



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #207 — AUG. 20, 2012

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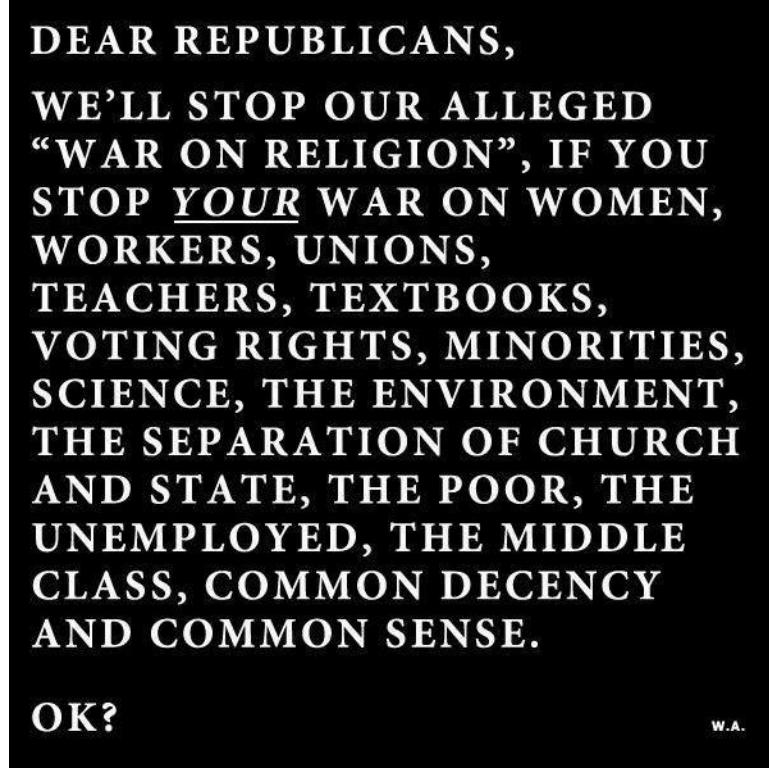
Legitimately Stupid

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Aug. 20, 2012)

Just in case you weren't sure what the Republican Party is all about...

"[Todd Akin on Abortion: 'Legitimate Rape' Victims Have 'Ways to Try to Shut That Whole Thing Down'](#)" (incl. video),
by Chris Gentilviso, Huffington Post

Aug. 19, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/19/todd-akin-abortion-legitimate-rape_n_1807381.html)



Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.) justified his extreme opposition to abortion by claiming that victims of "legitimate rape" rarely get pregnant.

In an interview with KTVI-TV on Sunday, the GOP Senate nominee was asked if he supported abortion in the case of rape.

"From what I understand from doctors, that's really rare," said Akin said of pregnancy caused by rape. "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down. But let's assume maybe that didn't work or something. I think there should be some punishment, but the punishment ought to be on the rapist."

Akin won a three-way primary on Aug. 7 for the rights to a November battle against incumbent Sen. Claire McCaskill (D-Mo.). McCaskill was "stunned" by Akin's Sunday comments:

As a woman & former prosecutor who handled 100s of rape cases,I'm stunned by Rep Akin's comments about victims this AM.

"It is beyond comprehension that someone can be so ignorant about the emotional and physical trauma brought on by rape," McCaskill added in a statement. "The ideas that Todd Akin has expressed about the serious crime of rape and the impact on its victims are offensive."

After Akin's primary win, McCaskill wasted little time in pouncing on his conservative record, calling the congressman "out of touch."

"We're going to prove to Missourians that Todd Akin is out of touch with their problems, out of touch with the pain that they feel, and out of touch with the views that they hold dear," she said back on Aug. 8.

Akin's comments on abortion and rape come less than two weeks after he suggested banning the morning-after pill.

"As far as I'm concerned, the morning-after pill is a form of abortion, and I think we just shouldn't have abortion in this country," he said in an Aug. 8 interview with KCMO radio.

UPDATE: Akin's campaign released a statement Sunday on the issue, where the congressman admitted that he "misspoke" in the KTVI interview:

As a member of Congress, I believe that working to protect the most vulnerable in our society is one of my most important responsibilities, and that includes protecting both the unborn and victims of sexual assault. In reviewing my off-the-cuff remarks, it's clear that I misspoke in this interview and it does not reflect the deep empathy I hold for the thousands of women who are raped and abused every year. Those who perpetrate these crimes are the lowest of the low in our society and their victims will have no stronger advocate in the Senate to help ensure they have the justice they deserve.

I recognize that abortion, and particularly in the case of rape, is a very emotionally charged issue. But I believe deeply in the protection of all life and I do not believe that harming another innocent victim is the right course of action. I also recognize that there are those who, like my opponent, support abortion and I understand I may not have their support in this election.

But I also believe that this election is about a wide range of very important issues, starting with the economy and the type of country we will be leaving our children and grandchildren. We've had 42 straight months of unacceptably high unemployment, trillion-dollar deficits, and Democratic leaders in Washington who are focused on growing government, instead of jobs. That is my primary focus in this campaign and while there are those who want to distract from that, knowing they cannot defend the Democrats' failed economic record of the last four years, that will continue to be my focus in the months ahead.

"Paul Ryan Got Federal Funds to Help with Bush-Era GM Plant Closure He Blames on Obama" by Sam Stein, Huffington Post

Aug. 17, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/17/paul-ryan-gm-federal-funds_n_1799515.html?utm_hp_ref=politics)

Rep. Paul Ryan, who tried to save a GM factory in Wisconsin that closed when George W. Bush was president, now blames the closure on President Barack Obama.

GOP vice presidential candidate Paul Ryan took a swipe at President Barack Obama on Thursday for failing to rescue a General Motors factory in his Wisconsin congressional district, calling it "one more broken promise" on the Democratic administration's record.

"I remember President Obama visiting it when he was first running, saying he'll keep that plant open," Ryan said during a campaign stop. "One of the reasons that plant got shut down was \$4 gasoline. You see, this costs jobs. The president's terrible energy policies are costing us jobs."

The attack has already received a fair amount of ridicule because the Janesville, Wis., plant actually closed during the last year of George W. Bush's presidency. What hasn't really been emphasized is whether Ryan clearly knew this and made the charge nonetheless.

According to a rudimentary LexisNexis search, Ryan made multiple public pleas to GM, including op-eds in his home state newspaper, to keep the plant open. He and fellow Wisconsin lawmakers went to the automobile company's headquarters to present plans to extend the plant's life. When the Bush administration itself called the decision to close the plant evidence that the auto industry was trimming fat and improving its bottom line, Ryan called the news "gut-wrenching."

And as it became clear in early-fall 2008 that GM wouldn't relent, Ryan publicly touted the federal tax money he secured to help displaced workers -- a use of funds that would seem at odds with his limited-government, fiscal conservative image.

The timeline is worth recounting now that it has popped up in Ryan's stump speech.

In April 29, 2008, it was announced that 750 workers at the GM plant in Janesville would lose their jobs. Ryan, according to the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, said he would "work closely with those in Janesville facing uncertainty in the months ahead and do all that I can to ensure that they get the assistance they need."

On May 1, 2008, then-Sen. Russ Feingold (D-Wis.), along with Sen. Herb Kohl (D-Wis.) and Ryan, sent a letter to Rick Wagoner, then GM CEO, urging the company to join government, community organizations and employers to help the affected workers.

"We ask that you give every consideration to maintaining GM's presence in Janesville, as well as taking future steps to ensure the continued success of the Janesville plant, including considering the assignment of new production models at the plant," the lawmakers wrote.

On May 4, 2008, Ryan wrote an op-ed in the *Journal Sentinel* calling for a comprehensive energy plan in light of the news that the GM plant was firing 750 people.

"As a fifth-generation native of Janesville, I grew up learning the old saying, "As GM goes, so goes Janesville,'" Ryan wrote.

It was announced in early June that GM would indeed close the Janesville plant and three others. Ryan said it was "gut wrenching."

Later, he joined Feingold and Kohl in writing another letter to Wagoner. "On May 1 of this year, we wrote to you asking that GM take future steps to ensure the continued success of the Janesville plant, including considering the assignment of new production models at the plant. We renew that request now," the letter read.

On June 4, 2008, the Bush administration framed GM's decision as evidence the troubled automaker was getting its finances in order.

The Bush White House spokeswoman, Dana Perino, said it was "a sign that Detroit continues to adapt and evolve and address the change in consumer tastes and attitudes. ... They're adapting well and they'll make these changes and hopefully be able to pull themselves up out of what has been a rough several years."

Then-Sen. Obama, who had visited the Janesville plant in February, issued a statement.

"My heart goes out to the workers and families affected by the closing of these GM plants," he said. "Today's news is a painful reminder not only of the challenges America faces in our global economy, but of George Bush's failed economic policies." He finished by pledging to help domestic automakers "with the funding they need to retool their factories and make fuel-efficient and alternative-fuel cars. And we'll invest in efforts to make sure that the cars of the future are made where they always have been -- in the United States."

Ryan was quoted in a *Detroit News* article that day. "Growing up and living in Janesville, this is something we've always feared," the congressman said, calling the closure "a big psychological and economic blow to our community and our state; but Janesville will survive this, because we simply have to survive this."

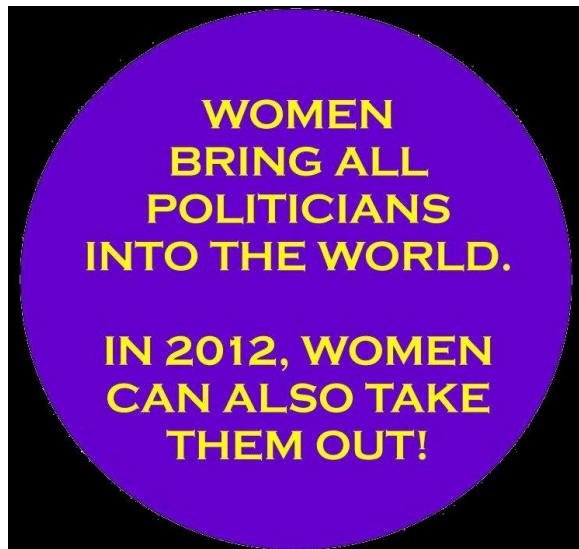
By September of 2008, Ryan, who supported the auto bailout so long as the funds didn't come from the financial sector bailout, was still working aggressively to get GM to change its mind. He, along with Feingold and Rep. Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.), met with company officials in Detroit and "made clear what a tremendous asset the people of Janesville's GM plant are to GM, and how important GM jobs are to the Janesville community." On Sept. 13, 2008, the *Herald Times* Reporter said Ryan and then-Gov. Jim Doyle (D) had presented an "aggressive incentive plan" to GM leaders.

But by then, GM's shutdown plans were set. On Oct. 11, 2008, the *Journal Sentinel* reported that GM would announce it would close the Janesville plant around Christmas, "at least a year earlier than the company had initially projected."

Less than a month earlier, Ryan was making preparations to help the displaced workers and using federal funds to pick up the tab. On Sept. 18, 2008, his office put out a statement that it had joined forces with the U.S. Commerce Department's Economic Development Agency to secure a \$450,000 grant to support economic initiatives for the Janesville area.

"This has been a gut-wrenching summer for southern Wisconsin," Ryan said, "and today's announcement provides our community with much-needed support. I remain firmly optimistic that Janesville's best days are ahead."

On Oct. 2, 2008, Ryan announced that the U.S. Department of Labor had awarded a \$1.6 million national emergency grant to the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development. The money would help "dislocated workers in Rock County's automotive industry, including workers at General Motors, Lear Corporation, Logistics Services Inc., and United Industries."



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from Sen. Bernie Sanders:

In the 77 years since President Franklin Roosevelt signed Social Security into law on August 14, 1935, the retirement program has been one of the nation's most successful anti-poverty programs. Before Social Security existed, about half of America's senior citizens lived in poverty. Today, less than 10 percent live in poverty.

Today, Social Security not only provides retirement security but also enables millions of people with disabilities, and widows, widowers and children to live in dignity and security.

In these highly volatile economic times, when millions of Americans lost their life savings in the 2008 Wall Street crash, it is important to remember that since its inception, through good economic times and bad, Social Security has paid every penny owed to every eligible beneficiary.

Despite Wall Street and right-wing misinformation, Social Security, which is funded by the payroll tax, does not contribute to the deficit. In fact, the Social Security Trust Fund today, according to the Social Security Administration, has a \$2.7 trillion surplus and can pay 100 percent of all benefits owed to every eligible American for the next 21 years. Further, unlike the huge commissions paid out to Wall Street firms, Social Security is run with very modest administrative costs.

Despite Social Security's popularity and overwhelming success, we are now in the midst of a fierce and well-financed attack against Social Security. Pete Peterson, the Wall Street billionaire, has pledged \$1 billion of his resources to cut Social Security and other programs of enormous importance to the American people. Other billionaires and Wall Street representatives are also working hard to weaken or destroy Social Security and endanger the well-being of millions of Americans. We must not allow their effort to succeed.

Let us never forget that the current deficit of \$1 trillion was primarily caused by two unpaid-for wars and tax breaks for the rich. These policies were strongly supported by "deficit hawks." The deficit is also related to a major decline in revenue as a result of the Wall Street-created recession. The deficit is a serious issue, but we must not move toward deficit reduction on the backs of the elderly, the children, the sick and the poor. This would not only be immoral, it is bad economic policy. At a time when the wealthiest people in this country are doing phenomenally well and their effective tax rate is the lowest in decades, the top 1 percent must begin paying their fair share of taxes. At a time when large corporations are enjoying record-breaking profits, we have got to eliminate the huge corporate loopholes which result in a massive loss of federal revenue. At a time when we have tripled military spending since 1997, we must take a hard look at a bloated and wasteful Defense Department.

House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan has been a proponent of privatizing the retirement program by putting seniors' savings into risky Wall Street investments. Even before tapping Ryan as his running mate, Republican presidential nominee Mitt Romney said he wants to begin the process of privatizing Social Security. He also would gradually increase the retirement age to 68 or 69. And he favors slowing the growth of benefits for persons with "higher incomes." Under a plan floated by Romney's allies on Capitol Hill -- Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Mike Lee (R-Utah) -- someone making about \$45,000 a year today who retires in 2050 would receive 32 percent less in annual Social Security benefits than under the current formula. By that definition, the top 60 percent of all wage earners would be considered "higher income."

President Barack Obama, meanwhile, was a staunch defender of Social Security in his 2008 campaign. So far this year, however, Obama has refused to stand behind his four-year-old opposition to cuts. In fact, the president has signaled that he may be open to lowering benefits by changing how they are calculated. In my view, it is long past time that the president told the American people in no uncertain terms, as he did in 2008, that he will not cut Social Security on his watch.

To keep Social Security's finances sound in the future I have introduced legislation -- identical to a proposal that Obama advocated in 2008 -- to apply the payroll tax on incomes above \$250,000 a year. Under current law, only earnings up to \$110,100 are taxed. The Center for Economic Policy and Research has estimated that applying the

Social Security payroll tax on income above \$250,000 would only impact the wealthiest 1.4 percent of wage earners.

Those who want to cut Social Security benefits are looking at a number of proposals. One of the most talked about ideas is moving toward a so-called "chained-CPI," which would not only impact seniors, but also military retirees and those who receive benefits from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The "chained-CPI" approach changes how the Consumer Price Index is calculated, so that a person 65 years old today would earn \$560 a year less in Social Security benefits once they turn 75. Benefits would be cut by nearly \$1,000 a year once they turn 85. Instead, I have proposed legislation to base Social Security cost-of-living adjustments on a Consumer Price Index for the Elderly, a measure that would increase benefits because it would take into account the real-life impact of rising health care costs and prescription drug expenses paid by seniors.

While we often take Social Security for granted, we must not forget that Social Security today is providing dignity and security to tens of millions of Americans. It is a program that is working and working well. We must stand up today, on the 77th anniversary of this enormously important program. We must pledge to continue the fight against the right-wing Republicans, some Democrats and their wealthy backers who want to destroy the program.

Thank you for all that you do.

Sincerely, Senator Bernie Sanders

Contribute:

<https://services.myngp.com/ngponlineservices/contribution.aspx?X=O38xUCC6cZGMCzykoyZBBDEu3ipe1B7SZQNYC%2bODF5o%3d>

20120817-02 09:46 SteveG Re: Joke: Talk with Daughter (reply to SteveBA, FotM newsletter #206)

Nice side splitter from SteveBA – always nice to get a good laugh out of slamming someone's religion.

20120817-03 09:55 Pam Photo: My Son, David

I can't remember if I sent this to FotM or not. If I didn't, here it is, and you are free to publish it. Isn't he handsome!?



[:-) I have to agree. –SteveB]

20120817-04 11:28 SteveB Fw: MoveOn Video: "Revealed: The GOP Strategy"

from MoveOn.org:

[Video: "Revealed: The GOP Strategy" by karinmoveon](#)

Aug 13, 2012, (http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=a0ccPh3YYH4)

This Video MIGHT Stop Romney from Becoming President

Is the GOP employing a racist strategy to get Mitt Romney into the White House? Watch this video to find out.

Mitt Romney could win. Don't believe it?

Well, you're not alone. Most people don't understand that the GOP has an incredibly upsetting plan in place to put Mitt Romney in the White House—a plan that, frankly, is working.

This video spells it out for you—a three pronged GOP strategy that includes a little-known, shocking, and racist strategy designed to help Romney win. Watching and sharing it might be the most important thing you do to defeat Romney in this election.

If we understand what we're fighting against, we CAN mobilize and fight back. People power works—MoveOn members have proven it time and time again.

Please watch this video and get in the game by sharing it with your Facebook and social networks.

Thank you for all you do. –Justin, Mark, Victoria, Tate, and the rest of the team

20120817-05 14:21 SteveG "Obama Better for World Economy: Poll"

Interesting poll...

"Obama Better for World Economy: Poll" by Andy Bruce, Reuters/Yahoo! News

Aug. 17, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/executives-obama-better-world-economy-poll-092717460--business.html>)

(LONDON) Twice as many business executives around the world say the global economy will prosper better if incumbent President Barack Obama wins the next election than if his Republican challenger Mitt Romney does, a poll showed on Friday.

Democrat Obama was chosen by 42.7 percent in the 1,700 respondent poll, compared with 20.5 percent for Romney. The rest said "neither".

The result was different among respondents in the United States, where a slim majority thought Romney would be better for their businesses than Obama.

Obama maintains a seven-point lead over Romney among registered voters in the race for the November 6 presidential election, despite the fact Americans are increasingly pessimistic about the future, according to a Reuters/Ipsos poll conducted last week.

The FT poll was conducted before Romney picked Wisconsin Congressman Paul Ryan as his vice presidential running mate at the weekend, a move that could dramatically shift the election debate between two sharply contrasting views of government spending and debt.

Romney's choice for running mate gave him no immediate boost to his White House prospects, a Reuters/Ipsos poll suggested on Monday.

20120817-06 15:06 SteveG "Paul Ryan's Skeleton in the Closet"

"Paul Ryan's Skeleton in the Closet" by Gary Weiss, The Street

Aug. 13, 2012, (http://www.thestreet.com/story/11661708/1/paul-ryans-skeleton-in-the-closet.html?cm_ven=GOOGLE_N)

(NEW YORK) Paul Ryan is either a chameleon, a flip-flopper or a liar. There is no third alternative. I vote "liar."

I'm really staggered by the media's softball handling of what is going to become known in the waning months of this campaign as **Mitt Romney's Ayn Rand Problem**.

For years, his newly minted running mate has championed Rand, a Russian-born author chiefly known for her novels *Atlas Shrugged* and *The Fountainhead*. In those books and in essays, speeches and interviews, Rand celebrated greed and selfishness, rejected Judeo-Christian morality, and set forth an alien vision of a nearly government-free America that would be ruled by its industrialists and bankers -- an untaxed super-rich elite. She was a strident atheist.

Then, in April, Ryan had an apparent change of heart. He gave an interview to the *National Review* in which he disavowed Rand entirely. Ryan said that, yes, like a lot of people he'd read Rand as a youth, but he certainly was not an adherent to her philosophy.

"I, like millions of young people in America, read Rand's novels when I was young. I enjoyed them," Ryan told the *National Review*. That got him interested in the Chicago School of economics and in Milton Friedman. "But it's a big stretch to suggest that a person is therefore an Objectivist."

The *National Review* went on thusly: "'I reject her philosophy,' Ryan says firmly. 'It's an atheist philosophy. It reduces human interactions down to mere contracts and it is antithetical to my worldview. If somebody is going to try to paste a person's view on epistemology to me, then give me Thomas Aquinas,' who believed that man needs divine help in the pursuit of knowledge. 'Don't give me Ayn Rand.'"

There's nothing more unsavory than smearing somebody because of views he held years ago. I remember how teed-off my parents were back in the 1960s, when the Democratic boss of the Bronx, Congressman Charles Buckley, smeared his Reform Democrat challenger Jonathan Bingham as an anti-Semite because he was a youthful member of the isolationist America First Committee. Yes, he was, but that was years ago and his views had changed. Buckley was voted out and Bingham became the congressman in a largely Jewish district.

"These Rand-related slams, Ryan says, are inaccurate and part of an effort on the left to paint him as a cold-hearted Objectivist," said the magazine's Robert Costa, who quoted Ryan as saying, "You know you've arrived in politics when you have an urban legend about you, and this one is mine."

If Ryan is getting a bad rap as a Randian, then he is definitely a victim of an injustice. But Ryan didn't have a brief flirtation with this atheistic, amoral -- but highly appealing -- philosophy as a youth. He was a full-fledged Randian as a Congressman. He didn't change his views. He is lying about them.

In 2005, he gave a speech to the Atlas Society, an organization devoted to the promulgation of Rand's views. A tape recorder was running. An audio file of his speech can be accessed here. It's important to listen to the entire tape, which runs about 20 minutes, to understand the full depths of Ryan's dishonesty.

I grew up reading Ayn Rand and it taught me quite a bit about who I am and what my value systems are and what my beliefs are. It's inspired me so much that it's required reading in my office for all my interns and my staff.

The reason I got involved in public service, by and large, if I had to credit one thinker, one person, it would be Ayn Rand. And the fight we are in here, make no mistake about it, is a fight of individualism versus collectivism.

When you look at the 20th century experiment with collectivism that Ayn Rand more than anybody else did such a good job of articulating, the pitfalls of statism and collectivism, you can't find a thinker or writer who did a better job of describing and laying out the moral case for capitalism than Ayn Rand.

He went on and on like that, speaking like the strident Objectivist that he is, invoking Rand hero John Galt and the "money speech" in *Atlas Shrugged*, beloved by all Rand followers, given by the dissolute playboy (but covert government-hating revolutionary) Francisco d'Anconia: "It's so important that we go back to our roots to look at Ayn Rand's vision, her writings, to see what our girding, under-grounding principles are. I always go back to, you know, Francisco d'Anconia's speech ... on money when I think about monetary policy," Ryan said.

Ryan said that he would go back to Galt and d'Anconia and "a lot of other things that she did, to try and make sure that I could check my premises, so that I know that what I'm believing and doing and advancing are square with the key principles of individualism."

"Check your premises" is a Randian slogan, predicated on the belief that all us bad-thinking non-Randians are shaping our belief systems on poor assumptions. If we understood the fallacious premises behind our beliefs, we'd be card-carrying Objectivists. Use of this rote catchphrase by Ryan shows how wedded he is to her philosophy and worldview.

Sure, it's possible that Ryan had a sudden change of heart since 2005. But the chances of that are reduced to nearly zero by his claim that he is the victim of an "urban legend." This is a man running away from his past, not candidly acknowledging it and saying that he has changed his views, as Bingham did. The people of the Bronx forgave him. Ryan, apparently, feels that's not an option, and clearly expects that he'll be able to lie about his Ayn Rand philosophy and get away with it.

Now, to be fair, not all followers of Objectivism necessarily buy all of her views. Ryan is a strident opponent of abortion, and Rand was militantly in favor of a woman's right to choose. In fact, Ryan is an extremist on the subject. They may differ in other areas. But all one has to do is read through his mind-blowing budget plan, which would shift the burden of budget-cutting to the poor and middle class -- while totally exempting the rich from any sacrifice -- to know that Ayn Rand continues to dominate Paul Ryan's worldview. The strident, Rand-quoting Paul Ryan of 2005 is very much the same Paul Ryan who is running for vice president today.

So let's call a spade a spade. When Paul Ryan distances himself from Ayn Rand, he's not obfuscating. He's not flip-flopping. He's not being a chameleon, trying to appeal to a wider national audience, one that might be put off by Rand's atheism, by concealing his true views. He's lying.

(Gary Weiss's most recent book is *Ayn Rand Nation: The Hidden Struggle for America's Soul*, published by St. Martin's Press.)

20120817-07	15:46	SteveG	"Ryan Is a 'Dream Come True' for Health Insurance Industry"
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"Ryan Is a 'Dream Come True' for Health Insurance Industry" by Wendell Potter, MSN

Aug. 14, 2012, (http://leanforward.msnbc.com/_news/2012/08/14/13277101-wendell-potter-ryan-is-a-dream-come-true-for-health-insurance-industry?lite)

As someone who worked nearly two decades as a health insurance executive, I know that Mitt Romney's selection of Rep. Paul Ryan as his running-mate is a dream come true for my former colleagues—and a potential nightmare for just about everyone else in America under the age of 55.

For years, the insurance industry has contributed generously to candidates who want to hand over the Medicare program to private insurance companies. That's exactly what Ryan's so-called "Path to Prosperity" would do. It would end the Medicare program as it has existed for almost half a century—a program that guarantees access to affordable care for senior citizens—and replace it with a scheme in which beneficiaries would be given "premium support" to help them buy coverage on the private market. Yes, the traditional Medicare program would continue to be a choice under the 2012 version of Ryan's plan, but it would have to compete with private insurance companies. And because, under Ryan's plan, insurers would be able to cherry-pick the healthiest seniors, the traditional Medicare program would likely be unable to survive over the long haul. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that **Ryan's wife is a former lobbyist for the health insurance industry.**

As the head of corporate communications for Cigna—charged, among other tasks, with disseminating financial information to the news media—I came to understand the lengths insurers routinely go to to satisfy shareholders and analysts. During congressional testimony in 2009, I explained how they make promises they have no intention of keeping, how they flout regulations designed to protect consumers, and how they make it nearly impossible to understand—or even obtain—information consumers need. I described how the big for-profit insurance corporations, in their quest to meet Wall Street's profit expectations, often cancel the coverage of policyholders who get sick and how they implement "medical management" practices that often result in policyholders being denied coverage for care their doctors recommend.

The Affordable Care Act outlaws many of the most egregious practices of the insurance industry, such as refusing to sell coverage to people with preexisting conditions and charging older people many times more than what they charge younger people for the same coverage. Ryan proposes not only to privatize Medicare but also to scrap those consumer protections, by repealing the reform law.

Of course, Mitt Romney is trying to muddy the issue. On the day he announced Ryan as his running mate, Romney accused President Obama of using the reform law to cut \$700 billion from the Medicare program. That's not true. In reality, that figure is what the Congressional Budget Office estimates will be saved over the next several years as a result of changes in the way Medicare pays doctors, hospitals and drug companies—changes that doctors, hospitals and drug companies endorsed.

They endorsed it because they understand the importance of providing coverage to the millions of people who are currently uninsured. The uninsured all too often show up at the emergency room to get care when they get sick or injured, and all too often they can't pay their bills. Hospitals call this uncompensated care, but somebody has to pay for it, and that somebody is everybody with private insurance. Family premiums now cost more than \$1,000 extra to help cover that uncompensated care. That's what cost shifting is all about.

Romney's misleading talking point about that \$700 billion reminded me of the work my former colleagues in the insurance industry and I used to do to scare people into believing things that were not true, such as calling the Affordable Care Act a "government takeover of health care." It wasn't hard to get our friends in politics and the media to take our spin and run with it.

And given what a boon Ryan's plan would be for the industry, it looks like health insurers just got a very well-placed friend indeed.

20120817-08 21:44 SteveG Where is Boehner?

Where is Boehner?

20120818-01 05:48 SteveB Re: Where is Boehner? (reply to SteveG, above)

Why do you ask, Steve? I guess I hadn't noticed he's missing...

20120818-02 06:14 SteveG Re: Where is Boehner? (reply to SteveB, above)

I guess we don't ask anyone, he wasn't adding much to the dialogue or scenery. Just an old playmate. Do sort of miss his golden, I mean orange, complexion.

20120818-04 07:47 SteveB Re: Where is Boehner? (reply to SteveG, above)

You're thinking he's not happy with the Ryan pick? And maybe not so much with Mitt either?

I hear the House is now in play...

20120818-07 09:50 Art Re: Where is Boehner? (reply to SteveG & SteveB, above)

If you were Speaker of the House with an approval rating of below 10% wouldn't you be laying low?

20120818-03 07:17 SteveB "Mitt Romney's 2010 Tax Disclosure May Be Lacking 'Unrelated Business' Form"

Is Mitt paying his fair share or ripping the rest of us off???

What might be perfectly legal, might be seen as mighty unseemly in a Presidential candidate...

I also happen to believe, as a matter of faith, I guess, that the more blatant and cynical the lies, the least likely the Presidency. Sorry, Mitt, I think and hope that's the way the majority of the electorate is, despite the loud right fringe.

"Mitt Romney's 2010 Tax Disclosure May Be Lacking 'Unrelated Business' Form" by Jason Cherkis, Huffington Post

Aug. 17, 2012 (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/17/mitt-romney-2010-tax-unrelated-business_n_1798152.html?utm_hp_ref=politics&utm_hp_ref=politics)

(WASHINGTON) Presidential candidate Mitt Romney's tax returns may be more incomplete in their public release than was previously thought. Filings related to Romney's individual retirement account, already subject to press scrutiny, indicate that the presumptive GOP nominee should have filed a form accounting for unrelated business income taxes.

The unrelated business income tax is set up for tax-exempts like nonprofits and IRAs that engage in commercial activity. Not filing the form, known as a 990-T, may indicate that Romney's IRA funds are held by an offshore account in order to shield them from taxation.

Romney campaign spokesperson Andrea Saul did not return multiple requests for the 990-T form, nor did she answer repeated questions related to the matter.

From what Romney has disclosed, there is mounting circumstantial evidence that the IRA may hold offshore investments through what are known as "blocker corporations," which help him avoid paying taxes. Senator Max Baucus (D-Mont.) told *The New York Times*, "From what I have read about Governor Romney's tax returns, I think it raises very serious questions."

"We know Romney's IRA has Bain funds in it," explained Rebecca J. Wilkins, senior counsel for federal tax policy with the nonpartisan Citizens for Tax Justice. "Bain private equity funds are listed in those assets and those funds are located in the Cayman Islands."

Wilkins says that if Romney's IRA held those funds directly, instead of through a blocker corporation, a 990-T should have been filed. "Typically it doesn't even have to file a tax return," Wilkins says. "But if it has unrelated business income, then it has to pay the unrelated business income tax." And a 990-T would need to have been filed.

HuffPost previously uncovered another document that likely should have been filed among Romney's 2010 tax returns, which would have provided more details on his overseas bank holdings. Such a form has yet to be released by the Romney campaign.

The offshore tax avoidance could be huge. HuffPost recently reported that the candidate has between \$20.7 million and \$101.6 million in his IRA -- well above the average IRA value of \$67,438 in 2010.

Vanity Fair raised the issue in its piece on Romney's offshore accounts:

Romney's I.R.A. also appears to have invested in so-called blocker corporations in the Cayman Islands and elsewhere. U.S. pension funds, foundations, and even I.R.A.'s routinely use offshore blocker corporations to avoid something called the Unrelated Business Income Tax, which was designed to keep nonprofits from competing with ordinary companies in areas outside their core purpose: if you invest directly you get hit with the tax, but if you invest in a blocker, which then invests in the U.S. business, you escape it. Romney's I.R.A. appears to have employed this lawful escape route, and his campaign has used language suggesting that it has. But that would mean the Romney camp's claim that Mitt's tax consequences of investing via the Cayman Islands is 'the very same' as it would have been had he invested directly at home is simply not true.

If Romney had been operating a nonprofit, his use of the offshoring loophole would be similar to the sort of activities Sen. Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) has long sought to shut down. The senator has made similar tax avoidances a priority since 2007.

Two years ago, Grassley and colleagues in the Senate were stunned to learn that the Boys and Girls Club of America held more than \$50 million in offshore accounts and funds, including some held in the Cayman Islands. The organization had to admit that it had used the Caymans to avoid paying the unrelated business income tax.

Grassley's proposed legislation to close the loophole has yet to come up for a vote.

Jill Kozeny, a Grassley spokesperson, told HuffPost that the senator is not focused on IRAs that may employ offshoring. "This focus hasn't been on unlikely UBIT avoidance by pension funds, IRAs, or other tax-deferred retirement accounts since those funds and accounts are generally not using debt, such as tax-exempt bonds or real estate mortgages, to finance investments, which is what usually triggers UBIT for charities," she said via email.

Wilkins of Citizens for Tax Justice believes the loophole should be closed for IRAs. "Clearly it's an unintended loophole in the tax code," she says. "The reason they are making these investments offshore is to avoid paying the unrelated business tax."

20120818-05 08:00 SteveB 'The Scam' in a Nutshell

Here's 'The Scam' in a Nutshell

For more than four years, the Republicans have been calling President Obama a socialist—head of the biggest "Nanny State" ever, giving welfare and food stamps to everyone, running up the national debt and wanting to bankrupt the country.

Through years of speeches, campaigns, press conferences, etc., Americas have also pretty much been educated by Republicans that Republicans are dead-set against:

1. Billionaires paying their fair share of taxes.
2. Anything even minimally resembling universal health care, like Romneycare or Obamacare.
3. Public assistance of almost any kind (people are just lazy, right?).
4. American workers (maybe they're just lazy too?).
5. Women.
6. Minorities.
7. Public education, in many (most?) cases.
8. Anyone not extremely rich or extremely stupid.
9. Social Security/Medicare/Medicaid.

I mean, this is the very Party that, through its V.P. candidate, Paul Ryan, has proposed dismantling the entire safety net!

Now, suddenly, we're supposed to believe that Republicans Mitt R0mney and Paul Ryan are more likely to find a way to preserve these extremely popular programs—Social Security/Medicare/Medicaid—than the socialist radical Obama and the Democrats!

I'm sorry, but doesn't this strain the credibility of even the most devoutly dogmatic Republicans???

The public ain't gonna buy it and that's what the polls show—basically, fear of what Republicans might do if given more power...

Please tell me how I'm wrong.

20120818-06 08:31 Beth Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)

You are so right!

20120818-10 11:08 Pam Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB & Beth, above)

Reckless Endangerment is the title of a book I'm reading about the collapse of the global economy, including the debacle of 2008--10. It's by Gretchen Morgenson and Joshua Rosner. I'm only about a third of the way through, but it's blowing my mind. I knew things were bad but I didn't know how bad and exactly who was responsible. I'm finding out. Morgenson names names, cites statistics, and essentially leaves no stone unturned. A handful of people, it would seem, were greedy and, to be kind, self-deluded. The few who saw disaster coming and tried to stop it were ignored or ridiculed or bullied. It's a disgrace that the people who are responsible for so much suffering of their fellow citizens are getting away with golden parachutes and lucrative careers, either in government or in banking. The top players seem to move back and forth between the two with impunity. I'm beginning to question the bailouts. I'm still not sure they were a bad idea; they kept the economy afloat. But the underlying problems have not been addressed, and the status quo sends the message that no matter what you do, the government will always bail you out. We need to reinstate Glass-Steagel and cut government ties with Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. The Right carries on about downsizing government, but we need to downsize financial institutions even more. Being too big to fail should not be an option. I'm no economist, but I'm learning, and I have a certain amount of common sense. Even I know that living on credit (having done it myself) is unsustainable, but it's wrong to protect the top 1% at the expense of everybody else. The recent article on China raises the alarm of what might happen when the population grows dissatisfied. What might happen if Americans grow terminally dissatisfied? Gun sales are through the roof. I'm just saying....

20120818-11 16:19 Roy Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)

I hope you're right – that the "public ain't gonna buy it." Unfortunately, Obama has never gone after any of the bankers that scammed us out of billions, so many people aren't sure about him anymore. And unemployment is still extremely high, despite his claims of how he was going to turn unemployment around.

It looks like we're not going to have a good choice. Only the lesser of two evils. But then that's usually the case.

20120819-01 11:08 SteveB Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to Roy, above)

Yes, I think I've felt that every Presidential election I've ever voted in was just the "lesser of two evils." I've never had a "hero" candidate whom I could get behind 100%.

That being said, to me, the greater of the two evils here is pretty apparent, I think you agree.

And I too am very disappointed that a lot more fat cats have not gone to jail. The whole system is corrupted by the big money. No question. And the Supreme Court is on the side against freedom!

20120819-03 11:57 Susette Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB, above)

Perhaps no countries' governments refer to corruption and graft within their own nation. Perhaps we are the only ones who will not admit to it. What would be the result of an accusation of corruption being lodged at our legislators/president/military/court system? Probably the chaos that arises anywhere. Can we handle that chaos? Will it not take form with others as they wrest control from the "corruptors"?

20120819-04 12:10 Pam Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to Susette, above)

Interesting point, but risking chaos by exposing corruption is a risk well worth taking. Corruption creates its own chaos, and unless it is rooted out it infects everything.

20120819-16 20:24 SteveB Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to Susette, above)

Interesting questions, Susette.

It's strange to me how well we control the kind of corruption in the U.S. that is rampant in the rest of the world—petty bribery. It certainly isn't unknown in the States, but it isn't a big problem. I've always thought that, somehow, our public schools were responsible for this lack of graft in most public offices. Why else would the U.S. be different than, say, Argentina in terms of personal honest?

But the terrible kind of corruption we have in the U.S.—where politicians and the nation's future are sold to the highest political contributors—is almost unknown in most of the rest of the world. They have sensible laws that do not allow such shenanigans.

Somehow, America must do the same, or all is lost, I fear.

20120819-05 12:33 SteveG Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to all, above)

Transparency is a good word that is thrown around like a piece of trash. We have little idea of the corruption in corporations, state, local, federal government, and the effects on all of us. Probably never will know. It would be nice to at least try to out the corruption and live with that chaos for a change.

20120819-07 13:39 Art Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to all, above)

At the turn of the last century (1900) Argentina had approximately the same per capita standard of living as the USA. In the ensuing 100 years the difference by 2000 was startling. Why? Corruption mostly. While we undoubtedly have had some, they had a lot. Remember Peron? It will destroy us, if we don't get it under control.

Remember the fundamental of any business is to produce something (it doesn't have to be a thing, it can just be a loan or an investment) at the lowest possible price and sell it at the highest possible price. The bigger the difference, the better. Nothing wrong with that but for many businessmen that will mean cutting corners whenever possible (dog poop in the hamburger if you can get away with it), twisting any regulations possible to improve profit, buying politicians, cheating and on and on. The only things that restrain them are the loss of customers because of a shoddy product, but that can take time, or government regulations. I'm not sure these are the people we want running the government. I admire what they do but I don't trust any of them. Most of these so called republicans saviors are from this group. Lying, cheating, screwing the other guy in the name of profit is just a part of their makeup. I'm not sure these are the people we want running the government.

20120819-08 13:55 SteveG Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to Art, above)

Agree, Art. There is the old saying that money corrupts. Someone pointed out that Ryan was worth in the neighborhood of \$3.2 million and was only the 124th richest in Congress. With Citizens United in place, thank you he said sarcastically to the Supreme Court, the problem continues to grow with corruption, lying to make others look bad or yourself to falsely look good. A poor person, a middle/middle class, or even an upper middle class person does not have a chance in hell of winning office unless they are backed by BIG money, and then they become a pawn

20120819-09 13:59 Pam Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to Art, above)

Well, I'm sure I don't, but it seems we're stuck, for now anyway. We have our own generation of Robber Barons, and it's going to take a Teddy Roosevelt or someone to clean things up. The railroads were broken up; we need to do the same thing with the banks and lending institutions. I thought we had a law against monopolies, but I can't see that from where I'm standing. FDR was right about fear, and America is in the grip of it. We may not be packing up our belongings in our cars and heading west, but the same panicky mentality is lurking behind all of us. It's corruption that's gotten us in trouble in the past (Tea Pot Dome, the Savings and Loan collapse, etc.), and this time around it seems about as bad as it can get, short of outright fisticuffs on the Senate floor. The French aristocracy fell, the Roman empire fell, the Soviet Union fell, the Catholic church was riven. (Not in that order.) Why? Corruption. When change comes, it almost always comes from the bottom up, and those at the bottom are not necessarily the brightest bulbs in the lot. Anything can happen when the center does not hold (thank you, Yeats). Does anyone believe it's impossible for mayhem to break out in America? The 'sixties were bad, but the "revolution" was made up largely of middle-class college kids. The next revolution will not be manned by such genteel folks. And they won't be armed with pitchforks. The only solution that makes sense to me is for the government to subsidize jobs and get people working again and impose a fair tax on the wealthy. No one deserves what James Johnson has raked in through his manipulations of Fannie Mae, to take just one example. Then we can work on the deficit, and the way to do that is to clean up Wall Street.

20120819-11 17:23 Roy Re: The 'Scam' in a Nutshell (reply to SteveB & Pam, above)

Thank you, SteveB & Pam. I appreciate the reply and the suggestion on the book, *Reckless Endangerment*. I am going to pick it up right away.

20120818-13 23:10 SteveG "Suspects in Deputy Killings Linked to Extremists"

Has anyone been reading about the activities of the "sovereign citizens"?

"Suspects in Deputy Killings Linked to Extremists" by Cain Burdeau, AP/Yahoo! News

Aug. 18, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/suspects-deputy-killings-linked-extremists-005244499.html>)

(NEW ORLEANS) At least some of the seven people arrested in a fatal shootout with Louisiana deputies have been linked to violent anarchists on the FBI's domestic terrorism watch lists, a sheriff said Saturday.

Detectives had been monitoring the group before Thursday's shootout in Laplace in which two deputies were killed and two more wounded, said DeSoto Parish Sheriff Rodney Arbuckle. His detectives and other law enforcement discovered the suspects were heavily armed adherents to an ideology known as the "sovereign citizens" movement.

The FBI has classified "sovereign citizens" as people who believe they are free from all duties of a U.S. citizen, like paying taxes. The FBI considers the group's members a danger for making threats to judges and law enforcement, using fake currency and impersonating police officers.

The seven suspects have been charged in the shooting of Deputy Michael Scott Boyington, who survived. But authorities have said murder charges are pending.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation said it was investigating the killings but declined to comment Saturday and referred questions to the Louisiana State Police, the lead investigating agency.

Arrested were the group's apparent leader, 44-year-old Terry Smith, his wife, Chanel Skains, 37, and his two sons, Derrick Smith, 22, and Brian Lyn Smith, 24. Also arrested were Brittney Keith, the girlfriend of Brian Smith; Kyle David Joekel, 28, and a woman living with him, 21-year-old Teniecha Bright.

Brian Smith was charged with attempted first-degree murder and the others with related charges.

Detectives in Tennessee, Nebraska and Louisiana have sketched a portrait of an outlaw gang led by a 44-year-old accused molester named Terry Smith, who has a criminal record dating to 1984 in Morehouse Parish, the *Times-Picayune* reported Saturday.

Morehouse Parish Sheriff Mike Stubbs said the Smith family was notorious. He said they lived for a long time in a house on the outskirts of Bastrop.

"We had a good bit of dealings with them," he said. He said the Smith brothers had been involved in theft and drugs.

Arbuckle, reached by telephone by The Associated Press, said his deputies had the group under surveillance and considered them armed and dangerous before they suddenly left his parish about two months ago. He said they had set up camp at a mobile home park while they working at an International Paper plant.

The sheriff said deputies became suspicious after they investigated a reported burglary in May at the park's laundry. The detectives discovered members wanted under warrants issued in Tennessee, Nebraska and Louisiana.

"Once we had them on our radar we started doing research on them," he said. Arbuckle said his detectives monitored the group until they left in November.

Sovereign citizens are a loosely organized movement founded in the 1970s and more fully developed in the 1980s, according to the Anti-Defamation League website. Sovereign citizens believe that all levels of government have no jurisdiction over them and resist — sometimes with violence — authority including police, the website said.

They also like to use what is dubbed "paper terrorism." It involves using frivolous lawsuits and fake documents and of using genuine documents such as IRS forms to intimidate, harass and coerce public officials, law enforcement officers and private citizens.

Arbuckle said his detectives could easily have been the victims instead of the St. John the Baptist Parish deputies killed and wounded. Deputies Brandon Nielsen and Jeremy Triche were killed and along with Boyington, Jason Triche was wounded. The Triches were somehow related, authorities said.

"We understand they had some pretty good firepower," Arbuckle said. "This very well could have been us" in the gunfight, he said.

He said the group traveled the country in trailers doing construction work and possessed a stockpile of weapons.

They were arrested after an early morning assault on Boyington led to the deadly shootout in the mobile home park in Laplace, a suburb west of New Orleans. Boyington was shot at the entrance of a parking lot used by contract workers on a job at a nearby oil refinery. He was working off-duty on a security detail at the lot.

Shortly thereafter, the other deputies were shot at the trailer park where a car involved in the first shooting was spotted.

Joekel and Brian Smith were hospitalized with gunshot wounds and will be jailed once they are out of the hospital. The others were jailed with bonds ranging from \$350,000 to \$750,000.

The Gage County, Neb., Sheriff's Office website listed Joekel among its most wanted fugitives, saying he is accused of making "terroristic threats" to patrons of a Nebraska bar and law enforcement officials.

Sgt. Len Marie, a state police spokesman, said investigators were amassing evidence. He said the agency had received the reports from the DeSoto sheriff and other law enforcement agencies in other states. He said the FBI and Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms was involved.

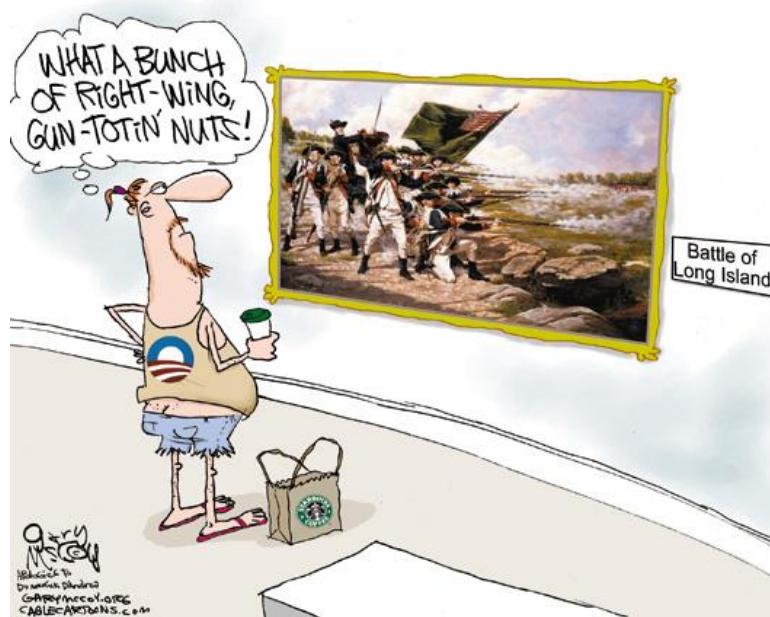
He said it was too early to verify links to the extremist groups associated with the sovereign citizen movement.

"We are confident that we have the people responsible for this in custody," Marie said.

20120819-02 11:09 Pam Re: "Suspects in Deputy Killings Linked to Extremists" (reply to SteveG, above)

We all remember the Weather Underground, the Black Panthers, the SLA, and in Europe the Red Brigades. In the 'sixties it was the far Left that caused a ruckus; now it looks like it's the far Right that's on the move. I don't know if these Sovereign Citizens have anything like a political agenda or whether they're just a bunch of criminals who get a thrill out of trashing things and people, but I don't think we should be too complacent about the possibility of Right-wing militant groups posing a threat. Folks who put ideas above people will do anything and find ways to justify their actions. I fear that we will be so focused on foreign terrorists that we will overlook even more dangerous home-grown ones. There are a lot of guns out there.

20120819-06 12:44 SteveM Graphics: Gun Control?



[20120819-10] 14:45 SteveM Fw: NRA Video: "Borderless!"

Not a very good situation...

Too bad we can't hear this on the Senate floor instead of Reid's BS...

[Source of original email unknown. –SteveB]

I know a lot of you folks don't like or agree with the NRA (National Rifle Association), but please watch this video. Every word of it is true. I've lived in Arizona so can back this up as being dead on the money. Eric holder wasn't mentioned in this video but should have been.

<http://videos.allinnra.com/share#.UB0fVII5mc0>

[20120819-12] 18:51 SteveB Re: NRA Video: "Borderless!" (reply to SteveM, above)

Her "God-given right to own a gun"???

I didn't know guns had been invented yet, the last time God was handing out rights...

I don't care if you're for or against guns (I tend to be for), it certainly ain't no "God-given right"!

20120819-13

19:05 SteveB

Re: NRA Video: "Borderless!" (reply to SteveM, above) & Video: "Revealed: The GOP Strategy"

See if you think any of this sounds familiar to you...

Video: "Revealed: The GOP Strategy"

(http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=a0ccPh3YYH4)

20120818-08

11:54 SteveB

"We Don't Need No Bloody Treaties: Britain Blows a Fuse over Ecuador's Asylum Grant to Wikileaks' Assange"

"We Don't Need No Bloody Treaties: Britain Blows a Fuse over Ecuador's Asylum Grant to Wikileaks' Assange" by Dave Lindorff, NationofChange

Aug. 18, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/we-don-t-need-no-bloody-treaties-britain-blows-fuse-over-ecuador-s-asylum-grant-wikileaks-assange-13>)

The concerted and orchestrated campaign to capture WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange and ultimately to hand him over to the tender mercies of a kangaroo court in the U.S., where he would likely be tried for spying and other possibly capital offenses, continues as Britain threatens the Ecuadoran Embassy with a police assault.

According to the newspaper *The Australian*, a News Corp. property and Australian flagship of media baron Rupert Murdoch, Ecuador's Foreign Minister Ricardo Patino says he and the Ecuadoran ambassador received a written message yesterday from the British Foreign Office warning that Britain might send police to "assault" the country's embassy and forcibly remove Assange so as to hand him over to Sweden to face questioning on several controversial sexual assault claims made by women there.

Although the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, passed in 1961 and signed by Britain, Sweden and the U.S., along with nearly every country in the world, clearly grants embassies the status of being considered the official territory of the country represented by the embassy, thus putting them beyond all laws of the host country, Britain is citing a 1987 U.K. law that states that when a foreign nation "ceases to use land for the purposes of its mission or exclusively for the purposes of a consular post," the Vienna Convention no longer applies, and the building is no longer beyond the reach of British police.

The text of the threatening U.K. letter, released by the Ecuadoran government, reads:

You need to be aware that there is a legal base in the UK, the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act 1987, that would allow us to take actions in order to arrest Mr Assange in the current premises of the Embassy.

We sincerely hope that we do not reach that point, but if you are not capable of resolving this matter of Mr Assange's presence in your premises, this is an open option for us...

...We need to reiterate that we consider the continued use of the diplomatic premises in this way incompatible with the Vienna Convention and unsustainable and we have made clear the serious implications that this has for our diplomatic relations.

A letter sent to the government of Ecuador by the British Embassy in Quito was even more explicit, saying:

We must arrest Mr. Assange and extradite him to Sweden. Should you grant him asylum, and then request safe passage for him, we will refuse it. We consider Assange's use of diplomatic premises to be incompatible

with the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, and not sustainable. Under the Diplomatic and Consular Premises Act of 1987, we have a legal basis to arrest Mr. Assange inside your embassy. If you cannot resolve the issue of Mr. Assange's presence on your premises, then this route is open to us.

Clearly this threat is ridiculous on its face, given that the Vienna Convention is unambiguous in stating that embassies are inviolate. As Article 22 of the Convention puts it:

1. The premises of the mission shall be inviolable. The agents of the receiving State may not enter them, except with the consent of the head of the mission.
2. The receiving State is under a special duty to take all appropriate steps to protect the premises of the mission against any intrusion or damage and to prevent any disturbance of the peace of the mission or impairment of its dignity.
3. The premises of the mission, their furnishings and other property thereon and the means of transport of the mission shall be immune from search, requisition, attachment or execution.

There's not a lot of wiggle room left there for sending police barging into an embassy to grab someone. The British government's assertion that somehow the Ecuador Embassy, by granting Assange asylum from deportation to Sweden and possibly to the U.S. (which reportedly has a secret sealed indictment waiting for him), is "misusing" its embassy grounds and is thus not protected by the Vienna Convention is both absurd and dangerous. The ability of embassies to grant people asylum without fear of invasion by forces from the host country has been recognized for centuries, with its roots going back to the Greeks and Egyptians, and even at the coldest period of the Cold War, it was honored by rival states like Britain, the U.S., and the Soviet Union. If Assange, whose most serious "crime" at this point is skipping out on bail in Britain, can be rousted from asylum in a foreign embassy, what does that mean for those people charged with "crimes" in countries like China or Cuba who may in the future seek asylum from persecution or prosecution in a British or a U.S. embassy? How would the late astrophysicist Fang Lizhi, an acknowledged intellectual mentor to many of the young activists in the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989, who after the brutal government crackdown holed up with his wife for months in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, have fared under such a warped interpretation of the Vienna Convention? How would Chen Guangcheng, the blind dissident in China who escaped house arrest and fled to the US Embassy, have fared?

It's significant that last year, the U.S. government, including even President Obama at a press conference, tried to claim that Raymond Davis (whom they all knew was a contract agent and paid killer from the CIA), was immune from arrest and prosecution in Pakistan even after he had brazenly slaughtered two young men on motorcycles, shooting them both in the back and then executing them with point-blank shots to the head, all in a crowded street in broad daylight. Their argument: he worked either for the U.S. Consulate in Lahore or the U.S. Embassy in Karachi. And he was nabbed at the scene of the crime. He wasn't even on protected consular grounds. (In the end, Pakistan let Davis escape the country, after the US paid death payments to Davis's victims' families in accordance with Sharia law.)

Actually, when it comes to use of an embassy or a consulate "in a way incompatible with the Vienna Convention," the U.S. and Britain, which post CIA agents or MI6 agents undercover as diplomats in most of their foreign embassies, and which have long used their so-called diplomatic "pouches" (which in the U.S. case can often be entire shipping containers!), immune from customs inspections, to transport weapons to favored terrorist groups inside countries like Chile or Iraq or Iran, are really guilty of using their embassies and consulates in ways that are "incompatible" with the Vienna Convention.

During the U.S. occupation of Iraq, there were a number of solid reports of weapons being smuggled into the country via diplomatic pouch to both countries for use by Iraqi operatives working outside the law, and for smuggling onward to groups inside Iran. Just today, Iran's PressTV reports that the US Consulate in the southern Iraqi city of Basra was found to have obtained, through diplomatic pouch, a shipment of light and heavy weapons intended for smuggling to terror groups operating inside of Iran. At one point during the occupation, several British agents operating out of the British Consulate in Basra, were caught by Iraqi police driving a car while dressed in local arab garb. Found in the car were guns, RPGs, and bombs and wiring. They were arrested, but were later

rescued by British military forces who stormed the police station. No arrests were made by Iraqi police of any British consular personnel following this incident, because of the Vienna Convention.

Why would Britain risk destroying that same Vienna Convention, which has been around since 1961, and even longer in other legal iterations, over such a minor case as ducking out on bail, particularly as Assange has never even been charged with a crime in Sweden, where a British Court says he has to be deported on an Interpol warrant? (He's just wanted in Sweden at this point only for questioning, technically). After all, Britain is no longer a global power, and stands to lose a lot if its own embassies no longer can count on protection under the Vienna Convention.

The answer to that would seem to be that it is the U.S., which despite its denials seems to desperately want to get Assange and prosecute him for leaking secret cables, which is behind this farce. The U.S., unlike Britain, is a global power to reckon with, and does not have to worry overmuch about its embassies being over-run (bombed maybe, but aside from the Iranian US Embassy occupation, which was not entirely government sanctioned, there has not been a U.S. Embassy taken over by government action, and there is unlikely to be). The costs to the host country would simply be too great.

As Ecuador has told Britain, an assault on an embassy is technically an act of war, as embassies are viewed legally as the territory of the home country they represent.

Already, there are threats in other countries to invade and take over British embassies if Britain makes good on its threat and has police assault the Ecuador embassy. It's a fair bet that in Latin America, where there is broad support for Ecuador's principled stand, and where asylum in embassies has a hallowed tradition and has saved many people during coups and dictatorships, it's a good bet that British embassies would take a heavy beating if Assange is dragged out of Ecuador's embassy. U.S. embassies too could take a hit, since Latin Americans are acutely aware of America's role in this affair, and have little love lost for America and its penchant for pushing its weight around. Ecuador's President Rafael Correa has called for a meeting of the Organization of American States to address the British threat to his country's sovereignty.

Odds are that Britain is bluffing, although it has massed police and vans around the Ecuador Embassy building, which, unlike the fort-like U.S. embassies around the world, sits unguarded and unwalled on a street in London, though the question of how or when Assange will be able to escape the embassy and gain safe passage out of Britain and to Ecuador, and whether he could subsequently avoid being kidnapped there and "renditioned" to the U.S., remains. British supporters of Assange have been putting out calls on social media for people to mass around the embattled embassy to protect it against a police assault. Some have already been arrested doing so there.

What this astonishing incendiary reaction by the British Foreign Office to Assange's grant of asylum by Ecuador makes abundantly clear is that Assange and his WikiLeaks organization are truly feared by Britain and the U.S. His organization's ability to expose the war crimes, the war criminals, and the international treachery of these two countries and their allies around the world is one of the biggest threats they face, and they are proving it by their desperate efforts to neutralize or eliminate him.

[20120818-09](#) 12:45 SteveB Fw: SignOn.org Petition: Reinstate the Glass-Steagall Act!

from SignOn.org:

Glass-Steagall aided in a six-decade rise of a more egalitarian financial system and a healthy middle class. Its 1999 repeal ushered in our current era of reckless and ruinous banking practices, which brought the USA to the brink of financial disaster in 2008.

Essentially nothing has changed since then, and the economy remains at great risk. The banking system must be brought back to serving the people and sustaining the economy rather than draining its lifeblood.

Without a strong middle class, the America that we have known will cease to exist, and the oligarchs will have finally won their coveted prize. This must not be allowed to happen.

That's why I created a petition on SignOn.org to Congress and President Obama urging them to reinstate Glass-Steagall.

Click here to sign the petition to reinstate Glass-Steagall:

<http://signon.org/sign/reinstate-the-glass-steagall-5?source=mo&id=49172-20195165-LvBClx>.

The petition says:

Thomas Jefferson got it right when in 1802 he wrote, "I believe that banking institutions are more dangerous to our liberties than standing armies. If the American people ever allow private banks to control the issue of their currency, first by inflation, then by deflation, the banks and corporations that will grow up around the banks will deprive the people of all property—until their children wake up homeless in the continent their fathers conquered."

His words were prescient indeed as we are in the midst of the greatest transfer of wealth to a scarce few individuals and banks, all of it being done within the boundaries of laws that the bankers themselves have either written or paid well to have written.

Glass-Steagall prevented this egregious behavior and must be reinstated.

Click here to add your name to this petition, and then pass it along to your friends.

Thanks! –Mitchell Gershten

20120818-12 21:58 SteveG "Should the Recent Upgrade of Standard Chartered Bank Concern Investors?"

"Should the Recent Upgrade of Standard Chartered Bank Concern Investors?" by Matt Schilling, [Seeking Alpha](#)

Aug. 15, 2012, (<http://seekingalpha.com/article/809311-should-the-recent-upgrade-of-standard-chartered-bank-concern-investors>)

On Wednesday, August 15, both Nomura Holdings (NMR) and Bank of America (BAC) upgraded shares of Standard Chartered Bank (SCBFF.PK), and in most cases, I wouldn't have a problem with it, except in this case, it happens to be two highly scrutinized banks upgrading yet another highly scrutinized bank and with that I have a very big problem.

[Continue reading at Seeking Alpha...](#)

20120819-14 19:42 SteveM Fw: Photo: Just Relax!

[Source of original email unknown. –SteveB]

Just Relax! Quit paying your insurance premiums. Free health care is here! The doctor will see you now.



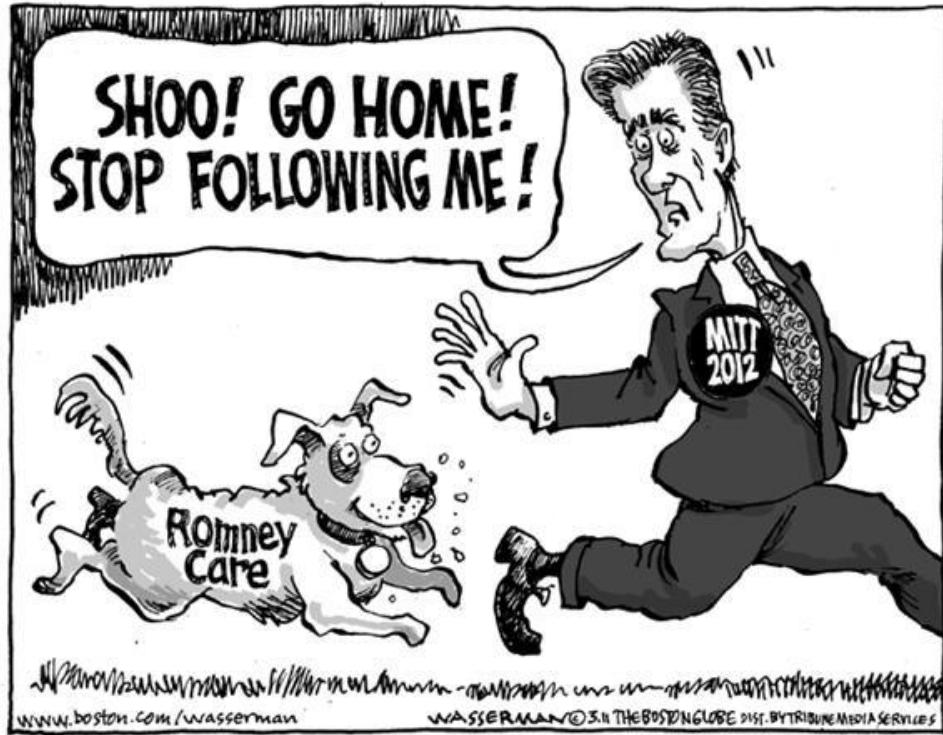
Coming soon to a clinic near you

[20120819-15](#)

20:19 SteveB

Re: Photo: Just Relax! (reply to SteveM, above) & Cartoon: R0mney
Running from Romneycare

The reality is so very different as to be, well...a different planet. LOL!



20120819-17 22:49 Tom "SR-71 Blackbird Breakup at Mach 3.18"

It is a miracle anyone survived! A great read... <http://www.bartworks.com/aviation/sr71breakup.htm>

"SR-71 Blackbird Breakup at Mach 3.18" by Bill Weaver (Chief Test Pilot, Lockheed), The Digital Aviator

Feb. 26, 2008, (<http://www.thedigitalaviator.com/blog/?p=504>)



Among professional aviators, there's a well-worn saying: Flying is simply hours of boredom punctuated by moments of stark terror. But I don't recall too many periods of boredom during my 30-year career with Lockheed, most of which was spent as a test pilot. By far, the most memorable flight occurred on Jan. 25, 1966.

Jim Zwayer, a Lockheed flight-test specialist, and I were evaluating systems on an SR-71 Blackbird test from Edwards. We also were investigating procedures designed to reduce trim drag and improve high-Mach cruise performance. The latter involved flying with the center-of-gravity (CG) located further aft than normal, reducing the Blackbird's longitudinal stability.

We took off from Edwards at 11:20 a.m. and completed the mission's first leg without incident. After refueling from a KC-135 tanker, we turned eastbound, accelerated to a Mach 3.2 cruise speed and climbed to 78,000 ft., our initial cruise-climb altitude.

Several minutes into cruise, the right engine inlet's automatic control system malfunctioned, requiring a switch to manual control. The SR-71's inlet configuration was automatically adjusted during supersonic flight to decelerate airflow in the duct, slowing it to subsonic speed before reaching the engine's face. This was accomplished by the inlet's center-body spike translating aft, and by modulating the inlet's forward bypass doors.

Normally, these actions were scheduled automatically as a function of Mach number, positioning the normal shock wave (where air flow becomes subsonic) inside the inlet to ensure optimum engine performance. Without proper scheduling, disturbances inside the inlet could result in the shock wave being expelled forward- a phenomenon known as an "inlet unstart."

That causes an instantaneous loss of engine thrust, explosive banging noises and violent yawing of the aircraft, like being in a train wreck. Unstarts were not uncommon at that time in the SR-71's development, but a properly functioning system would recapture the shock wave and restore normal operation.

On the planned test profile, we entered a programmed 35-deg. bank turn to the right. An immediate unstart occurred on the right engine, forcing the aircraft to roll further right and start to pitch up. I jammed the control stick as far left and forward as it would go. No response. I instantly knew we were in for a wild ride. I attempted to tell Jim what was happening and to stay with the airplane until we reached a lower speed and altitude. I didn't think the chances of surviving an ejection at Mach 3.18 and 78,800 ft. were very good. However, g-forces built up so rapidly that my words came out garbled and unintelligible, as confirmed later by the cockpit voice recorder.

The cumulative effects of system malfunctions, reduced longitudinal stability, increased angle-of-attack in the turn, supersonic speed, high altitude and other factors imposed forces on the airframe that exceeded flight control authority and the stability augmentation system's ability to restore control.

Everything seemed to unfold in slow motion. I learned later the time from event onset to catastrophic departure from controlled flight was only 2-3 seconds. Still trying to communicate with Jim, I blacked out, succumbing to extremely high g-forces.

Then the SR-71 literally disintegrated around us. From that point, I was just along for the ride. And my next recollection was a hazy thought that I was having a bad dream. Maybe I'll wake up and get out of this mess, I mused. Gradually regaining consciousness, I realized this was no dream; it had really happened. That also was disturbing, because I COULD NOT HAVE SURVIVED what had just happened.

I must be dead. Since I didn't feel bad- just a detached sense of euphoria- I decided being dead wasn't so bad after all. As full awareness took hold, I realized I was not dead. But somehow I had separated from the airplane.

I had no idea how this could have happened; I hadn't initiated an ejection. The sound of rushing air and what sounded like straps flapping in the wind confirmed I was falling, but I couldn't see anything. My pressure suit's face plate had frozen over and I was staring at a layer of ice.

The pressure suit was inflated, so I knew an emergency oxygen cylinder in the seat kit attached to my parachute harness was functioning. It not only supplied breathing oxygen, but also pressurized the suit, preventing my blood

from boiling at extremely high altitudes. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but the suit's pressurization had also provided physical protection from intense buffeting and g-forces. That inflated suit had become my own escape capsule

My next concern was about stability and tumbling. Air density at high altitude is insufficient to resist a body's tumbling motions, and centrifugal forces high enough to cause physical injury could develop quickly. For that reason, the SR-71's parachute system was designed to automatically deploy a small-diameter stabilizing chute shortly after ejection and seat separation. Since I had not intentionally activated the ejection system—and assuming all automatic functions depended on a proper ejection sequence—it occurred to me the stabilizing chute may not have deployed.

However, I quickly determined I was falling vertically and not tumbling. The little chute must have deployed and was doing its job. Next concern: the main parachute, which was designed to open automatically at 15,000 ft. Again I had no assurance the automatic-opening function would work.

I couldn't ascertain my altitude because I still couldn't see through the iced-up faceplate. There was no way to know how long I had been blacked-out or how far I had fallen. I felt for the manual-activation D-ring on my chute harness, but with the suit inflated and my hands numbed by cold, I couldn't locate it. I decided I'd better open the faceplate, try to estimate my height above the ground, then locate that "D" ring. Just as I reached for the faceplate, I felt the reassuring sudden deceleration of main-chute deployment.

I raised the frozen faceplate and discovered its uplatch was broken. Using one hand to hold that plate up, I saw I was descending through a clear, winter sky with unlimited visibility. I was greatly relieved to see Jim's parachute coming down about a quarter of a mile away. I didn't think either of us could have survived the aircraft's breakup, so seeing Jim had also escaped lifted my spirits incredible. I could also see burning wreckage on the ground a few miles from where we would land. The terrain didn't look at all inviting—a desolate, high plateau dotted with patches of snow and no signs of habitation.

I tried to rotate the parachute and look in other directions. But with one hand devoted to keeping the face plate up and both hands numb from high-altitude, subfreezing temperatures, I couldn't manipulate the risers enough to turn. Before the breakup, we'd started a turn in the New Mexico-Colorado-Oklahoma-Texas border region. The SR-71 had a turning radius of about 100 miles at that speed and altitude, so I wasn't even sure what state we were going to land in. But, because it was about 3:00 p.m., I was certain we would be spending the night out here.

At about 300 ft. above the ground, I yanked the seat kit's release handle and made sure it was still tied to me by a long lanyard. Releasing the heavy kit ensured I wouldn't land with it attached to my derriere, which could break a leg or cause other injuries. I then tried to recall what survival items were in that kit, as well as techniques I had been taught in survival training.

Looking down, I was startled to see a fairly large animal—perhaps an antelope—directly under me. Evidently, it was just as startled as I was because it literally took off in a cloud of dust.

My first-ever parachute landing was pretty smooth. I landed on fairly soft ground, managing to avoid rocks, cacti and antelopes. My chute was still billowing in the wind, though. I struggled to collapse it with one hand, holding the still-frozen faceplate up with the other. "Can I help you?" a voice said. Was I hearing things? I must be hallucinating. Then I looked up and saw a guy walking toward me, wearing a cowboy hat. A helicopter was idling a short distance behind him. If I had been at Edwards and told the search-and-rescue unit that I was going to bail out over the Rogers Dry Lake at a particular time of day, a crew couldn't have gotten to me as fast as that cowboy-pilot had.

The gentleman was Albert Mitchell, Jr., owner of a huge cattle ranch in northeastern New Mexico. I had landed about 1.5 mi. from his ranch house—and from a hangar for his two-place Hughes helicopter. Amazed to see him, I replied I was having a little trouble with my chute. He walked over and collapsed the canopy, anchoring it with several rocks. He had seen Jim and me floating down and had radioed the New Mexico Highway Patrol, the Air Force and the nearest hospital.

Extracting myself from the parachute harness, I discovered the source of those flapping-strap noises heard on the way down. My seat belt and shoulder harness were still draped around me, attached and latched.

The lap belt had been shredded on each side of my hips, where the straps had fed through knurled adjustment rollers. The shoulder harness had shredded in a similar manner across my back. The ejection seat had never left the airplane. I had been ripped out of it by the extreme forces, with the seat belt and shoulder harness still fastened.

I also noted that one of the two lines that supplied oxygen to my pressure suit had come loose, and the other was barely hanging on. If that second line had become detached at high altitude, the deflated pressure suit wouldn't have provided any protection. I knew an oxygen supply was critical for breathing and suit-pressurization, but didn't appreciate how much physical protection an inflated pressure suit could provide.

That the suit could withstand forces sufficient to disintegrate an airplane and shred heavy nylon seat belts, yet leave me with only a few bruises and minor whiplash was impressive. I truly appreciated having my own little escape capsule.

After helping me with the chute, Mitchell said he'd check on Jim. He climbed into his helicopter, flew a short distance away and returned about 10 minutes later with devastating news: Jim was dead. Apparently, he had suffered a broken neck during the aircraft's disintegration and was killed instantly. Mitchell said his ranch foreman would soon arrive to watch over Jim's body until the authorities arrived. I asked to see Jim and, after verifying there was nothing more that could be done, agreed to let Mitchell fly me to the Tucumcari hospital, about 60 mi. to the south.

I have vivid memories of that helicopter flight, as well. I didn't know much about rotorcraft, but I knew a lot about "red lines," and Mitchell kept the airspeed at or above red line all the way. The little helicopter vibrated and shook a lot more than I thought it should have. I tried to reassure the cowboy-pilot I was feeling OK; there was no need to rush. But since he'd notified the hospital staff that we were inbound, he insisted we get there as soon as possible. I couldn't help but think how ironic it would be to have survived one disaster only to be done in by the helicopter that had come to my rescue.

However, we made it to the hospital safely—and quickly. Soon, I was able to contact Lockheed's flight test office at Edwards. The test team there had been notified initially about the loss of radio and radar contact, then told the aircraft had been lost. They also knew what our flight conditions had been at the time, and assumed no one could have survived. I explained what had happened, describing in fairly accurate detail the flight conditions prior to breakup.

The next day, our flight profile was duplicated on the SR-71 flight simulator at Beale AFB, Calif. The outcome was identical. Steps were immediately taken to prevent a recurrence of our accident. Testing at a CG aft of normal limits was discontinued, and trim-drag issues were subsequently resolved via aerodynamic means. The inlet control system was continuously improved and, with subsequent development of the Digital Automatic Flight and Inlet Control System, inlet unstarts became rare.

Investigation of our accident revealed that the nose section of the aircraft had broken off aft of the rear cockpit and crashed about 10 mi from the main wreckage. Parts were scattered over an area approximately 15 miles long and 10 miles wide. Extremely high air loads and g-forces, both positive and negative, had literally ripped Jim and me from the airplane. Unbelievably good luck is the only explanation for my escaping relatively unscathed from that disintegrating aircraft.

Two weeks after the accident, I was back in an SR-71, flying the first sortie on a brand-new bird at Lockheed's Palmdale, Calif., assembly and test facility. It was my first flight since the accident, so a flight test engineer in the back seat was probably a little apprehensive about my state of mind and confidence.

As we roared down the runway and lifted off, I heard an anxious voice over the intercom.

"Bill! Bill! Are you there?"

"Yeah, George. What's the matter?"

"Thank God! I thought you might have left."

The rear cockpit of the SR-71 has no forward visibility—only a small window on each side—and George couldn't see me. A big red light on the master-warning panel in the rear cockpit had illuminated just as we rotated, stating: "Pilot Ejected." Fortunately, the cause was a misadjusted micro switch, not my departure.

(Bill Weaver flight-tested all models of the Mach-2 F-104 Starfighter and the entire family of Mach 3+ Blackbirds—the A-12, YF-12 and SR-71. He subsequently was assigned to Lockheed's L-1011 project as an engineering test pilot, and became the company's chief pilot. He later retired as Division Manager of Commercial Flying Operations. He still flies Orbital Sciences Corp.'s L-1011, which has been modified to carry the Pegasus satellite-launch vehicle. And as an FAA Designated Engineering Representative Flight Test Pilot, he's also involved in various aircraft-modification projects, conducting certification flight tests.)

20120819-18

23:59 SteveB

Photo: Río Piraí at Flood, Porongo, Bolivia

<http://www.geolocation.ws/v/W/File:R%C3%ADo%20Pira%C3%AD%20-%20Santa%20Cruz%20-%20Bolivia.jpg/-/en>



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

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