



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #212 — AUG. 27, 2012

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Titanic Tax Rip-Off of Middle Class America

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Aug. 27, 2012)

Thank you, Mitt. It all becomes clearer now. I think Mitt R0mney may end-up doing more damage to the tax rip-offs of the super-rich than anything ever has. At least, I hope so! For the good of our nation, we should all hope so...all except the super-rich like R0mney and the R0mney wannabe, of course... And these thieves of \$trillions in taxes claim to be concerned about the deficit? LOL!

"\$Trillions Stashed in Tax Havens" by Stephen Lendman, OpEdNews

Aug. 25, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/Trillions-Stashed-in-Tax-H-by-Stephen-Lendman-120825-86.html>)



(Stolen wealth hidden tax free.)

A new Tax Justice Network (TJN) USA report reveals an estimated \$21 to \$32 trillion of hidden and stolen wealth stashed largely tax-free secretly.

Titled "The Price of Offshore Revisited", it explains what financial insiders know but won't discuss. Many of them have their own hidden wealth. (http://tjn-usa.org/storage/documents/Price_of_Offshore_Revisited_72612.docx)

TJN describes a "subterranean" systemic "economic equivalent of an astrophysical black hole." The higher estimate above exceeds US GDP twofold.

It's mind-boggling. It's hard imagining a tiny percent of privileged elites control this much wealth secretly. It's worse knowing it's largely tax free. It's appalling that governments let them get away with it.

Wall Street and other major banks manage it. Their business is fraud and grand theft. Private banking operations yield huge profits. Keeping funds secreted tax free attracts rich clients. Private capital globally is attracted. It's welcome from anyone, "no questions asked."

Government policies protect them. Societal costs are huge. Tax justice is absent. Hotel magnate Leona Helmsley once said only little people pay taxes. TJN's report bears her out.

A vast "global offshore industry" is explained. It's largely tax-free. It's controlled by the world's richest, most powerful elites. Estimating amounts secreted takes tedious data mining.

Previous estimates relied more on rough judgments. TJN used several methods. They include available data sources, estimation methods, and core assumptions. They're open to peer review and public scrutiny.

Four key approaches were used:

1. A "sources-and-uses" country-by-country model.
2. An "accumulated offshore wealth" model.
3. An "offshore investor portfolio" model.
4. Best-guess estimates of offshore assets held by the world's top 50 private banks.

Familiar Wall Street, European, and other global financial institutions comprise them.

Current data gotten from global central banks, the World Bank, IMF, UN, and national accounts were used. Other evidence includes:

1. "Transfer mispricing" data.
2. Demand for cross-border liquid "mattress money" data.
3. Current research data on the offshore private banking market's size.

TJN believes its work comprises the "most rigorous and comprehensive" data ever produced. It challenges anyone to contest it.

In overall size through 2010, it estimates hidden global wealth at from \$21 - \$32 trillion. It's invested "virtually tax-free" through a still-expanding black hole of more than 80 secret jurisdictions. It calls estimates conservative.

Developed countries don't face debt problems. They've got huge offshore tax evasion ones. Repatriation would reduce debt substantially. Doing so would bring it well within tolerable levels.

Only financial wealth is included. Much else isn't measured. It includes real estate, yachts, racehorses, gold, art, and other categories not easily quantified.

The offshore economy alone has an enormous negative impact on the domestic tax bases of affected countries. They've had significant private capital outflows for years, decades or longer.

TJN focused on 139 countries. They're mainly "low-middle income" ones. The World Bank and IMF maintain data on them.

Since the 1970s, private bankers let rich elites accumulate trillions in hidden wealth. At the same time, these nations experienced structural adjustment harshness.

They became debt-entrapped. Some borrowed themselves into insolvency. They sold off public assets at fire sale prices. They impoverished their people. They colluded with big money interests at their expense.

Through 2010, they accumulated over \$4 trillion in debt. Minus foreign reserves invested in First World securities, it's \$2.8 trillion. Including hidden wealth, they're net lenders.

Key is that assets of these countries are held by wealthy elites. Ordinary people bear the burden of debts.

In the 1980s, an unnamed Fed official said:

The problem is not that these countries don't have any assets. The problem is they're all in Miami and other global cities. They're home to private financial institutions.

Hidden offshore wealth correlates positively with loan amounts to indebted countries. Large amounts of borrowed capital were secreted lawlessly in global tax havens.

Local elites continue "vot(ing) with financial feet." At the same time, their public sectors borrow heavily and ordinary people go begging.

Although First World countries borrow most, they and elites in them remain global financiers.

Wealth is concentrated in select private hands "in a handful of source countries." Many are regarded as debtors.

Through 2010, 50 top private banks managed over \$12 trillion in cross-border assets from individual clients, trusts and foundations.

Smaller banks, investment firms, insurers, and non-bank intermediaries like hedge funds and independent money managers handle additional amounts up to an overall \$32 trillion estimate.

TJN calls these enablers part of a global "tax injustice system." Complicit governments let them operate at the expense of their own people.

Since the late 1970s, investigative journalists, tax authorities, drug enforcement officials, terrorist trackers, national security experts, and others became aware about vast amounts of money stashed in "offshore" tax havens.

Private banking "professional enablers" manage it. They make fortunes doing it. The term "offshore" refers less to physical locations than virtual ones anywhere. They're often "networks of legal and quasi-legal entities and arrangements." They operate in the interests of money managers.

Physical locations can be anywhere. Legal structures typically are assets owned by anonymous offshore companies in one jurisdiction. Trusts are in another. Trustees are in multiple places globally.

Clients are rich elites, companies, and criminals. They include real estate speculators, technology tycoons, oil sheiks, underworld millionaires, heads of state, despots, and drug lords, among others. Their common needs include:

1. Anonymity and confidentiality.

2. Minimizing or avoiding taxes.
3. Skilled money management.
4. Ability to access and manage their wealth anywhere.
5. Secure places to reside, visit, or hide.
6. Assured financial security no matter what's happening in the real world.

Skilled professionals provide these services globally. Money management happens in a virtual world. They live under one set of rules. Another exists for all others. It's gone on for decades. Global banks thrive on it. It's one of their most profitable operations.

Physical locations operate from Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Nauru, St. Kitts, Antigua, Tortola, Switzerland, the Channel Islands, Monaco, Cyprus, Gibraltar, Liechtenstein, and elsewhere.

Over 3.5 million paper companies, thousands of shell banks and insurers, more than half the world's registered commercial ships above 100 tons, and tens of thousands of shell subsidiaries of giant global banks, accounting firms, and various other companies operate there.

Nonetheless, conventional havens are misleading. Despite their vast financial infrastructure, most super-rich elites want more security. They also need easy access to First World capital markets, competent attorneys and accountants, independent judiciaries, and laws protecting them.

Professional "enablers" provide all needed services. Managing vast wealth is complex. Many skills are required. They include financial, economic, legal, accounting, and insurance. Super-rich elites demand and get the best.

Haven locations offer more than tax avoidance. Almost anything goes on. It includes fraud, bribery, illegal gambling, money laundering, human and sex trafficking, arms dealing, toxic waste dumping, conflict diamonds and endangered species trafficking, bootlegged software, and endless other lawless practices.

It's impossible to estimate total lawful and illegal wealth from all sources. It's vastly more than estimates within the parameters of TJN's study. Credit Suisse tried.

Through mid-2011, it puts total financial and non-financial global wealth at \$231 trillion. It's a best guess. It's tenfold TJN's top figure. It's mind-boggling. It's roughly 3.5 times global GDP. In 2011, it was about \$65 trillion.

Imagine the good a small percent of global wealth could do for billions of disadvantaged people. Imagine its ability to stabilize and recapitalize troubled countries. Imagine a world where everyone shares its wealth. Imagine one worth living in.

Global wealth represents low-hanging fruit out of reach. Instead of everyone benefitting, few do at the expense of all others. Injustice that great begs for transformational change. From the bottom up is the only way possible. Shedding light on what's dark is a good way to start.

(Stephen Lendman lives in Chicago. His new book is titled *How Wall Street Fleeces America: Privatized Banking, Government Collusion and Class War*, <http://www.claritypress.com/Lendman.html>)

(I was born in 1934, am a retired, progressive small businessman concerned about all the major national and world issues, committed to speak out and write about them.)

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"How Romney's \$Millions Went Tax-Free Overseas" by Joe Conason, *The National Memo*

Aug. 25, 2012, (<http://www.nationalmemo.com/foreign-affairs-how-romneys-millions-went-tax-free-overseas/>)

On the same day that Mitt Romney cracked his birther "joke," new evidence indicated that he and his partners at Bain Capital have used questionable methods to avoid federal taxes – including a scheme that transforms corporate stock into untaxed offshore "derivatives," and a practice that converts management fees into capital gains, which are taxed at a far lower rate.

While nobody has asked to see the Republican candidate's birth certificate, as he said at a Michigan rally on Friday, everybody has a renewed interest in examining the tax returns he continues to withhold.

The complex and tricky tax shelters used by Bain Capital continued to emerge from as lawyers and other experts examined the hundreds of pages of previously confidential company documents uncovered by the Gawker website in an exclusive series this week. The authenticity of the documents was confirmed by a Bain spokesperson, who said that the company deplores the public posting of its proprietary materials.

In a sense, the latest revelations about how Bain protected its vast income from taxation are scarcely surprising to anyone familiar with the world of private equity where Romney made his fortune, estimated at \$250 million or more. Avoiding taxes is among the most important attractions of that industry for the wealthy clients it aims to attract.

But several experts who have looked over the new Bain documents have warned that dubious legal tactics may have been employed by some of the company's investment vehicles, including several that are listed on the partial returns that Romney has already released. Those experts, such as Victor Fleischer, a law professor at the University of Colorado, and Daniel Shaviro, who teaches tax law at New York University's law school, have raised questions about both the equity "swap" and fee conversion maneuvers.

Companies like Bain make money both from investment income, which is taxed at the lower capital gains rate, and from management fees, which are taxed as ordinary income like wages. If the firm can somehow transform its management fees into capital investments, then it can avoid the 35 percent top federal income tax rate, and pay the 15 percent capital gains rate instead. That is what Bain evidently does to keep its partners' taxes low – around the 13 percent rate that Romney admits to paying. But critics like Fleischer say this is an abusive tactic that cannot be justified by law, even though the IRS has never attempted to stop companies that use it.

"Unlike carried interest, which is unseemly but perfectly legal, Bain's management fee conversions are not legal," the Colorado professor wrote on his blog. "If challenged in court, Bain would lose. The Bain partners, in my opinion, misreported their income if they reported these converted fees as capital gain instead of ordinary income."

Equally troubling is the use of offshore accounts to avoid taxation on stock holdings. This tactic is called a "total return equity swap," because it involves swapping real equities for derivative paper investments that provide all the same dividends as the stock itself – but aren't subject to federal taxes. According to Shaviro, this practice was sufficiently blatant to elicit a warning from the IRS two years ago. He wrote recently that those who used it over the past decade "were coming perilously close to committing tax fraud, in cases where the economic equivalence to direct [stock] ownership was too great."

In the complex territory of tax law, precise boundaries aren't always clear. What makes the "total return equity swap" potentially perilous for Romney, however, is the use of foreign accounts to avoid taxes, which is what many Americans suspect him of doing. Despite the accounts that he has maintained in Switzerland, the Cayman Islands, Luxembourg, Bermuda and other tax havens, Romney's campaign has repeatedly denied, with little credibility, that his wealth was invested abroad to evade taxes.

The proof may well lie within the tax returns that he is so determined to conceal. Wisecracks about the president's alleged foreign birthplace may not distract concerned voters from the overseas accounts where Romney's money has been hidden.

20120826-02	06:03	SteveB	"Mitt Romney Reaped Huge Tax Benefits Based on 'Active' Role at Bain Capital"
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"Mitt Romney Reaped Huge Tax Benefits Based on 'Active' Role at Bain Capital" by Zach Carter, Ryan Grim, and Jason Cherkis

Aug. 26, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/26/romney-bain-taxes_n_1828816.html)

(WASHINGTON) Mitt Romney has repeatedly insisted during the presidential campaign that layoffs and other controversy surrounding Bain Capital companies for the past decade are not his responsibility, because he retired in 1999. When tax experts charged that he benefited from legally dubious tax avoidance strategies employed by Bain, his campaign noted that the investments are kept in a blind trust completely out of his control.

"As we have said many times before, Governor and Mrs. Romney's assets are managed on a blind basis. They do not control the investment of these assets. The investment decisions are made by a trustee," spokeswoman Michele Davis said.

But according to his 2010 tax return, when the Internal Revenue Service comes calling in April, Romney has a different answer: The presumptive GOP nominee reaps lucrative tax breaks for "active" participation in the private equity firm he founded, as well as a host of other investments.

As David Kautter, a tax expert at American University, explains, the concept of active investment has different meanings for the IRS and for regular people. "When you say you're actively involved in all these businesses, people do think, OK, you're actively involved. But the tax law has its own definition," he said.

The IRS advises that "[f]actors that indicate active participation include making decisions involving the operation or management of the activity, performing services for the activity, and hiring and discharging employees. Factors that indicate a lack of active participation include lack of control in managing and operating the activity, having authority only to discharge the manager of the activity, and having a manager of the activity who is an independent contractor rather than an employee."

Even if Romney could persuade the IRS his involvement was legitimately active, that still leaves him in a rhetorical jam: For tax purposes, he claims an active status; for political purposes, he claims to have zero to do with the investments.

The distinction is valuable, for the IRS treats passive and active income and losses differently. If a passive investment loses money, the taxpayer can only write off that loss if passive gains have also been made. But active losses can be written off at a 35 percent rate and deducted from the taxpayer's ordinary income. In other words, a

taxpayer wants active losses, not passive losses. So by describing many of his investments as active, Romney saves himself millions of dollars in taxes.

With those active investments, he is also securing a tax break few Americans enjoy: When he wins, he's paying a 15 percent rate on the gain. When he loses, he's writing it off at 35 percent, meaning that tax policy is subsidizing Romney's risk in his Bain investments.

In other words, Romney didn't build that, at least not without taxpayer backing.

Federal rules allow many of these tax loopholes. But under the technical terms of the retirement package that Romney negotiated for himself, he has borne a lighter tax load than most other retired financial professionals. And the unusually large scope of his deductions and the generous rate at which they are recognized have some tax experts questioning their validity.

Romney's 2010 tax return lists \$301,630 in "trade or business interest" deductions and \$503,737 in "trade or business expense" deductions -- all of it described as expenses from his business partnerships, including Bain. Specifically from his various Bain-related activities, Romney scored a total of \$547,525 in such deductions.

These kinds of deductions are only available to "active" participants in business partnerships. While Romney filed as an active participant for tax purposes, there is no evidence that he took part in Bain management decisions in 2010, and he has denied doing so.

The sophistication with which Romney used Bain's later efforts to boost his own income could serve as fodder for political campaign advertisements. Since Romney has been willing to profit from Bain's later activity, the Obama campaign may well argue that such practices are fair game for attack ads. Some Democrats are already on the attack.

"Governor Romney appears to be saying one thing to the American people and one thing to the Internal Revenue Service," Rep. Brad Miller (D-N.C.) said to The Huffington Post. "Right now we are just seeing inconsistent statements. The American people are entitled to know more than that. If there's a legalistic distinction, we are entitled to know what that is. ... Has he played too close to the line or over the line?"

It is also possible that these deductions are all legitimate expenses for Bain and the handful of Goldman Sachs subsidiaries in which Romney is a partner. But listing personal expenses as business expenses is not allowed.

In addition, some tax experts are surprised by the size of the deductions he takes as business expenses and the aggressive nature of the deductions.

"One question is just the amount of the expenses," said Rebecca Wilkins, senior tax policy counsel at Citizens for Tax Justice. "At half a million dollars, you have to wonder what all of that is."

Romney's income can basically be divided into two parts. His "ordinary" income triggers the top 35 percent tax rate to which America's wealthiest earners are subject. But most of his income comes in the form of capital gains, which are taxed at only 15 percent. According to the *Washington Post*, 50 percent of all capital gains in the United States flow to the top 0.1 percent of taxpayers.

These two different tax rates present a tempting opportunity: By applying deductions to the pool of money taxed at 35 percent, rather than the pool of money taxed at 15 percent, Romney can reduce his overall tax bill. The \$805,367 in deductions from his partnerships all receive exactly this useful treatment -- which may or may not be appropriate, depending on the nature of the expenses incurred.

"What's problematic is that these expenses are being deducted at the ordinary income tax rate of 35 percent, while the related income is mostly subject to the preferential long-term capital gain tax rate of 15 percent," Wilkins said.

Whether these expenses rightly apply to the pool of money taxed at 35 percent can only be determined by accessing the tax returns of Romney's Bain partnerships, which are not public documents. But many investment partnerships recognize stock losses that could not receive this favorable treatment.

In the years after Romney insists that he ended any active role at the firm, Bain Capital companies suffered huge job losses, plant closures and bankruptcies. KB Toys may be the saddest example. The New York Times has reported that after Bain bought the toy company in 2000, KB Toys filed for bankruptcy, laying off more than 3,000 workers. Bain's aggressive financial maneuvering, however, scored a 370 percent return on its investment.

Romney's own testimony and Securities and Exchange Commission filings demonstrate that he might not have been as hands off decision-making during those later years as he's suggested. Either way, his sophisticated tax practices show that he continued to benefit not only from Bain's profits but, at least in his tax bill, from Bain's losses.

[20120824-01](#) 07:06 MarthaH "Press Coverage of the Character of the Candidates is Highly Negative, and Neither Obama nor Romney Has an Edge"

"Press Coverage of the Character of the Candidates is Highly Negative, and Neither Obama nor Romney Has an Edge" by Journalism.org / Pew Research Center

Aug. 23, 2012, (http://www.journalism.org/analysis_report/2012_campaign_character_narratives)

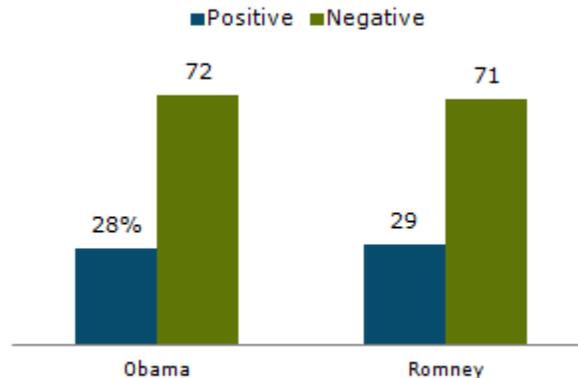
On the eve of the conventions, the portrayal in the news media of the character and records of the two presidential contenders in 2012 has been as negative as any campaign in recent times, and neither candidate has enjoyed an advantage over the other, according to a new study of mainstream media coverage of the race for president.

More of what the public hears about candidates also now comes from the campaigns themselves and less from journalists acting as independent reporters or interpreters of who the candidates are.

An examination of the dominant or master narratives in the press about the character and record of presidential contenders finds that 72% of this coverage has been negative for Barack Obama and 71% has been negative for Mitt Romney. The study, conducted by the Pew Research Center's Project for Excellence in Journalism, examined the personal portrayal of the candidate in 50 major news outlets over a 10-week period.

Both Candidate Narratives are Negative

Percentage of personal assertions per candidate



Date Range: May 29-Aug. 5, 2012

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

These numbers make this as negative a campaign as PEJ has seen since it began monitoring the master narratives about candidates in press coverage in presidential campaigns in 2000. Only one campaign has been comparable- 2004 when coverage was filled with the controversy over the war in Iraq, the prison scandal at Abu Ghraib and the

Swift Boat documentaries. That year, 70% of the personal narrative studied about Democrat John Kerry and 75% of that about incumbent George Bush was negative, numbers similar to now.

Journalists themselves now play a smaller role in shaping these media narratives than they once did. Journalists are the source for about half as much of the statements about the candidates as was the case 12 years ago. The campaigns, by contrast, have come to play an ever larger role in shaping these narratives. The candidates and their partisan allies are the source for nearly a third more of the personal narrative about the candidates than in 2000.

On the eve of the nominating conventions, the discussion of President Obama in major mainstream news outlets is dominated by two narratives assessing his economic record—that his policies have failed to help the economy and that things would be much worse without his actions. Together these two narratives make up half of all the statements about Obama's record and character—and the negative side of the argument outweighs the positive in the coverage by more than two to one.

The next biggest personal narrative about Obama in the mainstream news media is one that raises doubts about whether the president really believes in American capitalism and ideas of individualism.

On the Republican side, the No. 1 personal narrative about Romney is that his experience in private equity suggests he is a "vulture" capitalist who doesn't care about workers, followed closely by the idea that he is an elitist out of touch with average Americans. The third-biggest personal narrative in the media about Romney is that he is a gaffe-prone, awkward campaigner.

Only some of these narratives, however, seem to be sticking with voters—at least so far. While much of the press narrative has suggested Obama has the wrong approach to fixing the economy, voters are split on whether to associate that notion with Obama or Romney. They are also divided on which candidate believes in American values (though Obama's ideals are questioned more often in the press). The two personal narrative themes that appear to be breaking through to voters are Romney's elitism and his awkwardness on the stump.

These are among the conclusions of a study that examined 1,772 assertions contained in more than 800 stories from major news outlets in radio, cable, network broadcast television, newspaper front pages and the most popular news websites in the country. The study of news coverage was twinned with a survey of public attitudes about the candidates by the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press.

In all, five of the six most prevalent master narratives in the press about Obama's character and biography were negative. And five of the six most prevalent themes about Romney were negative as well.

It is hard to know whether the findings reflect the highly polarized atmosphere of politics in 2012, changes in the ideology of the two parties, changes in the culture of the news media, or some combination of all these phenomena enabling and reinforcing one another. One conclusion, however, is unavoidable: Journalists to an increasing degree are ceding control of what the public learns in elections to partisan voices. Less of what we are hearing is coming from the press as an independent intermediary, filtering or assessing political rhetoric. And to that degree, the press is acting more as an enabler or conduit and less as an autonomous reportorial source.

Among the findings of the study:

- Obama's economic record dwarfs all other character issues in the campaign. Fully 36% of the master narrative themes about Obama in the press suggested that the president had failed to do enough to help the economy. That was more than twice the percentage of the counter argument—that the economy would be weaker had it not been for the administration's actions—which made up 16% of the assertions about Obama.
- The media narrative about Romney is more diffuse, but includes a number of sizable negative themes—more than for Obama. The largest—that he is a callous "vulture" capitalist—made up 14% of the assertions about Romney. The idea that he was a rich elitist was almost as large (13%). The idea that he was a weak, gaffe-prone campaigner was also substantial (11%). So was the idea that his policies would hurt the economy (10%).

- Journalists are a shrinking source in shaping the candidate narratives, while campaigns and partisans have assumed a much larger role in defining the press discourse. Reporters (and talk show personalities) account for about half as many of the assertions about the candidates' character and biography as they did 12 years ago-27% versus 50% in 2000. At the same time, campaigns, their surrogates and allies now account for nearly half of these themes, 48%, up from 37% in 2000. That shift, giving partisans a bigger role in shaping the media narrative, has been gradual and may reflect in part the shrinking reportorial resources in newsrooms.
- Campaigns have an even bigger voice in shaping the narrative online. On the 12 most prominent news websites in the country, campaigns and surrogates are behind 58% of statements studied about the record and character of the candidates-the highest of any medium. Outside experts have the smallest presence in the coverage online, making up just 2% of statements (versus 10% generally). The top political stories online tend to be breaking news, and this orientation may account for the larger role that partisans play here in shaping the narrative. Candidates and their allies put a premium on rapid response to ensure that their messaging is available in the early accounts of any news.
- What is not being projected in the coverage is also striking-namely the positive arguments that the candidates want to convey. Just 3% of assertions about Obama, for instance, contain the idea that he cares about regular Americans-which PEJ has found is a major theme in his advertising and his digital messaging. For Romney, in turn, there were more assertions refuting one of his central campaign themes-that he has the experience to fix the economy (10%)-than there were affirming the idea (8%).
- Voter perceptions vary from the media narrative. When we surveyed these personal themes with voters, the strongest impression was that 52% thought Obama was a person of good moral character-though it represented just 1% of the coverage about him and 10% of his coverage suggested the opposite. The theme about Romney that resonated most with voters was that he was prone to gaffes. Nearly half of voters, 47% associate him with that.
- In cable television, Fox and MSNBC's coverage of the candidates' character themes are mirror images of each other. Fox has offered a mixed view of Romney, but its assessments of Obama's record and character have run negative by a ratio of six to one. The numbers are almost identical, in reverse, for MSNBC. Meanwhile, CNN has offered less about the campaign in general, but what it has, to a greater degree than its cable rivals, resembles what audiences would find in the rest of the media.

Candidate Narratives Mostly Negative

*Percentage of personal assertions
2000-2012*

	Positive	Negative
Mitt Romney	29%	71%
Barack Obama	28	72
John McCain	43	57
Barack Obama	69	31
George W. Bush	25	75
John Kerry	30	70
George W. Bush	48	52
Al Gore	20	80

PEW RESEARCH CENTER'S PROJECT
FOR EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

In the four election cycles for which PEJ has conducted these studies, only two candidates have seen portrayals as negative as both Romney and Obama are seeing this year. One was Vice President Albert Gore Jr. in 2000. That year, fully 80% of the reporting of the major narrative themes about Gore portrayed negative messages about him.

The largest was that he was tainted by the scandals of Bill Clinton and the second was that he was prone to lying. The other was George W. Bush in 2004, when 75% of the personal narrative studied was negative, led by the idea that he was arrogant followed by the idea that he lacked credibility.

The negative portrayal of Obama and Romney in the press also finds some correlation in the way that the public views the candidates this year. Data from the Pew Research Center for the People & the Press and Gallup find that both of these candidates are viewed less favorably by the public-50% for Obama and 37% for Romney-than any Democratic or Republican nominees have been since 1992.

Four years ago at this point, both Obama and the Republican candidate, Senator John McCain, had favorability ratings in the low 60s. The last candidate to have a favorability rating comparable to either candidate this year was George W. Bush in 2004, at 51%, numbers similar to Obama's this year. The portrayal in the press about the candidates was also similar.

What cannot be determined is cause and effect. To what extent is the media portrayal of the candidates helping make the public view of the candidates this year more negative? Or are negative public perceptions driving the press coverage?

The study is not an analysis of media bias; rather, as it has for four campaign cycles, PEJ is examining what the public is hearing and reading from all sources in the mainstream media-from the campaigns, journalists, outside analysts and others.

PEJ began to produce this series of studies analyzing the coverage of the candidates' character and record to probe two major ideas about press coverage of presidential elections. One is that for all the reporting about tactics and strategy, campaign performance (the horse race), or even policy, in the end, character is central to how voters will choose. These studies are a way to isolate those messages about character and record and examine them in detail.

The second purpose is to test the theory that the election reporting is heavily influenced by a handful of master narratives, or what some scholars have called "meta-narratives," about the candidates. While every campaign is an ongoing story, the theory argues that journalists' choice of facts and incidents is influenced by certain perceived character traits or themes about the candidates. And one concern about these master narratives is that they become self-perpetuating. Facts and anecdotes that illustrate ongoing storylines become magnified, critics worry, and events that do not fit with those running storylines get overlooked.

Over the years these studies have tested the meta-narrative theory, explored how widespread certain narratives are about different candidates, how those themes have ebbed and flowed over the course of races, and examined the success of candidates in refuting negative assertions about themselves or projecting positive ones.

In 2000, for instance, we found that the idea that George Bush was unintelligent was a major theme, though it had largely disappeared in 2004, replaced by the idea that he was arrogant. The idea that Al Gore was a liar stood out as a major theme in coverage in 2000, to the point that there were moments when the press misquoted him because they thought he had begun to exaggerate again. In 2008, the idea that John McCain was not a true conservative dominated coverage about him, whereas for Obama it was that he offered the promise of a new kind of politics, a theme that is now largely absent in 2012.

To execute the studies, researchers draw up a list of character themes that they have seen in the coverage, creating an equal number of positive and negative themes. They then test a sample of stories to refine the list, add new themes and drop others, to identify which themes are indeed most common or obvious themes that campaigns are trying to project that are absent. Then a larger sample of reporting is examined to measure the presence of these themes across a broader swath of coverage.

[20120824-02](#)

07:24

MarthaH

"Who Are the Kochs & How Far Does Their Influence Reach?" & "Koch Brothers' Non-Profit Hits the Ground in Swing States"

Kochs, 2 articles to inform!

"Who Are the Kochs and How Far Does Their Influence Reach?" by Fredreka Schouten, *USA Today*

Aug. 23, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/story/2012-08-23/koch-brothers-profile/57255068/1?csp=34news>)

(WASHINGTON) Charles and David Koch each have nearly 10 times the money amassed by TV superstar Oprah Winfrey, but none of her fame.

This election could change that — as the conservative mega-donors ramp up their political activity, and liberal groups set out to target them as greedy oil billionaires, seeking to influence the election to help their bottom line.

The brothers, who have a combined net worth that Forbes pegs at \$50 billion, control Kansas-based Koch Industries. It operates oil refineries, makes chemicals and asphalt, controls pipelines and owns a wide range of consumer products, including Stainmaster carpet and Angel Soft toilet paper.

Charles Koch, 76, serves as chairman and CEO of the company, an outgrowth of an oil-refining business begun by their father, Fred Koch. David Koch, 72, is executive vice president.

"My joke is that we're the biggest company you've never heard of," David Koch said in a 2008 interview with Portfolio.com.

David Koch, a prostate cancer survivor, has emerged as a leading arts- and cancer-research philanthropist in New York, where he lives. In 2008, he grabbed headlines with a \$100 million donation to Lincoln Center for the renovation of the State Theater of New York, which now bears his name. This year, he donated \$35 million for a new dinosaur hall at the Smithsonian's Museum of Natural History. In all, he has pledged or contributed \$750 million to charity.

In Washington, however, the brothers are best known for their growing influence in politics as they inject millions into an array of conservative groups, including Americans for Prosperity.

"They believe that economic freedom is essential for improving society as a whole," Robert Tappan, a Koch Industries spokesman, said in an e-mail.

In Congress, Republicans on the House Energy and Commerce Committee have been the top recipients of Koch-related contributions for the past two election cycles, data compiled by the non-profit Center for Responsive Politics show.

The company spent \$20 million in federal lobbying in 2008, up from \$610,000 five years earlier — as lawmakers worked on a proposal to slash greenhouse-gas emissions. In 2008 Senate filings, company officials said they would lobby to "oppose restraints on production and use of energy" in the measure. The bill never became law.

Two years later, a Koch subsidiary, Flint Hills Resources, spent \$1 million to support an unsuccessful ballot initiative to suspend a California law, mandating significant reductions in greenhouse-gas emissions in the state.

In the first six months of this year, the company has spent \$5.4 million to influence Washington policy, ranking among the top five oil companies in lobbying expenses, according to the non-profit Center for Responsive Politics. The company has sought to shape nearly five dozen bills, including one pushed by Democrats to repeal oil-industry subsidies.

"They are trying to influence the election to maintain taxpayer subsidies for their oil companies," Obama campaign spokesman Ben LaBolt said last week. "Ultimately, the American people will reject their arguments once their motives are clear."

Tappan denies that. The company has "consistently opposed subsidies over the years, even if it benefits us," he said.

Obama's allies "have attacked Charles Koch and David Koch, who are private citizens, because of their exercise of their constitutional right to speak out about issues of public policy," Tappan said. "These attacks confuse honest disagreement over policies with the politics of personal destruction. This is troubling and should be very concerning to all Americans."

The battle over the Kochs' role in politics will grow only more intense in the weeks ahead.

This week, a liberal non-profit, Patriot Majority, launched what it said will be a multimillion-dollar campaign targeting the Kochs over what the group called the brothers' "greed agenda."

The first phase was a \$500,000 cable television ad buy that charges the Kochs and their "special-interest friends" will spend \$400 million to "buy this year's elections and advance their agenda."

Another Koch official, Phillip Ellender, issued a statement calling the ads an "attempt to shut down free speech."

Foster Friess, a multimillionaire Wyoming investor and Republican donor who has grown to know both Kochs in recent years, said he tires of portrayals of them as the dark villains of the conservative movement.

"They are nice, decent people," told *USA Today* recently. "They are absolutely national treasures and have a huge respect for what makes this country great — free enterprise."

Friess, who donated more than \$2 million in this election cycle to a super PAC aiding Rick Santorum's presidential campaign, said he is among Americans for Prosperity's donors, but declined to say how much he has given.

"I probably want to keep that private," he said. "But it was a meaningful amount for me."

"Koch Brothers' Non-Profit Hits the Ground in Swing States" by Fredreka Schouten, *USA Today*

Aug. 23, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/news/politics/story/2012-08-23/koch-brothers-election-north-carolina/57254832/1>)

(GARNER, NC) Clutching Samsung tablets filled with interactive maps, eight conservative activists gathered in a Food Lion parking lot here on a sweltering summer afternoon to get their marching orders.

Knock on doors in this Raleigh suburb and identify residents opposed to President Obama's health care law and his stewardship of the economy — all part of an ambitious voter-outreach campaign by Americans for Prosperity, a non-profit backed by billionaire brothers Charles and David Koch that is emerging as one of biggest outside forces of the 2012 election.

The Kochs, who own an oil, chemical and textile conglomerate that *Forbes* magazine pegs as the nation's second-largest private company, have become the country's leading figures of libertarian activism. The Koch duo (pronounced "coke") has injected millions into an array of foundations, think tanks and political groups to spread their small-government, anti-regulation philosophy, which their critics argue matches their economic interests.

Obama targeted them in the first TV ad of his re-election campaign as "secretive oil billionaires." And Hollywood has joined in: A new comedy, "The Campaign", features the fictional Motch brothers, business titans who try to rig the election to advance their corporate agenda.

"It's almost like Kochs have created an alternative to the Republican Party that pushes their brand of conservatism — an economy with less regulation and one in which the government intervenes far less than it does now," said Bill Allison of the non-partisan Sunlight Foundation, which tracks political money. "I don't think we've seen anything like this before, and a lot of it is under the radar."

Americans for Prosperity (AFP) has been at the forefront of the libertarian attacks on Obama, blistering him with \$25 million worth of commercials this month. The first round focused on the nation's rising debt and call for Obama's ouster. AFP officials stress, however, that their goal isn't to elect Democrats or Republicans but to educate voters on the candidates' positions and build a cadre of activists willing to hold elected officials accountable after Election Day.

The group is well on its way to amassing more than \$100 million this year, AFP President Tim Phillips said, but he notes that less than half of the money will be spent on ads. Instead, most of the activity will happen far from the spotlight as the group taps an army of 2.1 million activists to reach voters in swing states such as North Carolina, which Obama won by 14,177 votes in 2008 and where he will be renominated for the presidency next month at the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte.

AFP's goal: to reach about 8.5 million voters in more than a dozen battleground states. The group's ramped-up activity highlights the ways independent political groups of all stripes and political allegiances — often funded by a handful of wealthy donors — are racing to shape national policy. And it points to an aggressive expansion by Republican independent groups into voter-mobilization efforts that were once the province of candidates and the parties.

Know the voter

AFP's voter-canvassing is a precise operation — distilling information culled from a massive voter data warehouse, also created with the Kochs' financial backing. Conservatives say they took their cue from Democratic-aligned groups, who used a vast voter databank funded with help from billionaire financier George Soros to identify and turn out voters in 2004 and again in 2008.

The conservatives' data-gathering operation, called Themis for the Greek goddess of divine order, amasses information on millions of Americans and allows political strategists with AFP and other like-minded groups to pinpoint potential supporters and bombard them in person, via the phone and Internet with personalized messages.

"Our geo-targeting looks at everything from voting data to Census data to consumer-purchasing information," Phillips said. "We know their magazine subscriptions. In some cases, we know the websites they prefer to surf."

Launched in 2003, AFP and its sister organization, the Americans for Prosperity Foundation, have grown in size and influence, now employing 200 people in 31 states.

AFP helped organize some of the raucous protests at 2009 congressional town-hall-style meetings to oppose Obama's health care plan and rallied its supporters in recent years to oppose Democratic-backed legislation that would have created a cap-and-trade system to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. On that day in late June when the Supreme Court upheld the 2010 health care law as constitutional, the group immediately announced a \$9 million ad campaign in 12 presidential swing states to slam the law as one of the "largest tax increases in history."

Little is publicly known about the precise sources of its funding. Americans for Prosperity and its foundation reported combined revenue of nearly \$39.6 million in 2010, according to the groups' tax returns. David Koch is the foundation's president.

Americans for Prosperity is a non-profit "social welfare" organization that can take unlimited money, but does not have to publicly disclose the sources of its money. (That's in contrast to super PACs — committees that can raise and spend unlimited amounts, but must disclose contributors.)

Phillips declined to reveal funders, saying such disclosure would have a "chilling effect" on donors.

Tar Heel State opening

North Carolina — one of nine states won by President George W. Bush in 2004 that shifted to Obama four years later — is home to one of AFP's busiest state chapters with nearly 140,000 activists.

Obama, too, has a robust activist network in the state, where he became the first Democrat to carry North Carolina since Jimmy Carter's victory in 1976. His campaign has opened more than 40 offices here and installed hundreds of voter-registration boxes in barbershops and beauty salons.

But Obama's narrow win in 2008 came against a Republican ticket so cash-strapped that "it was virtually impossible for anyone here to get a McCain-Palin yard sign," said Dee Stewart, a GOP strategist in Raleigh.

The picture is markedly different this year. Republican presumptive nominee Mitt Romney and the Republican Party out-raised Obama and Democrats in July — the third month in a row — and Romney has opened 20 offices in the state. Further adding to Democrats' worries: Jobs figures released last week show unemployment in the state climbed to 9.6% in July, topping the 8.3% rate for the nation.

Dallas Woodhouse, AFP's North Carolina director, said he believes support for Obama has waned in the white, working-class suburbs that sided with him four years ago. "They are contending with high food prices, big gasoline bills," he said, "and their young adult children with college degrees are stuck at home with Mom, flipping burgers for a living."

Finding those who 'disapprove'

Back in Garner on a recent Tuesday evening, the small band of Americans for Prosperity volunteers takes to the streets to find some of those voters.

At one stop, George Hansen, 74, tells 30-year-old volunteer Amy Bryson that he's deeply worried about the economy. Hansen's adult daughter works at a pet store and struggles with her mortgage, but she can't find a better-paying job, he said. He voted for Obama but isn't sure whom he will support in November.

A few blocks away, volunteer Peter Morley, 69, reads his survey questions to Recia Long as she sits on her front porch, smoking a cigarette. Obama's economic policies have had no impact, she responds. How does she feel about the 2010 health care law? "Disapprove," the 63-year-old retiree answers.

With a few touches on the tablet's screen, Morley logs her responses. She's a likely target for follow-up communication.

Josette Chmeil, 44, relishes her role with AFP. The energetic ex-New Yorker who now runs her own business as a professional organizer in Durham, N.C., said she is appalled by what she views as government intrusion into personal matters.

"New York is now a nanny state that's governing the size of soft drink you can buy," she says, referring to Mayor Michael Bloomberg's drive to ban the sale of super-size sugary drinks. "It wasn't like that 20 years ago."

She's one of AFP's most active Raleigh-area volunteers, devoting as many as seven hours a week. During the canvassing, she strides quickly up concrete driveways despite 90-degree heat and swarming gnats. Most of her assigned residents decline to take the survey.

"It's not frustrating," she says later. "If I knock on 20 doors and have one person I can have a dialogue with and change their perception, that's success."

Koch affiliations

A sampling of the billionaire brothers' major grant recipients:

1. Koch Industries (divisions)
 - Flint Hills Resources
 - Koch Minerals
 - Koch Pipeline Co.

- Koch Supply & Trading
- Koch Chemical Technology Group
- INVISTA
 - Georgia-Pacific
 - The Matador Cattle Co.
- 2. David H. Koch Charitable Foundation (major grant recipients in 2010)
 - Ballet Theatre Foundation
 - City Center of Music & Drama
- 3. Charles G. Koch Charitable Foundation (major grant recipients in 2010)
 - Arts & Sciences Foundation
 - Bill of Rights Institute
 - Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
 - George Mason University Foundation
 - Institute for Humane Studies
 - Jack Miller Center
 - Market-Based Management Institute
- 4. Claude R. Lambe Charitable Foundation (major grant recipients in 2010)
 - American Council for Capital Formation
 - American Legislative Exchange Council
 - Americans for Prosperity Foundation
 - The Federalist Society
 - The Heritage Foundation
 - Independent Women's Forum
 - Manhattan Institute for Policy Research
 - Washington Legal Foundation
- 5. Americans for Prosperity
- 6. Cato Institute

Sources: Federal tax records, Koch Industries website, USA TODAY research

20120824-03	9:05	Pam	Re: "Texas Democrats: Judge Who Said Obama Could Trigger Civil War Should Quit" (reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #211)
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I love it too!! You, Martha, are so right--about everything. :-) I agree that education is vital, and the conservatives do too, which is why they try so hard to privatize education and control curriculum. The battle for the schools is really a battle for the minds of the young. Having taught at a university in the South, I can attest to the stubborn ignorance of many of our students. Evolution, naturally, is the biggie.

I'm sure folks despaired during the Civil War and the World Wars. What would the world be today if Hitler had prevailed? There are turning points in history, when a different direction was possible--the defeat of the Spanish Armada, the failure of the bomb to kill Hitler. I think we're at one now. I love Woody Allen's "Advice to the Graduates." It's worth looking up. :-)

(I'm dying to know if I'd recognize the name of the Greencastlite you describe.)

20120824-04	10:04	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Rape Is Rape! Censure Todd Akin!
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from CREDO Action:

Todd Akin — the Missouri Congressman who launched an outrageous attack on women by claiming survivors of "legitimate rape" have biological defenses against pregnancy — is refusing to step down despite calls for his resignation from prominent members of his own party.

Not only were his remarks ignorant, dangerous and offensive, they were also unbecoming of a member of Congress. That's why Congress must take action and censure him immediately — the most severe form of punishment in the House short of expulsion.

Tell members of Congress who voted to redefine rape: Censure Todd Akin.

Suggesting that women who become pregnant as a result of rape are not "legitimately raped," is outrageous and shows an utter lack of understanding of the basic principles of human biology.

And this is not simply an isolated comment by a dangerously ignorant politician, or the first time right-wing extremists in the House have tried to "redefine" rape — in 2011, 250 members of Congress joined Rep. Akin in a vote to redefine rape. The purpose of that bill was to limit the number of survivors of rape and incest who could receive federally funded abortion care under existing law by changing the definition of rape to "forcible rape." We fought back successfully then, and we need to do the same now.

With censure, we have an opportunity to get extremist and anti-woman members of Congress who have worked in the past to redefine rape, on the record once again. We need to know who stands with women and admits that, as the president declared, "Rape is rape."

Rep. Akin's utterly offensive remarks are part of a pattern of attacks led by Tea Party Republicans against women in this country. We have to push back, and we have to push back hard not just against Rep. Akin but against any member of the House who participates in rhetorical attacks on women by trying to redefine rape as "forcible" or "legitimate."

With many members of the House already going on record to denounce Rep. Akin's statement we have a unique opportunity to push legislators to go a step further and support a censure resolution.

We will not let Congress redefine rape. We will not let right-wing extremists continue their attacks on women's health. We must not let our momentum slow at this crucial moment. Click below to sign the petition:

http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/censure_akin/?utm_expid=16130742-0.

Thank you for standing up for women. —Becky Bond, Political Director



from Avaaz:

Facing 2 years in jail for singing a song criticizing President Putin in a church, a member of Pussy Riot gestured to the court and said in her show-trial's closing statements, "Despite the fact that we are physically here, we are freer than everyone sitting across from us ... We can say anything we want..."

Russia is steadily slipping into the grip of a new autocracy -- clamping down on public protest, allegedly rigging elections, intimidating media, banning gay rights parades for 100 years, and even beating critics like chess master Garry Kasparov. But many Russian citizens remain defiant, and Pussy Riot's eloquent bravery has galvanized the world's solidarity. Now, our best chance to prove to Putin there is a price to pay for this repression lies with Europe.

The European Parliament is calling for an assets freeze and travel ban on Putin's powerful inner circle who are accused of multiple crimes. Our community is spread across every corner of the world -- if we can push the Europeans to act, it will not only hit Putin's circle hard, as many bank and have homes in Europe, but also counter his anti-Western propaganda, showing him that the whole world is willing to stand up for a free Russia. Click below to support the sanctions and tell everyone.

Last week's trial is about far more than three women and their 40-second 'punk prayer'. When tens of thousands flooded the streets to protest rigged elections, the government threw organisers into jail for weeks. And in June Parliament effectively outlawed dissent by raising the fine for unsanctioned protest an astounding 150-fold, roughly the average Russian's salary for a whole year.

Pussy Riot may be the most famous Russian activists right now, but their sentence is not the grossest injustice of Putin's war on dissent. In 2009, anti-corruption lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who uncovered a massive tax fraud at the heart of Russia's power dealers, died in jail -- without a trial, on shaky charges, and with medical attention repeatedly denied. 60 of Russia's elite have been under scrutiny for the case and its cover-up, and the sanctions the European Parliament is proposing are on this inner circle.

International attention to Russia's crackdown is cresting right now, and the 'Magnitsky sanctions' are the best way to put the heat on Putin and help create breathing room for the suffocating democracy movement. Let's give Europe's leaders a global public mandate to adopt the sanctions. Sign the petition now and share this with everyone:

http://www.avaaz.org/en/free_pussy_riot_free_russia_a/.

What happens in Russia matters to us all. Russia has blocked international coordination on Syria and other urgent global issues, and a Russian autocracy threatens the world we all want, wherever we are. The Russian people face a serious challenge, but we know that people-powered movements are the best cure for corruption and iron-fisted governments -- and that international solidarity can help keep the flame of these movements alive. Let's join together now to show Putin that the world will hold him to account and push for change until Russia is set free.

With hope, Luis, David, Alice, Ricken, Lisa, Vilde, and the Avaaz team

More information:

Pussy Riot sentenced to 2 years in jail for stunt against Putin, <http://world.time.com/2012/08/17/protests-verdict-loom-for-russias-jailed-punks/>.

Russia faces angry response to jailing of Pussy Riot members (*Irish Times*), <http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/frontpage/2012/0818/1224322386243.html>.

Media Frenzy Over Pussy Riot Obscures Legal Plights Of Lesser-Known Protesters (Radio Free Europe), <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-antigovernment-protesters-jail-time-pussy-riot/24677862.html>.

Moscow election official: I helped rig Russia vote (NBC News), <http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/news/2011/12/06/9255664-moscow-election-official-i-helped-rig-russia-vote?lite>.

As US acts on Magnitsky, Europe debates (*The Moscow Times*), <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/as-us-acts-on-magnitsky-europe-debates/463107.html>.

20120824-05	10:32	SteveG	From the Right: Fw: WAKE UP, AMERICA!!!
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Received this today. How do you respond to this type of thinking?

[Source of original email unknown, but both batches of insane, rabid, lying complaints by Mr. Pritchett appear to be genuine, if misguided. -SteveB]

WAKE UP, AMERICA!!!

Hit the nail perfectly. Lou Pritchett Update. Read this and weep...

Lou Pritchett is one of corporate America's true living legends -- a former P & G executive, an acclaimed author, a dynamic teacher, and one of the world's most highly rated speakers. It was he who changed the way America does business by creating an audacious concept that came to be known as "Partnering".

Here is part of a speech given by Lou Pritchett, Apr. 15, 2012:

I was born in "year two" of the Great Depression (1931) and spent the first 10 years of my life influenced by the extreme hardships of the Depression. By today's standards my family was about a mile below today's so called 'poverty level'; but if you never 'had' -- doing without was not so 'bad'. Borrowing shoes to graduate from the 8th grade didn't seem at all demeaning because most of the 8th graders did the same thing.

In June 1944, my only brother, Joe, was killed in action on Utah Beach in Normandy, France during the D-Day landings. Exactly one year later, my father died and left me, my mother, and my sister to go it alone. And alone we went. My mother went to work at a department store, my sister dropped out of school and joined her and I went to work shining shoes on the streets of Memphis for a dime a shine. Government assistance was not available and if it were I am confident my mother would have refused it because she never wanted the government involved in our lives.

I mention this bit of personal history to help you understand that Millions of Americans, including your parents and grandparents, grew up like me during the Great Depression and never expected nor wanted the government to offer them anything other than an opportunity.... and now; to see what Obama is trying to do to our country tends to make you crazy.

As some of you know, my "Scare Me" letter went viral with millions of hits on the Internet during the past 3 years. I have now written a follow-up letter, which I will now share with you. It will be released to the press tomorrow morning:

In April 2009, I sent President Obama and the *New York Times* a Letter titled "You Scare Me" because, as a candidate, he promised to "fundamentally transform America." Now, after observing his performance for over three years, he no longer scares me--- he terrifies me for the following reasons:

1. He has done more to damage America's standing in the world, to lower the standard of living in America, to impoverish future generations and to shake our faith in the country's future than any other American president in history.

2. With a compliant Democrat congress, a lapdog media, and a weak, almost nonexistent Republican opposition; he has shattered the America's dream of job security, home ownership and rugged individualism for millions of Americans and has poisoned and divided our civil society with his politics of envy, class warfare, race warfare, and religious warfare which he is using as fundamental building blocks for his socialist agenda.

3. Culturally, he remains totally out of touch with traditional American values. This has absolutely nothing to do with race or where he was born, rather it has everything to do with where, how and with whom he was raised, schooled, educated, trained and associates with still today.

4. He has surrounded himself with naive academicians, lawyers, politicians, bureaucrats and socialist leaning czars who arrogantly think and behave exactly as he does. People who offer no balanced suggestions or devil's advocate positions.... think in lock step with him that big government is the answer to all our problems.

[These would be all the Bush people, perhaps? –SteveB]

5. He not only encourages but aids and abets the unionization of all American industry.... the albatross around the neck of the free market. In turn, they provide the money and muscle to intimidate his opponents.

[Fascist! –SteveB]

6. He has increased the national debt by over 30% in just Three years. If re-elected and this rate of increase continues, America will be burdened with an unsustainable 20 trillion dollar debt which will result in the Country's financial death. Recovery will be impossible ---- America will be the Greece of 2016.

7. Given his fanatical beholding to the environmental and man-caused global warming fringe, he has deliberately discouraged U.S. fossil fuel exploration and production while wasting millions of tax payer dollars on solar, wind and algae experiments. He refuses to accept that oil, gas and coal are

not America's enemies, they are America's assets which, properly managed, could make us energy independent within a generation.

8. He views the U.S. as a power in retreat which abused its World dominance. Therefore he systematically apologizes round the world. Last March he whispered to Russian President Medvedev "--this is my last election. After my election, I have more flexibility". Just what is the secret that Obama and Putin are concealing from the American people until after the election? With what other leaders has he made similar secret agreements?

9. Finally, after all his missteps, bad decision making, poor management, and zero leadership, the fact that he has the audacity to seek re-election should terrify every American.

I predict that if re-elected, future historians and political interpreters will look back at the eight year period 2008-2016, and conclude "the 44th President of the U.S. allowed the takers to overpower the payers which resulted in the greatest economy in history vanishing from the face of the Earth.

Farewell America, the World will really miss you!

Lou Pritchett April 15, 2012

Lou Pritchett's Open Letter to President Obama (May 14, 2009)

The author, Lou Pritchett, is a well-known public speaker who retired after a successful 36-year career as the VP World Sales for Proctor and Gamble.

Lou Pritchett is one of corporate America's true living legends - an acclaimed author, dynamic teacher and one of the world's highest rated speakers. Successful corporate executives everywhere recognize him as the foremost leader in change management. Lou changed the way America does business by creating an audacious concept that came to be known as "partnering." Pritchett rose from soap salesman to Vice-President, Sales and Customer Development for Procter and Gamble and over the course of 36 years, made corporate history.

AN OPEN LETTER TO PRESIDENT OBAMA

Dear President Obama:

You are the thirteenth President under whom I have lived and unlike any of the others, you truly scare me.

You scare me because after months of exposure, I know nothing about you.

You scare me because I do not know how you paid for your expensive Ivy League education and your upscale lifestyle and housing with no visible signs of support.

You scare me because you did not spend the formative years of youth growing up in America and culturally you are not an American.

You scare me because you have never run a company or met a payroll.

You scare me because you have never had military experience, thus don't understand it at its core.

You scare me because you lack humility and 'class', always blaming others.

You scare me because for over half your life you have aligned yourself with radical extremists who hate America and you refuse to publicly denounce these radicals who wish to see America fail.

You scare me because you are a cheerleader for the 'blame America' crowd and deliver this message abroad.

You scare me because you want to change America to a European style country where the government sector dominates instead of the private sector.

You scare me because you want to replace our health care system with a government controlled one.

You scare me because you prefer 'wind mills' to responsibly capitalizing on our own vast oil, coal and shale reserves.

You scare me because you want to kill the American capitalist goose that lays the golden egg which provides the highest standard of living in the world.

You scare me because you have begun to use 'extortion' tactics against certain banks and corporations.

You scare me because your own political party shrinks from challenging you on your wild and irresponsible spending proposals.

You scare me because you will not openly listen to or even consider opposing points of view from intelligent people.

You scare me because you falsely believe that you are both omnipotent and omniscient.

You scare me because the media gives you a free pass on everything you do.

You scare me because you demonize and want to silence the Limbaughs, Hannitys, O'Relllys and Becks who offer opposing, conservative points of view.

You scare me because you prefer controlling over governing.

Finally, you scare me because if you serve a second term I will probably not feel safe in writing a similar letter in 8 years.

—Lou Pritchett

[20120826-16](#) 15:41 SteveB Re: WAKE UP, AMERICA!!! (reply to SteveG, above)

The dude is not in the same world as you and me. And I think anyone who could string these words together must also know they are blatant lies. Surely...

[20120824-06](#) 11:19 SteveB Video: Robert Reich Explains The Romney-Ryan Economic Plan

This shows why Robert Reich is such a great professor! Excellent! I would sure love to see R0mney or Ryan respond and debate! Fat chance!

Video (Aug. 20, 2012): http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=cO1F7EcGFAC.

[20120824-07](#) 13:26 Pam "Washington & Wall Street: The Revolving Door"

"Washington and Wall Street: The Revolving Door" by Robert B. Reich, *NYT Sunday Book Review*

May 27, 2011, (http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/29/books/review/book-review-reckless-endangerment-by-gretchen-morgenson-and-joshua-rosner.html?_r=1&emc=eta1&pagewanted=all)

(*Reckless Endangerment*, by Gretchen Morgenson and Joshua Rosner, Times Books/Henry Holt & Company)

It's hardly news that the near meltdown of America's financial system enriched a few at the expense of the rest of us. Who's responsible? The recent report of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission blamed all the usual suspects — Wall Street banks, financial regulators, the mortgage giants Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and subprime lenders — which is tantamount to blaming no one. *Reckless Endangerment* concentrates on particular individuals who played key roles.

The authors, Gretchen Morgenson, a Pulitzer Prize-winning business reporter and columnist at *The New York Times*, and Joshua Rosner, an expert on housing finance, deftly trace the beginnings of the collapse to the mid-1990s, when the Clinton administration called for a partnership between the private sector and Fannie and Freddie to encourage home buying. The mortgage agencies' government backing was, in effect, a valuable subsidy, which was used by Fannie's C.E.O., James A. Johnson, to increase home ownership while enriching himself and other executives. A 1996 study by the Congressional Budget Office found that Fannie pocketed about a third of the subsidy rather than passing it on to homeowners. Over his nine years heading Fannie, Johnson personally took home roughly \$100 million. His successor, Franklin D. Raines, was treated no less lavishly.

To entrench Fannie's privileged position, Morgenson and Rosner write, Johnson and Raines channeled some of the profits to members of Congress — contributing to campaigns and handing out patronage positions to relatives and former staff members. Fannie paid academics to do research showing the benefits of its activities and playing down the risks, and shrewdly organized bankers, real estate brokers and housing advocacy groups to lobby on its behalf. Essentially, taxpayers were unknowingly handing Fannie billions of dollars a year to finance a campaign of self-promotion and self-protection. Morgenson and Rosner offer telling details, as when they describe how Lawrence Summers, then a deputy Treasury secretary, buried a department report recommending that Fannie and Freddie be privatized. A few years later, according to Morgenson and Rosner, Fannie hired Kenneth Starr, the former solicitor general and Whitewater investigator, who intimidated a member of Congress who had the temerity to ask how much the company was paying its top executives.

All this gave Fannie's executives free rein to underwrite far more loans, further enriching themselves and their shareholders, but at increasing risk to taxpayers as lending standards declined. A company called Countrywide Financial became Fannie's single largest provider of home loans and the nation's largest mortgage lender. Countrywide abandoned standards altogether, even doctoring loans to make applicants look creditworthy, while generating a fortune for its co-founder, Angelo R. Mozilo. Meanwhile, Wall Street banks received fat fees underwriting securities issued by Fannie and Freddie, and even more money providing lenders like Countrywide with lines of credit to expand their risky lending and then bundling the mortgages into securities they peddled to their clients. The Street, Morgenson and Rosner say, knew lending standards were declining but maintained the charade because it was so profitable. Goldman Sachs even used its own money to bet against the bundles — making huge profits off the losses of its clients on the very securities it had marketed to them. Eventually, of course, everything came crashing down.

The authors are at their best demonstrating how the revolving door between Wall Street and Washington facilitated the charade. As Treasury secretary, Robert Rubin, formerly the head of Goldman Sachs, pushed for repeal of the -Depression-era Glass-Steagall Act that had separated commercial from investment banking — a move that Sanford Weill, the chief executive of Travelers Group had long sought so that Travelers could merge with -Citibank. After leaving the Treasury, Rubin became Citigroup's vice chairman, and "over the following decade pocketed more than \$100,000,000 as the bank sank deeper and deeper into a risky morass of its own design." With Rubin's protégé Timothy F. Geithner as its head, the New York Federal Reserve Bank reduced its oversight of Wall Street.

A tight web of personal relationships connected Fannie, Goldman Sachs, Citigroup, the New York Fed, the Federal Reserve and the Treasury. In 1996, Fannie added Stephen Friedman, the former chairman of Goldman Sachs, to its board. In 1999, Johnson joined Goldman's board. That same year Henry M. Paulson Jr. became the head of Goldman and was in charge when the firm created many of its most disastrous securities — while Geithner's New York Fed looked the other way. As the Treasury secretary under George W. Bush, Paulson would oversee the taxpayer bailout of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Goldman, Citigroup, other banks and the giant insurer American International Group (A.I.G), on which Goldman had relied. As head of the New York Fed, and then as the Treasury secretary, Geithner would also oversee the bailout.

Morgenson and Rosner are irked that their key players got away with it. American taxpayers have so far shelled out \$153 billion to keep Fannie and Freddie afloat and are still owed tens of billions from bailing out other financial institutions. Yet today James Johnson is a rich and respected member of Washington's political establishment (although he was forced to resign from President-elect Obama's advisory team after the press got wind of his cut-rate personal loans from Countrywide). Franklin Raines retired from Fannie with a generous bonus. Henry Paulson became a fellow at Johns Hopkins. Robert Rubin is affiliated with the Brookings Institution. Timothy Geithner remains Treasury secretary.

"The failure to hold central figures accountable for their actions sets a dangerous precedent," the authors say. "A system where perpetrators of such a crime are allowed to slip quietly from the scene is just plain wrong." True up to a point — but Morgenson and Rosner don't show that any actual crimes were committed. Their major characters surely exhibited outsize ambition and greed, but these qualities are not exactly rare in modern capitalism. Curiously absent from their book are some other prominent people who have been suspected of perpetrating fraud, like Richard S. Fuld Jr., who ran Lehman Brothers into the ground, and Joseph J. Cassano, the former head of the financial products unit at A.I.G.

The real problem, which the authors only hint at, is that Washington and the financial sector have become so tightly intertwined that public accountability has all but vanished. The revolving door described in *Reckless Endangerment* is but one symptom. The extraordinary wealth of America's financial class also elicits boundless cooperation from politicians who depend on it for campaign contributions and from a fawning business press, as well as a stream of honors from universities, prestigious charities and think tanks eager to reward their generosity. In this symbiotic world, conflicts of interest are easily hidden, appearances of conflicts taken for granted and abuses of public trust for personal gain readily dismissed.

All told, the nation appears to have learned remarkably little from the near meltdown. Fannie and Freddie, now wards of the state, currently back more than half of all new mortgages, and their executives are still pocketing fortunes. Wall Street's biggest banks are a fifth larger than they were when they got into trouble, and the pay packages of their top guns as generous. Although the rest of America has paid dearly, we seem more recklessly endangered than ever.

20120824-08	13:55	SteveG	"GOP Official Says God Chooses to Bless Raped Women with Pregnancy"
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"GOP Official Says God Chooses to Bless Raped Women with Pregnancy" by Lou Colagiovanni, Examiner.com

Aug. 21, 2012, (<http://www.examiner.com/article/gop-official-says-god-chooses-to-bless-raped-women-with-pregnancy>)

The state of Missouri has been in the national spotlight recently because of comments made by Republican Congressman Todd Akin who claimed that raped women rarely get pregnant. After his statements hit the Internet, immediate outrage burned across the country. Akin later apologized, but his statements have rekindled a nationwide debate. One that republicans desperately do not want to have, lest they alienate a wide majority of female voters.

Sharon Barnes, a high ranking state Republican, came to the defense of her conservative colleague who she believes only "phrased it (his statement) badly."

Barnes was quoted by *The New York Times* saying, "abortion is never an option." Barnes went on to biblically claim that, "If God has chosen to bless this person [the rape victim] with a life, you don't kill it."

Barnes did not elaborate on her views for post-pregnancy care, or costs.

Barnes has been a figure in conservative St. Louis politics for years, and currently holds all of the following titles according to her LinkedIn profile:

1. President of The 2nd Congressional District Republican Women

2. President of The Republican Women's Club of St. Louis
3. Vice President, Membership Committee at National Federation Of Republican Women
4. Vice President of The Missouri Federation of Republican Women
5. Chairman of The St. Louis City Republican Central Committee
6. State Committeewoman, 4th Senate District at Missouri Republican Party
7. Committeewoman, 24th Ward at Missouri Republican Party
8. Volunteer at GOP Missouri Republican Party

As her comments become more known the GOP will attempt to spin Barnes' clout in the party as little, when in reality she is a big player behind the scenes.

20120824-09	19:35	SteveM	Fw: Thank God That Godless Castro Didn't Destroy America [Instead, It Was the Godless Dollar! -SteveB]
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[Source of original email unknown. -SteveB]

What others see plainly, we often ignore. Here's something to think about.

I remember asking dad about Castro when I was about 9 years old. I asked, "Is Castro a good guy or bad?"

Dad said he couldn't tell!! This was about 1955. At the time, Dad was in the Army there.

Cuba was fairly close and in the news a lot. The Cubans were asking the same question!

Ike was president.

This past July, we had the pleasure of sharing a summer barbecue with a refugee from Cuba. Our dinner conversation was starkly different than most.

This refugee came to the United States as a young boy in the early 1960's. His family was more fortunate than most, as they were able to bring a suitcase and \$100 when they fled Castro's newly formed revolutionary paradise.

Our dinner consisted of all-American fare: hamburgers, potato salad, watermelon and fresh ears of sweet corn. This is a menu shared with family and friends nationwide while celebrating the birth of our beloved America on the Fourth of July.

We began with a simple discussion about our country, and the direction it has taken since Barack Obama came to power. We shared the usual complaints about the sour economy and liberal social engineering emanating from the rulers in Washington.

But then he said it. The sentence came naturally. I assume it was unplanned. But it carried the weight of a freight train. "You know when Castro took power, none of us knew he was a Communist".

We sat stunned. He continued, "Yes, we all thought he was a patriot, a nationalist. Before the revolution he didn't sound like a radical."

The comparison at this point was easy, and I interjected, "You mean just like Barack Obama?"

He responded; "Yes, just like Barack Obama."

He continued, "We were all shocked as the government just continued to grab more power. First they said the revolution is over, so please turn in your guns. We all complied."

I remember my uncle saying after it started; "Castro will only nationalize some of the big industries. He will never come and take our family hardware store!!" But that is exactly what happened. Castro started with the sugar mills

and the large industries, but they eventually came and knocked on the door of our family hardware store. My family had run this store for generations. They said we now own the hardware store, you work for us. And that nice, large four-bedroom home you own? It is now our property also, and you can move yourself and five children into two rooms of the house, because others are moving in with you."

The lesson learned from this discussion, is a lesson most Americans refuse to hear. Political leaders can lie about their agenda and once in office they can take totally unexpected turns.

If you had asked us three years ago if we thought General Motors would be nationalized, we would have never believed it. We could never contemplate a country where the rule of law, the most fundamental building block of a justice society would be evaporating, just like it did in Castro's Cuba in the early 1960's.

But the news of injustice keeps increasing. Black Panthers are not charged with wrong doing by the U.S. Department of Justice...because their crimes are against whites. The bondholders of GM are stripped of their assets without due process by the government! Governmental leaders are bribed in full daylight only to have all investigation of the crimes stifled by the Attorney General.

The U.S. borders are over run with crime and illegal activity, and the leaders in D.C. act as if it is important to protect the lawbreakers while the innocent are killed and over run. When local communities attempt to enforce the law, they are ridiculed and threatened as racists and bigots. They are sued by the very administration...entrusted with enforcing the law.

Without the rule of law, the U.S. Constitution is a sham!! Without the rule of law, our beloved America is swiftly becoming a country where only the well connected and politically powerful will be safe. As Michelle Malkin has so eloquently explained in her recent book, a culture of corruption has replaced honest government.

The only way this problem will be fixed, is by massive citizen action. All honest citizens that want to be treated equally, must come together and demand that the favoritism, the bribes, the uneven enforcement of law end now!! And yes, it can happen here.

PLEASE SEND THIS TO EVERYONE YOU KNOW!! And may God save the United States of America!

[Ya, this is really all really new, exciting news! From when, the '50's? Hey, that's really modern thinking for a Republican, way after the 19th Century. Ya, send it to everyone, you lazy people! Yawn! -SteveB]

The least you can do is forward this email. 6 million plus Jews didn't believe it would happen in Germany either!!! If you're a Christian in these United States of America, you're next on the list. The real problem here is, the boy from Cuba did manage to make it to the U.S. We will not have any place to escape to except death! And, for the most part even though I'm forwarding this to recipients, probably only 5 or 10 will even read it.

"There's never a wrong time to do the right thing, and never a right time to do the wrong thing."

People think this will never happen in America but it IS HAPPENING TODAY!!!

Fairness isn't giving my money to LAZY PEOPLE!.

20120824-11	20:17	SteveB	Re: Thank God That Godless Castro Didn't Destroy America (reply to SteveM, above)
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This was obviously written by an insane person.

<http://islandvoice.blogspot.com/2012/01/rememberance-of-cuban-immigrant.html>

Yep! Obama is Castro and Bush is Hitler. Now that got us real far in solving our problems, didn't it? Or are all Republicans like Paul Ryan, wanting to run away from real-world problems like a crying baby?

This is a truly wonderful, completely true and funny article. You should read it to the end and think about it.

Then, let me know specifically what you think.

"My New Rule for Todd Akin and the Republican Party" by Bill Maher, Huffington Post

Aug. 24, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/bill-maher/todd-akin-republicans_b_1826617.html)

New Rule: If your entire party tries to get rid of you, and you stay in, you can't talk about how easy it is for a woman to push a stupid prick out of her body.

I don't want to waste another second thinking about Todd Akin, and his theory that you can't get pregnant unless your eggs are asking for it. Here's the only thing you need to know about Todd Akin and human anatomy: he's an asshole. What I want to talk about is how it's not a coincidence that the party of fundamentalism is also the party of fantasy. When I say religion is a mental illness, this is what I mean: it corrodes your mental faculties to the point where you can believe in tiny ninja warriors who hide in vaginas and lie in wait for bad people's sperm.

Evangelicals might like to pretend that the magical thinking that they indulge in at home doesn't affect what they do at the office, but it absolutely does. The brain that believes in angels and miracles and Jesus riding a dinosaur is trained to see the world not as it is, but as you want it to be.

Republicans would like to pretend like Congressman Akin's substitution of superstition for science is a lone problem but it's not: they're all magical thinkers, on nearly every issue. They don't get their answers on climate change from climatologists, they get them from the Book of Genesis. Hence Sharia Law in America is a dire threat, and global warming a hoax.

Or take the issue that consumes the right these days, our sea of red ink: Republicans are united in their fervent desire to reduce the deficit, but they want to do it in some magical fashion that doesn't involve raising taxes or cutting any spending. When given a choice in polls between these two options, a majority of Republicans check "none of the above" as a way to reduce the deficit. That's like deciding to pay off your student loans by daydreaming.

Or as it's known on Capitol Hill, supply-side economics. Remember that magic beans theory? That you actually bring in more revenue by bringing in less? Ronald Reagan believed it. But at least back in the '80's it was new. The thing is, we tried it, and it doesn't work. Yet, Paul Ryan, who every shit-for-brains pundit in America keeps telling us is a "serious" guy, still believes in the supply-side theory. All the Republicans do. They all believe in something that both science and history have shown to be pure fantasy. The symbol for their party shouldn't be an elephant -- it should be a unicorn.

Paul Ryan is their tough guy on spending but he doesn't want to touch defense -- that's right, a budget hawk who doesn't think there's anything bloated about the Defense Department's budget. It's like being a health inspector and finding nothing wrong with the Asian place that has the chicken hanging in the window. This is how low we've put the bar for political courage -- that you can just write, "I want a pony" in a binder and call it the "Plan For Restoring Vision For the Future of America's Greatness" or some shit, and then everyone has to refer to you as the serious one in Congress. It reminds me of health care. Republicans are for all the popular things, like covering people with pre-existing conditions, but they're not for the part where you pay for it, like the mandate. Just like they were for our recent wars, but not for paying for them. For the prescription drug bill, but not for paying for it.

How do they get away with it? They know that, because we're already such a religious country, our minds are primed for magical, fantasy thinking. The gullibility comes factory-installed. They've learned that you appeal not to an American's head, but to his gut -- it's a much bigger target. But here's the problem: life is complicated. I mean, I

know we know some things for sure, like why Jesus put us here on Earth: to watch "Here Comes Honey Boo Boo" on a 50-inch TV screen. But what about the Chinese slaves who made the TV? What about carbon from the coal that generated the electricity? What about the Walmart where we bought it, where the workers don't have health insurance? What about racism, or the oceans turning into nail polish remover? The grown-up answer is: identify problems scientifically, prioritize and solve. The Republican answer is: there isn't a problem. And anyone who tells you different is a liar who hates America. We don't have to make hard choices. We just have to ignore the science and the math -- that's why God gave us values.

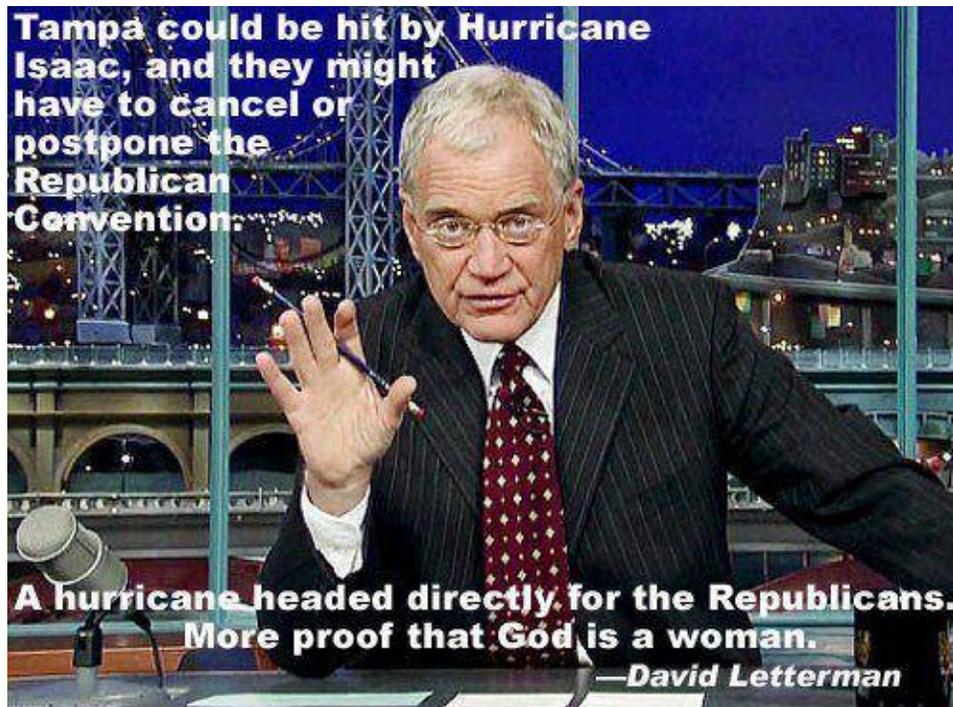
If rape babies throw a monkey wrench into the whole right-to-life pitch, just make believe rape babies don't exist. If you want to cut down on teen pregnancy, just tell curious kids with raging hormones to practice abstinence. Until they get married. Because everyone knows, that's when the f*cking never stops. Health care? Not a problem if you just keep repeating, "We have the greatest health care in the world." Even though the U.N. ranks it 37th.

What's the solution to global warming? It's that it isn't real, and even if it is, big whoop, just buy an air conditioner, you pussy. Republicans also believe that putting the word "clean" next to the word "coal" creates something called clean coal. Even though there's the exact same amount of evidence for clean coal as there is for Todd Akin's mistaken baby makin' theory.

Republicans also believe if they kick all the Mexicans out of the country, the strawberries will pick themselves, and that if they cut the safety net all the poor blacks are "resting" in, they will fall gently to the ground, stand up, dust themselves off, and get good-paying jobs as Olympic gymnasts.

Next week in Tampa the Republicans must admit that the difference between a GOP convention and Comic-Con is that the people at Comic-Con have a much firmer grasp of reality.

[20120824-12](#) 22:49 SteveG Quote: David Letterman on Hurricane Isaac



[20120825-01](#) 05:28 SteveB "Sher Valenzuela, GOP's 'We Built It' Speaker, Received Millions in Government Loans"

If they say they built it alone, they lie. Here's just one typical example. Liars! What a problem for Republicans!

"Sher Valenzuela, GOP's 'We Built It' Speaker, Received Millions in Government Loans" by Nate C. Hindman, Huffington Post

Aug. 24, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/24/sher-valenzuela-we-built-it_n_1828847.html?utm_hp_ref=politics&ir=Politics)

Sher Valenzuela, who is scheduled to speak at the Republican National Convention next week, embodies the American Dream. The 58-year-old, who is running for lieutenant governor in Delaware, started an upholstery business with her husband in their garage more than a decade ago to pay for their son's autism treatments. The business, which makes padding for baseball umpires and vests for the Israeli military, now employs at least 40 workers and pulls in millions in revenue each year.

But there's one problem for Republicans, who hope to align Valenzuela's story with the convention's "We Built It" theme: **She didn't actually build her company without the government's help.**

Valenzuela's company received roughly \$17 million in federal loans and contracts and she's openly encouraged other business owners to rely on taxpayer funding, Media Matters reported Thursday.

"But where do I start?" Valenzuela wrote in a presentation to a group of women entrepreneurs at a Delaware business conference earlier this year. "With your BIGGEST secret weapon!" the presentation read. **"You start with the no cost/low-cost resources that you, the taxpayer, have already paid for."**

[Continue reading at Huffington Post...](#)

20120825-07	10:25	SteveM	Re: "Sher Valenzuela, GOP's 'We Built It' Speaker, Received Millions in Government Loans" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Looks like they paid it back, unlike Solyndra and Abound Solar. And they didn't move their manufacturing overseas, unlike Fisker Automotive.

The larger question is why the administration was pursuing a green-energy policy in which companies are going bankrupt and wasting taxpayer money, even when warned against as bad loans by their own staff?

OH YEAH, Pelosi and Reid and big bundlers benefited directly from the money. Lying f*cking thieves!

20120826-17	19:07	SteveB	Re: "Sher Valenzuela, GOP's 'We Built It' Speaker, Received Millions in Government Loans" (reply to SteveM, above)
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Yet, I notice that you don't argue the point that no business is built alone.

That is the larger question.

20120825-02	05:35	SteveB	"American Exceptionalism: The 2012 GOP Platform"
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The most extreme example of spin I've ever seen in my life, and that was certainly necessary if an attempt was going to be made to make this stuff palatable to average voters.

http://images.politico.com/global/2012/08/preview_of_american_exceptionalism_-_gop2.html.

20120825-03	06:02	SteveB	"Four Laughable Explanations for Mitt Romney's Birther Joke"
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OK, Mitt, we know what country you were born in, but we sure don't know what country you pay taxes in. Apparently not much to the USA! Liar! Tax cheat!

"Four Laughable Explanations for Mitt Romney's Birther Joke" by David Weigel, Slate

Aug. 24, 2012,

(http://www.slate.com/blogs/weigel/2012/08/24/four_laughable_explanations_for_mitt_romney_s_birther_joke.html)

So this happened today in Michigan:

"No one's ever asked to see my birth certificate," Mitt Romney quips. "They know that this is the place that we were born and raised." Without using our powers of telepathy to read Romney's mind, it sounds like a classic example of the guy saying something that offends people without knowing why it would. Here's why: Romney's a white guy who grew up in Michigan, whereas Barack Obama's a black guy who spent some formative years in Indonesia.

It's a simple story. Romney made a joke that relies on a debunked conspiracy theory about the president—a theory especially popular with people who don't like blacks and foreigners. Romney's crowd cheered. He probably opened up a preconvention worm-can that he didn't mean to open. This, I think, is why we're already seeing the comment spun away. The four biggest spins:

It's just a joke. Well, sure, but who's the joke for? Since the summer of 2008, false rumors have circulated online, alleging that Obama's pregnant teenage mother flew to Kenya—or something like that—and gave birth to a kid who wasn't eligible for the presidency. Starting that year, activists started filing lawsuits, full of false information, aiming to get Obama kicked off of presidential ballots. In 2009, somewhat surprisingly, the conspiracy theory became even more popular—more lawsuits, members of Congress proposing legislation to require birth certificates from candidates, endless rumors at sites like WorldNetDaily that encouraged people to support soldiers who refused to serve under Obama. Even through this year, Donald Trump has continued pushing the theory and Maricopa County, Ariz., Sheriff Joe Arpaio has convened a "cold case posse" that produced evidence—all bogus—that the birth certificate is forged. Romney's been endorsed by both those guys.

It's fair play because Obama lowered the tone of the campaign by joking about Seamus. OK. Mitt Romney once put his dog in a kennel on the roof of his car and drove to Canada. But Obama wasn't actually born in Kenya. Spot the difference? I completely see the comparison between the Seamus story and Obama's story of eating "dog meat" in Indonesia. Both of those things are embarrassing and they happened.

The Obama campaign has accused Romney of all manner of things, like being a felon, and this is just "feigned outrage." Hence the Seamus reference. Stephanie Cutter, Obama's deputy campaign manager, responded to the mid-July wave of Romney/Bain stories by saying Romney had either lied to the Federal Election Commission, "which is a felony," or was "misrepresenting his position at Bain to the American people. If that's the case, if he was lying to the American people, that's a real character and trust issue." Over time this has morphed into a weapon of Romney umbrage—he claims that the campaign called him "a felon." Lucky for him, reporters have adopted that take on the quote. Two problems, though. Cutter was (badly) making an either/or statement—it obviously wasn't likely that Romney had committed a crime, so maybe he was lying. Also, Cutter is a surrogate for Obama. Obama himself hasn't said anything like that. (He's just disagreed with the "your campaign called Romney a felon" spin, which has been interpreted as proof that he endorses the "attack," which wasn't really made then and hasn't been made since.) We assign more weight to statements made by candidates than by surrogates. I warned you that this would be obvious, right?

Hey, Obama has joked about the birth certificate, too! How can it be offensive? There's some truth here. Ever since the Great Trump Interregnum of 2011, when the president published his long-form birth certificate, his campaign has sold a coffee mug that reproduces the form under the slogan "Made in the U.S.A." There are, right now, hipsters who love Obama but have those mugs in their cabinets. But a fairly clever child is probably familiar with this rule: You can say certain things about yourself and your friends that other people can't say. In 2005, when

he was gearing up to run for president and his state was famous for legal gay marriage, Mitt Romney liked to riff on the Mormon church's past practices of polygamy. "I believe," he'd say, that "marriage should be between a man and a woman ... and a woman ... and a woman." But when Romney ran for U.S. Senate in 1994 and then-Rep. Joe Kennedy brought up the polygamy issue, Romney—correctly—lit into him. (Somebody correct me if I'm wrong, but I vaguely remember George Romney going nuclear on Kennedy.) Republicans would light into Obama if he ever made a joke like Romney's. I could explain why, but it's so obvious that you might pass out.

[20120825-04](#) 08:26 SandyI Fw: Obama Punching Bag

Oh where, oh where, have good manners gone? Oh where, oh where, can they be?

Like birds flying in a V, when we feel the presence of others moving along side of us, there is little we cannot accomplish. Thanks to those that have flown alongside me and given me wind beneath my wings.

Just another example of how mean-spirited it's getting out the:

from Nancy:

Hey, Lauren...

I'm writing to you because you always seem to have a way of "calling out inappropriate behavior".

I am getting this from a first-hand attendee...Today, at LSCC's Magnolia Room, after an Estate Planning Seminar, John Feldman (of Cauthen & Feldman, PA in Tavares) raffled-off a 5' punching bag of President Obama (w/a black eye). While he may have thought this was funny, it was offensive to some attending. This seminar was attended by lawyers, accountants and other professionals, though I use that word loosely under this circumstance.

The event was sponsored by the First National Bank of Mount Dora, Florida Hospital Waterman and Lake Sumter's Foundation.

I called Mr. Feldman, only to find he is "out" until after Labor Day. I called Rosanne Brandeburg, who attended the event, and she said she thought it was inappropriate...but noted, "no one spoke up".

In this day and age of shootings, nasty politics and disrespect of others rights, I find it highly inciteful (if there is such a word) to raffle something like this in a public venue.

I just needed to vent...am waiting for a call back from Feldman...

[20120825-06](#) 08:49 Pam Re: Obama Punching Bag (reply to SandyI, above)

"Bad manners" is an understatement. It may have become bad form in most circles to be overtly racist, but there's still something very nasty under the surface of our "post-racial" society. Disguising it in "humor" is a cheap way of making a point. You can always tell what pushes people's buttons by what they laugh at--for Catholics, it's the church; for Germans, it's scatological; for the Chinese, it's someone in distress; for the British, it's silliness, and so on. I think there are levels of humor too, with practical jokes being near the bottom. This guy's "joke" was no joke at all; it was an insult dressed up as a joke. If you don't find it funny, then you're a stuffed shirt, according to the perpetrator. It's hostile to turn a joke against the listener, and that's what this man did. Humor and good manners are what keep us sane and civilized, but sometimes the nasty beast breaks through.

[20120825-05](#) 08:33 SteveB "Romney's Lying Machine"

"Romney's Lying Machine" by Robert Reich, Huffington Post

Aug. 24, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-reich/romneys-lying-machine_b_1827787.html)

I've been struck by the baldness of Romney's repetitive lies about Obama -- that Obama ended the work requirement under welfare, for example, or that Obama's Affordable Care Act cuts \$716 billion from Medicare benefits.

The mainstream media along with a half-dozen independent fact-checking organizations and sites have called Romney on these whoppers, but to no avail. He keeps making these assertions.

Every campaign is guilty of exaggerations, embellishments, distortions, and half-truths. But this is another thing altogether. I've been directly involved in seven presidential campaigns, and I don't recall a presidential candidate lying with such audacity, over and over again. Why does he do it, and how can he get away with it?

The obvious answer is such lies are effective. Polls show voters are starting to believe them, especially in swing states where they're being repeated constantly in media spots financed by Romney's super PAC or ancillary PACs and so-called "social welfare" organizations (political fronts disguised as charities, such as Karl Rove and the Koch brothers have set up).

Romney's lying machine is extraordinarily well financed. By August, according to Jane Mayer in her recent *New Yorker* article, at least 33 billionaires had each donated a quarter of a million dollars or more to groups aiming to defeat Obama -- with most of it flooding into attack ads in swing states.

In early August, "Americans for Prosperity," one of the nonprofit front groups masquerading as a charity, and founded in part by billionaire right-wingers Charles and David Koch, bought some \$27 million in ad time on spots now airing in eleven swing states.

So Romney's lying machine is working.

But what does all this tell us about the man who is running this lying machine? (Or if Romney's not running it, what does it tell us about a man who would select the people who are?)

We knew he was a cypher -- that he'll say and do whatever is expedient, change positions like a chameleon, eschew any core principles.

Yet resorting to outright lies -- and organizing a presidential campaign around a series of lies -- reveals a whole new level of cynicism, a profound disdain for what remains of civility in public life, and a disrespect of the democratic process.

The question is whether someone who is willing to resort to such calculated lies, and build a campaign machine around them, can be worthy of the public's trust with the most powerful office in the world.

20120825-08	14:17	Pam	Money & Politics
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I just read an article in the most recent *New Yorker* about how Obama has not "sucked up" enough to big donors and consequently is falling behind in the financial race to the White House. In this case, his virtues are his downfall: he disdains big money and can't find it in himself to court it. I admire him for this, even though I can see it may cost him the presidency.

The thing that really gets me is the truly stratospheric amount of money the Right is willing to spend to defeat Obama. I feel like the tide is running out on this country. Piece by piece, we are losing our democracy and replacing it with an oligarchy that makes the Gilded Age look rusty. I remember a time when TV stations were mandated to give "equal time" to opposing candidates, ensuring that one side would not dominate the other. That's certainly gone by the boards. Citizens United, Karl Rove, the Koch brothers, that Las Vegas billionaire: the list is seemingly endless. The tsunami of Republican funding isn't going to go away. We're all going to drown in it.

I hope I'm wrong. I'm trying to prepare myself for a Romney presidency with the hope that, if he wins, he will be at least sane. But the thought of Paul Ryan just a heart beat away from the Oval Office makes me shudder. When the Tea Party got started, I thought they were just a bunch of uneducated rubes with Confederate flags on their pick-up trucks, but now they've become the driving force in right-wing politics. I know I'm preaching to the choir and stating the obvious, but I feel so helpless. I hope Obama wins, because the Supreme Court depends on it for one thing, but I also hope that, if he doesn't, I will be proved wrong about the danger I sense we're in.

[20120825-10](#) 15:12 SteveG Re: Money & Politics (reply to Pam, above)

If I had \$20-40 million a year income and an IRA of \$100 million or so, and a net worth of \$200 or more millions, I would have really good accountants, not pay more than \$1 over the taxes I owed. I would not be running for president though. My ego would have all it needed in knowing I played the finance/investment game and won.

Ryan's foreign policy experience is voting on a war or two. Rmoney's is investing overseas. Claim to fame as a governor is a health care package that he doesn't like now. Ryan and Rmoney change their beliefs more than some people change clothes. Slippery slopes, unfortunately, seem to be here to stay and we are sliding fast.

[20120825-11](#) 16:04 Art Re: Money & Politics (reply to Pam, above)

To me one of the interesting things that seems to be happening is the repeated gaffs being made by the Republicans don't seem to move the polls one bit. Romney really wants to continue beating the drum on the economy and jobs thinking he can score big points here, but the campaign keeps getting pushed off track by one stupid Republican self inflicted wound after another. Romney's taxes, Ryan's repeated lies, the Akin "legitimate rape thing", it just goes on and on. Although I am sure the Democrats would have liked to have made some of these things happen, the facts is, it is the repeated stupidity of the Republicans that cause them to occur. Yes, the Democrats take advantage, but they are simply acting on gifts handed to them.

We all see this but the alarming fact is, it does not sway that racist core of the Republican Party one bit. They would vote for Adolf Hitler or Joe Stalin today, if they believe it would result in getting that ni**er out of the White House. I think by now any even remotely thinking American adult realizes that the Republican candidates are probably the most dishonest, secretive and just generally scummy bunch we have seen in a long time. My wife played today a Facebook hour radio broadcast of some Limbaugh type idiot in Texas, going on how 9-11 was a government plot, Bin Ladin died many years ago, Ghadafi is really in hiding and on an on, sent by some acquaintance of hers. People in middle America and sadly elsewhere really listen to this garbage and all too many really believe. We have some on them in FriendsOfTheMiddle. Have you ever noticed how often we are called "dummy" or "stupid" or "blind sheep" by people who I will bet you have little or no advanced education degrees, speak no foreign languages, have never really gone anywhere overseas and probably have not read a real book in 20 years.

So, the focus now seems to me to be making sure all the people who have seen through this charade get out and vote. We are not going to get the racists to change. They have made up their minds and they are really not interested in any facts that would affect that. President Obama still has black skin no matter what the Republicans do and that is all that matters. Maybe in time some will begin to think but right now we are kidding ourselves if we believe they are going to suddenly wake up one day and say, "You know, they are right!"

Just my opinion.

[20120825-12](#) 16:27 Pam Re: Money & Politics (reply to Art, above)

I wonder if the way I'm feeling has anything in common with cultivated Jews in 1930s Germany: We're a civilized people. Surely the barbarians can't prevail. Just because we're Americans doesn't mean terrible things can't happen here. It worries me that if I can dream up all sorts of scary scenarios, then the nut jobs will be able to do that too--and carry them out. The Nixon and Clinton scandals were rather entertaining, if infuriating, but the

scandal of our political climate today is frightening. Am I being an alarmist? I don't want to turn into a nut job myself.

There's an article in the New Yorker about the war in Syria too (as well as a great story by Alice Munro). What's going on in Syria is insane. There are so many sides, and people keep changing sides, and they're all trying to kill each other for Allah. What I see are groups of young men high on testosterone who get off on beating other young men bloody. It's primal. What I see in the U.S. is a cohort of middle-aged blowhards who wouldn't know the truth if they fell over it and get off on hating non-whites. It's odd that they don't hate the rich, who are really short-changing them, but they're so easy to manipulate and the 1% are so good at that. I worry that these pea brains will get behind the unemployed, undereducated young men with concealed weapons about their person and let 'em loose. I know we've had difficult times in America in the past, and I also know that some of those difficult times have included blood in the streets and the burning of neighborhoods. The young don't remember the turbulent 'sixties, when political disorder was like a tang in the air for a lot of people. Maybe the time is ripe for another gasket to blow.

Somebody, please, talk me out of thinking this way.

[20120825-14](#) 17:51 SteveB Re: Money & Politics (reply to Pam, above)

It's not too early to think about self defense, before they take all our guns away! That's what the Right has been preparing for, fantasizing about, and drooling over for years, right?

I know one thing. If the shit starts coming down, I'm moving in with Art and his friends!

[20120826-01](#) 03:34 Dennis Re: Money & Politics (reply to Pam, above)

I just visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. It makes you understand what can happen when people are willingly ignorant of what is being done to them. So, no Pam, you are not being alarmist. Of course, raising the comparison to the extreme situation of Nazi Germany just causes people to dismiss what can happen when they lack vigilance. The Nazis, however, are not an isolated historical example, but rather a recurring phenomenon of hate and violence.

[20120826-11](#) 11:24 Pam Re: Money & Politics (reply to Dennis, above)

I just watched a BBC series called "The Last Enemy," a sort of dystopian story about an experiment to implant little nano-monitor in people so they could be tracked every minute of their lives. The rice-size gadget would store all your data, allow you access to transport, your bank account, etc. etc. I thought it was pretty good, because it gave the argument for both sides: those who fear "Big Brother" vs. those who want to root out terrorism. Arguments for: the UK has a good government and wouldn't abuse it; it will only target the bad guys, which will make everyone safer; it will be unnoticeable to the person carrying it; you'll never lose your car keys or forget a password ever again. Against: who are we if we're all reduced to data?; what if the government isn't good?; it would be easy to target and trace our enemies (in the show the device was intended to target Arabs, infect, and kill them); you would be under constant surveillance, at least potentially; it's a complete invasion of privacy.

Of course, the characters who wanted to go forward with T.I.A (Total Information Access) were depicted as the bad guys, though you don't realize just who's bad and who's good until almost the end, while the good guys want to put a stop to the whole invasive program. I certainly know where I stand on this, but I can see how seductive the idea of absolute safety could be. We already put computer chips in our pets, and some people even want to put them in our kids. Everything about us is already online anyway. We're monitored all the time and the pop-up ads on our computers are targeted especially to us (I get lots about anti-aging creams). I've got a webcam in my computer. How do I know no one is monitoring me even now? Are we on a slippery slope here? Should we be alarmed? I've noticed that everything that science fiction writers have come up with has eventually become reality: submarines, airplanes, watches you could communicate with; instant messaging; access to information in seconds, Skype. You

can go all the way back to Leonardo and Jules Verne and trace this. We're way past "1984" and "Brave New World," with CCTV, phone taps, and the rewriting of history. I know things that seem scary in a novel or a movie can easily become an accepted part of life: cameras that catch speeders or runners of red lights, cameras in banks, metal detectors and body scans at airports, home alarm systems. I even went to a restaurant once that had a metal detector at the door. That gave me pause. When I was a kid, no one locked their door. Now my 7-yr old grandson has to be walked to school by a parent, and he lives directly across the street. When fear rules, no one is free. It seems to be that America is becoming more and more frightened (I know I am), and I dread what might lie ahead. What will the world be like when 2012 is the good old days?

[20120826-15](#) 12:21 Art Re: Money & Politics (reply to Pam, above)

Well said. Besides history, my other secret literary love is science fiction. As Pam writes, so many of the things that had become common in SCFI writings are now coming to pass. One of the common themes is an implanted artificial Intelligence (AI) that would give us all immediate access to all sorts of information, communications etc. Well we are almost there with the cell phone. I think many of us are of a similar age. Just think back how incredibly rapid the transition has been first to the computer, then the cell phone and now the smart phone. None of these things existed when we grew up. Remember the Dick Tracey comic strip and the watch radio. All pure fantasy 40 years ago.

As you also points out there is a downside. A few days ago police tracked a marijuana trafficker by following his cell phone for a few days. Sign of the time.

[20120825-13](#) 17:41 SteveB Re: Money & Politics (reply to Art, above)

I'm worried about the polls. I don't understand what's going on at all!

Exactly, Art. Getting out the vote is going to be so very important!!! For instance, I read the other day that O is leading among black folks XX% to **zero per cent** for Romney-Ryan! That's right! Zero! It was actually some fraction, but less than a half. What Hispanics will vote Republican? I guess even a lot of the Jewish vote has been lost with the abortion and Fundamentalist crap.

That leaves women and racists. What is God's name is wrong with American women????

All these people have to actually vote!

I just have to say one more thing: I literally HATE politicians who flat-out lie to me! Don't understand why everyone doesn't feel the same...

Oh, did I tell you I got emails from GaryC, Dale, and SteveM? They've all seen the light and decided to vote O! ;-)

[20120825-17](#) 19:03 Art Re: Money & Politics (reply to SteveB, above)

SteveB: I'm worried about the polls. I don't understand what's going on at all!

Of course, on that last one!

[20120825-15](#) 18:06 SteveG Re: Money & Politics (reply to SteveB, above)

Moving in with Art if all goes wrong may not be bad.

Polls – wait until after the conventions and see what happens. The scary thing are the voting law changes – PA, Ohio, Florida, Texas, etc. The more people that do not have the proper picture ID to vote, the better it is for

republicans. Most changes in voting laws are in republican controlled states, are seemingly designed to limit older/black/Hispanic/ethnic voters.

20120825-16

18:09

SteveG

"Akin for the Truth: How Are US Religious Fundamentalists Any Different Than Middle Eastern Ones?"

"Akin for the Truth: How Are US Religious Fundamentalists Any Different Than Middle Eastern Ones?" by Shirin Sadeghi, Truthout

Aug. 25, 2012, (<http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/11068-akin-for-the-truth-how-are-us-religious-fundamentalists-any-different-than-middle-eastern-ones>)

In the American media, the news from Iran, Pakistan, Egypt, Afghanistan and elsewhere generally runs along the same themes: scary, violent and religious nutsos. But isn't it time the US media and the American public agreed that America isn't much different? America has just as many religious fundamentalists and nut jobs, and they are making public statements just as often - if not more often - than the religious fundies elsewhere.

Are we to believe that a fundamentalist in a suit is less scary than a fundamentalist in a beard, even if both are spouting hatred against women?

Missouri Republican Congressman Todd Akin's recent comments about how women can't become pregnant from what he called "legitimate rape" was just the latest in a long line of pronouncements from American leaders with strong religious backgrounds who believe they are an authority on women's needs and health. Akin is no different than the numerous Iranian clerics who've said such ridiculous things as women who have extramarital sex "cause earthquakes," or the Egyptian cleric who first said that a husband and wife cannot be completely naked while having sex. (This was then modified by scholars, and it was agreed that the most important thing is that no one look at the vagina at the scene of the sex act.) Or the fatwa after fatwa about men and women working together, schooling together and all the rest (sounds a lot like segregation, doesn't it America?).

In the early days of the Taliban, before they began their habit of bombing girls' schools, they too, started out with making ridiculous comments about women and sexuality. It's only just escalated to the violence we've become familiar with.

The truth is, Akin and his fellow religious fundamentalist men the world over are very much the same when it comes to women: they know more about women than women do. In their minds, of course. Because none of them know what it's like to have a period or to give birth or to suffer the tragic and deeply disturbing decision to abort a baby. (Many women don't even know what it's like to suffer through a decision about an unwanted baby.) Further, no man knows what it's like to live in a world where women are second-class citizens - although that is a fact even in the most "civilized" and modern countries. None of them know what it's like to work just as hard as a man and not get the job, or not get the promotion, or, certainly, not get the same amount of pay.

Sure, there are a lot of female fundamentalists, too. It is deeply troubling when women take views against women, but at least we cannot accuse them of speaking out of turn, and you'll be hard-pressed to find any woman - even the most conservative and devoutly religious - who shares all the views of a biased man when it comes to women's rights, health care and needs. She would, after all, be speaking against herself.

But no man knows what it is like to be a woman, even though too many of them think they do. And too many of them attain public positions that give them a platform to spout their sexism. It is extraordinary that we don't hear female politicians make the same blanket statements about men, yet it makes a great deal of sense: in the patriarchy of world gender dynamics, a woman should focus on her area of expertise and leave the rest to the men.

Akin, a graduate of the Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri - he has a master of divinity - has gathered along the way, largely due to societal cues, that he is an authority on things that he is not, because he is a man. Like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, who recently spoke on behalf of all the women in the

Republican Party when he said that his female colleagues "don't see any evidence" of a war on women, it never struck Akin that he is not qualified to speak for women, particularly when he is attacking their rights.

And he is not the first. It was just this year that Wisconsin state senator Glenn Grothman said that, "money is more important for men," as he argued against a Wisconsin state equal pay act. In his view of the matter, there is no pay discrimination because women simply don't want to be paid as much as men do, particularly when they are married and more focused on raising kids (as he duly noted). Grothman, a devout Christian, also made headlines this year when he said that "unwanted and mistimed pregnancies" are "a choice" that women make and are not actually accidents.

Incidentally, Grothman has never been married and does not have kids.

Or what about Idaho state senator Chuck Winder, who just this year said that women may not actually know the difference between rape and the normal course of sexual relations in marriage (something Winder believes involves a woman being obligated to have sexual relations with her husband even when she does not want to): "I would hope that when a woman goes into a physician, with a rape issue, that that physician will indeed ask her about perhaps her marriage. Was this pregnancy caused by normal relations in a marriage, or was it truly caused by a rape?" He went on to imply that many women are using rape as an excuse for abortion.

And then there is the totality of what many people are simply referring to as the war on women in America: the attitudes, statements, media bias and campaign platforms that together work to denigrate women and take away their rights simply because of the physical realities of their bodies. The war on women refers, primarily, to the Republican Party - a party largely consisting of devout men whose understanding of religion provides them the context and confidence to make statements and decisions about women's body parts, sexual relations and reproduction, in addition to women's role in society (and in the home), and their right to equality in employment and pay.

A great many of these male politicians allow themselves to address these issues because of their religious qualifications: either they are, in fact, ordained ministers and divinity school graduates, or they are so devout in their religion that they are above reproach when it comes to being pious.

All of the petty statements by these sexist men would amount to just words in the air, except that in America's male-dominated Congress (women hold less than 20 percent of seats in Congress, and state legislatures don't look much more equal either) - just as in the governments of those Middle Eastern and South Asian nations that are vilified in the US media - bill after bill, law after law has been presented, passed and signed that depletes women's rights. American women need just as much protection from their religious fundamentalist men as women anywhere else do - the problem is, not enough of them know it.

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20120826-03	06:35	SteveB	"The Fountainhead"
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"The Fountainhead" by Uri Avnery, OpEdNews

Aug. 25, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/The-Fountainhead-by-Uri-Avnery-120825-802.html>)

I was not interested in Paul Ryan, the man about to be nominated by the Republican party for the office of Vice President, until the name Ayn Rand popped up.

Ayn Rand, it was said, was one of the main inspirations for his particular philosophy. Since Ryan is being represented not as an ordinary, run-of-the-mill politician, like Mitt Romney, but as a profound political and economic thinker, the inspiration deserves some scrutiny.

Like most people in this country, Ayn Rand first entered my life as the author of *The Fountainhead*, a novel that came out four years before the birth of the State of Israel. It quickly became a bestseller. The movie based on it, with Gary Cooper playing the main role, was even more popular.

It is the story of an architect of genius (roughly similar to Frank Lloyd Wright) who follows his own individual style and disdains the tastes of the masses. When his architectural design for a housing project is altered by the builders, he blows the buildings up, defending his actions in court in a stirring speech in defense of individualism.

(Honest disclosure: I have often dreamed of doing the same to certain buildings in Tel Aviv, especially the luxury hotels built between my home and the sea.)

I started to read her second bestseller, *Atlas Shrugged*, in which she set out her philosophy in detail. But I must confess, to my eternal shame, that I never finished it. It bored me.

One day in 1974, my friend Dan Ben-Amotz called me and demanded that I immediately meet a young genius he had discovered called Dr. Moshe Kroy.

Ben-Amotz was a character by himself. A man of my age, he was at the time Israel's most conspicuous humorist and an icon of the generation that fought in the 1948 war and created the new Hebrew culture. Ben-Amotz, like many of us, was not only a self-made man, but also self-invented. He was known as the ultimate Sabra (native-born Israeli). Much later it transpired that he was actually born in Poland, arrived in Palestine as a boy and adopted the very Hebrew-sounding name to replace his original name -- Moshe Tehilimzeiger ("reciter of psalms" in Yiddish).

He brought Kroy to my home and I was impressed. Here was an unusually erudite 24-year-old youngster, already a lecturer at Tel Aviv University, with thick glasses and very outspoken philosophical views.

It appeared that he was a True Believer in the teachings of Ayn Rand, which she called Objectivism. This proclaimed that egoism was the basic duty of every human being. Any kind of social commitment was a sin against nature. Only by serving his own interest and cleansing himself of any trace of altruism can a person truly fulfill himself. Society at large can progress only when it is based on such individuals, each one striving to serve only himself (or herself).

Such an outlook can be hugely attractive to a certain kind of individual. It provides them with a philosophical justification for the extreme exercise of egoism, not giving a damn for anyone else.

Kroy, and of course Ben-Amotz, were religiously devoted to this new creed. (This is, of course, an oxymoron, since Ayn Rand was a total unbeliever, condemning any form of religion, including the Jewish religion of her parents.) When I caught Ben-Amotz doing something which could be construed as beneficial to others, he went to great lengths in justifying it by proving that in the long run it was to his own ultimate advantage.

Kroy himself was obviously a very disturbed being. At the age of 41, he committed suicide. I was not certain whether Ayn Rand disturbed his mind or whether he was attracted to her because he was disturbed to start with.

Ayn Rand was born as Alisa Zinovyevna Rosenbaum in Saint Petersburg, which later became Petrograd, which later became Leningrad. She was 12 years old when the Bolshevik revolution broke out in that city. The pharmacy of her parents was taken over by the regime, and the bourgeois family fled to the Crimea, which was held by White Russian forces. Later they returned to their native city, where Alisa studied philosophy and even published a book in Russian. In 1926 she reached the US, leaving her parents behind.

She adopted the name of Ayn (rhymes with "swine," as she herself was wont to explain). She probably took the word from the Hebrew, where it means "eye." The surname Rand may be a contraction of her original German-Jewish family name.

Her early history may in some measure explain her abiding hatred for Communism and any kind of collectivism, including social democracy, as well as any kind of religion or statism. For her, the state was the enemy of the free

individual. This led her naturally to embrace an unbridled laissez faire capitalism (what Shimon Peres called "swinish capitalism") and to reject any form of welfare state or safety net.

All this was well structured in her philosophy, which was adopted by believers all over the world. She once called herself "the most creative thinker alive." On another occasion, she asserted that in all the annals of philosophy, there were only three great thinkers, all starting with an A: Aristotle, Aquinas and Ayn Rand.

She must have been an unabashed racist, too: during the 1973 Yom Kippur War she said that it was "civilized men fighting savages," comparing Israelis to the White Americans fighting the Red Indians.

No wonder that she posthumously became the darling of the Tea Party fanatics who are now dominating the Republican Party. And no wonder that Paul Ryan proudly cites her as one of his most important mentors. (Ayn Rand herself died in 1982 at age 77. Her funeral was attended by her devotees, including Alan Greenspan, one of the gravediggers of the US economy.)

There is something in the teachings of this Jewish White Russian preacher of extreme egoism that appeals to the primitive American myths of rugged individualism, gun-toting Wild West self-reliance, suspicion of the domination-hungry state (going back to King George the Third). But this is not the 18th century, for God's sake.

I never studied philosophy, though on my path I have picked up a few dozen books about it here and there. But Ayn Rand's theories always struck me as, well, juvenile.

There is a picture in my mind. The late Israeli writer Pinchas Sadeh described how once, as an adolescent, he had climbed a ladder in the library of his kibbutz, taken out a book of Nietzsche's and stood there, at the top of the ladder, for several hours, unable to stop reading. It was, I suppose, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, a dangerous book for young people. It also had a huge impact on Ayn Rand in her younger years.

Nietzsche castigates the "Jewish pity morality," which has infected the adorable "blond beasts." Compassion for the weak is a sin, because it blunts the capabilities of the strong, those on the way to becoming supermen. Which young person does not see themselves as a potential superman (or, I suppose, superwoman)?

When Dan Ben-Amotz tried to convince me of the "rational egoism" of Ayn Rand, I countered with a simple argument: when I was wounded in 1948 and lay completely exposed to enemy fire, four soldiers of my squad came up and rescued me, risking their lives. Their egoism must have told them that this was an extremely silly thing to do. Risking their most precious possession -- their very lives -- for another human being was inexcusable according to Ayn Rand. They had nothing to gain from it. They had everything to lose.

I have seen in my life innumerable acts of altruism, large and small. Indeed, what is love, real love, but a pure form of altruism?

Sure, every person is, to some extent, an egoist. But every person is also, to some extent, an altruist. Human beings are social animals, their social instincts deeply imbedded in their nature. Without them, human society could not function.

I too was captured by Nietzsche in my youth. But "Jewish pity morality" won. That's why I, like many Israelis, cannot even begin to understand American social attitudes, as illustrated yet again in the present election campaign.

For us it is self-evident that the state has a duty to help the sick, the old, the children, the handicapped and the disadvantaged. An ancient saying goes "Israelis (meaning all the Jews) are responsible for each other." Long before the State of Israel was born, we already had a strong system of health insurance and social services. Social insurance, instituted in Germany by the right-wing politician Otto von Bismarck in Nietzsche's time, is for us Israelis self-evident.

Binyamin Netanyahu is an American-style Republican, a strong supporter of Mitt Romney. He has done incalculable damage to the Israeli social net, both as Finance Minister and as Prime Minister. But not even he would advertise

himself as a disciple of Ayn Rand. He has, however, one thing in common with Paul Ryan: both are pushed forward and financed by Sheldon Adelson.

I can think of no purer personification of Ayn Rand's vision than this Casino billionaire. She would have adored him. He is the perfect egoist. He has become super-rich by exploiting the pitiful addiction of weak human beings. His business practices have been questioned. Yet even here there is some room for doubt: does Adelson spend hundreds of millions on people like Romney, Ryan and Netanyahu only to further his own business interests? Or do we detect even here a trace of altruism, a desire to fulfill his national and social visions, objectionable as they may be?

Since Ayn Rand was an atheist and abhorred anything that was not purely rational, while the Tea Party is strictly religious (never mind what religion), Ryan is now compelled to distance himself from his mentoress, who was also a militant advocate of abortion.

Actually, I don't believe in either the intellectual prowess or the political honesty of the man. He looks to me slightly phoney. I am not sure that Ayn Rand would have liked him either. If only Gary Cooper could play him, he might look more convincing.

20120826-04	06:55	SteveB	From the Right: "Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War"
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What is this???

But, of course, America's police would never shoot innocent citizens!

"Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War" by Jack Swint, OpEdNews

Aug. 21, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/Homeland-Security-s-Intent-by-Jack-Swint-120821-433.html>)

(It's clear our military is no longer the nation's only standing army when it comes to killing power.)

Over the past 2 weeks, everyone from the mainstream media to bloggers and conspiracy theorists have questioned the government's mass purchasing of ammunition for federal agencies like the National Weather Service and even the Social Security Administration. Combined, both agencies ordered over 210,000 rounds. This ammunition is mostly made up of "hollow point" bullets, which are designed strictly for maximum damage to the human body and have been outlawed for use in warfare since 1969.

On the surface, these purchases alone are scary enough and raise questions as to why these unlikely agencies need any amounts of ammo, especially bullets that have been outlawed. The National Weather Service claims they have 63 officers who "enforce the nation's ocean and fishing laws to ensure a level playing field for fishermen and to protect marine species like whales, dolphins and turtles." If you divide 46,000 rounds by the 63 agents they employ, that's 730 bullets per agent, or, in other words, 63 crack shots and a lot of dead fisherman.

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has given no specific response to questions regarding their purchase of 174,000 rounds. They said their "agents" need them. But, keep this in mind: the SSA only deals with US Citizens in America. The SSA has never been involved with anything outside of this country for any reason. And what do they need with armed agents? All SSA offices employ private contracted security for their offices.

Digging deeper into the government's recent procurements for ammo, you learn just how aggressively they are buying up ridiculous amounts of ammo and riot related equipment. The feds have actually ordered over 1 billion rounds of ammo in 2012 alone. They received 750,000,000 in March and are awaiting another 450,000,000 arriving soon. All in conjunction with large-scale orders for riot gear, bulletproof checkpoint outposts with red and green stoplights, human shaped paper practice targets, and other crowd control and containment equipment.

There is no conspiracy theory here. The federal government is expecting either a catastrophic financial collapse that could provoke nationwide food riots and all out civil unrest, another civil war, or even Armageddon. All in the very near future. Some theorize that the mass purchase of ammunition is an attempt to hoard as much as possible from the American public whom the feds believe may be in preparation for civil war right now.

Activist, radio talk show and journalist, Madison Ruppert, recently detailed on his "End The Lie Radio Show" how our Department of Homeland Security has an apparent obsession with buying up all the ammunition on earth. He noted that even if this ammo were purchased strictly for training purposes, as the Feds claim, we simply do not have the money in the federal budget to buy hundreds of millions of rounds of high dollar ammunition for domestic agents' target practice.

Another recent story by Ruppert entitled, "We Are Preparing For Massive Civil War...Says DHS Informant" outlines investigator Doug Haggman's interview with reportedly, high-level, reliable sources inside Homeland Security, who claim the agency is preparing for a massive civil war in America. The DHS source states that the federal government foresees and prepares for a massive civil revolt. "Every time you hear about troop movements, military equipment, the militarization of the police, and the buying of the ammunition in the US, all of this is orchestrated by the DHS who are reportedly preparing for a massive uprising."

Hagmann goes on to say that his sources tell him the concerns of the DHS stem from their belief in an impending collapse of the U.S. dollar as the the world's primary reserve currency, and their fear that a significant portion of the population is already armed and will rise up over the crash of our monetary system. Hagmann's sources confirmed the ongoing fear of a U.S. dollar collapse at the hands of the Chinese and possibly the Russians in retaliation for aggressive U.S. foreign policy initiatives against Chinese and Russian strategic allies like Iran and Syria.

"The one source that we have, I've known since 1979," says Hagmann. "He started out as a patrol officer and currently he is now working for a federal agency under the umbrella of the Department of Homeland Security. He's in a position to know what policies are being initiated and what policies are being planned at this point." And, "he's telling us right now that what you're seeing is just the tip of the iceberg."

"We are preparing, we, meaning the government, we are preparing for a massive civil war in this country."

Then there is Trends Research Institutes' Founder Gerald Celente's forecast of last year where he believes and expects a collapse of the U.S. dollar and riots in America some time this year. Since Celente's "Civil War' prediction of last year, President Obama signed executive orders known as the National Defense Resources Preparedness, which are politically damaging actions taken by a sitting president. Of course, he also signed the National Defense Authorization Act, abolishing habeas corpus and the Bill of Rights, and permitting indefinite detention without charge or trial of American citizens at home and abroad. He further claims the power to murder American citizens without indictment, trial or conviction upon his finding that they support or substantially assist an enemy of the United States or one of its allies. Let the firing squads begin.

And most recently, additional requests made by the DHS for another procurement of 750 million rounds of hollow-point ammunition only fuels speculation of an upcoming tragic event expected on American soil. These major events, as shocking to the American people as they are, will be taking place during an election year.

How seriously does the government consider a Tea Party rebellion? Kevin Benson, a retired U.S. Army colonel, who now teaches modern warfare to soldiers at the University of Foreign Military and Cultural Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, has co-written an article with Civil War expert, Jennifer Weber, detailing how to crush a Tea Party insurgency. That report, by itself, has ignited a firestorm among those increasingly concerned about what they feel is a distinct anti-civilian tone that has infected much of the military and Homeland Security personnel since 2009.

Benson and Weber co-wrote the article for Small Wars Journal on a 2010 Army report entitled, "U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, The Army Operating Concept 2016 - 2028."

The report describes the Army's response to threats "at home and abroad" in the coming two decades, and, in doing so, made clear that a monumental cultural shift recently occurred in the thinking of those at the top levels of military command. This shift has some governmental watchdogs worried, particularly given that Benson is using the platform provided at Fort Leavenworth to indoctrinate soldiers in his vision of the nature of modern warfare in America.

Benson and Webber actually created a fictitious training scenario, including a military response, as a teaching tool for the future insurrection of tea party activists. As the scenario goes, the tea party stages a takeover of the town of Darlington, S.C.. They profess that the Declaration of Independence has been re-imposed, and the local government declared null and void. According to the vision articulated by Benson, the enemy will be average citizens whose values resonate with those articulated by the tea party.

The scenario admits to the public that the government fears that the Tea Party can alter or abolish an existing government and replace it with another. In the words of Benson's report, a takeover by the Tea Party will have an effect on the general population inasmuch as it "shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."

Also, there is a 2008 report produced by the U.S. Army War College's Strategic Institute that warns the United States might experience massive civil unrest in the wake of a series of crises, which it termed "strategic shock." It goes on to say, "widespread civil violence inside the United States would force the defense establishment to reprioritize itself to defend basic domestic order and human security." The report, authored by Retired Lt. Col. Nathan Freir, adds that the military may be needed to squash "purposeful domestic resistance."

Even though Freir's warning does not directly cite the Tea Party as the cause of the mass civil unrest, the inference is there. With the publication of the reports by Freir, Benson and Weber, it is clear that DHS and the U.S. Army considers it a valid proposition to assume that a future civil war will be sparked not by extremist Islamists with dirty bombs or left wing insurrectionists, but by the tea party and the conservatives who participate in it.

Just three years ago the Department of Homeland Security generated the notorious Home Grown Terrorist Assessment Memorandum detailing the the vision the DHS held of the primary threats to U.S. domestic security in the near future. The memo was distributed to local law enforcement across the nation with details about the Tea Party being the object of the government's fears. The fears included combat hardened returning veterans to a nation without jobs for them, weapons and ammunition shortages that could be blamed upon the federal government, citizens who believe there is an effort to build an international government, extremist internet chatters who perceive a loss of U.S. manufacturing and construction jobs to overseas markets and blame governmental policies for that exodus and resultant home foreclosures, libertarians, Ron Paul supporters, people who talk a lot about their constitutional rights, people with copies of the constitution or Bill of Rights, etc., are all suspected domestic terrorists according to the memo.

Why Hollow Point Bullets?

After being bombarded with questions wanting to know why the feds are procuring stockpiles of ammo, their half-hearted excuses came down to needing this ammo for training and qualification purposes. That answer only raises more questions. Like, why does anyone need to practice or qualify with expensive "hollow point" rounds. Manufacturers make "practice" rounds that are considerably cheaper.

According to an article published by war decorated Army Major General Jerry Curry (Ret), the feds explanation about the bullets fails to pass the smell test. **"Hollow point bullets are so lethal that the Geneva Convention does not allow their use on the battle field in time of war."** Hollow point bullets don't just stop or hurt people, they penetrate the body, spread out, fragment and cause maximum damage to the body's organs. Death often follows. "Notice that all of these purchases are for the deadly hollow nose bullets. These bullets are not being purchased and stored for squirrel or coyote hunting.

"This is serious ammunition manufactured to be used for serious purposes."

He goes on to write that "In the war in Iraq, our military forces expended approximately 70 million rounds per year. In March DHS ordered 750 million rounds of hollow point ammunition. It then turned around and ordered an additional 750 million rounds of miscellaneous bullets including some that are capable of penetrating walls."

His final claim is food for thought "This is enough ammunition to empty five rounds into the body of every living American citizen."

General Curry raises 3 additional good points.

1. We have enough military forces to maintain law and order in the U.S. even during times of civil unrest. We have local police, backed up by each state's National Guard, backed up by the Department of Defense.
2. In addition to all these forces, why does DHS need its own private army?
3. Why do the SSA, NOAA and other government agencies need to create their own civilian security forces armed with hollow nose bullets?

This is not a "conspiracy theory" or guessing that our government is actively stockpiling enormous amounts of lethal ammunition, riot equipment and other related control devices designed solely for civil unrest. This purchase is a fact, and there is plenty of documentation from the feds themselves on how they are procuring these items. It is readily available on the Internet. It is also evident that within the last few years, several military strategists have produced in depth reports outlining the probability for a massive Civil War in America in the near future.

The DHS and other federal agencies are aggressively acting on those reports and recommendations by launching their own preparedness plans in order to both conduct a pre-emptive strike first and or combat any uprising by civilians that may occur first.

These ammo purchases by the feds do not include any mention of "non-lethal" tactics such as rubber bullets, water hoses, bean bags (fired from a shotgun to knock a person down) or tear gas, etc., which are used instead of deadly force to control civil unrest. It appears on the surface that they are gearing up for all out warfare on the American public. It also appears that the entity behind this plan is the Department of Homeland Security, not the military or local city, county, state or federal law enforcement.

The below analogy will likely anger some of the people reading it. It is only being used to point out how agencies akin to Homeland Security can get out of hand and allow self-appointed power and authority to become grossly abused, thus losing sight of their intent and objective.

In our own fears from 911, our government created Homeland Security, an agency that has become so powerful and relentless in believing they are protecting America that they have evolved into nothing more than what the German Waffen -"SS' officers became over time. Out of control. The "SS' were first formed in 1934 only as a supplementary army alongside the main German army. But, in just a few years, they were able to appoint themselves into the core of Germany's terror apparatus and by about 1936 assumed control of the entire terror machine.

20120826-07	09:01	Beth	Re: "Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Nonsense. That's what it is!

20120826-08	10:58	Art	Re: "Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War" (reply to SteveB, above)
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Think this one may need a bit more research.

20120826-10	11:15	Ben	Re: "Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War" (reply to SteveB, above)
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174,000 / 41 = a bit over 4000 rounds per location.

I shot well over 10,000 rounds a year by myself, just practicing, the first couple years I was shooting regularly. Rising ammo prices have forced me to cut back considerably.

For practice, the amount of ammo for which SSA requested a bid is not unreasonable. It might also suffice to defend a regional office for a few hours. Maybe.

It's certainly not enough to contain widespread insurrection or stop a civil war.

I seem to recall to responding something very like this a couple years ago, but am too lazy to look. It didn't have the Tea Party label, then, but as I think I said at the time, it's the whacko ultra right that I fear, anyway.

<http://www.snopes.com/politics/guns/ssabullets.asp>

20120826-13 11:28 Pam Re: "Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War" (reply to SteveB, above)

Is this a reliable source? Even I, with my jittery nerves, find this hard to believe.

20120826-14 12:03 Clark Re: "Homeland Security Prepares for Civil War" (reply to Pam, above)

It's not properly sourced. No evidence of the government buy-up of ammunition. Maybe it's true, maybe it isn't, but let's see sources.

BTW, this story dates from May, not August, for what it's worth.

It wouldn't particularly surprise me if the DHS were creating contingency plans for civil war/insurrection etc. That's what government bureaucracies with too much time/money on their hands do, and anyway, you have to prepare for anything that might happen whether you believe it will or not. Beyond that it doesn't mean much. Unfortunately we'll never be able to get rid of the DHS because no one wants to be accused of being soft on terrorism if there's an attack.

The notion that China, heavily invested in the US, would want the dollar to collapse is laughable.

The threat of right-wing domestic terrorism does seem real enough to me, The real crazies are on the right, not the left, these days.

Right now all this doesn't add up to much.

20120826-06 07:59 Dennis "Does Paul Ryan Know What's in His Budget?"

Ryan's going-out-of-business budget...

"Does Paul Ryan Know What's in His Budget?" by Dean Baker, Yahoo! Finance/The Exchange

Aug. 17, 2012, (<http://finance.yahoo.com/blogs/the-exchange/baker-does-paul-ryan-know-budget-185617687.html>)

If the news media had to work for a living, this is what they would all be asking right now. The reason is simple. The projections the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) made for Representative Ryan's budget imply that he literally wants to shut down the federal government.

His budget implies that after three decades the federal government will have no money to spend on health research, education, highways, airports, and other infrastructure, the Food and Drug Administration and most other activities that we associate with the federal government. His budget has money for Social Security, Medicare and other health programs and the Defense Department. That's it.

This is not a vicious anti-Ryan attack coming from hyper-partisan Democrats. This is what the analysis of his budget by the non-partisan CBO shows. It's right there in the fifth row of Table 2:

http://www.cbo.gov/sites/default/files/cbofiles/attachments/03-20-Ryan_Specified_Paths_2.pdf.

The table shows that in 2040, Representative Ryan would allot an amount equal to 4.75 percent of GDP to all these other areas of government including defense spending. By 2050, Ryan's allocation for these areas, including defense, falls to 3.75 percent of GDP.

The defense budget is currently a bit over 4.0 percent of GDP. Ryan has indicated that he would like to maintain or even increase this level of spending. The arithmetic is then straightforward. **In 2040, Ryan would leave less than 0.75 percent of GDP for areas of spending that currently require more than five times this amount. In 2050, all these areas of spending would literally have to be zeroed out as defense spending will take up every cent and more that Ryan has left in his budget.**

It is important to understand that CBO tried to accurately present the implications of the budget that Representative Ryan gave them. CBO works for Congress. These are career civil servants. They cannot be easily fired, but if CBO's staff deliberately misrepresented a budget proposal from a powerful member of Congress like Paul Ryan, that is the sort of thing that could get them put out on the street.

The way CBO would typically analyze a proposal is that they would sit down with Representative Ryan and his staff and determine as closely as possible the outlines of the budget he is proposing. They would then produce projections which would be shown to Ryan and his staff to ensure that they had accurately represented his proposed budget. CBO would only publish a document with these projections after Representative Ryan and his staff had a chance to review them and agreed that they had accurately represented his proposal.

This means that there can be no accident here. CBO did not blindside Representative Ryan with a half-baked analysis they did in the middle of the night. We can safely assume that the projections from CBO do in fact represent the budget proposal as presented to them by Representative Ryan and his staff.

This leaves the obvious question. Is he serious? Does Representative Ryan really think it is a good idea to end the federal government's role in building and maintaining infrastructure, in financing education, in funding basic research in health care and other areas, in maintaining our national parks, federal courts, the FBI? His budget says that this is what he thinks, since these services will not be provided for free (FBI agents expect to get paid), but it is difficult to believe that a politician running for national office would really want to eliminate most of the government.

Anyway, this is the most basic question that reporters should be asking Representative Ryan now that Governor Romney has selected him as his vice presidential candidate. We know that they all have to run stories about his high school friends and his college courses, but the public has a right to know where he stands on the policy issues that he has put at the center of his political agenda.

If reporters do their job, they have a simple question to put to Mr. Ryan. "Your budget would put an end to everything the government does, except for Social Security, health care and defense. Is this really what you want to do?"

[20120826-09](#)

11:02

Art

Re: "Does Paul Ryan Know What's in His Budget?" (reply to Dennis, above) & "Five Myths About Paul Ryan's Budget"

To me the more I look at the "Ryan Budget:" the squishier it becomes. It doesn't address the deficit and it doesn't really do anything by implement social re-engineering, to quote Mr. Gingrich. Good article today in WP about the 5 myths of the Ryan Budget.

"Five Myths About Paul Ryan's Budget" by Peter Orszag, *The Washington Post*

Aug. 23, 2012, (http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-paul-ryans-budget/2012/08/23/757b3718-eba0-11e1-a80b-9f898562d010_story.html)

I've worked closely with Rep. Paul Ryan. He's an honest and amiable guy. In part because of his winning personality, Ryan, Mitt Romney's running mate in the presidential election, has convinced many in Washington that his budget blueprint is a serious proposal for solving our long-term fiscal problems. Unfortunately, it's not. Let's dig into the asterisks of Ryan's plan and unearth the fine print.

1. Paul Ryan's budget would reduce the deficit.

The Ryan budget is a Potemkin village: It looks good from afar but is just a facade. The Congressional Budget Office has estimated that the plan would cut the public debt almost in half as a share of the economy by 2040. Sounds good, right?

Take a closer look, and you'll see that the Ryan budget rests on three pillars that rely on capping and punting — limiting spending to a certain level but providing no specifics on how to achieve that number.

First, federal Medicaid spending is currently forecast to double by 2040, from 2 percent of gross domestic product to 4 percent. Under Ryan's budget, it is projected to be cut in half over that period. This dramatic turnaround will supposedly occur by turning Medicaid over to the states through block grants. Anyone want to bet that will work? If states can't find huge efficiencies in Medicaid, expect them to pressure the federal government to avoid the fanciful reductions in federal support assumed in the Ryan budget.

Second, the Wisconsin congressman has specified \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts, counting on massive rollbacks of tax breaks — such as the mortgage interest deduction — to pay for them. But he offers no details as to how to achieve such reductions, and most serious tax analysts don't think such changes are politically feasible.

Third, Ryan assumes that other spending, including nondefense discretionary spending, will fall from more than 12 percent of GDP last year to less than 5 percent by 2040. Again, he provides scant details on how to get there.

If you take out everything Ryan is assuming and look at his concrete proposals, his budget is not fiscally conservative. Without the magical reductions in Medicaid, other spending and tax breaks, his plan would expand the deficit in 2040, not reduce it.

2. The Ryan budget would help the middle class.

Ryan says he would cut tax rates for all families, but that doesn't mean the middle class would be any better off. Even after the Bush tax cuts, Ryan's reductions would amount to about \$1,000 a year for families with annual incomes between \$50,000 and \$75,000— compared with a cut of more than \$250,000 a year for those with incomes above \$1 million.

Ryan says he would pay for these cuts by broadening the tax base, which means scaling back tax breaks. But he is also committed to maintaining low taxes on capital gains, a bigger source of income for wealthier people. Most of the other big tax breaks — such as the mortgage interest deduction, state and local tax deductibility, and pension and health tax benefits — help the middle class.

So any attempt to broaden the tax base without raising taxes on capital income would almost inevitably place a higher burden on middle-class families. And if those middle-class tax breaks were not slashed to pay

for Ryan's high-income tax cuts, other spending would have to be reduced further or the deficit would spiral — either of which would also hurt the middle class.

Furthermore, unlike the proposal from the nonpartisan Domenici-Rivlin deficit-reduction commission, the Ryan budget does not include any provisions to create jobs immediately. With unemployment above 8 percent, we should couple any long-term deficit reduction with additional support for the economy today. That would help the middle class more than promises of a tax cut that will probably turn out to be a mirage.

3. Ryan's proposal would cut health-care spending by reforming Medicare.

Ryan says his plan would reduce health-care spending by increasing competition, but reality doesn't remotely match his rhetoric. The CBO analyzed Ryan's 2011 budget proposal, which would over time move Medicare entirely to private plans, and found that it would significantly increase total health-care spending (that is, spending by the government and Medicare beneficiaries).

"Both administrative costs (including profits) and payment rates to providers are higher for private plans than for Medicare," the report said. That effect, according to the CBO, would outweigh any savings achieved by people choosing less costly health care.

Ryan's supporters argue that the most recent version of his proposal, which would retain traditional Medicare but expand the role of private plans, would have different results. The CBO has not fully evaluated this proposal. But how could moving entirely to private plans be hugely costly, while moving partially to private plans would save lots of money?

Besides, the plan is similar to what we already have: Almost 30 percent of Medicare beneficiaries are also enrolled in Medicare Advantage, which offers private plans alongside the federal program. The evidence suggests that these plans cost more than traditional Medicare, once you take into account their ability to skim off the least costly beneficiaries. So much for Ryan's health-care-competition tooth fairy.

4. Ryan's plan would provide certainty to the markets and the economy.

Ryan likes to highlight the job-killing effects of uncertainty, but his budget would exacerbate it. Corporate executives hold back on investment and hiring when they don't know what will happen next in terms of government policy. From that perspective, uncertainty is created when specifics are unknown — just like in Ryan's plan.

How would tax deductions be rolled back? How would the block-granting of Medicaid work, and what happens if it doesn't? What programs would be cut to hit Ryan's spending targets? All of these are huge questions. Leaving them unanswered does nothing to reduce uncertainty.

5. If Romney wins, Ryan's budget will be his fiscal blueprint.

Differences between Romney's budget proposal and Ryan's are already emerging, most prominently the fact that Ryan's plan would retain the Medicare savings included in the Affordable Care Act, but Romney's would not.

More fundamentally, if the Romney-Ryan ticket wins, their administration would probably have to choose one or two of the big three items: tax reform, Medicare changes or block-granting Medicaid.

Among the three, I'd bet on Medicaid, given how difficult the other two goals are. The fact that the harm from block-granting would be concentrated on the poor, and that Congress would get to leave it to governors to impose the pain, sadly makes that change more politically viable than the others.

This worth a look if nothing else just for the music. (Beckie and I caught an ABBA concert (new Swedish group called Waterloo - surprise) last week at Wolf Trap - indoor/out door local arena. It was packed with geriatrics dancing in the aisles. Sudden influx of hip and knee surgeries reported the following week.)

Hmmm, I thought only southern American rednecks knew how to make fast cars. Wrong again.

"The Most Expensive Luxury Car in the World" by *International Business Times*

June 27, 2011, (<http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/170140/20110627/porsche-lamborghini-mercedes-ferrari-mclaren-bugatti.htm#page0>)

Bugatti Veyron \$1,700,000

The Bugatti Veyron is the fastest accelerating car on the market today - it can go from 0-60 in 2.5 seconds. It is also the fastest street legal car, reaching a top speed of 267 mph. The final in an exclusive production run of 300 units was sold to an unidentified European customer this month.



Justin Howard, looking like a Viking warrior in his leather tunic, gives an energetic performance, including sliding across the stage barelegged. (http://edition.cnn.com/2012/08/25/living/gallery/air-guitar-contest/index.html?hpt=hp_c2)



The taxpayers are sending congressmen on expensive trips abroad. It might be worth it except they keep coming back.

-Will Rogers



Balance...

<http://errorpicture.blogspot.com/2011/04/breathtaking-balanced-rock-formations.html>



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

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