



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #160 — JUNE 14, 2012

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The "Church"—Chpt. 24

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, June 14, 2012)

Almost any idea, even those that seem the most benign, can produce evil. Let's fantasize that you run a small country and that you really love babies a lot. So far, all is good. But, then, you decide babies are so wonderful that you pass a law mandating that all women must have a least one, regardless. Your good idea just became evil in its implementation.

Now, what if we took a really dangerous idea to see where it might lead? How about this one: I am infallible. I can never be wrong, and God talks to me every day and tells me what to do. This is the whole idea about, behind, and surrounding the Popes. And, surprise, surprise, EVIL!

Then look where the "Church" takes an idea like, "Children sure make delectable sex objects for dirty old men." Now, there's an idea the "Church" can get behind! Ya, that's the Pope's moral high ground!

What else but pure evil could lurk in the hearts of men who pretend to the world they are gods, while they molest our children, and try to tell, no, command, the rest of us what is moral and what is evil?

Only one thing remains to be said, as clearly as I possibly can: THESE MEN ARE EVIL! THIS "CHURCH" IS EVIL! Jesus must be rolling over in his...wherever he is.

"8 Ugly Sins of the Catholic Church" by Valerie Tarico, AlterNet

June 11, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/story/155828/>)

Did the Catholic Bishops wince last week when their leader, anti-contraception Cardinal Timothy Dolan, was exposed for paying pedophiles to disappear? One can only hope. After all, these are men who claim to speak for God. They have direct access to the White House, where they regularly weigh in on issues ranging from military policy to bioethics, and they expect us all to listen – not because of relevant expertise or elected standing, but because of their moral authority.

Ahem.

If pedophile payouts weren't enough to convince you that this "moral" authority is often anything but moral, take a look at some of their other sins against compassion and basic decency.

1. Excommunicating doctors and nuns for saving lives.

In 2009, a 27-year-old mom, pregnant with her fifth child, was rushed to a Phoenix hospital, St. Josephs, where her doctors said she would almost certainly die unless her pregnancy was aborted immediately. The nun in charge approved the emergency procedure, and the woman survived. The local bishop promptly excommunicated the nun. "There are some situations where the mother may in fact die along with her child. But — and this is the Catholic perspective — you can't do evil to bring about good. The end does not justify the means," said Rev. John Ehrich, the medical ethics director for the Diocese of Phoenix.

How far are the Church authorities willing to take this "moral" logic? In Brazil last year, with Vatican backing, the Church excommunicated a mother and doctor for saving the life of a 9-year-old rape victim who was pregnant with twins. (At four months pregnant, the girl weighed 80 pounds.) Cardinal Giovanni Batista Re, who heads the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, said "life must always be protected." Perhaps Mr. Batista Re can explain the Vatican's 1,500-year tradition of "just war."

2. Protecting even non-Catholic sex-offenders against child victims.

[The author is apparently a little confused in this paragraph. If the stepfather was not Catholic, of course the Church could not excommunicate him. If he was Catholic and not excommunicated, then the "non-Catholic" part, above, is in error. Either way, there's a problem here. —SteveB]

As we have seen, the moral priorities of the bishops are laid naked when they decide who to excommunicate and who not. The doctor and the mother of the pregnant 9-year-old got the boot for approving an abortion, but not the stepfather who had sexually assaulted the child, probably over a period of years. A similar contrast can be seen between the case of the Phoenix nun and hundreds of pedophile priests who were allowed to remain Catholic even after they finally were identified and removed from the Church payrolls.

It gets worse. In New York, a bill that would give child molestation victims more time to file charges has been blocked seven times by the Catholic hierarchy led by none other than Cardinal Dolan. Why? "We feel this is terribly unjust, we feel it singles out the church, and it would be devastating for the life of the church." In other words, regardless of whether the abuse really happened or what the consequences were for victims, what matters is how much additional lawsuits might cost the Church. Isn't that the ends justifying the means?

3. Using churches to organize gay haters.

When the Washington State legislature approved marriage equality this spring, fundamentalist Christians across the state organized to reverse the legislation. Even though three quarters of American Catholics think that gay marriage or civil unions should be legal, Archbishop Peter Sartain jumped to the front of the pack, decreeing that Western Washington parishes under his "moral authority" should gather signatures for an anti-equality initiative. To their credit, a number of priests refused, and a group called Catholics for Marriage Equality is raising money for ads. In contrast to the Catholic League, which has made the degrading argument that sex between priests and adolescent boys is consensual homosexuality, lay Catholics appear to know the difference.

4. Lying about contraceptives to poor Africans.

Of all the mortal sins committed by the men of the cloth, the most devastatingly lethal in the last 30 years has been the Catholic hierarchy's outspoken opposition to condom use in Africa. In 2003, the president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for the Family publicly lied about the efficacy of condoms in preventing both pregnancy and HIV: "The AIDS virus is roughly 450 times smaller than the spermatozoon. The spermatozoon can easily pass through the 'net' that is formed by the condom." The archbishop of Nairobi told people that condoms were spreading HIV. Some priests told parishioners that condoms were impregnated with the virus.

The motivation for such flagrant falsehoods? The Church has practiced competitive pro-natalism for centuries, but lately anti-contraceptive edicts have been ignored by most educated European and American Catholics, and Italy has the second lowest birthrate in the Western World, at 1.3 per woman. The bishops see this as a "catastrophe" and are looking to Africa as "a reservoir of life for the Church." They wrap their opposition to contraception in lofty moral language such as that offered by Pope John Paul II: It seems profoundly damaging to the dignity of the human being, and for this reason morally illicit, to support a prevention of AIDS that is based on a recourse to means and remedies that violate an authentically human sense of sexuality. As late as 2009, John Paul's successor, Benedict, continued to tell poor African Catholics that condoms were "wrong" and even suggested that they were making the epidemic worse. With god-knows –how-many lives lost and children orphaned, he finally softened his stance in 2010.

5. Obstructing patient access to accurate information and services in secular hospitals.

In rural Arizona near the Mexican border, women delivering babies by cesarean section were refused tubal ligations because their independent hospital was negotiating a merger with a healthcare network run by Catholics. Worse, when a woman arrived at the same hospital in the middle of a miscarriage and need a surgical abortion to complete the process, she was forced to travel by ambulance to Tucson, 80 miles away, risking hemorrhage on the way. All over the U.S. secular and Catholic-run health systems are merging, and patients are quietly losing the right to make medical decisions based on the best scientific information available and the dictates of their own conscience.

Even when the Catholic-owned hospital is a small part of the merger, administrators insist that Catholic directives apply to the system as a whole. These directives prohibit not only abortions but also contraceptives, vasectomies and tubal ligations, some kinds of fertility treatment, and compliance with end-of-life patient directives. Ectopic pregnancies cannot be handled in keeping with the medical standard of care. As biotechnologies and treatments relevant to the beginning and end of life advance, we can expect the list to grow longer. Patients cannot trust that they will be told other options are available elsewhere.

One of the bitter ironies here is that even wholly "Catholic" hospitals and charities are staffed primarily by non-Catholics and largely provide services to people of other faiths or of none, paid for with tax dollars. In healthcare much of the money flows from Medicare and Medicaid. In 2010, non-medical affiliates of Catholic Charities received 62 percent of annual revenue from the taxpayers – nearly \$2.9 billion. Only 3 percent came from church donations, with the remainder coming from investments, program fees, community donations and in-kind contributions. And yet all of those dollars get directed according to the dictates of bishop conscience rather than individual conscience.

6. Slapping down nuns.

Catholic charities and hospitals are at some competitive advantage in part because of hard-working nuns, many of whom have skills and responsibilities that exceed their compensation. The bishops are the Catholic Church's 1 percent; the nuns are managers and service workers --and many have taken the kind of poverty vows that America's 1 percent is trying to impose on the rest. Because many nuns live in the real world, where suffering and morality are complex, they often make care-based decisions and take nuanced positions on moral questions that the Council of Bishops resolves by appealing to dogma and authority.

In April, the Vatican decided to remind the nuns who's on top. Rome issued an 8-page assessment accusing the Leadership Conference of Women Religious of disagreeing with the bishops and of "radical feminism." It appears that their labors on behalf of poor, vulnerable people had distracted them from a more Christian priority: controlling other people's sex lives—oh, and standing up against the ordination of women. The Archbishop assigned by the Vatican to rein in unruly American nuns is none other than Peter Sartain of Seattle, the same moral authority who has declared a holy crusade against gay marriage.

7. Bullying girl scouts.

Unlike the Boy Scouts, who recently earned media and public attention by booting out a gay den-mother, the Girl Scouts have been stubbornly inclusive and focused on preparing girls for leadership. For example,

last year a Colorado troop included a trans-gender 7-year-old. That's a problem for the Bishops, and since up to a quarter of American Girl Scouts are Catholic kids with troops housed in churches, they see it as their problem. To make matters worse, the American Girl Scouts refused to leave their international umbrella, the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts, which has stated that young women "need an environment where they can freely and openly discuss issues of sex and sexuality." The World Association would appear to believe the data that girls who can't manage their sexuality and fertility are more likely to end up in poverty than leadership positions.

Then again, maybe that's what the church hierarchy is after. According to an article last month at the Huffington Post, "The new inquiry will be conducted by the bishops' Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth. It will look into the Scouts' 'possible problematic relationships with other organizations' and various 'problematic' program materials, according to a letter sent by the committee chairman, Bishop Kevin Rhoades of Fort Wayne, Ind., to his fellow bishops." We're talking about an organization run by women for girls facing an all-male inquisition. In today's Catholic church, leadership still requires a Y chromosome.

8. Purging popular and scholarly interfaith bridge builders.

Lest some reader assert that the sins of the Bishops are all a consequence of sexual repression – some contorted pursuit of sexual purity that degrades both sex and compassion—it is important to note that the current cohort of Church authorities are as obsessed with doctrinal purity as sexual purity. It would take me many paragraphs to describe their tireless pursuit of purity as well as retired Anglican bishop, John Shelby Spong, does in one:

Hans Kung, probably the best read theologian of the 20th century, was removed from his position as a Catholic theologian at Tübingen because his mind could not be twisted into the medieval concepts required by his church. This action was carried out by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, who at that time under Pope John Paul II held the office that in another time gave us the Inquisition. Matthew Fox, one of the most popular retreat and meditation leaders and an environmental activist, was then silenced by the same Cardinal Ratzinger. Professor Charles Curran, one of America's best known ethicists, was removed from his tenured professorship at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., also by the same Cardinal Ratzinger. Father Leonardo Boff, the best known Latin American liberation theologian, was forced to renounce his ordination in order to continue his work for justice among the poor of Latin America by the same Cardinal Ratzinger. Next we learn that the Vatican, now headed by Cardinal Ratzinger under his new name Pope Benedict XVI, has ordered the removal of a book from all Catholic schools and universities written by a popular female theologian at Fordham University, Sister Elizabeth A. Johnson. Now the nuns are to be investigated. Conformity trumps truth in every direction.

The Catholic tradition defines deadly or "cardinal" sins as those from which all other sins derive. In addition to lust, gluttony, wrath, sloth and envy, the traditional seven include pride and greed, which, to my mind, drive much of the appalling behavior in this list. If an attempt to assert autocratic control over the spiritual and physical lives of lay people isn't pride, I don't know what is. And if a willingness to silence child victims to protect church assets isn't greed, I don't know what greed is. The BBC's revelation last month of money laundering in the Vatican Bank pales by comparison.

To me, ultimately, the sins of the Catholic bishops are "deadly sins" because they kill people, whether pregnant mothers or depressed gay teens or African families, or simply desperate people who are forced into greater desperation by "moral" priorities that distract from real questions of wellbeing and harm.

What the Bishops will have to account for when they meet their maker, none of us can say. For some American Catholics, the process of holding them to account has already started. The Women Religious have pushed back against the condescending "assessment" issued by the Vatican. Small groups of lay Catholics have rallied to their support. Picketers meet monthly outside Sartain's cathedral to protest his stance against equality. The Franciscan brothers issued a statement of solidarity with the nuns, many of whom have remained solidly focused on economic justice instead of sexual transgressions.

Given the arrogant cruelty of Church leaders, criticism to date has been remarkably tempered. As the Bishops flash their moral authority in the White House and media and pulpit, clothed in white robes and draped in crimson, they should be glad they aren't eyeball to eyeball with Jesus himself. As the writer of Matthew tells it, he called out the corrupt religious leaders of his day in no uncertain terms: Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean.

(Valerie Tarico is a psychologist and writer in Seattle, Washington and the founder of Wisdom Commons. She is the author of *Trusting Doubt: A Former Evangelical Looks at Old Beliefs in a New Light* and *Deas and Other Imaginings*. Her articles can be found at Awaypoint.Wordpress.com.)

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20120613-01	10:03	Art	Re: He Didn't Win the Nobel Prize fer Nothin' (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #159)
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Love this one!

7. "It was his time, the Republican base does not want Romney and they keep on looking for an alternative, and Newt — although somebody said 'he's a stupid man's idea of what a smart person sounds like,' but he is more plausible than the other guys that they've been pushing up." — Nov. 20, 2011, on ABC's "This Week," speaking about Newt Gingrich's surge in the 2012 race

[Isn't it maybe the most perfect description of Newt possible: "a stupid man's idea of what a smart person sounds like." I have to remember that one! –SteveB]

20120613-02	10:41	Art	"Maine Study Finds Potentially Disastrous Threat to Single-Celled Plants That Support All Life"
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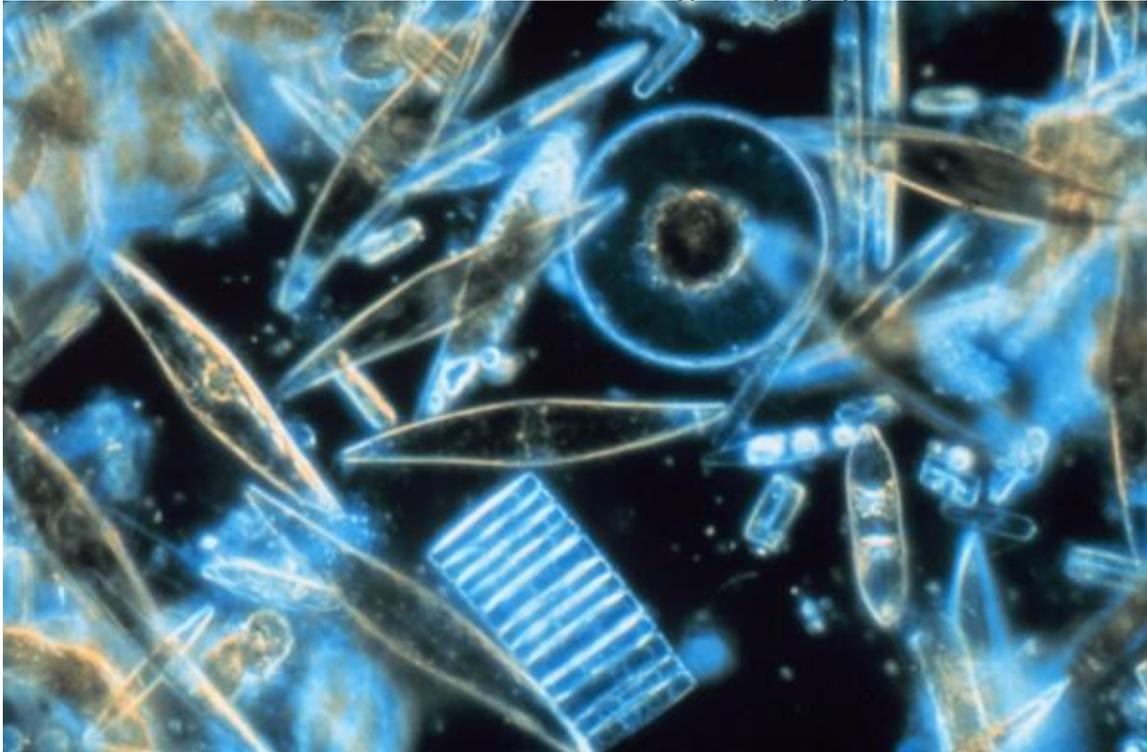
This quote says it all..."People shouldn't freak out about this, but they should think very carefully about the long-term changes that we humans are making."

Like the Gulf of Mexico reacted with the Corexit!

"Maine Study Finds Potentially Disastrous Threat to Single-Celled Plants That Support All Life" by Christopher Cousins, *Bangor Daily News*

June 10, 2012, (<http://bangordailynews.com/2012/06/10/environment/study-finds-potentially-disastrous-threat-to-single-celled-plants-that-support-all-life-on-earth/>)

Diatoms are one of the most common types of phytoplankton.



(BOOTHBAY, Maine) Phytoplankton. If the mention of the tiny plant organisms that permeate the world's oceans isn't enough to pique your interest, consider this: They produce the oxygen in every other breath you take.

Still not interested? This is where it's hard not to take notice. In 2007, the reproduction rate of phytoplankton in the Gulf of Maine decreased suddenly by a factor of five — what used to take a day now takes five — and according to a recently released study by the Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences in Boothbay, it hasn't bounced back.

So what does it mean? According to Barney Balch, the lab's senior research scientist and lead author of the study, such a change in organisms at the bottom of the planetary food chain and at the top of planetary oxygen production could have disastrous consequences for virtually every species on Earth, from lobsters and fish that fuel Maine's marine industries to your grandchildren. But the 12-year Bigelow study focused only on the Gulf of Maine, which leads to the question, will it spread?

"I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to know that if you shut down the base of the marine food web, the results won't be positive," said Balch.

Balch said the study, which was published recently in the *Marine Ecology Progress Series*, provides one of the strongest links to date between increases in rainfall and temperature over the years and the Gulf of Maine's ecosystem. Key factors in the study's conclusions were driven by 100 years of records on rainfall and river discharge, both of which have increased by between 13 and 20 percent over the past century.

In fact, of the eight heaviest rainfall years in the past century, four of them fell between 2005 and 2010. Balch said that increased precipitation, along with water melting from the polar ice caps, could be the reason for the problems discovered in the phytoplankton regeneration rate. The fact that Gulf of Maine's water temperature has risen about 1.1 degrees celsius — which is on par with what is being seen around the world — could also be a factor.

"The major change that we're seeing is that we are now able to put [precipitation and temperature data] into better context," said Balch. "It's so striking that the increase is so statistically significant."

Though heavier water flows into the Gulf of Maine might be a major factor, Balch said it may actually be side-effects of that phenomenon — such as decreased salinity and increasing amounts of materials like rotting plant matter being swept up in the stronger currents — that are actually causing the problem. In other words, when the water is brown it's bad for phytoplankton because the added material in the water starves the single-celled plants of sunlight.

During the 12-year study, which focused on the area of sea between Portland and Yarmouth, Nova Scotia, researchers noticed that plumes of material coming from Maine rivers were reaching 70-100 kilometers into the ocean — farther than had ever been seen before. The outflows also prevent nutrient-rich deep-ocean water from circulating into the Gulf of Maine.

"When you collect the amount of data that we've collected, it's hard to discount the significance," said Balch. "I know there are skeptics out there who still discount the issue of climate change, but the evidence now is just striking. We need to be thinking very carefully about trying to slow this down. It didn't happen overnight and it's not going to go away overnight."

Balch said that the Gulf of Maine is small compared to the world's oceans, but not without the capacity to have a marked effect on the overall ecosystem of the Atlantic Ocean. If the problem with the phytoplankton persists, fishermen will notice its effects long before the world's oxygen supply suffers. Phytoplankton is a key food source for several species of larval fish and lobster populations.

"People shouldn't freak out about this but they should think very carefully about the long-term changes that we humans are making," he said. "This study shows the incredibly tight connection that there is between land and the ocean, especially in the coastal ocean."

[20120613-03](#)

11:04

Pam

Re: "Maine Study Finds Potentially Disastrous Threat to Single-Celled Plants That Support All Life" (reply to Art, above)

I heard an interview on NPR recently about how, since the ice caps are melting, the ice is therefore thinner, allowing more sunlight to penetrate the ice, which encourages plant growth. This sounds like the opposite of what this article says. I'm not saying I doubt its veracity, but this is obviously a very complex matter. We have now overfished our oceans to the extent that once abundant species are no longer around. Heard that in a different interview. I also heard an interesting one last night about the idea of the commons. Remember that work by Hardin some years ago called "The Tragedy of the Commons?" The interviewee cited a case in Switzerland, where land for agriculture is scarce. If each farmer only had access to his own land, there would be lots of years when his land would produce nothing, because of weather and what not. So the Swiss decided to allow all farmers access to all land, so no one had to go a year (or more) with nothing to show for it. I wish more Republicans could see that allowing everyone, especially every rich everyone, to keep all their own money would be ruinous for everybody. Even if they don't care a fig about fairness or compassion, they should at least realize that a stressed, unstable society does them no good either. I believe Krugman is right that if we keep on with this "I've got mine, you get yours" mentality, the Occupy movement will seem tame. Very tame. We had race riots. I predict we'll have economic riots too. I hope not, but it wouldn't surprise me a bit.

[20120613-04](#)

12:14

SteveB

Flash Mob Sings 'Hail Purdue'

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HvD16BuJy6I>

[20120613-05](#)

14:01

SteveB

"Why the Economy Can't Get Out of First Gear"

["Why the Economy Can't Get Out of First Gear" by Robert Reich, NationofChange](#)

June 13, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/why-economy-can-t-get-out-first-gear-1339597353>)

Rarely in history has the cause of a major economic problem been so clear yet have so few been willing to see it.

The major reason this recovery has been so anemic is not Europe's debt crisis. It's not Japan's tsunami. It's not Wall Street's continuing excesses. It's not, as right-wing economists tell us, because taxes are too high on corporations and the rich, and safety nets are too generous to the needy. It's not even, as some liberals contend, because the Obama administration hasn't spent enough on a temporary Keynesian stimulus.

The answer is in front of our faces. It's because American consumers, whose spending is 70 percent of economic activity, don't have the dough to buy enough to boost the economy – and they can no longer borrow like they could before the crash of 2008.

If you have any doubt, just take a look at the Survey of Consumer Finances, released Monday by the Federal Reserve. Median family income was \$49,600 in 2007. By 2010 it was \$45,800 – a drop of 7.7%.

All of the gains from economic growth have been going to the richest 1 percent – who, because they're so rich, spend no more than half what they take in.

Can I say this any more simply? The earnings of the great American middle class fueled the great American expansion for three decades after World War II. Their relative lack of earnings in more recent years set us up for the great American bust.

Starting around 1980, globalization and automation began exerting downward pressure on median wages. Employers began busting unions in order to make more profits. And increasingly deregulated financial markets began taking over the real economy.

The result was slower wage growth for most households. Women surged into paid work in order to prop up family incomes – which helped for a time. But the median wage kept flattening, and then, after 2001, began to decline.

Households tried to keep up by going deeply into debt, using the rising values of their homes as collateral. This also helped – for a time. But then the housing bubble popped.

The Fed's latest report shows how loud that pop was. Between 2007 and 2010 (the latest data available) American families' median net worth fell almost 40 percent – down to levels last seen in 1992. The typical family's wealth is their home, not their stock portfolio – and housing values have dropped by a third since 2006.

Families have also become less confident about how much income they can expect in the future. In 2010, over 35% of American families said they did not "have a good idea of what their income would be for the next year." That's up from 31.4% in 2007.

But because their incomes and their net worth have both dropped, families are saving less. The proportion of families that said they had saved in the preceding year fell from 56.4% in 2007 to 52% in 2010, the lowest level since the Fed began collecting that information in 1992.

Bottom line: The American economy is still struggling because the vast American middle class can't spend more to get it out of first gear.

What to do? There's no simple answer in the short term except to hope we stay in first gear and don't slide backwards.

Over the longer term the answer is to make sure the middle class gets far more of the gains from economic growth.

How? We might learn something from history. During the 1920s, income concentrated at the top. By 1928, the top 1 percent was raking in an astounding 23.94 percent of the total (close to the 23.5 percent the top 1 percent got in

2007) according to analyses of tax records by my colleague Emmanuel Saez and Thomas Piketty. At that point the bubble popped and we fell into the Great Depression.

But then came the Wagner Act, requiring employers to bargain in good faith with organized labor. Social Security and unemployment insurance. The Works Projects Administration and Civilian Conservation Corps. A national minimum wage. And to contain Wall Street: The Securities Act and Glass-Steagall Act.

In 1941 America went to war – a vast mobilization that employed every able-bodied adult American, and put money in their pockets. And after the war, the GI Bill, sending millions of returning veterans to college. A vast expansion of public higher education. And huge infrastructure investments, such as the National Defense Highway Act. Taxes on the rich remained at least 70 percent until 1981.

The result: By 1957, the top 1 percent of Americans raked in only 10.1 percent of total income. Most of the rest went to a growing middle class – whose members fueled the greatest economic boom in the history of the world.

Get it? We won't get out of first gear until the middle class regains the bargaining power it had in the first three decades after World War II to claim a much larger share of the gains from productivity growth.

20120613-06	14:09 SteveB	Fw: Feminist Majority Foundation Action: Help Defeat Anti-Woman Measures in 2012!
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from Feminist Majority Foundation:

We did it! With your help, feminists made a big difference in North Dakota and pro-choice forces won BIG. Thank you for your support! And thank you North Dakota voters!

North Dakotans voted overwhelmingly – 64% to 36% - against Measure 3 the so-called "religious liberties" state Constitutional amendment that could have been a huge blow to women's rights. Voters also resoundingly defeated a measure opposed by public school teachers and educators that would have repealed all property taxes by a vote of 77% to 23%.

Feminist Majority Foundation campus organizers were on the ground working with hundreds of North Dakotans, the statewide coalition against Measure 3, North Dakotans Against Measure 3. With your support, we organized on college campuses with North Dakota Students Voting No on 3, a statewide campaign. Our national organizing team worked on-the-ground with other pro-choice groups, student organizers, and scores of volunteers who mobilized students on the major campuses. Our signs, leaflets, and stickers, which read "Vote NO on 3, It Goes Too Far" said it all!

Measure 3 would have threatened laws against sex discrimination, domestic violence, child abuse and more. The amendment could have provided a defense to wife beaters and child abusers – who would have been able to claim their religious beliefs allow them to use violence against family members. It could have also opened the door, based on religious beliefs, to sex discrimination and the denial of birth control and other fundamental services and protections. Undoubtedly, it would have led to many court cases.

Although there was initially much confusion about Measure 3, as soon as the public learned of the potential harmful impact of Measure 3, we moved solidly ahead despite strong opposition from the Catholic bishops and the local Catholic Conference as well as the local affiliate of Focus on the Family.

Thank you for standing with us in North Dakota. We couldn't have done it without you!

For equality, Ellie Smeal, President

P.S. There will be more anti-woman state ballot measures in the fall. Sign up now to help us fight them!

http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1400/p/salsa/web/common/public/signup?signup_page_KEY=6828

Paid for by North Dakota Students Voting No on 3, Sarah Shanks, Campaign Organizer.

20120613-07	14:13	SteveB	From the Right: "North Dakota Voters Decide Not to Eliminate Property Taxes"
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How is this not an attack upon education? Thankfully, North Dakota knew what to do, unlike Wisconsin.

"North Dakota Voters Decide Not to Eliminate Property Taxes" by John Hayward, *Human Events*

June 13, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/2012/06/13/north-dakota-voters-decide-not-to-eliminate-property-taxes/>)

North Dakota's "Measure 2," which would have completely eliminated property taxes, was "soundly defeated" on Tuesday night, according to the Associated Press. Polls had shown about 70 percent opposition to the measure, which made it to the ballot with strong Tea Party support.

If it had passed, North Dakota would have become the first state in the nation to abolish property taxes. This would have resulted in about \$800 million in lost annual revenue to the state, which would likely have been made up through increases in other taxes - a commonly cited reason for opposition. Also, property taxes are a primary source of revenue for local governments, and opponents of Measure 2 felt they would have become overly dependent upon the state for funding without them.

Supporters had countered that North Dakota's booming oil industry could provide enough tax revenue to replace property taxes, but it would appear the voters rejected that argument. Some worried that the oil boom might end abruptly, wreaking havoc with the state's finances. Measure 2 supporters maintained this very apprehension would be a useful means of pressuring the government to keep spending down.

Some interesting points were raised by proponents of the measure. They questioned the basic fairness of property taxes, which are not evenly dispersed across the population, as not everyone owns property, and not all property is taxed equally. (The maze of special property tax rates and exemptions is a prime target for reformers.) Some critics view property taxes as a way to farm revenue from an essentially captive population. Boom-and-bust cycles do affect property tax revenue, as the collapse in home values dramatically illustrates.

Measure 2 advocates noted that property taxes aren't entirely controlled by local government, contrary to popular impressions, because the state government exerts considerable control over the valuation of property, and the assessment of taxes upon it. It is always productive to debate the limits of "local" control, and the devolution of power to lower levels of government.

There seems to be widespread agreement in North Dakota that the property tax system is a mess. Reformers can hope that the push for Measure 2 will serve as a wake-up call to the state legislature... and perhaps government in other states with even higher, messier property taxes.

20120613-08	14:19	SteveB	From the Right: "Should Government Be Involved in Health Care?"
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"Should Government Be Involved in Health Care?" by:John Stossel, *Human Events*

June 13, 2012, (<http://www.humanevents.com/2012/06/13/john-stossel-improving-health-care/>)

Any day now, the U.S. Supreme will rule on whether the Obamacare insurance mandate is constitutional. Seems like a no-brainer to me. How can forcing me to engage in commerce be constitutional?

But there's a deeper question: Why should government be involved in medicine at all?

Right before President Obama took office, the media got hysterical about health care. You heard the claims: America spends more than any country -- \$6,000 per person -- yet we get less. Americans die younger than people in Japan and Western Europe. Millions of Americans lack health insurance and worry about paying for care.

I have the solution! said Obama. Bigger government will give us more choices and make health care cheaper and better. He proceeded to give us that. Bigger government, that is. The cheaper/better/more choices part -- not so much.

Costs have risen. More choices? No, we have fewer choices. Many people lost coverage when companies left the market.

Because ObamaCare requires insurance companies to cover every child regardless of pre-existing conditions, WellPoint, Humana and Cigna got out of the child-only business. Principal Financial stopped offering health insurance altogether -- 1 million customers no longer have the choice to keep their insurance.

This is to be expected when governments control health care. Since state funding makes medical services seem free, demand increases. Governments deal with that by rationing. Advocates of government health care hate the word "rationing" because it forces them to face an ugly truth: Once you accept the idea that taxpayers pay, individual choice dies. Someone else decides what treatment you get, and when.

At least in America, we still have some choice. We can pay to get what we want. Under government health care, bureaucrats will decide how long we wait for our knee operation or cataract surgery ... or if we get lifesaving treatment at all.

When someone else pays for your health care, that someone else also decides when to pull the plug. The reason can be found in Econ 101. Medical care doesn't grow on trees. It must be produced by human and physical capital, and those resources are limited. Politicians can't repeal supply and demand.

Call them "death panels" or not, a government that needs to cut costs will limit what it spends on health care, especially on people nearing the end of life. Medical "ethicists" have long lamented that too much money is spent in the last several months of life. Given the premise that it's government's job to pay, it's only natural that some bureaucrat will decide that 80-year-olds shouldn't get hip replacements.

True, surveys show that most Brits and Canadians like their free health care. But Dr. David Gratzner notes that most people surveyed aren't sick. Gratzner is a Canadian who also liked Canada's government health care -- until he started treating patients.

More than a million Canadians say they can't find a family doctor. Some towns hold lotteries to determine who gets to see one. In Norwood, Ontario, my TV producer watched as the town clerk pulled four names out of a big box and then telephoned the lucky winners. "Congratulations! You get to see a doctor this month."

Think the wait in an American emergency room is bad? In Canada, the average wait is 23 hours. Sometimes they can't even get heart attack victims into the ICU.

That's where we're headed unless Obamacare is repealed. But that's not nearly enough. Contrary to what some Republicans say, we didn't have a free medical market before Obama came to power. We had a system that limited competition through occupational licensing, FDA rules and other government intrusions, while stimulating demand through tax-favored employer-based "insurance," Medicare and Medicaid.

If we want affordable and cutting-edge health care, there's only one approach that will work: open competition. That means eliminating both bureaucratic obstacles and corporate privileges. Only free markets can give us innovation at the lowest possible cost.

Of course, that also means consumers should spend their own money on health care, limiting insurance to catastrophic expenses. Americans don't want to hear it. But that's the truth.

"A Modern Economy Has Universal Health Care" by Froma Harrop, NationofChange

June 13, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/modern-economy-has-universal-health-care-1339592731>)

For now, let's drop the talk about wanting a liberal America or a conservative America. What we truly need is a modern America. No country can be modern spending twice what its rich competitors do on health care while leaving millions without any coverage.

If the U.S. Supreme Court declares the essential "individual mandate" in the federal Affordable Care Act unconstitutional — or Republicans throw out the reforms — then it's back to the past, back to the economy-dragging health care mess we've been calling a "system."

Republicans say that Americans don't want top-down government control of their health care. But what we have now is top-down corporate control of health care. Insurers, drugmakers, sellers of expensive equipment, hospital executives, labs, home-health-care services, and others unnamed prosper by exploiting the chaos in our health care system.

They get other payers (be they private or government) to purchase \$50 drugs when \$10 drugs are just as effective. They make more money if patients have to be readmitted into the hospital. They profit from pushing surgery, when careful watching or less invasive therapy might do the trick at far lower cost and risk. They casually order CT scans without much thought to the expense or the patients' exposure to radiation.

The motives are undoubtedly mixed. Some providers see opportunity in siphoning the poorly regulated Niagara of health care dollars into their pockets. Many doctors prescribe far more tests and surgery than do their colleagues, either out of habit or fear of being sued. (Republicans are right about the need for tort reform to curb litigation against responsible doctors.)

Here's the point of an individual mandate requiring the uninsured to obtain coverage. The reforms call for state-run health-insurance exchanges, where the uncovered can find affordable health plans.

The plans can't remain solvent if young and healthy people can choose not to join them, leaving an insurance pool heavy with expensive sick people. Only a handful of states have moved forward on the exchanges, as others wait for the Supreme Court to rule on the individual mandate.

The 2006 Massachusetts health reforms, put into place by then-Gov. Mitt Romney, served as the model for the Affordable Care Act. Republican politics being what they are, Romney is now vowing to kill the national version of his reforms should he be elected president.

It happens that Romneycare was less conservative than Obamacare because it did little to confront rising health care costs. But a funny thing happened on the way to 2012. Polls show that folks in Massachusetts overwhelmingly support their universal coverage despite the expense. Instead of throwing it out, they're seriously looking for ways to reduce the spending.

For example, providers may bill for every little test and treatment. Proposed legislation would encourage paying "flat fees" to doctors, hospitals, and others to deal with the problem. That would remove the incentive to overprescribe care and reward those who do it right the first time.

Universal coverage, including an individual mandate, has evidently not hurt the Massachusetts economy. It may have even helped the state's strong tech sector by providing health care security for entrepreneurs starting businesses. In any case, Massachusetts has the 14th-lowest unemployment rate in the country. And unemployment is even lower in high-wage Germany and Sweden, where the state guarantees far more generous health benefits.

Only government can force order into the jungle of profitable waste and crazy cross-subsidies — most of it piled on the backs of taxpayers and employers. America can't be modern without a system of universal coverage that promotes wise use of health care resources. Let's stop fooling around and get on with it.

20120613-10	15:25	SteveB	Fw: USAction Petition: Stop Tax Breaks for Job Killers!
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from USAction:

Should we keep giving tax breaks to U.S. companies to shift jobs overseas? Incredibly, that's now a debate in Washington.

The American middle class is getting crushed and closed off, while huge corporations get tax breaks for shipping our jobs overseas.

Here's just one example: General Electric paid no – zilch, nada, zero – federal income taxes while making more than \$10 billion in profits and shipping thousands of jobs overseas. GE has parked \$102 billion in profits off-shore. And GE is far from alone. American companies are sitting on some \$1.2 trillion in off-shore profits.

(<http://www.ctj.org/corporatetaxdodgers/>)

That's ridiculous. Will you join us to put an end to this outrageous tax giveaway?

In early July, the U.S. Senate will vote on the Bring Jobs Home Act, which will directly reward companies that create jobs here in the U.S. instead of sending them away.

This should be a no-brainer – but with Republicans in lock-step opposition, we need you to sign our petition in support of the bill.

http://act.truemajorityaction.org/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=401&track=tw

We'll deliver your petition to members of Congress at events across the country to put the pressure on before the vote.

Here are the questions we'll be asking: Do you stand with the working families and the small businesses that create two-thirds of American jobs? Or do you stand with the CEO campaign contributors who cut our wages and benefits and ship our jobs overseas? With unemployment hovering around eight percent and millions of Americans still out of work, it is outrageous that we are giving huge tax breaks to multinational companies.

Sign our petition. Then share your story if you or someone you know has been personally affected by a company outsourcing jobs. We'll be delivering your petition signatures and your stories to Sen. Stabenow's office to show the groundswell of support for her bill – and to provide personal testimony showing how outsourcing has hurt everyday Americans.

The time to end this corporate gravy train is now. Sign our petition, and then, share your story if a company outsourcing jobs overseas has personally affected you or someone you know.

Sincerely, David Elliot, USAction / TrueMajority

20120613-11	20:00	SteveB	"Obama Trade Document Leaked, Revealing New Corporate Powers & Broken Campaign Promises"
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"Obama Trade Document Leaked, Revealing New Corporate Powers and Broken Campaign Promises" by Zach Carter, Huffington Post

June 13, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/13/obama-trade-document-leak_n_1592593.html)

(WASHINGTON) A critical document from President Barack Obama's free trade negotiations with eight Pacific nations was leaked online early Wednesday morning, revealing that the administration intends to bestow radical new political powers upon multinational corporations, contradicting prior promises.

The leaked document has been posted on the website of Public Citizen, a long-time critic of the administration's trade objectives. (<http://www.citizenstrade.org/ctc/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/tppinvestment.pdf>) The new leak follows substantial controversy surrounding the secrecy of the talks, in which some members of Congress have complained they are not being given the same access to trade documents that corporate officials receive.

"The outrageous stuff in this leaked text may well be why U.S. trade officials have been so extremely secretive about these past two years of [trade] negotiations," said Lori Wallach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch in a written statement.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) has been so incensed by the lack of access as to introduce legislation requiring further disclosure. House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) has gone so far as to leak a separate document from the talks on his website. Other Senators are considering writing a letter to Ron Kirk, the top trade negotiator under Obama, demanding more disclosure.

The newly leaked document is one of the most controversial of the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade pact. It addresses a broad sweep of regulations governing international investment and reveals the Obama administration's advocacy for policies that environmental activists, financial reform advocates and labor unions have long rejected for eroding key protections currently in domestic laws.

Under the agreement currently being advocated by the Obama administration, American corporations would continue to be subject to domestic laws and regulations on the environment, banking and other issues. But foreign corporations operating within the U.S. would be permitted to appeal key American legal or regulatory rulings to an international tribunal. That international tribunal would be granted the power to overrule American law and impose trade sanctions on the United States for failing to abide by its rulings.

The terms run contrary to campaign promises issued by Obama and the Democratic Party during the 2008 campaign.

"We will not negotiate bilateral trade agreements that stop the government from protecting the environment, food safety, or the health of its citizens; give greater rights to foreign investors than to U.S. investors; require the privatization of our vital public services; or prevent developing country governments from adopting humanitarian licensing policies to improve access to life-saving medications," reads the campaign document.

Yet nearly all of those vows are violated by the leaked Trans-Pacific document. The one that is not contravened in the present document -- regarding access to life-saving medication -- is in conflict with a previously leaked document on intellectual property (IP) standards.

"Bush was better than Obama on this," said Judit Rius, U.S. manager of Doctors Without Borders Access to Medicines Campaign, referring to the medication rules. "It's pathetic, but it is what it is. The world's upside-down."

In a statement provided to HuffPost, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative downplayed the concerns.

"This administration is committed to ensuring strong environmental, public health and safety laws," said USTR spokesperson Nkenge Harmon. "Nothing in our TPP investment proposal could impair our government's ability to pursue legitimate, non-discriminatory public interest regulation, including measures to protect public health, public safety and the environment."

Words like "legitimate" and "nondiscriminatory" can have flexible interpretations among international tribunals, however, which have recently ruled that U.S. dolphin-safe tuna labelling and anti-teen smoking efforts are unfair barriers to trade, according to prior trade pacts. The new investment rules, for instance, extend to government contracting negotiations, eliminating so-called "Buy American" preferences for domestic manufacturers.

USTR has previously stated that it does not comment on the terms of an allegedly leaked document.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative insists that while broad standards require many medical patents and IP rules that would increase the price of medications, the U.S. intends to work with countries involved in the Trans-Pacific talks to ensure that the agreement does not restrict access to life-saving drugs.

That statement is belied somewhat by recent American efforts in other international negotiations to establish controversial medical patents that grant companies long-term monopolies on life-saving medications. Those monopolies increase drug prices, which impede access to medications, particularly in developing nations. The World Health Organization and dozens of nonprofit public health groups have objected to the standards sought by the Obama administration. Two United Nations groups recently urged global governments not to agree to trade terms currently being advocated by the Obama administration, on the grounds that such rules would hurt public health.

Such foreign investment standards have also come under fire at home, from both conservative sovereignty purists and progressive activists for the potential to hamper domestic priorities implemented by democratically elected leaders. The North American Free Trade Agreement, passed by Congress in 1993, and a host of subsequent trade pacts granted corporations new powers that had previously been reserved for sovereign nations and that have allowed companies to sue nations directly over issues.

While the current trade deal could pose a challenge to American sovereignty, large corporations headquartered in the U.S. could potentially benefit from it by using the same terms to oppose the laws of foreign governments. If one of the eight Pacific nations involved in the talks passes a new rule to which an American firm objects, that U.S. company could take the country to court directly in international tribunals.

Public Citizen challenged the independence of these international tribunals, noting that "The tribunals would be staffed by private sector lawyers that rotate between acting as 'judges' and as advocates for the investors suing the governments," according to the text of the agreement.

In early June, a tribunal at the World Bank agreed to hear a case involving similar foreign investment standards, in which El Salvador banned cyanide-based gold mining on the basis of objections from the Catholic Church and environmental activists. If the World Bank rules against El Salvador, it could overturn the nation's domestic laws at the behest of a foreign corporation.

Speaking to the environmental concerns raised by the leaked document, Margrete Strand Rangnes, Labor and Trade Director for the Sierra Club, an environmental group said, "Our worst fears about the investment chapter have been confirmed by this leaked text ... This investment chapter would severely undermine attempts to strengthen environmental law and policy."

Basic public health and land-use rules would be subject to challenge before an international tribunal, as would bank regulations at capital levels that might be used to stymie bank runs or financial crises. The IMF has advocated the use of such capital controls, which would be prohibited under the current version of the leaked trade pact. Although several countries have proposed exceptions that would allow them to regulate speculative financial bets, the U.S. has resisted those proposals, according to Public Citizen.

Trans-Pacific negotiations have been taking place throughout the Obama presidency. The deal is strongly supported by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the top lobbying group for American corporations. Obama's Republican opponent in the 2012 presidential elections, Mitt Romney, has urged the U.S. to finalize the deal as soon as possible.

20120613-12	21:46	SteveG	"Sanders Releases Explosive Bailout List"
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"Sanders Releases Explosive Bailout List" by RSN

June 13, 2012, (<http://www.readersupportednews.org/news-section2/318-66/11895-sanders-releases-explosive-bailout-list>)

More than \$4 trillion in near zero-interest Federal Reserve loans and other financial assistance went to the banks and businesses of at least 18 current and former Federal Reserve regional bank directors in the aftermath of the 2008 financial collapse, according to Government Accountability Office records made public for the first time today by Sen. Bernie Sanders.

On the eve of Senate testimony by JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon, Sanders (I-Vt.) released the detailed findings on Dimon and other Fed board members whose banks and businesses benefited from Fed actions.

A Sanders provision in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform Act required the Government Accountability Office to investigate potential conflicts of interest. The Oct. 19, 2011 report by the non-partisan investigative arm of Congress laid out the findings, but did not name names. Sanders today released the names.

"This report reveals the inherent conflicts of interest that exist at the Federal Reserve. At a time when small businesses could not get affordable loans to create jobs, the Fed was providing trillions in secret loans to some of the largest banks and corporations in America that were well represented on the boards of the Federal Reserve Banks. These conflicts must end," Sanders said.

The GAO study found that allowing members of the banking industry to both elect and serve on the Federal Reserve's board of directors creates "an appearance of a conflict of interest" and poses "reputational risks" to the Federal Reserve System.

In Dimon's case, JPMorgan received some \$391 billion of the \$4 trillion in emergency Fed funds at the same time his bank was used by the Fed as a clearinghouse for emergency lending programs. In March of 2008, the Fed provided JPMorgan with \$29 billion in financing to acquire Bear Stearns. Dimon also got the Fed to provide JPMorgan Chase with an 18-month exemption from risk-based leverage and capital requirements. And he convinced the Fed to take risky mortgage-related assets off of Bear Stearns balance sheet before JP Morgan Chase acquired the troubled investment bank.

Another high-profile conflict involved Stephen Friedman, the former chairman of the New York Fed's board of directors. Late in 2008, the New York Fed approved an application from Goldman Sachs to become a bank holding company giving it access to cheap loans from the Federal Reserve. During that period, Friedman sat on the Goldman Sachs board. He also owned Goldman stock, something that was prohibited by Federal Reserve conflict of interest regulations. Although it was not publicly disclosed at the time, Friedman received a waiver from the Fed's conflict of interest rules in late 2008. Unbeknownst to the Fed, Friedman continued to purchase shares in Goldman from November 2008 through January of 2009, according to the GAO.

In another case, General Electric CEO Jeffrey Immelt was a New York Fed board member at the same time GE helped create a Commercial Paper Funding Facility during the financial crisis. The Fed later provided \$16 billion in financing to GE under this emergency lending program.

Sanders on May 22 introduced legislation to prohibit banking industry and business executives from serving as directors of the 12 Federal Reserve regional banks.

To read a report summarizing the new GAO information, click here:
<http://www.sanders.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/061212DimonIsNotAlone.pdf>.



<http://www.soularbliss.com/2012/03/01/a-is-for-anger-recipes-remedies-rituals-and-resources-for-dealing-with-anger/>



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

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