their attorneys drafted a bill that may have been acceptable in other states," he said.

Schultz was sympathetic to Wiggins and the Bad River Chippewa. "For them, this place is like Bethlehem is for our Christians," he said. "So they're obviously going to fiercely defend their territory. If you read some of the comments from Assembly members, they're saying, 'We don't have to listen to them.' So there is an unbelievable amount of anger and fear that's built up in the tribal community. When Mike first came to see me, I said: 'I'm for mining, and I know that you're never going to be for mining, and I understand that. But I want you to know I appreciate the fact

that you're here.' That's how we began our relationship. I'm still for mining. He's not going to be for mining there, and I understand. And I would hope that he would be somewhat kind about his feelings toward me."

The previous evening, I stood with Mike Wiggins on the coast of Lake Superior and talked about Schultz's role in staving off the mine. The civility that he demonstrated, the willingness to try to understand a different point of view — it all stood in stark contrast to what has transpired in Wisconsin politics over the past year and a half. "When I woke up this morning, I was thinking about Dale," Wiggins said as I was leaving. "I probably shouldn't be saying this, but I had tears in my eyes."

20120604-27	19:07 SteveB	Re: "How Did Wisconsin Become the Most Politically Divisive Place in America?" (reply to Pam, above)
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What an indictment!

But, come on! Republicans against government and against public education? Against compromise? How ridiculous!

It's one of those things where there's really no need for evidence—though this article contains much—because the proof is contained in, hell, makes up most of, the conservative Republicans' self-espoused philosophy. To me, they put the nail in their own coffin every time. Against schools. Against unions. Against women. Against science. Against the poor, minorities, immigrants, and banjo players. And, if you want to know the truth, they are against business, especially small business...anything but huge.

Then they're militarists and war-mongers to boot! I won't even bring up their lunacy in social issues.

Put that in your pipe and smoke it, Dale. Then tell me how I've got it wrong, please. What is it I misunderstand, exactly, about your Republicans? Can any of you other Republicans help us out here?

20120604-28	19:15 Art	Re: "How Did Wisconsin Become the Most Politically Divisive Place in America?" (reply to SteveB, above)
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So, can I take it you are not a Republican??? I've never asked.

[I never have the right emoticon when I need it! –SteveB]

20120604-30	19:48 Dale	Re: "How Did Wisconsin Become the Most Politically Divisive Place in America?" (reply to SteveB, above)
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I guess you have it all figured out. If the Devil existed, all Republicans would be it. Very advanced and "Friends of the Middle" thinking.

20120604-32	23:59 SteveB	Photo: Athens, Greece
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<http://www.greece-athens.com/>



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

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