



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #154 — JUNE 6, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Wisconsin, 'Our Republican Economy' & More

(posted by Friends of the Middle, June 6, 2012)



(by Christopher Weyant, thanks to SteveG, http://www.cagle.com/2012/06/wisconsin-recallhead/?utm_source=daily&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_content=cartoon-comment&utm_campaign=060512)

SteveB: The Walker victory over Barrett in Wisconsin? I must be missing something. I just don't get it! That's what voters really want? The dismantling of the American educational system and Progressive Wisconsin values? Amazing! Yet, I will be the first to admit, in the matter of Scott Walker, for now, the voters have certainly spoken loud and clear...shudder!

The following is a continuation of the hot political discussions which have occurred during the past couple of days—the recall elections in Wisconsin and Paul Krugman's article opinion piece in the *New York Times* in which he called the GOP's economy strategy a "gigantic con game." (This was a fun issue of the FotM Newsletter for me to put together. Thank you, everyone, for your invaluable contributions, especially our members from the Right who tend to get ganged-up on! I'm very proud of all of my friends. And, as Alan Grayson says, "Courage!")

SteveBA: (FotM Newsletter #153) Krugman's answer to the problem is more debt will solve our problems. **Having read SteveB's 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 with the likes of SteveB calling anybody who proposes a change a baby killer.** In the not too distant future the bond vigilantes will start making the choices for us.

SteveB: Let me just jump in here and say that I don't think I have ever uttered the two words "baby" and "killer" together in my entire life. That's not even my style. I abhor the Republican "tactic" of name-calling, having become, apparently, a perpetual victim of the practice (see above, for instance). But "baby killer" is a very oft-used phrase by the anti-abortion Right, maybe that's why SteveBA chooses to saddle me in this particular, inexplicable manner.

MarthaH: (to SteveBA) IF we all don't rein in the rhetoric and look for viable solutions rather than finger pointing (and name calling!!!!), WE will end up like Europe. Common sense is needed by ALL, and it's in short supply in our country which wants more for ME on the backs of THEM...as if we won't all (our descendents) end up in anarchy and chaos. Do your descendents know how to garden and kill a chicken? They may need to sustain themselves and not rely on the conveniences given to us by our prior generations who wanted MORE for us, having lived through poverty, depression, and world wars themselves.

I am offended by those more interested in themselves and less interested in the WHOLE picture. Where are we going? WHY? Give and take solves problems--it's called compromise, not a line in the sand, and we have lost that ability as a society/nation. My way is right--yours is wrong...ALL lose. Get with it--or allow your grandchildren a gloomy future. What I learned in economics class is that "theory" is not fact, so pulling together will get the load going and pulling apart will destroy us as we know us... For the sake of the future, don't join the lemmings!!!!!!!!!!!!

SteveB: Excellent points, MarthaH. I would add, perhaps, just one thought. Actually, it is a question of those on the Right: When the poor, the unemployed, the disenfranchised start rioting in the streets of America for the reasonable share of the pie that is rightfully theirs (society can't exist without them, but we're fine without billionaires)... When that day comes (and, believe me, it will if Republicans get their way), are you going to bomb America's cities and massacre her people like Assad in Syria? To me, as the Magic 8-Ball used to say, "All signs point to YES!" What a bleak future you Republicans espouse—the drastic decline and crash of the Bush years, repeated over and over again, deeper and deeper into the gloom of loss of freedom, debt and deficits, war and class warfare, austerity for the poor, but not for the elite rich who own our politicians. All wonderful! NOT WHAT I WANT FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN! THANK YOU, OH GREAT AND GRACIOUS RIGHT, FOR YOUR WONDROUS COMPASSION FOR THE PLIGHT OF HUMANITY! *HEIL!* (There, I feel better now.)

Pam: (to SteveBA) How about modest cuts in spending and a reasonable tax hike on those earning over \$500,000/yr.? And simplify the tax code. The Republican mantra is "smaller government," yet Republicans are the ones that keep introducing ever more restrictive legislation.

MarthaH: All need to look at the famous blue marble photos of Apollo trips to the moon to realize that if we don't change we all go down together. History does repeat itself. Are we will enough to change enough to avoid what seems to be on the horizon for those who refuse to accept changes in "ideology." I was once a Republican, then I played devil's advocate and I saw that it was far deeper than I had thought was the way. Add a few disappointments with politicians, a few mistakes made that I witnessed, and a WHOLE lot of bravery to change things long needed. Rigidity just can't hold on as society and the world changes. Those who stay back there are in denial and hurt us more than anything else. The political climate and personal observations lead me to believe

what I had hoped I witnessed was just a crust on scummy water that is coming back to bite us now...and for the future I do not want for our toddler Bentley and others of the future. Run...work...write...Change is about what you do, not just what you say or a curt bumper sticker or t-shirt. Silence is not golden when it comes to influencing change. Stand and go forth!

Art: (to SteveBA) Your points on the seriousness of the deficit issue are all well made. What I need to understand better is the Republican plan. Romney has stated he wants to increase Defense spending and reduce taxes for the super rich. Those are his very words. When asked how that will help address the deficit he has gone very vague, saying he will make savings elsewhere.

Pardon me but I recall Bonehead in 2010 pounding the desk saying as soon as the Republicans won the House he would immediately institute a bill to reduce spending by \$100MB. When asked where he would find the \$100B in savings his response was. "The usual way"". No specifics. Needless to say it did not happen.

So, I am a little suspect on this vague talk. Do you think Romney will come out with a specific plan? Remember much or maybe most of the huge run up in the Federal debt has been caused by Republican Administrations. It was basically general Republican economic policies (wars but no taxes to pay for them, lack of financial institution regulation etc. etc) that got us into this latest economic crisis. And yet Romney says he will follow the same general economic policies that GW did. That just does not fill me with confidence.

Dale: (to Art, FotM Newsletter #153, in reference to accusations against Wisconsin Gov. Walker) How the Hell do you or I know? [if the accusations are true] 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.

Art: Dale, this one is pretty simple. If he didn't do it, all he has to say is, 'I didn't do this and this is all a pack of lies.' On the other hand, if he did do it, and he lies, that will really come back to haunt him. If this does prove to be a last minute elections stunt, then I agree it is very reprehensible. Perry pulled something like this in Texas a few years ago and got away with it. It was wrong then and it would be wrong now..

On the other hand Dale, please don't get too indigent on me. There has been a carefully planned and Internet executed campaign of outrageous lies and slander going on against President Obama for the past several years. "Obama doesn't salute the flag, Obama spits on children" etc. etc. You know it and so does every other thinking American. SNOPEs and others have made an industry out of debunking these lies over the Internet against the President. I can easily send you a list that will choke your computer but you have already seen them.

I deplore that tactic from either side. The NAZIs were the first to recognize the value of the big lie and exploit it over the new radio communications and look how that turned out. A political party founded on lies and deceit does no one any good, especially the people. On this we agree.

Pam: Well done, Art. Just once I'd like to hear Dale say that if he's wrong he'll change his mind.

Pam: (reply to Dale, concerning the Paul Krugman article "Soros on the Euro", FotM Newsletter #153) I think your overview of Krugman's ideas is a bit out of kilter. I don't know where Krugman said that welfare generates wealth, but if, IF, he did, then I can see why you would balk at that. It doesn't make a lot of sense to me either. I don't think that's what he's saying though. I've read many of his essays, and I don't recall anything like your post. I believe he--and my other favorite, Robert Reich--argue that we need to get people working asap, that jobs have to be a priority. Deficit reduction is important, but it's a long-term problem. Jobs must come first. With the Republicans in control, our economy went belly up, and lots of jobs were lost, which is to say thousands of people, human beings like you and me, lost their savings, their livelihoods, often their homes, and their dignity. Austerity measures, by which I understand you to mean things like Food Stamps, Head Start, Pell grants, Medicare and Medicaid, AFDIC (I don't know if that even exists any more), affordable medicine and health care, etc., impact the populations that are the most vulnerable and least culpable of our fellow citizens. The rich have not shown

themselves to be "job creators." Big corporations export jobs and sit on piles of money, waiting for a more favorable business climate, while our employment climate continues to deteriorate. A major hotel chain has just moved its headquarters from the U.S. to the Middle East. Lots of young entrepreneurs are moving to China, creating a reverse brain drain. Obama inherited a giant mess, and he has made things less terrible than they might otherwise have been. To return to the extreme policies foisted on us by the far right is not only foolish, it is dangerous. Just today I learned that the Republican-controlled State Legislature in North Carolina has introduced a bill that would make it illegal to consider scientific projections of climate change that predict catastrophic rises in the sea level. The proof will be in the pudding, as they say. Time will tell.

You wrote yesterday, "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." Dale, no one here has said Republicans are the Devil, but plenty of Republicans see Obama as the anti-Christ. It's so ironic that you keep saying the Left has an agenda and an ideology, as if the Republicans don't. Maybe the Left had an ideology back in the 'sixties, but times have changed. Democrats today are so far from being ideologues. They're wusses if anything.

SteveB: The accusations from the Right are so very odd to me, to think that "intelligent" people can be so unreasoning. How does that happen?

I have to quote my younger daughter. She was about 18. I was consulting in Phoenix and she flew out to visit me for a long weekend. One of the places I took her was the Grand Canyon, where she had never been. In fact, the entire Western landscape was pretty unfamiliar to her then. I think she'd been to California once.

She looked at The Canyon and we both absorbed it for a long moment. Then she turned to me and said, "I don't get it! I just don't get it!"

So, being the boy scientist that I am, I started telling her about how the land had risen, how a giant lake had formed upstream of the canyon at the end of the last several ice ages, how the accidental "damns" had broken and violent floods cascaded through the ever widening, ever deepening canyon. I must have gone on for quite some time, because I've always been fascinated by crap like that.

She seemed to listen closely, then turned again to stare at the magnificence and incredibly vast nothingness, to me, the most intensely symbolic spot on the planet, in so many ways: the distant mystical river, wandering lost through a parched landscape, the gulf of what is missing, what is gone, the vast spans of time, the separation of the two sides, so that even the squirrels who live there are completely different colors, the bright walls like water colors painted by some Indian god, the intense Mediterranean-like sun...

Finally, I heard her say, "I don't get it! I just don't get it!"

How perfectly correct, my sweet! Me too.

And I feel almost as mystified by today's Republicans, who refuse to use the powers of deduction their God gave them. It's like a force of nature as alien to me as the nothingness of The Canyon.

SteveB: Dale, Let us for once get down to something factual. You state very specifically in your email that:

"BTW, his opponent [Mr. Barrett] has not given one statement about what he would do if elected...NOT ONE WORD."

Correct? Now, with very little effort I found lots of detail on the following website about Mr. Barrett's experience and qualifications, criticisms of Mr. Walker, and what Mr. Barrett will try to do if elected. I see plenty that "he would do if elected." (http://www.barrettforwisconsin.com/?no_splash=1)

Am I wrong somehow? And if the details of his plans are here (which they are, I read them, see the "Issues" tab), I'm positive I can easily find how he has talked about these same plans during the arduous campaign. So your statement is simply untrue. Untrue at a time that we are all seeking nothing but the truth, I thought. Why can't you

bend toward the middle a little, at least to the point, please, of not telling whoppers? This is just one small, but I think, important example.

Dale: When did he put it up...last night? Here's what the politically independent Reporter.com says: ("Scott Walker Challenger Tom Barrett Calls for Wisconsin State Worker Benefit Cuts" by Dustin Hurst, June 5, 2012, <http://reason.com/archives/2012/06/05/scott-walker-challenger-tom-barrett-call>. "Even Walker's opponent realizes government employee compensation is out of control.")

SteveB: Smells like still more plans to me. No bad for a guy with no plans at all.

SteveB: So, Dale, do you admit he has plans or not? It's that simple.

Art: I dunno, Dale The web site seems to be pretty thorough. The article [you referred to] seems to be looking for something specific that was put out two years ago and the position may have evolved since whatever they are looking for came. That does not seem to equate to me that he has said nothing. Heck, old 'etch a sketch' has said many things, a great deal of which seem to contradict something he said previously. Just my unbiased view :-)

SteveB: And, Dale, when you say "Barrett had no plans," does that mean the same thing as when you say things like:

"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."

"Time after time, Obama has promised and not delivered, except to feather his own nest."

"The effort to mislabel Romney as someone who is conducting a "war on women" is exposed for what it is – BS,"

I mean, if all these statements have the same veracity...your case could be in trouble, my friend.

Dale: He says he is offering up the plan he put together in 2010. I think the subject is academic. Is your point that you want to "win" this discussion? If so, I think you should declare yourself the winner, because you will anyway.

SteveB: No response. Recorded. The point is...does your side respect the truth and can they bend enough to admit it when confronted with it. Even a truth on such a plain, simple level, yet philosophically and ethically important, I believe. I'm certainly not out to win any argument, only to get at the truth and try to achieve some sort of minimal, rational consensus. We don't have time for lie, yet find ourselves constantly mired in them...nearly all from the Right (for example, peruse the last 3000 or so pages of the FotM Newsletter). Look at all the websites, as someone pointed out recently, that have had to be set up to debunk the barrage of lies, mainly about the President, but certainly not limited. Have a good day.

MarthaH: Ever wonder how lies are so easily believed and truths so easily ignored? Ostrich, anyone????

Art: I think the article, "The Keynesian Case for Romney" (below), is the answer to the question and makes the same point Dale did in a previous e-mail. The Republicans seem quite ready to see the country go down if they don't get their way and indeed have basically clearly said so. So the only way out is to vote them in. It is sort of like just giving your lunch money to the school bully so you can get to class safely as the easier of any alternative, but it does track. Much like voting in the NAZIS in 1929. In the long run I think we will all lose badly but there is logic here.

Pam: A very interesting analysis, Art. This does make a lot of sense, even if it's not very encouraging.

Dennis: (to Art and SteveBA) If conservative Republicans are so opposed to deficit spending, why do they also resort to it when they are in power? The biggest deficits were run up under Reagan and GW Bush and it was Dick

Cheney who said that "deficits don't matter." If it didn't matter to them before, why should we not believe that they are only using it as an issue to get back into power now?

If an Austrian School austerity program of cutting spending and taxes is the answer to our stagnant economy, then why is it failing so miserably in the UK, Spain, Italy, Ireland, and Greece? The Germans want to impose austerity on the weaker European economies since it worked over the last decade for their economy. But wasn't this just proof that Keynesian economics works since they imposed austerity when the world economy was prospering? The mischaracterization by the right of Keynesian theory is that debt produces wealth, when it actually says that spending stimulates economic activity during the recovery from a recession so that the economy can resume producing wealth rather than spiraling downward to oblivion. Reducing a deficit only is possible when an economy is prospering, such as during the Clinton years (although some credit goes to Reagan for being a practical Keynesian at times by raising taxes 11 times).

The appearance of prosperity during the GW Bush years was the result of deficit spending by both government and consumers provided by artificially low interest rates, thanks mostly to Greenspan's Federal Reserve. The American economy was essentially unsustainable because it was fueled by low taxes, consumer borrowing on credit cards (equaling \$8000 per card), and home equity loans made possible because of inflated housing prices (Americans were "spending money they didn't have on things they didn't need"). It was obvious to anyone who cared to look (or was willing to listen to U.S. Comptroller David Walker) that there was a deficit problem due to the Bush tax cuts, the funding of two wars, bloated military spending, and soaring medical costs. So where was the concern, and where was the Tea Party then?

So the Republican answer now is to cut social programs, as if squeezing the least wealthy makes any sense at all, and further cutting taxes, which has only left the states nearly destitute and thousands of teachers, police, and other public employees unemployed. Their solution to the out-of-control medical industrial complex is to kill Obamacare (a poor substitute of a reform to be sure, and totally the original ideas of conservative think tanks) without offering any other reform proposal. So are there any real ideas on the right? What is a plausible alternative to Obama since he has fundamentally been following the previous administration's policies with the same Wall Street and military advisors (Bush Lite)? Wouldn't a Romney presidency be a continuation of the same Bush-Obama policies that are unsustainable, except with a bigger hit on the poor and middle class wage earners, students, and small business owners? And what about that \$2 trillion needed to fix America's infrastructure before it deteriorates further and costs infinitely more?

And, SteveBA, WTF is "pure leftist elitism ideology"? Just asking....

SteveB: Now that's a beautiful message, Dennis. I wouldn't hold my breath for any rebuttal.

Art: We quite likely will crash in any event, so maybe let it be on their watch. Reasonable thinking could mitigate things but that won't come from Republicans. One thing is certain, when it does crash they'll try to blame President Obama. We should start a write in/call in campaign to Bonehead asking him where are the jobs? They have had over a year and accomplished absolutely nothing except to lose the nation its Triple A credit rating. They really are a totally inept group focused solely on party ideology as opposed to what may help the nation. Disgusting.

SteveG: Well written, Dennis. If tax cuts created jobs we would have 4%.

SteveB: Exactly, SteveG and Dennis! To me, that little "fact" (actually "Republican 'claim'", I guess) is one of the best pieces of evidence we have.

All the pieces of the Bush economy (tax cuts, deregulation, etc.) are still in place. We are reaping the rewards. The Republicans have it the way they wanted. Where is the prosperity? Where is the 4% unemployment? Where is the investment? Where is the charity? Oh, ya, it's all the black man's fault. He changed everything, right? What lies they tell...

SteveG: When I ran a business and times were tough, it was clear there was no way to cut our way to prosperity, no way to cut and additional income would come. Some technology would decrease the need for some personnel and make other staff more efficient, but the only way to go from red ink to black ink was actually a three part move

– decrease some spending, become more efficient, and increase income by growing our way out of red into black ink.

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I think the below is the answer to the question and makes the same point Dale did in a previous e-mail. The Republicans seem quite ready to see the country go down if they don't get their way and indeed have basically clearly said so. So the only way out is to vote them in. It is sort of like just giving your lunch money to the school bully so you can get to class safely as the easier of any alternative, but it does track. Much like voting in the NAZIS in 1929. In the long run I think we will all lose badly but there is logic here.

"The Keynesian Case for Romney" by Ezra Klein, *The Washington Post*

June 4, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/ezra-klein/post/the-keynesian-case-for-romney/2012/06/04/gJQAIETuDV_blog.html)

Even if you disagree with every one of Mitt Romney's policies, there's a chance he's still the best candidate to lift the economy in 2013.

That's not because he has business experience. For all his bluster about the lessons taught by the private sector, his agenda is indistinguishable from that of career politician Paul Ryan. Nor is it because he's demonstrated some special knowledge of what it takes to create jobs. Job growth in Massachusetts was notably slow under Romney's tenure. It's because if Romney is elected, Republicans won't choose to crash the economy in 2013.

View Photo Gallery: With the Republican presidential nomination secured, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney steps up his criticism of President Obama.

The Congressional Budget Office estimates that if Congress gridlocks this year — if it simply gets nothing done — the economy will take a \$607 billion hit in 2013 as the Bush tax cuts expire, the payroll tax cut expires and assorted spending cuts kick in. Falling off that "fiscal cliff," they predict, will throw us back into recession.

But it's worse even than that: Speaker John Boehner has said he wants another debt-ceiling showdown. We're not expected to hit the debt ceiling until February or March, and so the only scenario in which the debt ceiling matters is one in which Congress has already pushed us over the fiscal cliff. So as bad as the last debt-ceiling crisis was — and Gallup's polling showed it did more damage to consumer confidence than the fall of Lehman Bros — this one would be worse.

Miles Nadal, CEO of the marketing and communications firm MDC Partners, says that at a recent event with executives of more than 100 companies, the business leaders, panicked about this possibility, agreed on the best outcome for the economy: "a Republican landslide." Why? "Because anything that breaks the logjam is positive," he says. "The quality of the leader is less relevant than the ability to break gridlock."

There's no reason to believe Romney could "break" gridlock. But there's reason to believe he wouldn't face it in the first place. Republicans control the House. They're three seats from controlling the Senate — and, because this Senate election follows 2006, which was a wave election for Democrats, Republicans are defending 10 seats while Democrats are defending 23. It's difficult to imagine a scenario in which Romney wins the White House and Republicans don't control the House and Senate. On the other side, while it's not impossible to imagine President Obama winning the White House and Democrats taking back the House, it's unlikely.

Romney and the Republicans are not likely to reach 60 seats in the Senate, but they won't need them. The major issues on the table are budgetary. That means they can be considered using the budget reconciliation process, which can't be filibustered. So if Republicans can maintain party unity — and they usually can — they'll be able to govern effectively. And there's no way that they'll permit the Bush tax cuts to expire or the debt ceiling to lapse. Investors, knowing that, would likely stop worrying about the debt ceiling the moment a Romney win became clear.

Now, Republicans could still push the economy into recession if they pass an immediate austerity budget that slashed spending in 2013. And, given Republican rhetoric about how slashing the size of government will lead to more growth because the confidence fairy will come out and persuade businesses to spend more, you might think that's exactly what they'll do.

But Romney, though he often buys into that sort of nonsense while criticizing Obama, knows better. Time magazine asked him about cutting spending in 2013. "If you take a trillion dollars for instance, out of the first year of the federal budget, that would shrink GDP over 5 percent," Romney said. "That is by definition throwing us into recession or depression. So I'm not going to do that, of course." You couldn't have gotten a clearer definition of Keynesian budgeting from Obama.

There's a good chance that a Romney administration would extend both Bush and Obama's tax cuts and delay the scheduled spending cuts. Congress would raise the debt ceiling after Romney promised congressional Republicans that he'd sign some variant of Paul Ryan's budget as soon as it's sent to him. Somewhere along the way, Romney would pass both more short-term tax cuts and a long-term transportation bill — something Republicans have been blocking under Obama — that doubles as an infrastructure package and includes, to secure Republican support, the Keystone XL oil pipeline.

Nor is it clear that this will come at the cost of harsh deficit reduction in coming years. There will almost certainly be deep spending cuts if Romney is president, but both the Romney and Ryan proposals include trillions of dollars in unpaid-for tax cuts and defense spending. If Republicans clear that hurdle by simply assuming that deep tax cuts will lead, through supply-side magic, to larger revenues, their deficit-reduction plans might well end up increasing the deficit over the next few years. "Remember," wrote Business Insider's Joe Weisenthal, "Republicans were pro-deficit, and pro-entitlement expansion under Bush and Reagan. Deficit cutting only became part of the party's ideology under Obama."

Compared to anything Obama is likely to get from a Republican House, that is, at least in the short term, a much more expansionary, Keynesian approach. But it's also an awful precedent. In a sense, Republicans are holding a gun to the economy's head and saying, "vote for us or the recovery gets it."

That might well prove an effective political strategy: The more they say that they're willing to let the debt ceiling expire and the economy run over the fiscal cliff, the more businesses will pull back and households will stop spending in order to make sure they have enough cash on hand to ride out another crisis. That will further depress the economy this year, making it more likely that Romney wins, and that Republicans embrace the smooth Keynesian glide path that they're denying Obama.

If Obama wins, it's of course possible that the two sides will come to a swift agreement. That's the president's prediction. "I believe that if we're successful in this election, when we're successful in this election, that the fever may break, because there's a tradition in the Republican Party of more common sense than that," Obama has said. "My hope, my expectation, is that after the election, now that it turns out that the goal of beating Obama doesn't make much sense because I'm not running again, that we can start getting some cooperation again."

But privately, many top Democrats admit that congressional Republicans, angry after a narrow loss and appealing to a base that is likely to blame the defeat on Romney's moderate past, might prove just as obstructionist after the election than before it. If that happens, they say, the president can't keep giving into Republican threats. Much as the government shutdowns in the 1990s discredited Newt Gingrich's hardball tactics, Obama will have to let voters see the consequences of the Tea Party's approach. But while that might be sage political advice, the economic consequences could be devastating.

This is the logical conclusion of a system biased toward gridlock: The out-party benefits when the public feels that Washington is failing and it often has the power to make Washington fail. Which, arguably, leads to another unusual reality about this election: Even if you agree with Romney's policies, it may be that voting for Obama, and delivering a landslide against the GOP's economic brinksmanship, is the only way to end the dangerous appeal of strategic gridlock going forward.

So which are you more worried about? The fiscal cliff and the debt ceiling? Or the political system?

20120605-02

10:26 Art

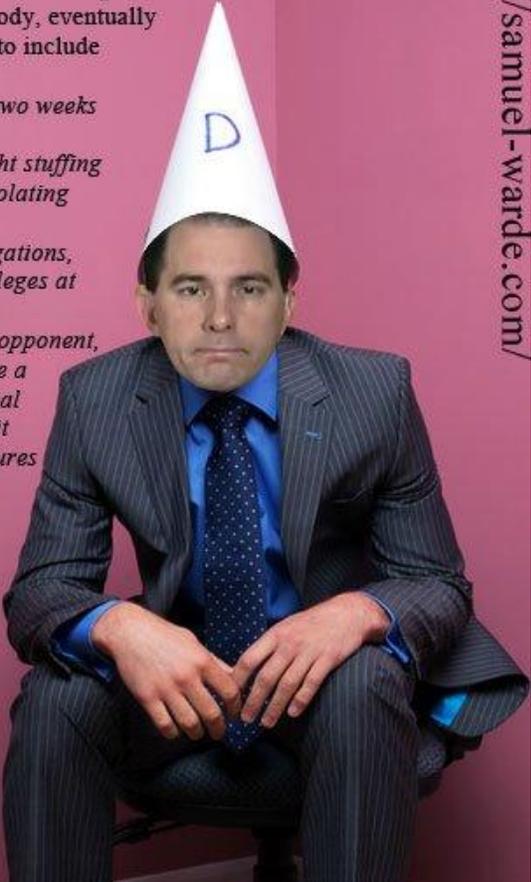
Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (to Dale)

Hmmm. Just saw this. I don't know, Dale. This guy appears to have quite a history. Does he even have a college degree?

Scott Walker attended Milwaukee's Marquette University from 1986-1990, earning a GPA of only 2.59 and left 36 credits shy of a degree. He spent much of his sophomore year running for president of the university's student governing body, eventually confessing to multiple electioneering violations to include

- He "was found guilty of illegal campaigning two weeks before his candidacy became official."
- Later, one of his campaign workers was caught stuffing brochures under doors at the school's YMCA, violating the school's ban on door-to-door campaigning.
- He initially denied the brochure-stuffing allegations, then admitted to them, losing campaigning privileges at the Y.
- The school paper initially endorsed Walker's opponent, John Quigley, but said either candidate would be a good president. The paper rescinded that editorial the following day, however, calling Walker "unfit for presidency" based on his mudslinging brochures against Quigley...and the fact that Walker's campaign workers were seen snatching up and trashing copies of the previous day's Tribune that had included the Quigley endorsement.

"For Walker, a questionable campaigning strategy is apparently nothing new," the Marquette Tribune reported at the height of Walker's contentious campaign for governor last October.



<http://www.facebook.com/NoTeaParty>

<http://samuel-warde.com/>

20120605-03

10:31 Pam

Re: Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker (reply to Art, above)

I saw a more expanded version of this, and it was pretty damning. Today will be interesting, no?

20120605-04

11:20 MarthaH

"Compromise' Is Not a Dirty Word"

"Compromise' Is Not a Dirty Word" by Jonah Goldberg, *USA Today*

June 4, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/story/2012-06-04/compromise-politics-republicans-conservatives/55384352/1>)

Compromise has always been a holy word for the Washington establishment. But against the backdrop of ever-increasing anxiety over our fiscal dysfunction, most particularly the next budget showdown, the word has taken on a tone of anger, desperation and even panic.

But in all its usages these days, "compromise" remains a word for bludgeoning Republicans. "Congress isn't just stalemated, it's broken, experts say," proclaims the typical headline, this one in *The Miami Herald*. And the experts say it's all the Republicans' fault.

"The challenge we have right now is that we have on one side, a party that will brook no compromise," President Obama explained at the Associated Press Luncheon in April. The Republicans' "radical vision," Obama insisted, "is antithetical to our entire history as a land of opportunity."

The speech was hailed as a "thunderclap" by the editors of *The New York Times* because Obama signaled he was done asking Republicans to put their "destructive agenda" aside. "In this speech, he finally conceded that the (Republican Party) has demonstrated no interest in the values of compromise and realism."

Now the standard Tea Party-Republican-conservative response is to note that Democrats didn't care much for compromise when they ran Washington for Obama's first two years in office. Moreover, what Democrats now mean by compromise is capitulation. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., summarized the attitude well during last year's budget negotiations: "We're recognizing that the only compromise that there is, is mine."

While I largely concur with that standard retort, it's worth at least saying something nice about compromise. Conservatism, rightly understood, does not consider compromise a dirty word. "All government, indeed every human benefit and enjoyment, every virtue, and every prudent act, is founded on compromise and barter," observed Edmund Burke, the founder of modern conservatism. A willingness to accept half a loaf when half is the best you can possibly get is the essence of wisdom.

Indeed, Obama is right when he says, "America, after all, has always been a grand experiment in compromise." The Founders placed compromise at the heart of the Constitution — compromise between the state and the federal governments, between the different branches of government, even between the two houses of Congress. That is all well and good.

But let's not go crazy here. The Founders didn't fetishize compromise, either. When Patrick Henry proclaimed at the Virginia Convention in 1775, "Give me liberty or give me death," even George Washington and Thomas Jefferson allegedly leapt to their feet to roar approval. Suffice it to say, the spirit of compromise didn't fill the air.

And that's a point worth keeping in mind. The merits of compromise depend mightily on direction. If my wife and I agree on moving to Chicago, then the opportunities for compromise are limitless. When we move, where we live when we get there, even how we get there: these are all reasonable subjects for negotiation. But if I want to move to Chicago and she wants to stay in Washington D.C., then splitting the difference and moving to Cleveland would be absurd. But it would be compromise.

Right now, the two parties are split fundamentally on the issue of direction. The Democrats — not to mention the "experts" and so much of the political press — would have you believe it is a choice between forward and backward. Hence, Obama's perfectly hackneyed slogan "Forward!" According to this formulation, reasonable compromise amounts to acquiescing to the direction Obama and the Democrats want to go, but demanding concessions on how fast we get there and by what means.

From the conservative perspective, this is madness. It is like saying Republicans must agree to let Obama drive the country off a cliff, but Democrats must be willing to negotiate how fast the car goes. And if a Republican counsels hitting the brakes or pulling a U-turn, he is dubbed "extreme" by the establishment cognoscenti.

Conservatives see it differently. Washington is aflame in debt; the national debt clock reads like a thermostat in an inferno. The annual budget deficit is approaching 10% of GDP. Meanwhile, the actual deficit is larger than our entire GDP. Under Obama, the deficit has grown by \$5 trillion to more than \$15 trillion (and as a headline in this newspaper recently reported, "Real federal deficit dwarfs official tally").

Hence, the Democratic insistence that Republicans enter negotiations about how much more gasoline we should throw on the fire is a non-starter, at least for conservative Republicans. As Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C., likes to say,

"Republicans and Democrats must start compromising over how much we have to cut, not how much we want to spend."

None of this has a chance of being settled before the election in November, and even then odds are we'll be having this argument for years to come.

But you can be sure of one thing. If Republicans take over the White House and the Congress and start cutting, the same voices now championing compromise as a virtue in itself will be applauding the principled idealism of Democrats who refuse to compromise.

20120605-10 13:49 Pam Re: "Compromise' Is Not a Dirty Word" (reply to MarthaH, above)

There is simply no evidence that should the Democrats win, they will not compromise any better than the Republicans have. This article makes it seem as if there are only two choices: go off the cliff (Dems.) or do a 180 and slash and burn government spending (Reps.). Our situation is, of course, much more complicated than that. I think the essay Art posted about what Republicans might do if they come to power is not unlikely, but if that scenario doesn't play out, I foresee long lines at food banks, more homeless families, a sicker population, and social unrest the likes of which we have never seen. Absent a military coup, Americans will not sit quietly while their lives disintegrate around them. There will be blood in the streets. We must all accept the fact that we cannot solve our problems overnight--or in three and a half years. We must display a modicum of patience while our economy and body politic heal, but going "Forward" is our only sensible, humane option. I understand the discomfort of people who lose big in the stock market and other investments. I don't even want to know what happened to our finances yesterday. But losing a home, choosing between medicine and food, being one of the long-term unemployed are all worse than my angst. Let's face it, we're all scared to death, and no one can predict what the future holds, though it doesn't look good. My hope is that if Romney does prevail, he will prove to be more intelligent, measured, and responsible than a majority of his supporters. Thank god Gingrich or Santorum didn't get the nomination.

20120605-05 11:49 Tom "Screwtape's Formula: Boys, Video Games & Porn"

"Screwtape's Formula: Boys, Video Games & Porn" by John Stonestreet, BreakPoint

June 5, 2012, (<http://www.breakpoint.org/bpcommentaries/entry/13/195090>)

According to a new book, we are witnessing the social, intellectual and sexual demise of our young men. We should have seen it coming. I'll explain, next on BreakPoint.

A generation of young men is choosing fantasy over reality. At least that's what Dr. Philip Zimbardo of Stanford University and psychologist Nikita Duncan argue in their new book, *The Demise of Guys: Why Boys Are Struggling and What We Can Do About It*.

The message of the book is simple: Research is demonstrating that young men are becoming addicted to video games and online pornography on a scale unparalleled by any addiction that we've ever seen in history.

But unlike with drugs, alcohol or gambling, these addictions aren't for ever-increasing quantity. Instead, they drive boys and young men to seek novelty — the next big thrill.

According to Zimbardo and Duncan, it's the same phenomenon observed in laboratory rats which, when given the opportunity, abandoned food in order to electrically stimulate the part of the brain responsible for pleasure. In effect, the rats gladly "short-circuit" their natural means of enjoyment to get a thrill that felt new every time.

"Young men...who play video games and use porn the most," say the authors, "are being digitally rewired in a totally new way that demands constant stimulation."

This chart shows rates of child poverty among developed countries. Err, American exceptionalism, anyone? (Hint: scroll to the bottom.)

[But, SteveG, everyone knows that the only reason for these facts is that the U.S. has so many more worthless, lazy people, who don't want to work and just want to lay around all day doing drugs and having sex using publicly-financed condoms, and who-knows-what kind of sex they're having, but they certainly aren't working and attending church regularly. Otherwise, I'm sure American exceptionalism would bring the, er...cream to the top, so to speak. – SteveB]



Note: Data refer to children aged 0 to 17.
Sources: Calculations based on EU-SILC 2009, HILDA 2009, SLID 2009, SHP 2009, PSID 2007. Results for New Zealand are from Perry (2011). Results for Japan are from Cabinet Office, Gender Equality Bureau (2011).

20120605-09 12:44 Pam Re: "A Crazy Fact You Need to Know When Arguing Politics" (to Dale)

OK, Dale. What's your response to these figures?

[20120605-08](#) 12:43 Pam Re: "Controversy Swirls After Anti-Gay Church Performance" (FotM Newsletter #153)

The video of the little boy singing in church is one of the most disturbing things I have ever seen. Ever.

[20120605-11](#) 14:08 Pam Re: "Truth, Lies & Afghanistan" (reply to Art, FotM Newsletter #153)

Art, your posting about our failure in Afghanistan certainly caught my eye. I am not one bit surprised that we're up to our necks in you-know-what over there. I'm not an expert, but I did live there once upon a time, and based on my own observations I would have predicted exactly what has come to pass. For one thing, Afghans have topography on their side. It's very difficult to wage a successful war in the mountains. (Again, I'm no expert, but common sense tells me that.) They're much more used to harsh conditions than Americans, Soviets, or other foreigners and will outlast us, just as they have every other nation that has tried to conquer them. It's THEIR country, and all they have to do is wait us out. We cannot bomb them into cooperating with us, and we have never and will never win over their hearts and minds. Killing civilians (even if unintentionally), urinating on the Koran, humiliating Afghan men and trying to tell them how to treat their women (and I believe they do consider women the property of men) are leading us into the abyss. We need to get out. All hell will break loose. The Taliban may well retake the country. Women will suffer. I don't think we can prevent any of those things from happening, and I don't want to lose another single young man's life or limb by being too stubborn or embarrassed to leave. I don't like the way Afghans live, whether by choice or not, but I think they will do better than, say, Congo or Sierra Leone. Afghan men oppress women, and ethnicities do not always get along, but I'd be very surprised if Afghans resorted to trying to annihilate each other. What do you think, Art? Am I missing something?

[20120605-12](#) 15:30 SteveB Re: "Truth, Lies & Afghanistan" (reply to Art, FotM Newsletter #153)

To paraphrase an old song:

"We gotta get out of that place / If it's the last thing we ever do."

In doubletime!

[20120605-13](#) 15:51 Art Re: "Truth, Lies & Afghanistan" (reply to SteveB, above)

Couldn't agree more. I do believe we could have "killed" our way to some kind of victory but that really wasn't in the cards, so time to go home. I'm not sure when the dust settles it will be any better than the Congo or Sierra Leone but also not sure I really care.

[20120605-14](#) 16:04 SteveB Re: "Truth, Lies & Afghanistan" (reply to Art, above)

You know, Art, while we're on this...I've had an unanswered question even since we invaded Iraq, even a little when we did it the first time (though I guess we didn't really "invade" under the wiser Bush (a relative of the raspberry bush).

In Iraq and Afghanistan, what I saw on television and read about, were droves of enemy combatants who were seemingly "allowed" to escape battle and hide-out as civilians or anywhere they wanted, seemingly.

I know it seems heartless, but there didn't seem to be any attempt to exterminate them. To me, never fight a war unless you must, and if you must, use all means to win as quickly and as painlessly (for you) as possible. All else is crap.

And, in both countries, that force returned to haunt us. It still more than haunts us in Afghanistan because most of the Taliban and their Army that existed when we invaded still exists there and in Pakistan. Now their very pi*sed-off children are becoming adults and additional combatants. Not a great situation.

Am I missing something or did these seem to you like strange actions for the American military to take and ever expect to be victorious? Granted, there are political considerations, but maybe if there are, you shouldn't be at war. What do you think, Art?

And [as an aside, not addressed directly to Art, who, like me, is no longer a Republican except maybe RINO] do all you Republicans follow the party line on this subject too?

20120605-16 16:46 Art Re: "Truth, Lies & Afghanistan" (reply to SteveB, above)

Good question and one we will be looking at for a long time.

For Iraq the major screw up was at the very senior USG levels, certainly the Administration and probably senior military too. We really did not have a "OK, when we get there what do we do next" plan. I think the military thought we would receive the surrender of larger Iraq Army units (The Iraq Army by the way was a pretty well organized and well led force) that we could turn into forces we could use to help control the country. Instead they just evaporated as we moved into the country. The Iraqi officers and troops went home and took their guns with them. After an initial fumble of running Iraq by LTG Garner and The Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance, our brilliant Administration sent in Bremer who formed the Coalition Provisional Authority. His orders No 1 and No 2 were to ban anyone in the Ba'ath Party from government service and to dismantle the Iraq Army. Remember these were the guys who went home with their guns. This effectively put close to 1/2 million Iraqis out of work and, oh by the way, also announced they would never get another job with the government, since most of the officers by necessity were also Ba'ath party members. Couldn't have been worse or stupider on our part. Next came the revolt led by people who we had made sure knew they had no hope in the "New Iraq". Bush should have been shot for that decision alone. It cost us 4000 dead and tens of thousands injured for no reason. Best thing that ever happened is when the Iraqi government refused to sign the Status of Forces Agreement, it gave the President the opening, and God bless him he took it, to get out all together.

The biggest problem in Afghanistan is we got sidetracked in Iraq. Initially we fought that little conflict on a shoestring. Remember there was an ongoing revolt against the Taliban called the "Northern Alliance" made up primarily of Tajiks and Uzbeks and other non Pashtun Afghans. We just kind of fell in on that and swept into power. Then what? Well, not much. Bin Laden had fled and as we hunted for him we got deeper and deeper into the briar patch. The war against Al Quaida turned into a war against the Taliban/Pasthuns. We never really had a plan and still don't. What constitutes victory? President Obama has probably done as good as he can with the mess he was handed. For many international reasons we just can't cut and run but now that we have taken out Bin Laden, it is time to go.

The Republicans will try to make political hay out of it as they have done in Iraq but it is the right decision. Don't despair, however. If Mitt wins I am sure we will soon try again in Iran.

20120605-15 16:22 SteveG "Senate GOP Blocks Democrats' Equal Pay Bill"

Amazing discrimination.

"Senate GOP Blocks Democrats' Equal Pay Bill" by AP/USA Today

May 5, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/washington/story/2012-06-05/equal-pay-women-senate-vote/55400316/1?loc=interstitialskip>)

(WASHINGTON) Senate Republicans on Tuesday blocked a Democratic bill calling for equal pay in the workplace. But President Obama and his congressional allies aren't finished appealing to women on the No. 1 concern for all voters: the cash in their wallets on the heels of recession.

As expected, the pay equity bill failed along party lines, 52-47, short of the required 60-vote threshold. But for majority Democrats, passage wasn't the only point. The debate itself was aimed at putting Republicans on the defensive on yet another women's issue, this one overtly economic after a government report showing slower-than-expected job growth.

Unlike past taunts over access to contraception and abortion, Republicans this time didn't take the bait.

In Fort Worth, Texas, presumptive Republican presidential hopeful Mitt Romney focused instead on unemployment among Hispanics.

"Of course Gov. Romney supports pay equity for women," said Romney spokeswoman Amanda Henneberg. "In order to have pay equity, women need to have jobs, and they have been getting crushed in this anemic Obama economy."

The device for the choreographed showdown in Washington was a Senate debate over the "Paycheck Fairness Act," a measure that aims to strengthen the Fair Labor Standards Act's protections against pay inequities based on gender.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., would require employers to prove that differences in pay are based on qualifications, education and other "bona fides" not related to gender. It also would prohibit employers from retaliating against employees who ask about, discuss or disclose wages in response to a complaint or investigation. And it would make employers who violate sex discrimination laws liable for compensatory or punitive damages. Under the bill, the federal government would be exempt from punitive damages.

Proponents of the bill say it is the next step after the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, which Obama signed into law in 2009. The law effectively overturned a Supreme Court decision that had strictly limited workers' ability to file lawsuits over pay inequity. Ledbetter said she didn't become aware of her own pay discrepancy until she neared the end of her 1979-1988 career at a Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. plant in Gadsden, Ala.

Near the end of her career, she received an anonymous tip that she was earning less than her male colleagues. She filed a charge with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. A jury initially awarded her more than \$3 million in back pay and punitive damages, a sum that a judge later reduced to \$300,000.

Ledbetter herself attended the vote and scolded Republicans for their filibuster.

"Do not let these Republicans keep us from getting paycheck fairness," she told reporters, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid at her side and a letter from her to Romney posted online by the Obama campaign.

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell spoke instead on the looming fight over student loan interest rates. Asked if he was concerned about alienating women with the GOP filibuster, the Kentucky Republican said the bill opened the door to more lawsuits against employers.

"We don't think America suffers from a lack of litigation," McConnell said. "We have a jobless problem. We have a debt problem. We have a deficit problem. We got a lot of problems. Not enough lawsuits is not one of them."

Democrats intend to test that discipline in the coming months by raising hubbubs nationally and in House and Senate races over several issues that disproportionately affect women, or just matter greatly to this group of voters that leans heavily toward their party. Independent women voters in exurbs and suburbs of states like Colorado, Virginia and North Carolina are particular targets, said these officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss strategy.

First up in this category is the looming Senate debate over preventing student loan interest rates from rising next month. Look, too, for hubbubs over raising the minimum wage, extending the Bush-era tax cuts, preserving Medicare and Social Security and access to women's health care, including contraception, the officials said.

The paycheck bill was aimed in part at putting Senate Republicans in tough races in the hot seat over a key women's issue. One, Massachusetts Sen. Scott Brown, issued a statement emphasizing his support for pay equity but calling the legislation "the right cause but the wrong bill."

"On the heels of last week's dismal jobs report, the last thing we should be doing is putting more job-killing burdens on small businesses and employers," he said.

Tweeted challenger Elizabeth Warren: "Scott Brown voted NO on Paycheck Fairness, telling MA women he thinks it's ok that they continue to earn less than men."

20120605-17	17:43	Art	Video: "Tea Party vs. The Constitution: ObamaCare Edition"
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This is classic. Talk about stupidity rules:

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N4pb2did8dA&feature=player_embedded.

20120605-18	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Thailand Tranquility
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<http://www.yachtworldcharters.com/tag/black-marlin/>



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

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