



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #168 — JUNE 26, 2012

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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Another American Tragedy

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, June 26, 2012)

We can now be sure that *Citizens United* was not just an aberration or a fluke—no, it's part of a concerted effort to take over the political machinery of America. Thanks to this decision on Montana's case, the wonderfulness and fairness of *Citizens United* has now been extended to all local elections, not just federal ones. What are the odds of a non-political decision on Obamacare, this Thursday?

"Supreme Court Reverses Anti-*Citizens United* Ruling from Montana" by Mike Sacks, Huffington Post

June 25, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/25/supreme-court-reversed-citizens-united-montana_n_1605355.html)

(WASHINGTON) The U.S. Supreme Court on Monday struck down Montana's century-old limits on corporate political spending, putting an end to the state's resistance to *Citizens United* and effectively expanding that controversial ruling to the state and local elections.

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, decided in January 2010, struck down federal limits on campaign spending by corporations and unions as violations of the First Amendment. Justice Anthony Kennedy, writing on behalf of Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Antonin Scalia, Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito, reached the bold conclusion that "independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption," and therefore "[n]o sufficient governmental interest justifies limits on the political speech of nonprofit or for-profit corporations."

In December 2011, the Montana Supreme Court disagreed. It found that the state's Gilded Age history of business-driven corruption was sufficient to justify the state's Corrupt Practices Act. Passed by voter referendum in 1912, the law decrees that a "corporation may not make ... an expenditure in connection with a candidate or a political party that supports or opposes a candidate or a political party."

By summarily reversing the case, *American Tradition Partnership v. Bullock*, the justices refused to reconcile their sweeping statement of free speech principles in *Citizens United* with the real-world facts -- from Montana's history to today's super PACs -- put forward by Montana and its supporters to demonstrate that independent expenditures do, indeed, corrupt or create the appearance of corruption. Instead, the 5-4 majority, in an unsigned opinion, wrote that "[t]here can be no serious doubt" that *Citizens United* applies to Montana's law.

"Montana's arguments in support of the judgment below either were already rejected in *Citizens United*, or fail to meaningfully distinguish that case," the majority wrote.

Justice Stephen Breyer, joined by Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan, wrote to dissent from the summary reversal. "Montana's experience, like considerable experience elsewhere since the Court's decision in *Citizens United*, casts grave doubt on the Court's supposition that independent expenditures do not corrupt or appear to do so," Breyer wrote. "Were the matter up to me, I would vote to grant the petition for certiorari in order to reconsider *Citizens United* or, at least, its application in this case."

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20120625-01	05:20	MarthaH	"A Big Unknown for Americans If Health Care Law Struck Down"
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"A Big Unknown for Americans If Health Care Law Struck Down" by Mary Agnes Carey, MSNBC

June 22, 2012, (http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/47918979/ns/today-today_health/t/big-unknown-americans-if-health-care-law-struck-down/#.T-mC9rVYuRQ)

The prospect of the Supreme Court striking down the entire health law or some of its key elements has many people in Washington abuzz about what happens next. What about the federal grants that have been awarded as part of the law's implementation? Does the shrinking "doughnut hole" in seniors' drug coverage grow again? Would consumers lose their protection against out-of-pocket costs for preventive services?

Consumers, states and the federal government have much to win – or lose – depending on how the court rules. Proponents say the subsidies for eligible lower income people, health insurance exchanges and Medicaid expansion, among other provisions, are examples of how the law will save consumers money and improve access to care. But critics want to reduce the billions of dollars in federal spending in the law as the nation wrestles with a massive deficit. If the court strikes the law — or even a portion of it — experts say it is not clear how these economic issues will play out.

There are few roadmaps or precedents to help guide policy makers and politicians.

"This case more directly affects the national economy and touches more Americans in their day to day lives than anything the Supreme Court has done in almost a century," said Tom Goldstein, a Washington lawyer and publisher of SCOTUSblog, which follows the Supreme Court. "This is right at the root of very basic questions of economic power and health care in the country. There aren't other similar disputes that have reached the justices since the New Deal."

Since there is little common ground between the Democrats and Republicans on the law, if it were struck down or altered significantly by the court, it would likely be extremely difficult to build a bipartisan consensus on legislation to tidy up the confusion or remedy the pocketbook issues.

"It's just too contentious," says Joseph Antos, a health care expert at the American Enterprise Institute, a conservative think tank. "Even next year, it's really hard to imagine you'd get corrective legislation because the enmity between the two sides will be just as strong as it ever was."

There would likely be differences of opinions about how the federal and state governments would proceed in closing their books on the law. If the Supreme Court and Congress give states no marching orders, it might again fall to the courts to settle bills and loose ends. The Supreme Court could kick some decisions -- perhaps on the fate of grants already issued to states and others -- to lower courts to decide.

Goldstein doubts that the justices will weigh in on issues like what happens to federal grants that have already been distributed or the law's payment cuts to hospitals and other Medicare providers. "That's too in the weeds," he said.

"It will be a partly political, partly legal question. I'm sure that if the entire law gets struck or at least the parts of the law that relate to the grants, the government's going to want back the unspent portion of the funds," Goldstein said. "A lot of details will depend on how the grants were written and those sorts of things."

The Department of Health and Human Services might try to fix some problems through rule making, he added.

Here's a look at a few of the major economic questions that could quickly arise if the court strikes all or parts of the law:

Will the federal government try to recover the money it has spent implementing the law?

If the whole law is tossed out, at some point the federal government may try to collect the grants it issued to states and others to fund the creation of health insurance marketplaces, called exchanges; prevention activities and programs to make health care more efficient, he says. "If the whole thing really is unconstitutional, that has to mean that it is illegal to spend the money that way under current law," said Antos.

Retrieving unspent funds might be possible, but collecting money that's already been spent could prove problematic, especially for cash-strapped states still dealing with a weak economy.

"My sense would be they would not recover the money. How do you recover the money? If it's spent, what do you do?" said Steven Lieberman, the president of Lieberman Consulting Inc. and the former deputy executive director for policy at the National Governors Association.

Would states continue their efforts to establish insurance marketplaces?

The health law creates state exchanges where eligible individuals and small businesses could purchase health insurance. If the entire law is struck down, some states, such as California and Maryland, are expected to continue their efforts.

But if the ruling prohibited additional federal funding for implementation of the health law, states wanting to build exchanges would have to do so with existing federal grants or with state funds. Federal subsidies in the law to help people buy coverage in the exchanges could also be gone, depending on the court ruling. If that happens, consumers would have to pay more from their own pockets for coverage.

What about consumer benefits?

Several provisions of the law are geared to guaranteeing low-cost care, such as mandates that some preventive services be provided to beneficiaries with no out-of-pocket costs. Favoring a market-based approach, the GOP would prefer that insurers decide themselves to keep health law consumer protections in place without Washington demanding it happen. And some companies are doing just that.

UnitedHealthcare, which covers about 26 million people in plans that could be affected by the regulations, said June 11 it would continue to offer cancer screenings and other preventive services without a copayment, as well as allow young adult children to stay on their parents' policies up to age 26 and not reinstate lifetime limits on coverage.

Hours later, insurers Aetna and Humana said they too would continue with some of those provisions. But other key safeguards, such as guaranteed coverage for people with medical problems, have not been addressed by the insurers.

Another area of uncertainty, is what happens to the rebates that insurers are required to pay consumers if health plans fail to spend at least 80 percent of premiums on medical care. An estimated \$1.1 billion in rebates would be paid by Aug. 1 under current law, according to the Department of Health and Human Services. If the entire law is struck down, it's not clear if insurers would have to pay the rebates.

Would the consumer savings in the Medicare prescription drug program remain?

Industry officials say a court rebuff could put seniors in jeopardy of once again having to pay full price for brand-name drugs after they reach the coverage gap in their prescription drug plans. If the entire statute is struck down, the legal structures that allowed pharmaceutical manufacturers to cut brand-name drug prices in half when Medicare beneficiaries hit that coverage gap -- known as the "doughnut hole" -- would be eliminated, according to Matthew Bennett, a spokesman for the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America. That would raise questions about whether this program could continue, he said.

20120625-02	08:56	Pam	Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #167)
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I wonder what the top 1% make of this statistic. [that since 1973 the median income in America has risen only 7%. -SteveB]

20120625-03	10:21	SteveG	Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to Pam, above)
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Oh, their income has risen approximately 1,000%.

[20120625-04](#) 10:40 SteveB Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to Pam, above)

I wish I knew someone in the top 1% who's still talking to me, let alone answering logical questions. :-)

[20120625-06](#) 10:46 SteveG Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveB, above)

I still talk to you. ☺

[20120625-08](#) 11:24 SteveB Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveG, above)

And I thought you were such a minimalist...can I get a loan?

[20120625-05](#) 10:43 SteveB Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveG, above)

So the 1% probably is as disappointed as the rest of us! Damn! Why couldn't they have rigged the system just a little better for twice that return? Even 2000% doesn't seem like enough for the greed of the geniuses who destroyed the goose that laid the golden eggs.

[20120625-07](#) 10:49 SteveG Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveB, above)

[So Rich, So Poor: Why It's So Hard to End Poverty in America](#) by Peter Edelman, New Press, 2012

http://books.google.com.bo/books/about/So_Rich_So_Poor.html?id=IO5GXwAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

[20120625-10](#) 11:30 Bill Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveG, above)

Saw the author on NPR Sunday. He made a pretty strong case. His suggestions for re-distribution are highly problematic in today's political climate.

[20120625-13](#) 12:14 Art Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to all, above)

Never have been quite sure what the top 1% means. It really isn't about wealth, however. It's how you look at things. I suspect Warren Buffet would enjoy our exchanges and he certainly is in the top tier.

In all the hullabaloo about the election and the accusations of who spent what first, there has been some glimmerings of logic. To me what makes the most sense is that if you have a prosperous middle class that spends money regularly on all sorts of things then everyone seems to benefit, even the rich who own the big companies. When you don't have that, everyone suffers, of course, the little guy suffers more.

I don't think anyone argues with that. So, how do we get there? Essentially the Republicans believe in trickle down economics and they continue to stack the deck legally to benefit the rich few. The Democrats believe that wealth needs to be more evenly distributed and the way to do that is through taxation, especially of the very rich. That really is the issue. One of the things that I continually look for is what is the Republican plan??? Romney has said he will cut taxes for the rich (I think one of the claims of there Republicans is that most Americans don't pay any taxes as it is so a tax cut won't mean much to them), and increase defense spending. How does that address the deficit they keep yapping about? Romney gets very vague when pressed on this point but the Democrats need to continue to ask these questions. In point of fact I don't think he really has a plan.

There currently seems to be an alliance of the super rich and the not very bright white lower/middle class. Some will take offense but, when I think about my circle of acquaintances, all those with better educations and/or people who have obviously continued to read and think after school are pretty much Liberals and Progressives. Those who did not get a higher education or more importantly clearly pretty much stopped thinking as soon as they left school, tend to be conservative Republicans. Try the model, it fits and it is why we can't get a good argument from the right. Not much ammunition and not much recent experience with logical thought processes.

One other thing that I use more and more. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (a guy I actually know) makes about \$200,000 a year. I use that as a measuring stick for other salaries. As you may have read, we are having a bit of a dust up here in VA over the recent firing of the President of the University of VA. While I think it was a low and underhanded blow, she makes about \$680,000 a year. That is over three times what the Chairman makes. Does anyone think that really makes sense. Forget corporate salaries. They are absurd.

[20120625-15](#) 13:18 SteveG Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to Art, above)

Several presidents of universities have passed the \$1M mark and even more football/basketball coaches.

Pay scales have become a joke for the most part. Ben and Jerry's is a different company with a social conscience: ingredients from rain forests, etc for local sustainability rather than cutting down rain forests; waiving of franchise fees for non-profits; maintaining a ration of pay from highest paid to lowest paid; etc.

During the period of trickledown economics has produced: a wider gap between the haves and the have nots; movement of manufacturing to other countries; lower wage scales; etc. I have watched in Terre Haute, Richmond, Greencastle, Crawfordsville, and now Yakima the loss of good paying manufacturing jobs; the increase of services jobs through retail strip malls and restaurants; followed by lower paying manufacturing (9-15 per hour). This has all been over a period from the early 70's until now. Most current manufacturers lease their buildings, renegotiate tax breaks, equipment grants, and training subsidies on a regular basis and if the desired results are not obtained, they move to another community.

So much focus currently is on the last quarter profits or the projection of next quarter profits. Little is done on a long term basis or an investment into the community.

[20120625-17](#) 13:37 Pam Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to SteveG, above)

I find it interesting that the Joint Chief of Staff earns \$200,000, compared to a university administrator. The chancellor here at UNCG earns upwards of \$400,000. The truth is, and maybe it always has been, that for some human beings to live comfortably, other human beings have to live miserably. Why? Because the comfortable ones are selfish. The terrible irony is that without all that cheap labor, many of the world's greatest achievements--from art to iPads--would never exist. No pyramids, no Angkor Wat, no Chartres, no Palace of Versailles. I keep thinking about all those Chinese workers who make our Apple products. I read somewhere--maybe on here--that they've had to put nets around factories to keep workers from jumping out of windows and committing suicide. Marx was right: labor has always been exploited, no less now than ever before. And we in the west watch our big-screen TVs and buy our cheap T-shirts and get pissed off that CEOs earn billions, compared to our thousands. I'm sure those factory workers in China or Mexico look at us with similar disdain. I'm not about to give up my goodies. I enjoy them too much, and my solitary gesture would be no more efficacious than spitting in the ocean. There has to be systematic change. I wish we could use our noggins to figure out a better way, but I fear the solution will come--as it always does--at the point of a gun and riots in the streets.

[20120625-25](#) 17:46 SteveG Re: U.S. Average Income on the Rise! (reply to Pam, above)

We do differently or sell what is left of our democracy to the highest bidder. We as a country have made our choices.

[20120625-09](#) 11:26 SteveG "Truth in Advertising"

Question: If there are truth in advertising laws, why are they not applied to political advertising?

"Truth in Advertising" by SBA (<http://www.sba.gov/content/truth-advertising>)

[20120625-11](#) 11:51 Pam Re: "Truth in Advertising" (reply to SteveG, above)

Very good question!

[20120625-12](#) 12:13 Jim Re: Magic Quiz (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #167)

Hi SteveG, in your diatribe (quiz) there is at least one error of fact. Salaries paid to Catholic workers, Protestant ministers and rabbis are taxed as income like everybody else.

There are no tax-exempt salaries.

I should probably also point out that some clergy can opt out of Social Security contributions but then, of course, they do not get any pension from the social security system.

[20120625-14](#) 12:54 SteveB Re: Magic Quiz (reply to Jim, above)

Good points, Jim, I'll make sure that information gets out. Thank you.

How was Europe? Sure a good time to go!

[20120625-16](#) 13:34 Phil Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Pam, FotM Newsletter #167)

I know I am getting in on this late, but I think the drone situation may be a slippery slope. Are we going to take out our foes via drones? How far do you go? Do we take out leaders of countries? This reminds me of "Spy vs Spy" days in *Mad Magazine*! I GOT you! Yeah, but Brother Spy is going to get you! Might get tricky. Plus, Pam, I was surprised you were in favor at all. Some diplomacy might be considered rather than annihilation. I guess I'm just way too simplistic.

[20120625-29](#) 20:01 Bill Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Phil, above)

It'll be good for the paranoid schizophrenic community out there, which is sizable.

[20120625-18](#) 13:52 Pam Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Phil, above)

I'm sort of ambivalent about drones. Back in the day, I always used to say, Why do we have to go to war? Why can't we just take out Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot and leave the people alone? Well, now we can do that. There's collateral damage, and that's an awful euphemism for mangled, bloody bodies, but maybe that's better than out and out war. I'm all for diplomacy. I agree with Churchill: "Jaw, jaw is better than war, war." I worry too about

using drones on our own population, and that's where the slippery slope comes in. I can foresee all sorts of nightmare scenarios that would make a Saturday night special seem like a pop gun. Swarms of drones taking out whole neighborhoods or watching all of us every minute, which is pretty much what we have already. I can see dangers either way, but now that we have drones they're not going away, so we'd better figure out how to use them and how to keep them secure. It's always been that the side with the better weapons wins the battle. (Art, correct me if I'm wrong.) The English at Agincourt were vastly outnumbered, but they had the long bow and the French didn't. All their fancy armor and pretty horses were no match for a bunch of rag tag archers. We won WWII with the atomic bomb. It was an invention of the devil, but would it have been better for Hitler to rule the world? Insurgents in Afghanistan, with their kalashnikovs, are a formidable foe, but maybe with drones we can get the better of them. We're sure not going to get them any other way. Not that I think "liberating" Afghanistan is a desirable or possible thing. But didn't we all cheer when Bin Laden got taken out?

20120625-21	15:15	Art	Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Pam, above)
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As usual. well said Pam. I think the quote was from WW I and went "God is on the side of the biggest battalions". I also think it was Napoleon who said. "Quantity has a quality of it's own".

I think the real issue, if you just take Iraq as an example, is what's it worth to you. Was it worth 4000 dead and another 10,000 maimed and \$1 Trillion, just to get Saddam? Probably not. Diplomacy is always better but if that fails and you still feel you have to take someone out, better a drone or two than the price we paid in Iraq.

Of course Phil is also absolutely correct, it is a slippery slope that cuts both ways and once you start it, I'm not sure how you stop it. On the other hand, wouldn't it be nice for once to have the Hitlers and Saddams of the world living in terror of their lives, instead of their people? Hmhmhm????

20120625-20	14:25	Dennis	Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Phil & Pam, above) & "A Cruel & Unusual Record"
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I'm going to side with Phil and Jimmy Carter.

Besides the human rights issues, damage to national reputation, and slippery slope arguments, I'm also afraid these drones are creating more terrorists than they eliminate. Obama's adoption of the national security practices of G.W. Bush is not the change anyone expected of a constitutional scholar. The grim reality is that these practices are popular with both parties and I have no doubt Romney would slide down the same slope.

[A little late...I have to weigh-in here and say that I think Jimmy Carter is a big pu*sy and Pam and the Pres. are completely right about this one. BUT... I have to admit that I still want the U.S. to be "the global champion of human rights." I guess that just means the POTUS is going to have to be very careful about who he erases. The closer war could get to *mano a mano*, the better, it seems to me, though I guess that makes our guys fair game too. And I'm very uncomfortable with drone use in the U.S. being legal for anything but border patrol. After all, the things are really weapons, not reconnaissance vehicles. Keep them out of U.S. skies as much as possible. -SteveB]

"A Cruel and Unusual Record" by Jimmy Carter, *The New York Times*

June 24, 2012, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/06/25/opinion/americas-shameful-human-rights-record.html>)

The United States is abandoning its role as the global champion of human rights.

Revelations that top officials are targeting people to be assassinated abroad, including American citizens, are only the most recent, disturbing proof of how far our nation's violation of human rights has extended. This development

began after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, and has been sanctioned and escalated by bipartisan executive and legislative actions, without dissent from the general public. As a result, our country can no longer speak with moral authority on these critical issues.

While the country has made mistakes in the past, the widespread abuse of human rights over the last decade has been a dramatic change from the past. With leadership from the United States, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted in 1948 as "the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." This was a bold and clear commitment that power would no longer serve as a cover to oppress or injure people, and it established equal rights of all people to life, liberty, security of person, equal protection of the law and freedom from torture, arbitrary detention or forced exile.

The declaration has been invoked by human rights activists and the international community to replace most of the world's dictatorships with democracies and to promote the rule of law in domestic and global affairs. It is disturbing that, instead of strengthening these principles, our government's counterterrorism policies are now clearly violating at least 10 of the declaration's 30 articles, including the prohibition against "cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Recent legislation has made legal the president's right to detain a person indefinitely on suspicion of affiliation with terrorist organizations or "associated forces," a broad, vague power that can be abused without meaningful oversight from the courts or Congress (the law is currently being blocked by a federal judge). This law violates the right to freedom of expression and to be presumed innocent until proved guilty, two other rights enshrined in the declaration.

In addition to American citizens' being targeted for assassination or indefinite detention, recent laws have canceled the restraints in the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 to allow unprecedented violations of our rights to privacy through warrantless wiretapping and government mining of our electronic communications. Popular state laws permit detaining individuals because of their appearance, where they worship or with whom they associate.

Despite an arbitrary rule that any man killed by drones is declared an enemy terrorist, the death of nearby innocent women and children is accepted as inevitable. After more than 30 airstrikes on civilian homes this year in Afghanistan, President Hamid Karzai has demanded that such attacks end, but the practice continues in areas of Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen that are not in any war zone. We don't know how many hundreds of innocent civilians have been killed in these attacks, each one approved by the highest authorities in Washington. This would have been unthinkable in previous times.

These policies clearly affect American foreign policy. Top intelligence and military officials, as well as rights defenders in targeted areas, affirm that the great escalation in drone attacks has turned aggrieved families toward terrorist organizations, aroused civilian populations against us and permitted repressive governments to cite such actions to justify their own despotic behavior.

Meanwhile, the detention facility at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, now houses 169 prisoners. About half have been cleared for release, yet have little prospect of ever obtaining their freedom. American authorities have revealed that, in order to obtain confessions, some of the few being tried (only in military courts) have been tortured by waterboarding more than 100 times or intimidated with semiautomatic weapons, power drills or threats to sexually assault their mothers. Astoundingly, these facts cannot be used as a defense by the accused, because the government claims they occurred under the cover of "national security." Most of the other prisoners have no prospect of ever being charged or tried either.

At a time when popular revolutions are sweeping the globe, the United States should be strengthening, not weakening, basic rules of law and principles of justice enumerated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But instead of making the world safer, America's violation of international human rights abets our enemies and alienates our friends.

As concerned citizens, we must persuade Washington to reverse course and regain moral leadership according to international human rights norms that we had officially adopted as our own and cherished throughout the years.

[20120625-23](#) 15:36 Pam Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Dennis, above)

Well, you've got me there, Dennis. I have to agree.

[What? OK, now I don't agree with Pam! :-) SteveB]

[20120625-24](#) 15:37 Pam Re: "The New Obama Doctrine, A Six-Point Plan for Global War" (reply to Art, above)

Well, now I'm pulled back the other way. What's a person to do? Be glad none of it is my responsibility, I suppose.

[20120625-19](#) 13:59 SteveB "The Myth of the Free Market"

"The Myth of the Free Market" by Thomas Magstadt, NationofChange

June 25, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/myth-free-market-1340630005>)



As numbing news of multibillion dollar boondoggles, scandals and swindles becomes a daily occurrence, now is the time to take a close look at the right-wing propagandist machine's favorite canards about capitalism and the free market. In the wake of the worst banking crisis since the Great Depression and in the throes of a prolonged recession brought on by rogue financial institutions operating outside a regulatory system supposedly designed to prevent the very kind of reckless behavior and profiteering that led to the current doldrums, here is a short list of myths perpetrated by the corporate greed-is-good culture – myths that taken together add up to The Big Lie that is destroying the American economy, the middle class, and the good character of a once-great country.

Let's begin with an axiom the US Chamber of Commerce, Koch Industries, Inc., Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase and Company, and Bain Capital, to name but a few, would all wholeheartedly endorse: state interference ("regulation") is inimical to economic growth, job creation, and prosperity. And this corollary: a free Market is the best and only way to achieve the greatest good for the greatest number.

Myth #1: There is no such thing as a free market, never has been, never will be. All markets are regulated, but some markets are regulated in the interest of the many and others in the interest of the few. The American economy is now clearly and indisputably regulated by the few and for the few who now control the wealth of the nation.

Proof: The top 20% own all but about 15% of the privately held money and assets in this country. The top 10% of taxpayers owns roughly 72% of the wealth and over 90% of the stocks, bonds, and mutual funds. Between 1981 and 2005, federal taxes on business declined 43 percent. Corporate income taxes accounted for about one-quarter of federal revenues in 1950; today, corporations contribute a mere 6% to the Treasury.

Myth #2: Market economies are hardly a guarantee of peace. The United States boasts by far the world's largest military establishment. Much of the money spent in the name of national security and war waging goes to private corporations through hundreds of thousands of procurement contracts (around 400,000). For FY2002 through FY2008, nearly half of all federal expenditures went to eight federal departments and agencies involved in national and homeland security – including the servicing of war-incurred debt.

Proof: The U.S. is still enmeshed in two protracted wars we initiated (Afghanistan and Iraq). Not counting the intelligence services and "black budget", the US accounts for 43-45% of total world military expenditures every year. According to the prestigious Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the United States accounted for \$19.6 billion of the \$20.6 billion global increase in military spending in 2010 – fully 96% of the total. The "military-industrial complex" has corporate and defense tentacles reaching into virtually every political constituency. DOD alone maintains nearly 5,500 bases and military sites in the U.S. and around the world

Myth #3: Market economies are based on competition and therefore guarantee efficiency and prosperity.

Proof: At least 95 percent of the national debt is war-related. The Defense Department absorbs 25-30 percent of the federal budget, depending what is counted and who's doing the counting. Two-thirds (68 percent) of all federal government civil and military employees are involved in national security and war related activities. If you add the \$100 billion or more for the two wars we are still fighting, the \$80 billion for the intelligence budget, and various other defense-related expenditures, that figure is actually much higher – roughly one-half the entire federal budget for the period 2002-2008.

Myth #4: The Constitution prescribes that corporations are no different from natural persons, with the same right to freedom of speech and expression as you and me, which means, among other things, that Chevron and WalMart can spend as much money as they please to manipulate public opinion and influence the outcome of elections.

Proof: The Constitution says nothing about corporations, much less does it declare *ad absurdum* that corporations are people. Not until 1886 in the case of *Santa Clara County v. Southern Pacific Railroad*, 118 U.S. 394, did the Supreme Court make this astonishing discovery. Never mind that it's preposterous to equate natural persons and corporations: the die was cast. The 1886 precedent-setting decision – not the Constitution – is the sledgehammer the Supreme Court has used to smash all federal legislation aimed at limiting corporate campaign spending to bits. The most recent example *Citizens United* decision, is also the most lethal for democracy because it puts Congress and the presidency on the auction block.

In reality, no democracy is immune from manipulation by the few. Or, for that matter, subversion. During the Cold War the fear of subversion focused on Communism and the danger from below; today, there is no parallel fear of subversion, but ironically the real danger is from above now and it is greater by far than it was then.

The extreme costs of political campaigns combined with the extreme inequality in wealth means that a very few individuals who control vast amounts of money can make or break virtually any candidate for high office, including incumbents. If you don't believe me, ask former Senator Russ Feingold of Wisconsin – a latter-day Solon who tried to reform our disastrous campaign finance laws and was defeated in 2010 by Ron Johnson, a business executive and prominent member of America's entrenched plutocracy, who poured eight million dollars of his own money into winning a Senate seat.

Conclusion: A vibrant market economy will not be long-lived or "sustainable" in the absence of smart regulation designed to accomplish two primary aims – wealth creation and social justice. In the pursuit of wealth and justice, it is the role of the state to balance these two aims.

Regulation is not the enemy of incentive, invention, or innovation. Nor is it incompatible with progress, profits, or personal gain. In a properly ordered republic, business makes the money and the government makes the rules. If

the federal government persists in allowing oil companies, investment banks, and front groups for billionaires to make the rules free of public scrutiny and transparency, the very competition so vital to a market economy will be ever more constricted and joblessness will become chronic rather than "cyclical", as companies cut jobs here at home, replace workers with robots, and go abroad in search of cheap labor, lax labor laws, and tariff-free access to fast-growing markets in Asia and elsewhere.

Meanwhile, a dysfunctional Washington dithers, the rich get richer, the middle class gets poorer, the poor lose hope, elections are a sham, and the American Dream dies a slow but certain death.

(Tom Magstadt earned his Ph.D. at The Johns Hopkins University School of International Studies. He is the author of *An Empire If You Can Keep It: Power and Principle in American Foreign Policy*, *Understanding Politics: Ideas, Institutions and Issues*, and *Nations and Governments: Comparative Politics in Regional Perspective*. He was a regular contributor to the *Prague Post* in 1998-99 and has published widely in newspapers, magazines and journals in the United States. He was a Fulbright Scholar in the Czech Republic in the mid-1990s and a visiting professor at the Air War College in 1990-92. He has taught at several universities, chaired two political science departments, and also did a stint as an intelligence analyst at the CIA. He is a member of the board of the International Relations Council of Kansas City. Now working mainly as a free-lance writer, he lives in Westwood Hills, Kansas.)

20120625-22	15:27	Art	Re: "The Myth of the Free Market" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Worth a read and a thought, as we contemplate putting a self proclaimed businessman who has it all figured out in charge. These are not my words, but made me think.

20120625-26	17:52	SteveG	"5 Reasons America Is Not — And Has Never Been — a Christian Nation"
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"5 Reasons America Is Not — And Has Never Been — a Christian Nation" by Rob Boston, Free Inquiry/Altnet

June 24, 2012, (<http://www.altnet.org/story/155985/>)

(The myth that America is a "Christian nation" is not only untrue, but promotes the pernicious idea that non-Christians are second-class citizens.)

"The United States is a Christian nation." If I had a nickel for every time I've heard this statement at a religious Right meeting or in the media, I wouldn't be rich—but I'd probably have enough to buy a really cool iPad. The assertion is widely believed by followers of the religious Right and often repeated—and, too often, it seeps into the beliefs of the rest of the population as well. But like other myths that are widely accepted (you use only 10 percent of your brain, vitamin C helps you get over a cold, and the like), it lacks a factual basis.

Over the years, numerous scholars, historians, lawyers, and judges have debunked the "Christian nation" myth. Yet it persists. Does it have any basis in American history? Why is the myth so powerful? What psychological need does it fill?

I'm not a lawyer, and my research in this area has been influenced and informed by scholars who have done much more in- depth work. The problem with some of this material, great as it is, is that it tends to be—how shall I say this politely?—'dense.' If I were a lawyer (the kind found on television dramas, not a real one), I would present the case against the Christian nation myth in a handful of easily digestible informational nuggets. Swallow them, and you'll be armed for your next confrontation with Cousin Lloyd who sends money to Pat Robertson.

There are essentially five arguments that refute the Christian nation myth. I'm going to outline them here and then take a look at the history of the myth. From there, we'll briefly examine the myth's enduring legacy and how it still affects politics and public policy today.

1. The Text of the Constitution Does Not Say the United States Is a Christian Nation

If a Christian nation had been the intent of the founders, they would have put that in the Constitution, front and center. Yet the text of the Constitution contains no references to God, Jesus Christ, or Christianity. That document does not state that our country is an officially Christian nation.

Not only does the Constitution not give recognition or acknowledgment to Christianity, but it also includes Article VI, which bans "religious tests" for public office. Guaranteeing non-Christians the right to hold federal office seems antipodal to an officially Christian nation. The language found in Article VI sparked some controversy, and a minority faction that favored limiting public office to Christians (or at least to believers) protested. Luther Martin, a Maryland delegate, later reported that some felt it "would be at least decent to hold out some distinction between the professors of Christianity and downright infidelity or paganism." But, as Martin noted, the article's language was approved "by a great majority . . . without much debate." The Christian nation argument just wasn't persuasive.

In addition, the First Amendment bars all laws "respecting an establishment of religion" and protects "the free exercise thereof." Nothing here indicates that the latter provision applies only to Christian faiths. Finding no support for their ideas in the body of the Constitution, Christian-nation advocates are left to point to other documents, including the Declaration of Independence. This also fails. The Declaration's reference to "the Creator" is plainly deistic. More obscure documents such as the Northwest Ordinance or personal writings by various framers are interesting historically but do not rise to the level of governance documents. When it comes to determining the manner of the U.S. government, only the Constitution matters. The Constitution does not declare that the United States is a Christian nation. This fact alone is fatal to the cause of Christian nation advocates.

2. The Founders' Political Beliefs Would Not Have Led Them to Support the Christian-Nation Idea

Key founders such as James Madison and Thomas Jefferson opposed mixing church and state. They would never have supported an officially Christian nation.

Jefferson and Madison came to this opposition in two ways. First, they were well-versed in history and understood how the officially Christian governments of Europe had crushed human freedom. Moreover, they knew about the constant religious wars among rival factions of Christianity. Second, they had witnessed religious oppression in the colonies firsthand.

Remember, Madison was inspired to fight for church-state separation and religious liberty because he had witnessed the jailing of dissenting ministers in Virginia. Madison and other founders wrote frequently about the dangers of governments adopting religion; they often worked alongside clergy who made similar arguments. John Leland, a Massachusetts pastor and powerful advocate for church-state separation, said it best: "The notion of a Christian commonwealth should be exploded forever."

Jefferson's Virginia Statue for Religious Liberty, which many scholars consider a precursor to the First Amendment, guaranteed religious freedom for everyone, Christian and non-Christian. Attempts to limit its protections to Christians failed, and Jefferson rejoiced.

In his famous "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments" Madison observed, "Torrents of blood have been spilt in the old world, by vain attempts of the secular arm, to extinguish Religious discord, by proscribing all difference in Religious opinion."

In his *Notes on Virginia* Jefferson observed, "The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or no god. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg."

Alexander Hamilton, writing in "Federalist No. 69," speaks bluntly to the religious duties of the U.S. president: There aren't any. In this essay, Hamilton explains how the American president would differ from the English king, outlining several key differences between the two. He writes: "The one has no particle of spiritual jurisdiction; the other is the supreme head and governor of the national church!"

3. The Key Founders Were Not Conservative Christians and Likely Would Not Have Supported an Officially Christian Nation

To hear the religious Right tell it, men such as George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison were eighteenth-century versions of Jerry Falwell in powdered wigs and stockings. This is nonsense.

The religious writings of many prominent founders sound odd to today's ears because these works reflect Deism, a theological system of thought that has since fallen out of favor. Deists believed in God but didn't necessarily see him as active in human affairs. The god of the Deists was a god of first cause: he set things in motion and then stepped back.

Although nominally an Anglican, George Washington often spoke in deistic terms. His god was a "supreme architect" of the universe. Washington saw religion as necessary for good and moral behavior but didn't necessarily accept all Christian dogma. He seemed to have a special gripe against Communion and would usually leave services before it was offered.

Washington is the author of one of the great classics of religious liberty—the letter to Touro Synagogue (1790). In this letter, Washington assures America's Jews that they would enjoy complete religious liberty—not mere toleration—in the new nation. He outlines a vision not of a Christian nation but of a multi-faith society where all are free to practice as they will:

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for giving to Mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. . . . All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their inherent natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection, should demean themselves as good citizens.

John Adams was a Unitarian. He rejected belief in the Trinity and the divinity of Jesus, core concepts of Christian dogma. In his personal writings, Adams made it clear that he considered the concept of the divinity of Jesus incomprehensible.

In February of 1756, Adams wrote in his diary about a discussion he had had with a man named Major Greene. Greene was a devout Christian who sought to persuade Adams to adopt conservative Christian views. The two argued over the divinity of Jesus. When questioned on the matter, Greene fell back on an old standby: some matters of theology are too complex and mysterious for human understanding.

Adams was not impressed. In his diary he writes, "Thus mystery is made a convenient cover for absurdity."

Jefferson's skepticism of traditional Christianity is well known. Our third president did not believe in the Trinity, the virgin birth, the divinity of Jesus, the resurrection, original sin, and other core Christian doctrines. Jefferson once famously observed to Adams: "And the day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the supreme being as his father in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter."

Although not an orthodox Christian, Jefferson admired Jesus as a moral teacher. He even edited the New Testament, cutting away the stories of miracles and divinity and leaving behind a very human Jesus, whose teachings Jefferson found "sublime."

Perhaps the most enigmatic of the founders was Madison. To this day, scholars still debate his religious views. Some of his biographers believe that Madison, nominally Anglican, was really a Deist. Notoriously reluctant to talk publicly about his religious beliefs, Madison was perhaps the strictest church-state separationist among the founders, opposing not only chaplains in Congress and the military but also government

prayer proclamations. As president, he vetoed legislation granting federal land to a church as well as a plan to have a church in Washington care for the poor. In each case, he cited the First Amendment.

4. Shortly After the Constitution Was Ratified, Conservative Ministers Attacked It Because It Lacked References to Christianity

Ministers of the founding period knew that the Constitution didn't declare the United States officially Christian—and it made them angry.

In 1793, just five years after the Constitution was ratified, the Reverend John M. Mason of New York attacked that document in a sermon. Mason called the lack of references to God and Christianity "an omission which no pretext whatever can palliate." He predicted that an angry God would "overturn from its foundations the fabric we have been rearing and crush us to atoms in the wreck."

Conservative pastors continued whining well into the nineteenth century. In 1811, the Reverend Samuel Austin thundered that the Constitution "is entirely disconnected from Christianity. [This] one capital defect [will lead] inevitably to its destruction."

In 1845, the Reverend D. X. Junkin wrote, "[The Constitution] is negatively atheistical, for no God is appealed to at all. In framing many of our public formularies, greater care seems to have been taken to adapt them to the prejudices of the INFIDEL FEW, than to the consciences of the Christian millions."

These eighteenth- and nineteenth-century pastors knew that the Constitution was secular and granted no preferences to Christianity. They considered that a defect.

5. During the Post-Civil War Period, a Band of Politically Powerful Pastors Tried Repeatedly to Amend the U.S. Constitution to Add References to Jesus Christ and Christianity

Nineteenth-century ministers knew that the Constitution was secular and that the nation was not officially Christian. They sought to remedy that through an amendment that would have rewritten the preamble to the Constitution.

The drive was led by the National Reform Association (NRA), a kind of early religious Right organization that sought an officially Christian America. This NRA had ambitious goals. It sought laws curtailing commercial activity on Sunday, mandating Protestant worship in public schools and censorship of material deemed sexually explicit or blasphemous. (Thanks to the NRA, freethought societies of this period often had difficulties mailing periodicals to supporters. The U.S. Postal Service was under constant siege by the NRA.)

The NRA was successful in many of its legislative endeavors, but it was never able to secure passage of the Christian nation amendment. The group's proposed preamble read as follows:

We, the people of the United States, humbly acknowledging Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, the Lord Jesus Christ as the Ruler among the nations, His revealed will as the supreme law of the land, in order to constitute a Christian government, and in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the inalienable rights and blessings of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness to ourselves, our posterity and all the people, do ordain and establish this Constitution of the United States of America.

Congress did consider the amendment, but the House Judiciary Committee voted it down in 1874, declaring its awareness of the dangers of putting "anything into the Constitution or frame of government which might be construed to be a refer- ence to any religious creed or doctrine." The proposal was reintroduced several times after that; in fact, versions of it were still appearing in Congress as late as 1965.

While the NRA was never successful in getting the Christian nation amendment passed, the group had better luck with another policy objective: adding "In God We Trust" to coins. That practice was codified in the North during the Civil War.

Obviously, there would have been no need to amend the Constitution to declare America officially Christian if the document already said as much. But it didn't, which is why the NRA felt so strongly about its emendation.

The Origins of the Christian-Nation Myth

This last point provides the key to understanding the staying power of the Christian-nation myth. The myth's origins go back not to the founding period but to a much different time in history—the post-Civil War era.

During this period, the country came as close it ever would to being officially Christian. Many laws did reflect the tenets of that faith. For example, books, magazines, and even stage productions were banned if they were deemed insulting to the Christian faith. Protestant prayer and worship were common in many public schools. Laws curtailed Sunday commerce. Even the Supreme Court flirted with the Christian-nation concept in its infamous decision in the Holy Trinity case.

The post-Civil War era was also a period of great social upheaval. The end of slavery in the South created dislocation and confusion, which left people grasping for answers in the chaos. Other social changes loomed. Late in the century, women began advocating for the right to vote. Not surprisingly, some people reacted to these changes by latching onto reactionary religious views.

Despite the social unrest, in many ways this period of history is the religious Right's ideal society. Think about it: public schools were pushing conservative forms of Protestantism. Religiously based censorship was common. All people were required to abide by a set of laws based on Christian principles, with the government playing the role of theological enforcer. Significantly, this was also a time of rigidly enforced gender roles and official policies of racial segregation.

Many of these principles still inspire the religious Right's agenda today. So when religious Right leaders or television preachers hearken back to our days as a Christian nation, remember that they are not talking about the founding period. What they long for is a return to an aberrant era in late-nineteenth-century America.

The attempt to "nineteenth-century-ize" modern America continues into the present. It's not uncommon to hear the Christian-nation myth invoked in battles over religion in public schools, displays of religious signs and symbols on public property, and other church-state disputes. It has also been raised in questions dealing with tax aid to religious groups through school vouchers and "faith-based" initiatives. The argument is that it's only to be expected that large amounts of taxpayer money will end up in the coffers of Christian groups because we are, after all, a Christian nation.

The myth also feeds several psychological needs. It assures religious Right supporters who fear the pace of social change that things like same-sex marriage and the rise of secularists are aberrations that run counter to the "real" Christian nature of the country. It also invokes a "stolen legacy" myth—the idea that a grand and glorious history (in this case, a Christian one) exists but that it is being covered up or denied by usurpers who seek to suppress the nation's history as part of a power grab.

The Christian-nation myth also has political ramifications. Put simply, it is often used to motivate people to vote a certain way. Increasingly, the theocrats of the Far Right are assailing what they call the "secular Left," an all-purpose bogeyman guilty of many crimes, including denying the Christian-nation idea.

But the myth is by no means limited to the religious Right. Polls show great confusion in this area: in 2007, for example, 55 percent of respondents told the First Amendment Center they believed the Constitution establishes America as an officially Christian nation.

Misinformation like this has especially bad consequences for secular humanists. The myth promotes the pernicious idea that non-Christians are second-class citizens in "Christian America." It leads to the idea that the law mandates only a grudging tolerance of nonbelievers rather than what the Constitution really extends: full and equal rights to all Americans, regardless of what they do or do not believe.

That the Christian-nation myth has many supporters among the religious Right doesn't mean it has validity. It is, in fact, a form of "historical creationism" that mainstream scholars have repeatedly shown to be fallacious. But, like "scientific creationism," the Christian-nation myth still has great power and wide acceptance. Humanists must confront—and debunk—the myth wherever it appears.

(Rob Boston is the assistant director of communications for Americans United for Separation of Church and State, which publishes *Church and State* magazine.)

20120625-27	17:54	SteveG	Paul Chappell Videos
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Video: "Peaceful Revolution: How We Can Create the Future Needed for Humanity's Survival" by Paul Chappell, <http://www.booktv.org/Watch/13321/quotPeaceful+Revolution+How+We+Can+Create+the+Future+Needed+for+Humanitys+Survivalquot.aspx>.

Video: "Will War Ever End?: A Soldier's Vision of Peace for the 21st Century" by Capt. Paul Chappell, <http://www.booktv.org/Watch/11525/Will+War+Ever+End+A+Soldiers+Vision+of+Peace+for+the+21st+Century.aspx>.

20120625-28	18:49	Art	"Fifteen Differences Between Democrats and Republicans"
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This is pretty good.

"Fifteen Differences Between Democrats and Republicans" posted by Jeff, Addicting Info

June 22, 2012, (<http://www.addictinginfo.org/2012/06/22/fifteen-differences/>)

I've noticed over the years, there are some fundamental differences in the way Republican and Democratic politicians think. Here are just 15 examples.

1. Republicans fear that the government has too much control over corporations. Democrats fear that corporations have too much control over our government.
2. Democrats believe it benefits all of us to help the weakest and the poorest among us. Republicans believe it benefits all of us to help the wealthiest and most powerful among us.
3. Republicans believe large corporations will always do what is best for the American people if the government stays out of the way. Democrats believe large corporations would disembowel you and sell your organs to the highest bidder if the government didn't stop them.
4. Democrats believe everyone is entitled to health care regardless of their ability to pay. Republicans believe everyone is entitled to jack squat if they can't pay for health care.
5. Democrats believe too much of our money goes to crooked corporate executives who take government subsidies and pay themselves \$80 million salaries. Republicans believe too much of our money goes to teachers who make \$30,000 a year.

6. Democrats believe anything that helps the American people during a recession or a time of crisis is the true essence of patriotism. Republicans believe anything that helps the American people during a recession or a time of crisis is the true essence of communism.
7. Democrats believe that we need to set high standards for clean air and drinking water. Republicans believe that standards for clean air and water are burdensome over-regulation.
8. Democrats believe the President and Congress need to work together to create jobs during a weak economy. Republicans believe that Congress should do nothing to create jobs and then blame the President.
9. Democrats believe that corporate polluters should be made to pay for the cleanup of their pollution. Republicans believe that making corporations clean up their pollution is burdensome over-regulation.
10. Democrats believe our health care system exists solely for the purpose of making people healthy. Republicans believe our health care system exists solely for the purpose of making a healthy profit.
11. Democrats believe Congress should be of the people, by the people and for the people. Republicans believe corporations are the people.
12. Democrats believe that corporations have too much influence over Congress due to their lobbyists and huge campaign contributions. Republicans believe the middle class has too much influence over Congress due to their voting and paying taxes.
13. Democrats believe we need to protect victims of corporate negligence by allowing Americans to file lawsuits against corporations. Republicans believe we need to protect large corporations from lawsuits by Americans who've been victimized by them.
14. Democrats believe that the rich should be taxed more than the poor and middle class. Republicans believe that the rich should be allowed to keep all their wealth, except for the millions in campaign contributions they give to politicians.
15. Democrats believe that too much money in politics produces corruption and destroys the American way of life. Republicans believe that money and corruption in politics are the American way of life.

These are just my observations from a lifetime of watching Democratic and Republican politicians. I'm sure some Republican will come up with their own clever list.

[I found this to be quite entertaining and perceptive. If any parts are inaccurate, please let me know. --SteveB]

[20120625-30](#) 22:57 SteveG Bolivia Has Had 17 Constitutions

Since 1825 Bolivia has had 17 constitutions. Maybe we should try that method.

[20120625-31](#) 23:25 SteveB Re: Bolivia Has Had 17 Constitutions (reply to SteveG, above)

Geez, you would have to bring that up!

Ya, we just can't seem to get it right. Actually some of those were pretty good, like the one before now, thrown out by the latest little dictator, who is now having a world of trouble.

I'm not sure the Bolivian model would produce such wealth in the U.S. as it has here.

<http://www.fotonatura.org/galerias/fotos/221076/>

<http://www.boliviafacts.net/living-in-bolivia.html>

Volcanes, Santa Cruz, Bolivia (Rubén Darío Azogue Molina)



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

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