



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #213 — AUG. 28, 2012

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2012: What America Has Come To

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Aug. 28, 2012)

"Americans still believe in an America where anything's possible — they just don't think their leaders do."—Barack Obama

"The United States in 2012: A Status Update for the Country" by Christopher S. Rugaber, AP

Aug. 26, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/25/america-2012-status_n_1830159.html?ir=Business)



(WASHINGTON) We're heavier in pounds and hotter by degrees than Americans of old. We're starting to snub our noses at distant suburbs after generations of burbs in our blood. Our roads and bridges are kind of a mess. There are many more poor, and that's almost sure to get worse.

The oddly American obsession with picking up and moving on — "this spectacle of so many lucky men restless in the midst of abundance," as Alexis de Tocqueville noted nearly 200 years ago — has given way to the un-American activity of going nowhere. But check back tomorrow.

Such swirling changes are not fodder for a State of the Union speech, but they are part of the state of the union nonetheless, on the eve of the Republican National Convention that convenes briefly Monday with the full schedule starting Tuesday, and the Democratic convention that follows it a week later. The country that President Barack Obama and Mitt Romney are vying to lead for the next four years is not quite the same as the one four years ago, not nearly the same as the one further back in time.

Our taste for McMansions, for example, has slightly soured in recent years in favor of more affordable abodes.

We, like, speak differently than our forebears, new twists on the same tongue. LOL.

Soldiers are flowing home from the wars; this is almost what peace looks like.

A paint-by-the-numbers portrait:

WHERE WE LIVE

Like much else, where we live is shaped by how — or whether — we make a living. But larger forces than that seem to be at work in determining Americans' chosen places.

U.S. cities and closely surrounding areas are experiencing more growth than farther-off suburbs for the first time in at least 20 years. The cost and bother of commuting are part of the reason. The average commuter spends over 30 hours stuck in traffic per year, says the Texas Transportation Institute, up from 14 hours in 1982. That's the time spent going nowhere or at a crawl.

As well, city life is becoming the choice of more young and old people, as the attractions and convenience rival the long-held American dream of affordable home ownership, which usually means farther out.

Meantime, the historic migration of Southern blacks to the North has reversed, with black populations rising in Southern cities and suburbs, especially among the more affluent.

But the overarching recent development in where we live is that we aren't moving much at all.

Mobility is the lowest it's been in the 60 years it has been tracked by the Census Bureau, with only 11.6 percent of the nation's population moving in the past year. That's just over half the level in 1951, the biggest year for Americans on the move, 21.2 percent. More adult children are living with parents because of economic hardship, fewer older people are able to retire to sunny climes and the housing bust further contributed to locking the restless in place.

Average home size dropped 5 percent from 2007 to 2010, to a little under 2,400 square feet. It's still a far cry from the 750-square-foot, one-story, 2-bedroom Levittown prototypes that sparked the suburban boom and brought modest homes within reach of the masses after World War II.

Though they paved paradise and put up housing lots, the U.S. remains heavily treed. One-third of its land area is forested, a proportion that has been stable since the beginning of the past century. But after the devastation of American chestnuts that grew by the billions in Eastern forests and of the elms that gave so many towns an Elm Street, today's forests and urban greenery are not the same as in the past.

Meantime asphalt and iron have fallen into disrepair: Nearly one in four of the country's 605,086 bridges is rated deficient.

HOW WE COMMUNICATE

Until World War II in residential areas and well beyond in rural America, telephone party lines were common. If you wanted to make a phone call, you had to wait for Velma down the road to finish gossiping on the same line, interrupt the chitchat to ask her to hang up — or just cover the speaker and eavesdrop on the juicy details. (Velma was a popular name from the 1890s through the 1930s, then no more). In party-line days, a major technological advance came when Ma Bell developed distinct rings for different homes on the line, so everyone didn't pick up each time the phone jangled.

These days, the dedicated landline that took over from the party line is itself fading, as Americans' favorite gadget, the cellphone, spreads in numbers and smarts.

The number of people with wireless only and no traditional landline phone has grown fourfold since 2005, the government estimates. In 2005, less than 8 percent of adults lived in households with only wireless telephones. Now it's more than 32 percent. Nearly nine in 10 adults own a cell.

The day Obama's Democratic convention opened in 2008, Facebook announced its 100 millionth user, a benchmark it actually took longer to reach than its now-overshadowed rival, Myspace. Facebook is closing in on its billionth user, sitting with Twitter as kings of the social-media mountain until something else knocks them off.

WHO WE ARE

Fatter. The average woman has gained 18 pounds since 1990, to 160 pounds; the average man is up 16 pounds, to 196, Gallup found.

Poorer as a whole, but richer than during the recession. The value of people's homes, stocks and all other assets stood at \$62.9 trillion in March, the latest count, down from \$66 trillion before the economy tanked but up from \$51.3 trillion at the downturn's depths.

Indebted, but perhaps not up to the eyeballs. Credit card debt has declined about 14 percent since 2008. Americans also have less mortgage debt, but more student debt and auto loans. The savings rate, meantime, climbed to 4.2 percent last year, a big improvement from 1.5 percent in 2005. But then there is the government. It is indebted past the eyeballs.

Hotter: The period from July 2011 to June 2012 was the warmest 12-month stretch on record. Altogether, the contiguous states posted an annual all-season average temperature of 56 degrees in that period, which is 3.3 degrees hotter than either of the years that Obama and Romney were born. The hottest calendar year on record for the U.S. is 1998, at 55.08 degrees, but that may not last this year's swelter and lack of winter. Most of the past 15 years have been among the steamiest on the books, and all 15 were hotter than Romney's birth year, 1947, and Obama's, 1961.

More numerous. The U.S. has 314 million people. The country surpassed 200 million in 1968 and 300 million in 2006.

More diverse. For the first time, more than half the children born in the U.S. are racial or ethnic minorities, and by 2040 or several years after, non-Hispanic whites are expected to become a minority of the population. Along with this trend has come a historic jump in interracial marriages, which now make up an estimated 8.4 percent of marriages, up from 3.2 percent in 1980.

Addicted to texting. Cellphone users sent an average of 13 text messages a day in December 2008, double the number from a year earlier, the government said. More recently, Pew researchers found the average teen sent more than 64 texts a day.

Older. Between 2000 and 2010, the population of people aged 45 to 64 grew by close to one-third as the baby boom generation and those behind it grayed. That has helped to push the median age to 37.2 — half the population younger than that, half over.

A lot of those young people are named Sophia, the top girl's name for the first time, and Jacob, No. 1 choice for boys for the past 13 years. So long Mary and James, the dominant names over 100 years.

WHAT WE THINK

On the issues of the day, the economy has no near rival atop the list of concerns. Pocketbook matters often rule but Americans were heavily focused on war in the early going of the last campaign. As the recession deepened, though, and now with troops coming home, it's been the economy plain and simple — the issue ranked important by more than 9 in 10 respondents to an AP-GfK poll out this past week.

About half of us approve of the job Obama is doing, the poll found. About half disapprove. Voters are about evenly split on the race, and among those who lean to one man or the other, very few are open to changing their minds. Obama's years-ago vision of a nation of united states soaring above the divisions of red states and blue states seems a pipe dream in a fractious time.

The sharp lines and stagnant views are evident in public opinion on gun laws, abortion, health care, taxes and the federal budget deficit — on which polling has long shown wide divergence. The Pew Research Center reports that partisan polarization on basic policy questions is at its highest point in 25 years.

One exception has been support for gay marriage. In May of 2008 as Obama was wrapping up the Democratic nomination, just 40 percent of Americans told Gallup's pollsters same-sex marriages should be recognized by the law as valid. This May, 50 percent said yes to the same question, the most striking shift in social attitudes during Obama's presidency. Still, more than 30 states have passed measures against it and it's frequently a losing issue at the ballot box. There are no united states on this question.

Polarization doesn't stop at politics or policy, either. It appears to be embedded in personal relationships. A pre-convention Washington Post-Kaiser Family Foundation poll found Democrats and Republicans tend to be surrounded by fellow partisans — two-thirds of their friends and family share their party leanings.

Many of us belong to tribes tinted red or blue.

WHAT WE EARN

Few could have seen it coming back when Bill Clinton was scrambling to salvage his presidency from the Monica Lewinsky business, but his later years in office are starting to look like one of the economy's golden ages. Unemployment was low, the government miraculously took in what it spent and the stock market marched steadily upward, at least until the bubble burst.

Household income peaked in 1999, at \$53,252 in today's dollars, and has declined since, to \$49,445 in 2010. That puts households back to where they were in the mid-1990s.

But an even bigger rewind to an earlier time seems to be happening with the poor.

In July, The Associated Press found a broad consensus among economists and scholars that the official poverty rate is on track to reach its highest level in nearly half a century, erasing distinct — if modest — gains from the 1960s "war on poverty" that expanded the safety net with the introduction of Medicaid, Medicare and other social welfare programs.

The wealth gap between younger and older has grown into an unprecedented divide. Older people always have more net worth than younger adults on average, but now those 65 and over have 47 times more than adults under 35. It used to be only 10 times more, a quarter-century ago.

Overall, the value of goods and services produced in the country has returned to pre-recession levels, though with 5 million fewer people working. That makes the U.S. more productive and competitive. But when combined with meager income gains during that time, it also suggests we're working harder for roughly the same pay.

WHAT WE PAY

Housing prices have dropped by a striking 34 percent since late 2006. That's good if — only if — you're buying.

Tuition is up 15 percent at four-year public universities and almost 10 percent at private four-year institutions from 2008 to 2010.

Gas? It's a rollercoaster. The U.S. saw 91 cents a gallon only 13 years ago, during Clinton's presidency. The average price hit \$2 in May 2004, \$4 in June 2008, then plunged before that year's election, spiked and rollercoasted along, sitting now at \$3.74 a gallon.

In 2008, workers paid an average of \$3,354 for a year's worth of job-based health insurance, more than double their cost from nine years earlier, the Kaiser Family Foundation reported. In 2011, that average grew to \$4,129. Not only did premiums rise, but many more workers were picking up the first \$1,000 or more of health care costs as deductibles grew and employers shifted more health costs to employees.

WHO WE WERE

Norman Rockwell's America may have come and gone, if it ever existed, but the much younger nation de Tocqueville, the French philosopher, saw in his 1830s travels is still recognizable in its older age. For all the new colors, bold strokes of the past still show.

Want some age-old perspective on why Republicans fought Obama's health care law up to the Supreme Court this year? De Tocqueville wrote: "There is hardly a political question in the United States which does not sooner or later turn into a judicial one."

Both a scold and admirer, he found Americans obsessed with money, tending to "move forward by sudden impulses and short-lived efforts," quick to form agitating associations, reveling in an "always moving scene," loving change because it "seems to give birth only to miracles," and apt to rise from their stitched-from-many-nations roots to light up the world.

You'll hear lots about change if you tune into the conventions. To be seen: whether we still believe in miracles.

(Associated Press writers Jennifer C. Kerr, Seth Borenstein and Hope Yen, and Deputy Director of Polling Jennifer Agiesta contributed to this report.)



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20120827-01	08:35	SteveB	"I Didn't Write This"
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Even if we can't win the election (though I don't believe that), maybe we can stop the hypocrisy.

"I Didn't Write This" by Alan Colmes, FOX/Huffington Post

Aug. 27, 2012, (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/alan-colmes/romney-republican-convention_b_1834278.html?utm_hp_ref=politics)

Mitt Romney, when you stand on that \$2.5 million stage in Tampa to accept the nomination, the one being built to make you look likeable, remember, you didn't build that. Your fine-tailored suits that signal your business success -- the threads that you bought with some of the money you deigned to keep in America -- remember, you didn't sew that. In fact, that business success at Bain Capital wasn't your success. You know the government that you claim should get out of the way so entrepreneurs can flourish? You used it to become a multi-millionaire.

When Bain started Environmental Data Resources of Milford, Connecticut, in 1994, it did so with the help of a \$500,000 state fund. And that was on top of another \$500,000 Connecticut had already invested in the firm from the state's Innovations agency. Victor Budnick, who ran the agency, said you got a better deal from the state than you could have received from private investors. In fact, one of the selling points your company made to government agencies was that Bain companies that received government largess got an average return of 88% through the end of 1999. Government is good, no?

When another Bain company, Leiner Health, relocated to York County, South Carolina, the government induced the move with worker training, upgrades to public roads, water and sewer facilities, and tax breaks, and a 43% cut by the county in property tax assessment. Bain bought GS Steel in 1993 for \$75 million, but with only \$8 million of its own money. But Mitt Romney, you didn't buy that company. It was made possible, in part, because of a \$3 million tax break courtesy of Kansas City. When the company went under, so did the \$3 million subsidy that could not be used for the citizens of that community.

These practices don't quite match up with the campaign speech where you decry the "endless subsidies and credits intended to shape behavior in our economic society," and denounce government "intrusion in the workings of the free marketplace itself." But that's okay, Mr. Romney, because that speech -- you didn't write that. Lindsay Hayes,

your director of speech writing, puts words in your mouth, even if they sound better coming out of it than Hays's words did when she wrote for Sarah Palin.

You know that man standing next to you on the stump, the one they say could be your sixth son? Yes, Paul Ryan, the vice presidential nominee. You didn't choose him. He was forced upon you by a right-wing base that you couldn't satisfy on your own. Oh, and he didn't make it on his own, either. That college education that prepared him for success was paid for by Social Security survivor benefits, part of a program he wants to dismantle. And his family wealth was obtained because of the company his great grandfather started, Ryan Incorporated Central, that received government contracts for roads, railroads, and part of what is now Chicago's O'Hare Airport. The company obtained at least 22 defense contracts, one of which, in 1996, was worth \$5.6 million. That family fortune that insured he never has to ever worry about the location of his next meal -- he didn't build that.

But the culmination of all that you've done is nigh upon us. Soon, you will be accepting the Republican Party nomination for president at the Tampa Bay Times Forum, an arena built with 62% government funds, a taxpayer gift of \$86 million. When that moment comes, chances are you won't be thinking about the "little people." After all, you recently remarked, "I don't give the bus driver credit for getting honor roll, I give the kid credit." Now, that's just dismissive of bus drivers, if not downright cruel. Maybe the kid had to take a school bus one day when his family's car elevator wasn't working. But please do think of one thing when you're basking in the glow of that \$2.5 million stage. Remember Governor, you didn't win the Republican nomination for president. Almost a dozen other Republicans, each taking his or her turn as the next "not Romney," lost it.

20120827-02	12:08	SteveB	"Add It Up: Taxes Avoided by the Rich Could Pay Off the Deficit"
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Sorry, Republicans. It's TAX CHEATS who are the problem...sort of like your Presidential candidate...

"Add It Up: Taxes Avoided by the Rich Could Pay Off the Deficit" by Paul Buchheit, NationofChange

Aug. 27, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/add-it-taxes-avoided-rich-could-pay-deficit-1346074084>)

Conservatives force the deficit issue, ignoring job creation, and insisting that tax increases on the rich wouldn't generate enough revenue to balance the budget. They're way off. But it takes a little arithmetic to put it all together. In the following analysis, data has been taken from a variety of sources, some of which may overlap or slightly disagree, but all of which lead to the conclusion that withheld revenue, not excessive spending, is the problem.

1. Individual and small business tax avoidance costs us \$450 billion.

The IRS estimates that 17 percent of taxes owed were not paid, leaving an underpayment of \$450 billion. In way of confirmation, an independent review of IRS data reveals that the richest 10 percent of Americans paid less than 19% on \$3.8 trillion of income in 2006, nearly \$450 billion short of a more legitimate 30% tax rate. It has also been estimated that two-thirds of the annual \$1.3 trillion in "tax expenditures" (tax subsidies from special deductions, exemptions, exclusions, credits, capital gains, and loopholes) goes to the top quintile of taxpayers. Based on IRS apportionments, this calculates out to more than \$450 billion for the richest 10 percent of Americans.

2. Corporate tax avoidance is between \$250 billion and \$500 billion.

There are numerous examples of tax avoidance by the big companies, but the most outrageous fact may be that corporations decided to drastically cut their tax rates after the start of the recession. After paying an average of 22.5% from 1987 to 2008, they've paid an annual rate of 10% since. This represents a sudden \$250 billion annual loss in taxes. Worse yet, it's a \$500 billion shortfall from the 35% statutory corporate tax rate.

3. Tax haven losses range from \$337 billion to \$500 billion.

The Tax Justice Network estimated in 2011 that \$337 billion is lost to the U.S. every year in tax haven abuse. It's probably more. A recent report placed total hidden offshore assets at somewhere between \$21 trillion and \$32 trillion. Using the lesser \$21 trillion figure, and considering that about 40% of the world's Ultra High Net Worth Individuals are Americans, and factoring in an annual 6% stock market gain based on historical records, the tax loss comes to \$500 billion.

[I believe the above figures apply to Mitt Romney's part, just by himself! –SteveB]

4. That's enough to pay off a trillion dollar deficit. Reasonable tax changes could pay it off a second time:

(a) A non-regressive payroll tax could produce \$150 billion in revenue.

Get ready for some math. The richest 10% made about \$3.84 trillion in 2006. A \$110,000 salary, which is roughly the cutoff point for payroll tax deductions, is also the approximate minimum income for the richest 10%. A 6.2% tax paid on \$1.43 trillion (\$110,000 times 13 million payees) is about \$90 billion. The lost taxes on the remaining \$2.41 trillion come to about \$150 billion.

(b) A minimal estate tax brings in another \$100 billion.

The 2009 estate tax, designed to impact only the tiny percentage of Americans with multi-million dollar estates that have never been taxed, returns about \$100 billion per year.

(c) A financial transaction tax (FTT): up to \$500 billion.

The Bank for International Settlements reported in 2008 that annual trading in derivatives had surpassed \$1.14 quadrillion (a thousand trillion dollars!). The Chicago Mercantile Exchange handles about 3 billion annual contracts worth well over 1 quadrillion dollars. One-tenth of one percent of a quadrillion dollars could pay off the deficit on its own.

More conservative estimates by the Center for Economic and Policy Research and the Chicago Political Economy Group suggest FTT revenues of a half-trillion dollars annually.

Add it all up, and we've paid off the deficit, almost twice. More importantly, the avoided taxes and a few other sensible taxes could provide sufficient revenue for job stimulus without cutting the hard-earned benefits of middle-class Americans.

20120827-03	14:33	Art	Delusions
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Trying to stay above the muck and continual to try to believe both sides have something besides racism and fundamentalism in their philosophy, the below may well cover the fundamental differences in how the two political groups see things. From the right's point of view, you're un-American if you don't see things this way. From the left's point of view these are all myths, because they have no factual basis, not because they love their country less.

Delusions:

1. Gun laws and gun deaths are unconnected.
2. Private enterprise is good; public enterprise is bad.
3. God created America and gave it a special purpose.
4. Our health-care system is the best there is.
5. The Founding Fathers were saintly figures who established liberty and democracy for everyone.
6. America is the greatest country in the world.
7. Tax rates are too high.
8. America is a peace-loving nation: the reason it gets involved in so many wars is that foreigners keep attacking us.

9. Cheap energy, gasoline especially, is our birthright.
10. Everybody else wishes they were American.

[20120827-07](#) 17:42 SteveB Re: Delusions (reply to Art, above)

I really like these, Art. Very distilled! These should be chunks of reality small and simple enough to grapple with, to discuss reasonably, to apply logic and human empathy to.

And I have no idea why it will be absolutely impossible to do that, but it will...it has proven to be impossible so far, at least.

Lord knows the subject of each is important, even crucial.

To come to grips with the truth or falsehood of these and very few other pivotal political axioms should be one of the major goals of both education and the political process in this country.

Given our rather large problems, you kinda have to ask yourself, why isn't this the case?

Why is it left to us amateurs? Doing what we pay the professionals to do, but they're too rapt-up in the power and money to do their jobs properly, or all those who are keep the others from functioning too, as in Mr. Obama's case, largely.

[20120827-09](#) 20:03 Pam Re: Delusions (reply to Art & SteveB, above)

I just listened to some clips of Romney commenting on global warming on NPR. His actual words. First he said he believed humans were contributing to climate change and we need to do something about it. Then he said he didn't know and thought spending trillions of dollars to cut greenhouse gasses was a bad idea. This man will say anything. How can people not see through this? I loved Chris Matthews' attack on Reince Priebus (what a name!) re. the race card. I just had dinner with my good conservative friend, who said, again, that the extremes on both sides make her crazy. I didn't say it, but what are the leftist extremists doing these days? I haven't noticed much hate speech coming from that quarter. I will be so glad when this election is over!--pam

Oh yeah. Remember when Hurricane Katrina was God's judgment on a sinful nation? What does Hurricane Isaac say about the Republican Convention? Jeesh!

[20120827-11](#) 21:31 SteveG Re: Delusions (reply to Pam, above)

I think it is intriguing/interesting that a man who or whom has been running for president for 6 years (at a minimum) has his staunch party supporters state that he is a private person and we just need to get to know him. Goodness gracious one would think he would have let us know him over the past 6 years, that is if he had nothing to hide, had the same beliefs then and now, did not flip flop at least once a day, etc.

Help me understand the change in welfare to work program through Obama's executive order. My understanding is that if a state had a different plan (a plan that would get the recipients to work quicker) the state could apply for and receive a waiver to the federal rules – creating smaller federal control and more states rights and getting people from welfare to work quicker. What did I miss? Why would the right wingers not want more state control & quicker movement to work?

Watch for the republican smirk – it will be everywhere this week.

[20120827-13](#) 22:48 Art Re: Delusions (reply to Pam, above)

I think Isaac is a message from Almighty God who has conjured up a mighty wind to blow away all the hate and viciousness of the Republican Party sinners.

How's that?

20120827-04 15:49 SteveB "George W. Bush as Hurricane Isaac"

WHERE IS GEORGE BUSH AT THE CONVENTION? NOT EVEN A MENTION OF HIS NAME!

If he was so great and Obama so bad, why is his name total sh*t???

The secret is out: even Republican know idiot Bush came within an inch of destroying the country!

Now they want us to elect another idiot?

"George W. Bush as Hurricane Isaac" by Robert Reich, Huffington Post

Aug. 27, 2012, (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-reich/george-w-bush-as-hurricane-bush-1833469.html>)

There is nothing Republicans would rather the American people forget more than George W. Bush, who doesn't even have a bit-part at the GOP convention opening today in Tampa.

But W's ghost may be there, anyway.

The National Weather Service says tropical storm Isaac is now heading for New Orleans, and Isaac is projected to become a Category 1 hurricane by the time it makes landfall late Monday or early Tuesday.

Isaac is very likely to revive memories of the Bush administration's monumental incompetence in dealing with the needs of Americans caught in Hurricane Katrina.

And if the public remembers the Bush administration's incompetence with Katrina, they may also recall that administration's lies about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq -- which led us into that devastating war.

And the public may recall how George W. Bush took the \$5 billion surplus Bill Clinton bequeathed to him and turned it into a \$6 trillion budget deficit by slashing taxes, mostly on the rich, and by creating an expensive new Medicare drug benefit that helped insurance companies more than it helped seniors.

The public might even recall how the Bush administration tried not to see what Wall Street was up to when the Street went on a rampage of risky bets, and then, when Wall Street was about to melt down, pushed Congress into approving a no-strings bailout -- both of which cost the nation billions more.

Indeed, we're still living with George W. Bush's legacy -- the last Republican to occupy the White House -- which is a truth that Romney is desperate to put out of our minds. He wants to blame the bad economy, and most of everything else, on Obama.

The GOP was intent on not even bringing up Bush's name at the GOP convention, because **the former president might also remind Americans how little the Republicans care about average Americans, like those caught in Hurricane Katrina, and how much they care about top corporate and Wall Street executives, like those being entertained in Tampa.**

But Hurricane Isaac seems likely to remind Americans anyway. And the split screen on the TV newscasts -- part GOP convention, part Hurricane Isaac bashing into the Gulf Coast -- will pose a public-relations problem to the GOP of the first order.

20120827-05 17:03 SteveG "Prosecutor: Georgia Murder Case Uncovers Terror Plot"

"Prosecutor: Georgia Murder Case Uncovers Terror Plot" by Russ Bynum, AP/Yahoo! News

Aug. 27, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/prosecutor-ga-murder-case-uncovers-terror-plot-173341769.html>)

(LUDOWICI, Ga.) Four Army soldiers based in southeast Georgia killed a former comrade and his girlfriend to protect an anarchist militia group they formed that stockpiled assault weapons and plotted a range of anti-government attacks, prosecutors told a judge Monday.

Prosecutors in rural Long County, near the sprawling Army post Fort Stewart, said the militia group of active and former U.S. military members spent at least \$87,000 buying guns and bomb components. They allege the group was serious enough to kill two people — former soldier Michael Roark and his 17-year-old girlfriend, Tiffany York — by shooting them in the woods last December in order to keep its plans secret.

"This domestic terrorist organization did not simply plan and talk," prosecutor Isabel Pauley told a Superior Court judge. "Prior to the murders in this case, the group took action. Evidence shows the group possessed the knowledge, means and motive to carry out their plans."

One of the Fort Stewart soldiers charged in the case, Pfc. Michael Burnett, also gave testimony that backed up many of the assertions made by prosecutors. The 26-year-old soldier pleaded guilty Monday to manslaughter, illegal gang activity and other charges. He made a deal to cooperate with prosecutors against the three other soldiers.

Prosecutors said the group called itself F.E.A.R., short for Forever Enduring Always Ready. Pauley said authorities don't know how many members it had.

Burnett, 26, said he knew the group's leaders from serving with them at Fort Stewart. He agreed to testify against fellow soldiers Pvt. Isaac Aguigui, identified by prosecutors as the militia's founder and leader, and Sgt. Anthony Peden and Pvt. Christopher Salmon.

All are charged by state authorities with malice murder, felony murder, criminal gang activity, aggravated assault and using a firearm while committing a felony. A hearing for the three soldiers was scheduled Thursday.

Prosecutors say Roark, 19, served with the four defendants in the 4th Brigade Combat Team of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division and became involved with the militia. Pauley said the group believed it had been betrayed by Roark, who left the Army two days before he was killed, and decided the ex-soldier and his girlfriend needed to be silenced.

Burnett testified that on the night of Dec. 4, he and the three other soldiers lured Roark and York to some woods a short distance from the Army post under the guise that they were going target shooting. He said Peden shot Roark's girlfriend in the head while she was trying to get out of her car. Salmon, he said, made Roark get on his knees and shot him twice in the head. Burnett said Aguigui ordered the killings.

"A 'loose end' is the way Isaac put it," Burnett said.

Aguigui's attorney, Daveniya Fisher, did not immediately return a phone call from The Associated Press. Attorneys for Peden and Salmon both declined to comment Monday.

Also charged in the killings is Salmon's wife, Heather Salmon. Her attorney, Charles Nester, did not immediately return a call seeking comment.

Pauley said Aguigui funded the militia using \$500,000 in insurance and benefit payments from the death of his pregnant wife a year ago. Aguigui was not charged in his wife's death, but Pauley told the judge her death was "highly suspicious."

She said Aguigui used the money to buy \$87,000 worth of semiautomatic assault rifles, other guns and bomb components that were recovered from the accused soldiers' homes and from a storage locker. He also used the insurance payments to buy land for his militia group in Washington State, Pauley said.

In a videotaped interview with military investigators, Pauley said, Aguigui called himself "the nicest cold-blooded murderer you will ever meet." He used the Army to recruit militia members, who wore distinctive tattoos that resemble an anarchy symbol, she said. Prosecutors say they have no idea how many members belong to the group.

"All members of the group were on active-duty or were former members of the military," Pauley said. "He targeted soldiers who were in trouble or disillusioned."

The prosecutor said the militia group had big plans. It plotted to take over Fort Stewart by seizing its ammunition control point and talked of bombing the Forsyth Park fountain in nearby Savannah, she said. In Washington state, she added, the group plotted to bomb a dam and poison the state's apple crop. Ultimately, prosecutors said, the militia's goal was to overthrow the government and assassinate the president.

Fort Stewart spokesman Kevin Larson said the Army has dropped its own charges against the four soldiers in the slayings of Roark and York. The Military authorities filed their charges in March but never acted on them. Fort Stewart officials Monday refused to identify the units the accused soldiers served in and their jobs within those units.

"Fort Stewart-Hunter Army Airfield does not have a gang or militia problem," Larson said in a prepared statement, though he said Army investigators still have an open investigation in the case.

"However, we don't believe there are any unknown subjects," he said.

District Attorney Tom Durden said his office has been sharing information with federal authorities, but no charges have been filed in federal court. Jim Durham, an assistant U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Georgia, would not comment on whether a case is pending.

20120827-06	17:32	SteveG	"Chris Matthews Accuses Romney of Playing 'Race Card'"
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Video is worth watching...

"Chris Matthews Accuses Romney of Playing 'Race Card'" (w/video) by Dylan Stableford, Yahoo! News

Aug. 27, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/ticket/chris-matthews-race-card-romney-priebus-145819601.html>)

Video (Chris Matthews Rips Reince Priebus): <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VxGUnc57eP0>.

Chris Matthews lashed out at Republican National Committee Chairman Reince Priebus on Monday in Tampa during a live "Morning Joe" segment, with the feisty MSNBC host accusing Mitt Romney and the GOP of playing the race card in their campaign against President Barack Obama.

"It is an embarrassment to your party to play that card," Matthews said. "This stuff about getting rid of the work requirement for welfare is dishonest, everyone's pointed out it's dishonest, and you are playing that little ethnic card there. You can play games and giggle about it, but the fact is your side is playing that card. You start talking about work requirements, everyone knows what game you're playing. It's a race card."

Matthews railed Priebus over Romney's recent joke about the birther movement.

"This thing about if your name is Romney," Matthews said. "Yeah you went to prep school and you brag about it. This guy's got an African name, he has to live with it. Look who's going further in their life. Who was born on third base? This absurdity, making fun of the birth certificate issue."

"Of course he's playing the race card," he continued. "Why would he bring [the birth certificate] up?"

"Because he's an awkward joker," co-host Mika Brzezinski responded.

"He misfired badly on the joke," Joe Scarborough said.

Tom Brokaw, seated next to Matthews, called it a demonstration of Romney's "awkward sense of humor."

"I do think in fairness that during the debates there was a lot of stuff aimed at the president that was not refuted by leaders of the party," Brokaw said.

Priebus, who stayed mostly silent during Matthews' rant, eventually responded.

"I'm not going to get into a shouting match with Chris," Priebus said, calling his accusations "garbage."

"We've gotten to a point in politics where any moment of levity is frowned upon by guys like you just so you can push your brand," the RNC chairman said. "You know what, good for you."

Last week on "The Tonight Show," Matthews was far less critical of the GOP campaign, but alluded to Romney's awkwardness.

"He's a little remote, you know?" Matthews said. "He says things like, 'Oh, I just left the aircraft.' What are you, a Conehead? What planet are you from? Nobody talks like that. We earthlings have a certain language. [We say] 'I just got off the plane.'"

20120827-08	17:52	SteveB	Fw: MoveOn Action: "Stepping on the Middle Class" (30-Second TV Ad)
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Video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=RXfy1aA9oKI.

from MoveOn:

Our efforts to define Mitt Romney as the candidate for the 1% are working. Nearly 6 in 10 Americans think Romney will look out for the rich more than the middle class if he becomes president.¹

But Romney just pulled ahead of President Obama in the latest national poll, and he's gaining ground in some key swing states.² At the Republican Convention in Tampa this week, Romney's going to try to do what all the experts say he has to—make us believe that he actually cares about the middle class, even though all the evidence shows otherwise.

That's why it's so important to remind voters that Romney and Ryan will step on cash-strapped seniors by dismantling Medicare and walk over the struggling middle class with more taxes to pay for steep tax cuts for the rich.³ And we have a video that LITERALLY shows just that.

[Watch this short video of Romney and Ryan accepting their nomination for President and Vice President of the 1%. And then share it with all your friends so that they're not fooled.](#)



Thanks for all you do. –Lenore, Tate, Emily, Robin, and the rest of the team

P.S. Tune in soon for the hilarious mockumentary about how Mitt Romney survived his hardscrabble childhood 'burbs of Bloomfield Hills to become the man he is today. It's aptly named "The Man from Bloomfield Hills", and it's coming out just in time for Romney's acceptance speech!

Sources:

¹"Poll: Obama, Romney neck-and-neck ahead of party conventions," *The Washington Post*, August 27, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=279437&id=&t=5&id=49894-20195165-mpO7lax&t=4>.

²Ibid.

"Despite Medicare plan, Romney gains in swing states," *The Boston Globe*, August 23, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=279459&id=49894-20195165-mpO7lax&t=5>.

³"Study: Romney tax plan would result in cuts for rich, higher burden for others," *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2012, <http://www.moveon.org/r?r=278241&id=49894-20195165-mpO7lax&t=6>.

20120827-10 20:50 SteveG Fw: Kucinich Action: Make Your Voice Heard!
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from Dennis Kucinich:

This week and next week, the Republican and Democratic parties are gathering in Tampa and Charlotte to have their conventions and agree upon a national platform - the official party position.

We launched Kucinich Action this summer to continue to stand for policies to transform our communities, our nation, and our world. This has always been a movement based on your voice, hopes and ideas.

As we move toward the next phase in our movement, I want to hear from you. What issues do you care about most? What should we focus on in the coming months? Click here to fill out our 2012 Issues Survey, and let us know where you stand.

We have big plans for Kucinich Action and our movement, but we need your help to guide this movement forward. Your input will help us as we select allies to work with us on these priorities in the next Congress.

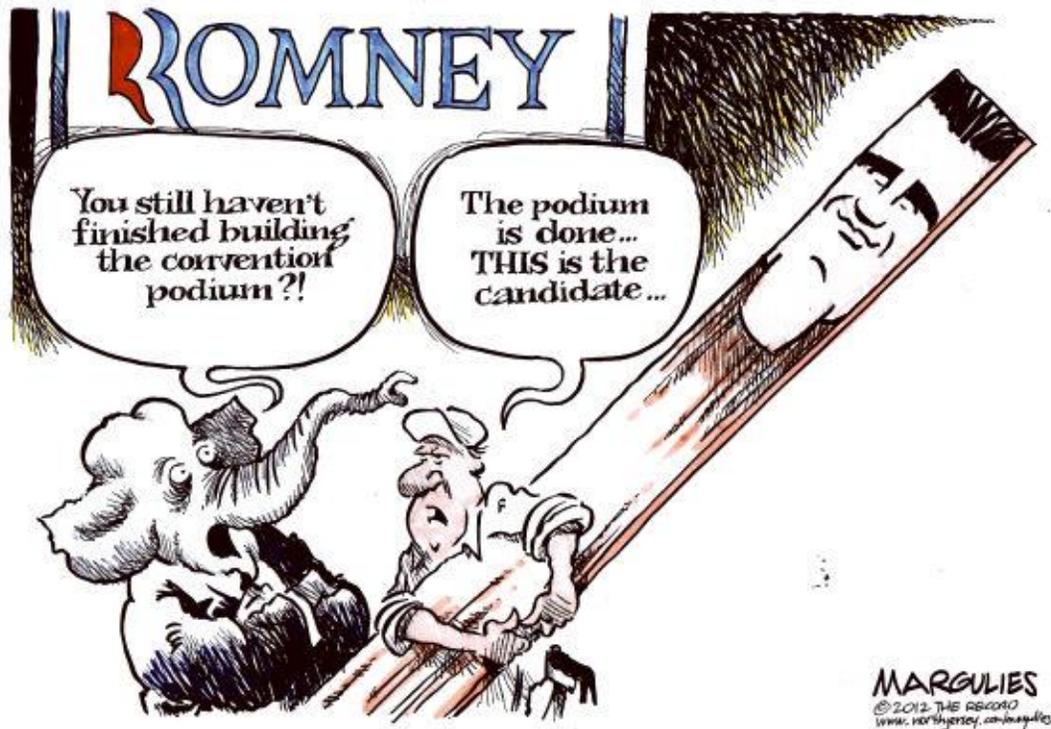
Please click here to complete the Kucinich Action issues survey:

<http://action.kucinich.us/page/s/issuessurvey>.

Let us continue to lead the way forward. Please join me. Together we can meet any challenge. Together we will restore peace, liberty and social and economic justice to this land we love.

Courage, Dennis Kucinich [We know who he got that from. -SteveB]

[20120827-12](#) 21:52 SteveB Cartoon: Wooden Man



<http://www.thefancydressbox.co.uk/ace-of-spades-card-mens-costume-one-size-p-3938.html>



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

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