



## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #183 — JULY 17, 2012

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

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### **Why Can't the U.S. Be as Rich as Canada?**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, July 17, 2012)

More evidence of our decline... That darned President Obama! For four long years Republicans have fought to fix things, but the President wouldn't let them. He halted progress on every front (ignore Obamacare). The greatest American president of all time, George W. Bush, handed President Obama a country that was functioning like a well-oiled machine, but Obama failed to use any grease or oil whatsoever. Now we're poor and it's all that socialist's fault! (Now, where's that sarcasm font when I really need it?)

"Hardheaded Socialism Makes Canada Richer Than U.S." by Stephen Marche, Bloomberg

July 15, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/populum/linkframe.php?linkid=153123>)



(Illustration by James Clapham)

On July 1, Canada Day, Canadians awoke to a startling, if pleasant, piece of news: For the first time in recent history, the average Canadian is richer than the average American.

According to data from Environics Analytics WealthScapes published in the Globe and Mail, the net worth of the average Canadian household in 2011 was \$363,202, while the average American household's net worth was \$319,970.

A few days later, Canada and the U.S. both released the latest job figures. Canada's unemployment rate fell, again, to 7.2 percent, and America's was a stagnant 8.2 percent. Canada continues to thrive while the U.S. struggles to find its way out of an intractable economic crisis and a political sine curve of hope and despair.

The difference grows starker by the month: The Canadian system is working; the American system is not. And it's not just Canadians who are noticing. As Iceland considers switching to a currency other than the krona, its leaders' primary focus of interest is the loonie -- the Canadian dollar.

As a study recently published in the New York University Law Review pointed out, national constitutions based on the American model are quickly disappearing. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, in an interview on Egyptian television, admitted, "I would not look to the United States Constitution if I were drafting a constitution in the year 2012." The natural replacement? The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, achieving the status of legal superstar as it reaches its 30th birthday.

### Canadian Luck

Good politics do not account entirely for recent economic triumphs. Luck has played a major part. The Alberta tar sands -- an environmental catastrophe in waiting -- are the third-largest oil reserves in the world, and if America is too squeamish to buy our filthy energy, there's always China. We also have softwood lumber, potash and other natural resources in abundance.

Policy has played a significant part as well, though. Both liberals and conservatives in the U.S. have tried to use the Canadian example to promote their arguments: The left says Canada shows the rewards of financial regulation and socialism, while the right likes to vaunt the brutal cuts made to Canadian social programs in the 1990s, which set the stage for economic recovery.

The truth is that both sides are right. Since the 1990s, Canada has pursued a hardheaded (even ruthless), fiscally conservative form of socialism. Its originator was Paul Martin, who was finance minister for most of the '90s, and served a stint as prime minister from 2003 to 2006. Alone among finance ministers in the Group of Eight nations, he "resisted the siren call of deregulation," in his words, and insisted that the banks tighten their loan-loss and reserve requirements. He also made a courageous decision not to allow Canadian banks to merge, even though their chief executives claimed they would never be globally competitive unless they did. The stability of Canadian banks and the concomitant stability in the housing market provide the clearest explanation for why Canadians are richer than Americans today.

Martin also slashed funding to social programs. He foresaw that crippling deficits imperiled Canada's education and health-care systems, which even his Conservative predecessor, Brian Mulroney, described as a "sacred trust." He cut corporate taxes, too. Growth is required to pay for social programs, and social programs that increase opportunity and social integration are the best way to ensure growth over the long term. Social programs and robust capitalism are not, as so many would have you believe, inherently opposed propositions. Both are required for meaningful national prosperity.

### Orderly Fairness

Martin's balanced policies emerged organically out of Canadian culture, which is fair-minded and rule-following to a fault. The Canadian obsession with order can make for strange politics, at least in an American context. For example, of all the world's societies, Canada's is one of the most open to immigrants, as anyone who has been to Toronto or Vancouver will have seen. Yet Canada also imposes a mandatory one-year prison sentence on illegal immigrants, and the majority of Canadians favor deportation. Canadians insist that their compassion be orderly, too.

This immigration policy is neither "liberal" nor "conservative" in the American political sense. It just works. You could say exactly the same thing about Canada's economic policies.

Canada has been, and always will be, overshadowed by its neighbor, by America's vastness and its incredible versatility and capacity for reinvention. But occasionally, at key moments, the northern wasteland can surprise. Two hundred years ago last month, the War of 1812 began. Thomas Jefferson declared, "The acquisition of Canada, this year, as far as the neighborhood of Quebec, will be a mere matter of marching." The U.S. was comparatively enormous -- with almost 8 million people, compared with Canada's 300,000. The Canadians nonetheless turned back the assault.

Through good luck, excellent policy and even some heroism, Canada survived the war. But it has taken 200 years for Canada to become winners.

(Stephen Marche is a novelist and columnist for Esquire Magazine. His most recent book is *How Shakespeare Changed Everything*. The opinions expressed are his own.)

### **FotM NEWSLETTER #183 (July 17, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

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<a href="#">20120716-01</a>	13:01	Tom	"Bikini-Clad, Gun-Toting Israeli Woman Becomes an Internet Sensation"
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This is common place in a land where terrorists attack civilians on a daily basis; Bikini-clad, gun toting Israeli woman becomes an Internet sensation:

Do you think people would freak out if they saw this at their beach?

"Bikini-Clad, Gun-Toting Israeli Woman Becomes an Internet Sensation" by Victoria Cavaliere, *New York Daily News*

Friday, July 13, 2012, (<http://m.nydailynews.com/1.1113980>)



(A photo of a gun-wielding, bikini-clad woman standing on a crowded Tel Aviv beach has become an Internet sensation, with thousands of viewers curious about whether the brunette beauty is part of Israel's military and why she wasn't in uniform with her weapon in tow.)

A photo of a gun-wielding, bikini-clad woman standing on a crowded Tel Aviv beach has become an Internet sensation, with thousands of viewers curious about whether the brunette beauty is part of Israel's military and why she wasn't in uniform with her weapon in tow.

The young woman, dressed only in a black-and-white string bikini, was captured chatting with a friend, rifle (with its magazine removed) slung casually behind her back. Though there's no uniform to identify her, the woman appears to be part of the Israel Defense Forces. Two years of IDF service is mandatory for most Israeli women at age 18. Men serve three years.

The photo was viewed 650,000 times in one day and was posted on sites including Facebook, Reddit and Gizmodo under titles like "Only in Israel," and "Bada\*s Chicks in Israel Don't Go to the Beach Without Their Assault Rifles." It garnered a series of lascivious comments from male admirers but almost as many questions about the IDF's weapons policy for off-duty soldiers.

Israel's *Haaretz* newspaper, which picked up on the viral photo, wrote that "To an Israeli, the photo makes perfectly practical sense. When soldiers take their weapon off military premises, they must guard it closely and keep it on their person, at all times. Having one's weapon stolen is harshly punished with time in military prison a given. "

Haaretz also concludes that Israelis are "used to seeing guns in all kinds of places - propped up next to the guy sitting next to us in a coffeeshop, or in a university classroom, and of course, slung over the shoulders of women soldiers." That apparently also includes the shoulder of a woman ready for an afternoon at the beach.

<a href="#">20120716-02</a>	13:07	SteveB	Fw: UltraViolet Petition: We Want a Woman to Moderate a Presidential Debate!
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from UltraViolet:

Incredible! Already, over 150,000 people have joined the call for a woman moderator at a presidential debate this year.

That's some serious momentum. And we want to get the numbers even higher before joining the original petition creators, three high school girls from New Jersey, to hand the petition signatures over to the Presidential Debates Commission and the two presidential campaigns next week. It looks like you haven't signed yet and we're hoping you will before the big delivery.

It's been 20 years since a woman moderated a presidential debate. Three high school girls, Emma, Sammi and Elena, are working to make sure that trend ends this year--and their call is really taking off. But they need more voices with them! Can you add your name to the petition?

They've started a petition on Change.org asking the Commission on Presidential Debates, and President Obama's and Mitt Romney's campaigns, to appoint a woman to moderate one of the upcoming presidential debates. It's totally taking off and starting to attract media attention--but they need more voices with them.

This should be a no-brainer. Women vote more than men. Women drive our economy and make the majority of the purchasing decisions in families. And this year, women's rights--from access to health care, to protection from domestic abuse and wage discrimination--have been front and center. And there's no sign of that letting up.

But to get the Presidential Debates Commission, and President Obama and Mitt Romney's campaigns to agree, we need to take this energy to the next level and show them that hundreds of thousands of people are demanding it. The more of us that sign on, the more media attention we'll get and the harder our ask will be to ignore. Click below to add your name:

<http://act.weareultraviolet.org/go/161?t=6&akid=136.359331.TZQ3K6>.

It's pretty shocking that it's been so long since a woman has moderated a presidential debate given how critical women's votes are in every election. But this year, with women's economic security, access to basic health services, and the right to control our own bodies dominating the political debate, it's especially important to have a woman giving voice to those issues and demanding real answers on them.

And this is a very serious and huge problem with the media and coverage of women in elections and politics generally. For example, in news stories about Planned Parenthood, men were quoted 67% of the time, and women just 26% (the other 7% were organizational quotes), and on birth control women were only quoted 19% of the time. Even NPR only quotes women 23% of the time and the problem is even worse on television--MSNBC's "Hardball" only quotes women 15% of the time.

It's not like there aren't tons of incredibly accomplished women journalists to choose from--Rachel Maddow, Gwen Ifill (who moderated the last VP debate), Diane Sawyer, Christiane Amanpour and Katie Couric just to name a few.

By not having a woman moderate a debate, the commission is sending a dangerous message to women and girls everywhere: That there are some honors, accomplishments and platforms that they just can't reach. That's wrong.

Please join the call to get the Presidential Debates Commission to appoint a woman moderator today.

Thanks for speaking out, Nita, Shaunna and Kat, the UltraViolet team

<a href="#">20120716-03</a>	13:10	SteveB	"Poll: Tax Hike for Rich Supported by Majority of Americans"
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The contrasts are fascinating! That darned President Obama!

from "Romney Singles Out Wait-Staff as Struggling Americans at Fundraiser" by Maggie Haberman, Politico

July 17, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/burns-haberman/2012/07/romney-singles-out-waitstaff-as-struggling-americans-129129.html>)

Mitt Romney sought to humanize his remarks about the middle class at a fundraiser in Jackson, Miss. earlier tonight, per a pool report: "I know that people in this room are probably doing relatively well, relative to folks across this country. But not everyone in America is doing so well right now, it's tough being middle class in America right now. The waiters and waitresses that come in and out of this room and offer us refreshments, they're not having a good year. The people of the middle class of America are really struggling. And they're struggling I think in a way because they're surprised because when they voted for Barack Obama...he promised them that things were going to get a heck a lot of better. He promised hope and change and they're still waiting."

"Poll: Tax Hike for Rich Supported by Majority of Americans" by Ariel Edwards-Levy, Huffington Post

July 16, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/16/tax-hike-for-rich\\_n\\_1677826.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/16/tax-hike-for-rich_n_1677826.html))

**Americans support raising taxes on the rich by a two-to-one margin**, with many believing an increase would both help the economy and make the tax system fairer, according to a Pew poll released Monday afternoon.

[Romney, of course, does not support such a tax because he'd have to pay more. --SteveB]

Forty-four percent of adults surveyed said that raising taxes on incomes above \$250,000 would help the economy and increase fairness, while 22 percent said it would hurt the economy and 21 percent that it would make the system less fair.

Opinions split somewhat down partisan lines, with 64 percent of Democrats predicting raising taxes on the wealthy would help the economy, compared to 27 percent of Republicans.

Members of both parties were also about 10 percent more likely than independents to know that President Barack Obama supports ending Bush-era tax cuts on income above \$250,000, a pledge that took political center stage last week.

Survey respondents who were aware of Obama's stance, as well as those who said they'd heard a lot about the issue, were more inclined to support a tax increase.

The Pew Research Center poll surveyed 1,015 adults by telephone between July 12 and July 15. The survey has a 3.6 percent margin of error.

[20120716-04](#) 13:17 Art Re: Congressional Reform Act—2012 (reply to Ben, FotM Newsletter #182)

As noted, this has been around awhile and it is also way off base. As dirtbag as many of our elected politicians may be, this is not one of the problems. They are under the FERS system just like all federal workers after 1984 and do not get any special retirement benefits. Only the few remaining from before 1984 or before are under the old CSRS system which did not pay into social security but again the retirement benefits are not particularly egregious. As far as I know, they pay into their health care system again just like all federal workers.

What this hides is the real reason many go into Congress. It is not the pay as Congress members, it is the payoffs from rich corporations etc. Santorum is classic. He went into the senate as a relatively poor Pennsylvania non entity and came out a millionaire. If they don't take it while they are in office, they sell themselves as lobbyists immediately after the leave Congress. This is the real problem, and large part of the reason we are in the shape we are in now.

[20120716-09](#) 19:34 SteveB Re: Congressional Reform Act—2012 (reply to Art, above)

I think you're right, Art. Unless we have campaign and lobbying reform, we're spinning our wheels.

[20120716-07](#) 14:12 SteveB Fw: Daily Kos.MoveOn Petitions: Demand the Release of Mitt R0mney's Tax Returns!

from Daily Kos:

Please click below to sign the petition from Daily Kos and Democracy for America telling Mitt Romney to release all of his tax returns. We'll deliver the signatures to Romney's campaign HQ in Boston, and do it in front of the press.

<http://democracyforamerica.com/activities/797?t=dkos>

Mitt Romney argues he would be a good president because of his experience at Bain Capital. However, evidence is piling up that he made millions at Bain by firing American workers, outsourcing jobs, and keeping his money overseas.

Romney could shed some light on this by releasing multiple years of his tax returns, as every major presidential candidate has done for decades. This practice was actually pioneered by Romney's father, George, who released 12 years of tax returns when he ran for president in 1968.

However, Mitt Romney has only released one year of his tax returns, increasing suspicion he got rich mainly by dismantling the American middle class. He is starting to take a pounding for it in the media, too. We can help fuel that media narrative with this petition, and put Romney's campaign in a hole from which it can never recover.

Keep fighting, Chris Bowers, Campaign Director, Daily Kos

from MoveOn:

Explosive news broke last week that Mitt Romney may have been in charge of Bain Capital well after he claimed to leave in 1999, as Bain continued to outsource American jobs.

Romney's own tax returns could help clear up his actual role at Bain during this time and his responsibility for what happened to those workers, but he's refusing to release them.

Even Romney's Republican allies, including two governors, are now calling on him to release more of his returns.<sup>2</sup> And guess what? The one complete tax return Romney did release details massive offshore investments in the Cayman Islands and a Swiss bank account.

Enough's enough. It's time for Mitt to come clean. Public pressure is building and we have the opportunity to pour it on with a MASSIVE petition, because even Mitt's Republican friends (and your conservative uncle) understand that Americans need to know the basic truth about our presidential candidates.

We'll deliver the petition soon to his campaign headquarters in Boston. So after you sign, be sure to share the petition with everyone you know—including your conservative uncle.

Sign the petition: "Mitt Romney: Stop hiding. Release all your tax returns back to 1999."

<http://pol.moveon.org/releasethereturns/?id=46354-20195165-KTHLZZx&t=5>

The American public deserves to know more than one year's worth of tax history for a presidential candidate—especially when there are legitimate questions about his financial record. And Americans need to know how long Romney was involved with Bain Capital as it continued to bankrupt American companies and outsource American jobs.

Romney's going against a tradition of transparency started by his own father, who released 12 years of returns when he ran for president saying, "One year could be a fluke, perhaps done for show."<sup>4</sup> It's time for Romney to come clean and let the American public know the truth about his taxes.

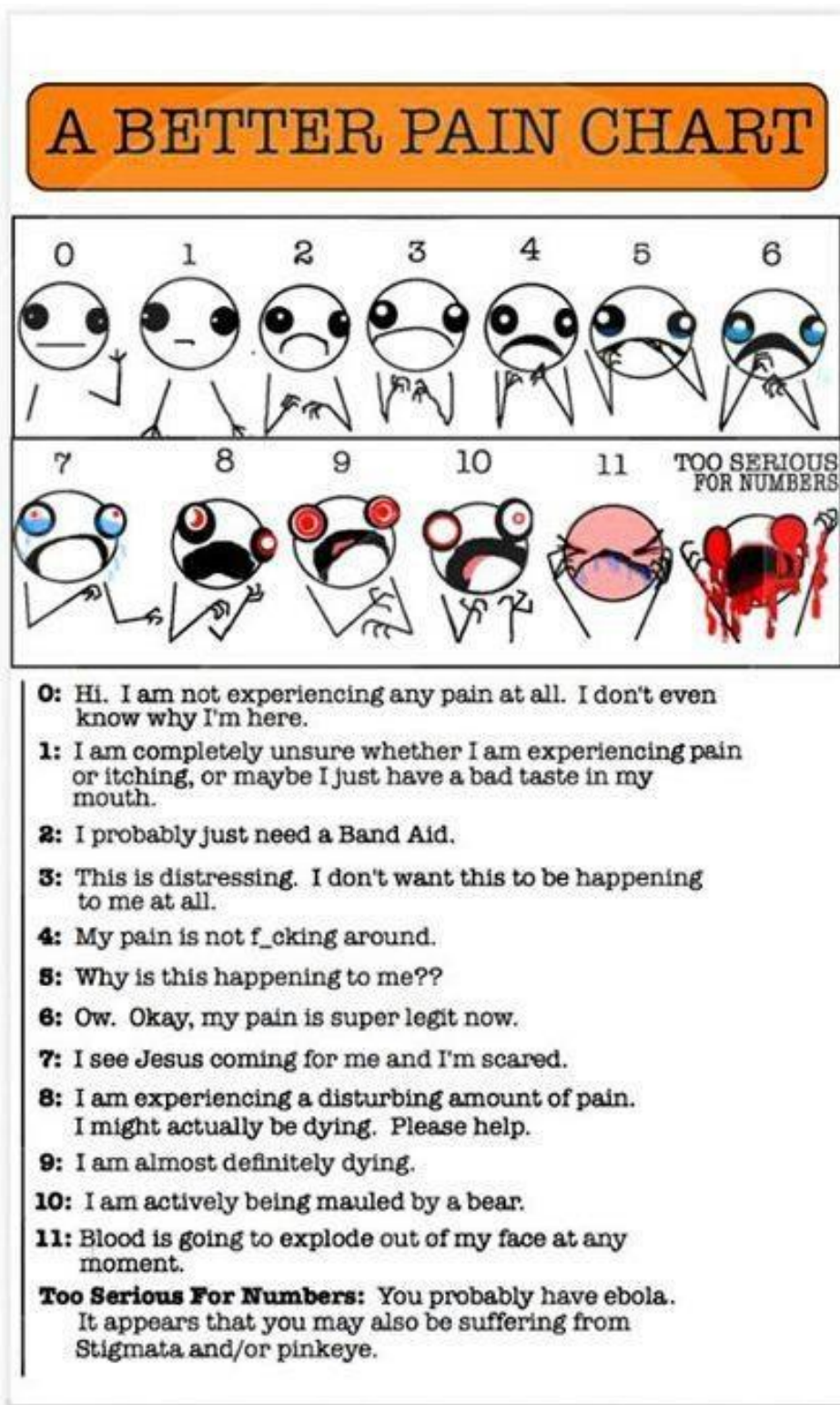
On Friday, MoveOn members went to Romney's campaign offices across the country to get him to come clean. Now this petition can put even more pressure on Romney to release his tax returns.

Then share the petition—and remember, not just with your friends but with your conservative uncle too!

Thanks for all you do. –Justin, Victoria, Emily, Milan, and the rest of the team



Many of you can relate to this!



more awesome pictures at [THEMETAPICTURE.COM](http://THEMETAPICTURE.COM)

That darned President Obama! He sure has sunk the economy with his rampant, radical socialist experiments!!!

"An Astounding Read on Housing" by Jim Cramer, MSN Money

July 16, 2012, (<http://money.msn.com/top-stocks/post.aspx?post=05f98c6f-663f-43ed-af12-6be9efde0372>)

(A report from Wells Fargo reveals a booming mortgage business -- and a U.S. economy in fine shape.)

Beginning this week we won't have time -- at least most of us won't -- to do enough work on individual quarterly reports as they happen. The next three weeks will be sheer hell, and I am always amazed when generalists have claimed they've seen more than just the cheat sheet of the reports -- the CliffsNotes, so to speak.

But last week was different. If you took the time out to read the report of Wells Fargo (WFC 0.00%) -- and, believe me, there was time to do it -- you would have been pretty much stunned at how much business it's doing and at how strong the mortgage business is in the U.S.

Put the following facts in perspective from a company that has more than 30% of the mortgage market in this country:

- Mortgage business revenue was up 90% from a year earlier and 11% from the prior quarter.
- Revenue from refinancing was up more than \$19 billion, or 43%, from the first quarter, "indicating continued strength in the overall housing market, where we see increases in sales and pricing in markets throughout the country, even some of the hardest hit areas during the slowdown," according to CEO John Stumpf.
- A 31% increase was achieved in commercial loan growth, through portfolio acquisitions and organically increased credit card penetration.
- Credit quality continued to improve, with the charge-off ratio declining to 1.15%, the lowest since 2007.
- Nonperforming assets declined by \$1.8 billion from the first quarter, down 11% from a year earlier.
- Record net income rose by 17%, with earnings per share up 17% from a year earlier.
- "Mortgage volumes have been much stronger than anyone expected a year ago or even three months ago, for that matter, with originations more than double where they were a year ago, and our mortgage pipeline, which should lead to future revenue and expense growth, has also doubled," according to CFO Timothy Sloan.

These are astounding numbers. They're the kinds of numbers that signal a gathering strength in housing, something that few people expected and fewer still had thought possible, given that the economy was supposed to have hit a wall a few months ago.

When the largest bank for mortgages reports these numbers, you simply have to rule out the kind of slowdown the employment numbers suggest to us. You have to conclude otherwise. The numbers from Wells are just too big.

I have been a believer in Wells ever since the bank got its arms around the portfolio it bought from Golden West via Wachovia.

That deal -- which no one, other than Wells Fargo, would ever admit was cheap -- now does look incredibly intelligent for this simple reason: The amount of national coverage Wells bought otherwise never would have been allowed by regulators. Wells basically got control over most of the country's mortgage market and servicing market. It services an astounding \$1.9 trillion in residential mortgages, with an amazing ability to cross-sell, in return for two years of outsized losses.

**Put simply, Wells Fargo is telling you that housing is back and that it is booming and that this moribund part of the economy is now a huge tailwind, not a headwind.** Can housing carry the economy? No. Can it offset sluggish employment? I'm beginning to think it can, and that's the main reason the market was able to reverse direction and go up at the end of last week. When you consider the good commercial lending by JPMorgan Chase (JPM 0.00%) and the mortgage lending by Wells, you basically come back with a picture of the U.S. being in fine shape, by far the best of all economies around the world, save for China. It emerges as an economy with increasing strength, not declining strength, as we head into the second half of the year.

20120716-08 15:10 SteveB "The Latest Lie: 'You Didn't Build That'"

"The Latest Lie: 'You Didn't Build That'" by Dave Johnson, NationofChange

July 16, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/latest-lie-you-didn-t-build-1342451525>)

Did President Obama tell business owners they didn't build their businesses? That's what the entire right-wing media machine is saying he said. What did he really say?

Drudge Report headline: "Obama Goes Wild: 'If you've got a business, you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen'..."

Drudge links to the *Washington Times*, which writes, "President Barack Obama addressed supporters in Roanoke, Virginia on Friday afternoon and took a shot at the business community. President Obama dismissed any credit business owners give themselves for their success:"

Heritage Foundation: Obama Tells Entrepreneurs "You Didn't Build" Your Business

Heritage writes: "That sound you hear is silence—as millions of small business owners and entrepreneurs were left speechless this weekend from President Obama's latest insult."

What Did He Really Say?

President Obama pointed out that **businesses did not build the roads and bridges** that help them get their products to markets. He said that in the United States we succeed together. Here is the full quote:

**There are a lot of wealthy, successful Americans who agree with me -- because they want to give something back. They know they didn't -- look, if you've been successful, you didn't get there on your own. You didn't get there on your own. I'm always struck by people who think, well, it must be because I was just so smart. There are a lot of smart people out there. It must be because I worked harder than everybody else. Let me tell you something -- there are a whole bunch of hardworking people out there.** (Applause.)

If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. **Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business -- you didn't build that.** Somebody else made that happen. The Internet didn't get invented on its own. Government research created the Internet so that all the companies could make money off the Internet.

The point is, is that when we succeed, we succeed because of our individual initiative, but also because we do things together. There are some things, just like fighting fires, we don't do on our own. I mean, imagine if everybody had their own fire service. That would be a hard way to organize fighting fires.

This is not "insulting," it is just the way it is.

Nuts

PS, Heritage then goes seriously off the deep end:

Obama pushed his policy goals of infrastructure (aka stimulus) spending and "government research" as part of a collectivist utopia "doing things together." It's simply stunning that he would tell Americans, "If you've got a business—you didn't build that."

Heritage mocks the idea that government should maintain our country's infrastructure -- internal improvements? Heritage says infrastructure and research and "doing things together" are part of a "collectivist utopia?" Deep end, people, deep end. Get back in the children's pool.

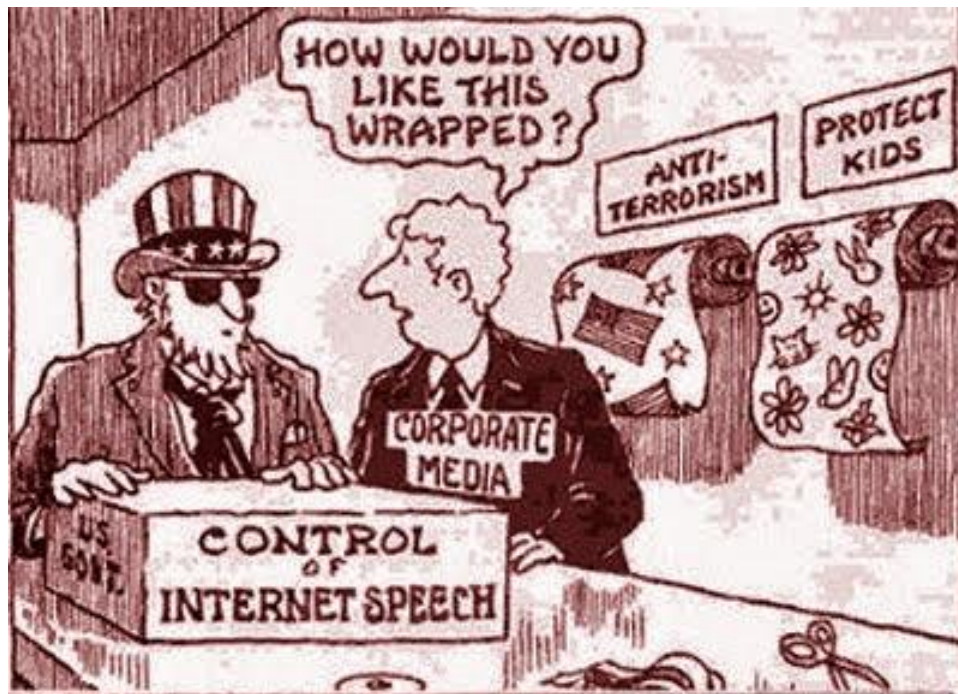
20120716-10 20:51 SteveB Drip...drip...drip...

Note: Maybe the vetting didn't go so well, since Palin beat Mitt out.

"If one has nothing to hide, why not release a set of comprehensive records (Romney reportedly, after all, provided the McCain campaign with 20 years of returns when being vetted for VP)? The answer is simple -- **Mitt Romney must have something to hide.**"

—Abby Huntsman, Political Commentator and Host for HuffPost Live, July 16, 2012,  
([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/abby-huntsman/mitt-romney-tax-returns\\_b\\_1675711.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=politics](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/abby-huntsman/mitt-romney-tax-returns_b_1675711.html?utm_hp_ref=politics))

20120716-11 21:36 Tom Cartoon: Internet Free Speech



**THE CHOICE**

## Paying for higher education



6.27.2012

Students should “get as much education as they can afford.”



6.21.2012

“Higher education cannot be a luxury reserved for the privileged few. It is an economic necessity.”

[BARACKOBAMA.COM/TRUTHTEAM](http://BARACKOBAMA.COM/TRUTHTEAM)



<http://www.aeroplanes.com/travel/photos/pictures-of-canada-90403821/>

Moraine Lake, Banff National Park



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

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