



# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #232 — SEPT. 24, 2012

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

**INDEX: Click here.**

## **Evil Corporations**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Sept. 24, 2012)

If there is one thing Republicans seem to believe about big corporations, it's that they treat people and humanity much better than big government does. Not according to common sense or these movies:

"9 Movies with Evil Corporations That Want to Destroy Humanity" by Julianne Escobedo Shepherd, AlterNet

Sept. 18, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/9-movies-evil-corporations-want-destroy-humanity>)

(Sometimes art imitates life, even just a little bit.)



A terrible virus is unleashed by an evil corporation that turns humans and animals into voracious zombies: it's a plot point so popular with Americans that the *Resident Evil* franchise has released a fifth movie based on the premise, in theaters now. It's already leading at the box office (\$21 million this weekend) and will likely remain wildly popular (it's made upwards of \$100 million worldwide, per film), thanks to its star, Milla Jovovich, and its ability to crossover into horror, sci-fi, gaming, and Maxim audiences.

But its righteous storyline about protagonist Alice (Jovovich) struggling to save humanity against corporate global takeover in a near future has its own resonance. **Distrust of corporations is steadily increasing around the world, according to the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer, with business distrust reaching its lowest point in 10 years.** The concept that a big evil corporation would do something irresponsible enough to decimate the population is not that farfetched considering some of the disasters we've seen in the past few years (BP's giant oil spill, the housing crisis) and films in which corporations are responsible for unspeakable horrors play on our fears. More often than not, they're redemption stories, the protagonist triumphing over some dastardly deed, and sometimes they're even based in truth—though usually the documentaries on this list have less than perfect endings.

Here are nine films in which a corporation does something horrible to humanity (and occasionally prevails).

### 1. *The Corporation*

This is sort of ground-zero of the psychology of it all, a documentary that's just as eerie and terrifying as any of the science fiction films on this list. Legendarily, the film applied tenets of psychiatry to corporations as though their behavior is that of a person, which they are, legally speaking. The result: corporate behavior as analyzed by criteria from the DSM-IV diagnoses such well-known entities as the Coca-Cola Corporation and IBM as bona fide psychopaths, due to their lack of concern for the well-being of people, expunging of responsibility for their actions, and lack of guilt for any of it. The corporations featured in this documentary have unleashed horrors upon the population, from assisting the Nazis in genocide (IBM) to privatizing a poor country's water supply (Bechtel Corporation, **in Boliva**). So this film is a good primer for the pathos that makes Americans so transfixed by movies that depict outsized corporations doing unspeakable things to us—because the real corporations are so stealth, we need something tangible on which to affix our anxieties.

### 2. *Coma*

The 1978, Michael Crichton-directed film (based on the novel of the same name by Robin Cook) plays on the terrifically scary idea that our healthcare providers might be worse than incompetent, they might be evil. When patients at a large hospital in Boston who go in for minor procedures start ending up in comas, one doctor begins to get suspicious, particularly when her best friend is one of those patients. After some investigative work, she discovers that a shadow corporate entity behind the hospital, the Jefferson Institute, is behind the comas, inducing them for profit in a creepy plot twist. It's a paranoia that apparently resonates with today's healthcare-wanting masses—A&E remade the film in the TV format earlier this month, playing on our fears that big medicine is nothing more than another way for the rich to get richer. Even if it means sacrificing our actual bodies.

### 3. *The Island*

Another in the corner of terrible corporeal nightmares is Merrick Biotech, the corporation in this 2005 Scarlett Johansson vehicle, which clones humans and keeps their body doubles on a prisonlike island, available for organ transplants whenever they might need one. The problem, though, is that the clones don't know they're clones—they live as though they're the originals, while the originals don't know their clones have the ability to think or be, beyond a purely organic state. It's the evil of good intentions: Merrick Biotech is ostensibly trying to help humanity, but by keeping this giant secret, it's harboring a horrible paradox that at the very least could severely screw up some people's mental states if and when they happen to bump into their clone-twin. The concept delves into some very real moral questions about the biotech industry, and a cloning ethics debate that was at a furious peak when this movie was made, at the beginning of Bush's second term and stem-cell insanity.

### 4. *Soylent Green*

This sci-fi classic predicts a dystopian future that's entirely manmade, the planet having been decimated thanks to the vagaries of overpopulation. After pollution and global warming deplete the crops, humans all over the world are starving, and New York City's only recourse is to consume pellets dispersed to them by the Soyent Corporation, which processes nutritious food rations for a weakened population. But their ingredients are worse than (almost) anything you can find in a can at the bodega, and in a disorganized world, there's no one to keep them in check—so the pop will eat itself, as it were. A good argument for FDA regulation, also a fairly good argument for why the film's star, Charlton Heston, went crazy and bought a ton of guns. You're in enough apocalypse movies, you might start getting a little paranoid.

### 5. *The Insider*

Here's another good case for government regulation: the film based on the true story of big tobacco whistleblower Jeffrey Wigand, who told "60 Minutes" in 1996 that his former employer, Philip Morris, and other major tobacco corporations knew that nicotine in cigarettes is both addictive and causes cancer. Blowing the lid on a major coverup—many top executives had perjured themselves under oath, as well as knowingly misled millions of customers—the film explores the drama that led to a landmark \$246 billion settlement on the part of Big Tobacco, from the CBS producer who first pursued the story, to the near-destruction of Wigand's life thanks to a corporate smear campaign. This is one of the rare redemption stories on this list that's also true, and inspiringly, a host of ominously powerful corporations were essentially stopped by a single honest man.

### 6. *Daybreakers*

Okay, this one is a tad convoluted, but it's a great horror movie that also plays on peoples' fear of corporations. So, nearly the entire world has been infected by a vampire virus that, well, turns us all into vampires. This is working out all right for society except that, since most of the global population drinks human blood, there's a human shortage. Fewer than 5% of humans remain, so a corporation called Bromley Marks is working on a synthetic version of blood, because when vampires don't get fed, they don't die, they just turn into crazed, freakish Nosferatu monsters (whereas normal vampires are merely civilized night people). But if a better solution comes along, will the greedy head of Bromley Marks go the weaker route if it makes him more money? What do you think? The vampires aren't really a larger metaphor here, but it sure helps flesh out the corpo characters that they've got fangs and beady little eyes.

### 7. *District 9*

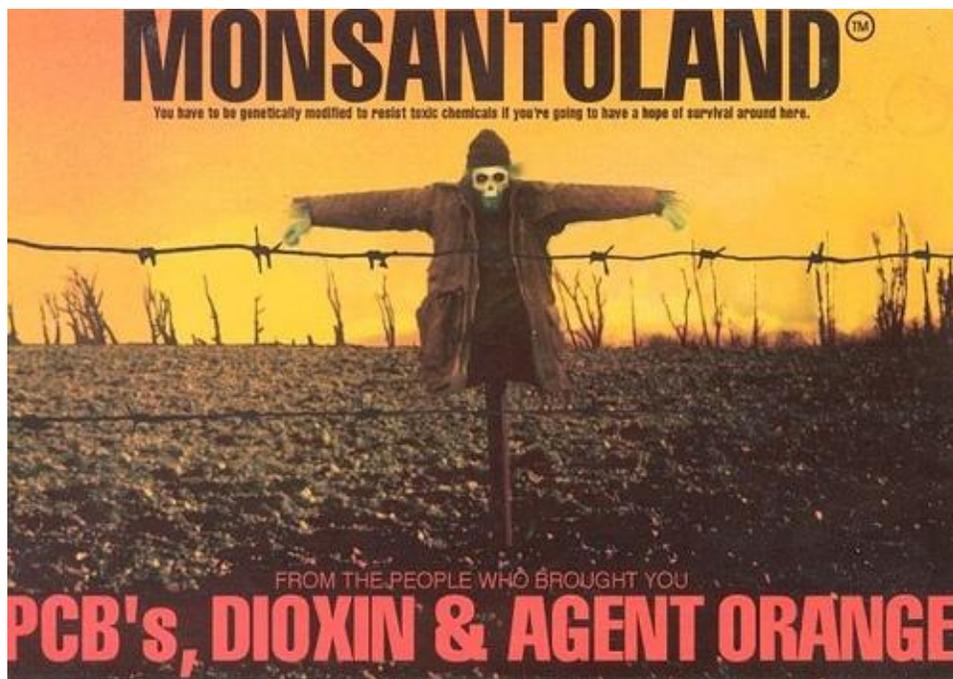
Think of this science fiction film's evil corporation, Multi-National United, as a cross between the SS and Halliburton. A military conglomerate that's predicated on having the biggest weapons and being the biggest xenophobes, MNU is responsible for a Johannesburg internment camp where a population of not-so-attractive but kind-hearted aliens is stranded and imprisoned by humans. Of course, the deadliest combination is that of the corporate psyche (no conscience) and the military one (kill everything), so this entire film is about innocent aliens trying to get home while keeping their advanced weaponry out of the hands of the warmongers. Complete with commentary on racism and, well, species-ism, the underlying lesson here is that corporations will flout laws, whether governmental or moral, for their own greedy ends.

### 8. *Brain Twisters*

This film's storyline is a parent's biggest fear: those computer games your kids are playing are making them completely violent. A really bad 1991 movie, *Brain Twisters* follows a college professor's video-game research, expedited at the behest of a major corporation, which is being conducted on students. Instead of *Call of Duty* (or maybe exactly like *Call of Duty*), though, the professor's games actually control and warp the mind of the player, flipping on the homicidal and/or suicidal switch in their brains for the benefit of the corporations' profits, presumably. This movie is not worth watching, but it is notable that it plays on the concept of corpo video games ruining the minds of the youth (which the professor does by using... fractals).

### 9. *Pootie Tang*

A Chris Rock classic (written and directed by Louis C.K.), *Pootie Tang* not only spoofs blaxploitation flicks but also makes comedic commentary on corporations' stranglehold on America. The title character is a parody of a *Sweet Sweetback* style badass who also happens to be incredibly empowering to the youth through his various talents, including singing and doing Bruce Lee moves with his belt—a positive role model whose PSAs and influence are affecting the sales of the evil LectorCorp. Because the corporate bottom line is always, well, the bottom line, LectorCorp launches an offensive against Pootie Tang, leading him to implode his own career and infecting the youth with act-alikes that will tow the line for its products. For a big over-the-top comedy, the script is pretty true to life—but then when you've got truth-tellers like Rock and C.K. telling the tale, you aren't going to get anything too false about the American predicament. And it's a lesson: when corporations aren't doing overtly terrible things, they're still trying to control our free will with their outsized pocketbooks and influence. One of the worst sins of all.



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<a href="#">20120921-01</a>	07:32	MarthaH	"Midwest Drought Belt: A Changed World Emerges"
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I thought this article was a good summary of The Way Things Are across our area and many others. It has been depressing to go on a drive and see the fields as they are--and the brown yards with deep cracks. Smutty field stubble is common now in early harvesting. A very rare field having had adequate rain in a timely fashion was spied on our way to Lafayette. We are declared "past" the drought here, but nothing is normal to the eye. I think although you personally may have escaped our scenes, your grocery store will bring you the fallout shortly.

This September, thus far, has been declared our first below normal temperatures in over a year, and frost is predicted for Saturday night. It's all so odd, and I fear it's the future as politics plays out more and more with our climate.

"Midwest Drought Belt: A Changed World Emerges" by Judy Keen, *USA Today*

Sept. 20, 2012. [(<http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/story/2012-09-20/midwest-drought-cover/57816198/1>)]

At first glance, it looks like a typical fall across the Midwest.

It's not.

Beneath green pastures and lawns brought to life by August rains, the earth is still desiccated. On closer inspection, the brown corn stalks are half as tall as they should be and the husks contain stunted ears — or nothing at all.

The drought of 2012 isn't just a rural tragedy. Barges plying the Ohio and Mississippi rivers carry less cargo to avoid running aground in low water.

Homeowners far from farmland are paying for expensive repairs to basements and foundations separated from the shrinking soil around them. Businesses that depend on water — a canoe rental company, a campground that counts on its well-stocked fishing pond to attract visitors — feel the economic pain, too.

"The drought is not over by any means," says Josh Sittler, battalion chief for the Honey Creek Township Fire Department in western Indiana. Fall brings new worries: brush fires and fires caused by dry plant dust jamming the engines of farmers' combines.

The northern Great Plains and Upper Midwest remain "drought-stricken," meteorologist David Simeral of the Western Regional Climate Center notes. All of nine states — Arizona, Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Iowa, Missouri — can't shake the drought.

The scorching of the central USA is one of the nation's worst in decades: Almost 65% of the nation is enduring drought conditions, Thursday's Drought Monitor reported. That's the highest percentage since the government website began recording conditions in 2000. Purdue economist Chris Hurt pegged the cost at \$77 billion, which would make it the third-costliest natural disaster in U.S. history, after Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and another devastating drought in 1988.

Americans in the stricken states and well beyond them are feeling the pain, as the prices of food, gas, retail goods and utilities have all ticked up.

The extreme drought has been exacerbated by near-record heat: The summer of 2012 was the third-hottest in U.S. weather history, and July was the hottest month the nation has ever recorded.

The dominant mood in four drought belt states visited this week by *USA Today* was resignation tempered by hope that next year will be better. And the deadpan humor that's part of the Midwestern ethos is intact: Paul Staley, a farmer in Paris, Ill., jokes that at least "the well didn't go dry until the hurricane hit" — a reference to the remnants of Tropical Storm Isaac that brought some rain earlier this month.

Snapshots from the road:

### Day 1: Even the fish suffer

The drought was a double whammy for the Virostko family.

Third-generation farmer Jim Virostko, 58, is selling one of his tractors. His corn crop was lousy, and he had no crop insurance. He had to haul in water for his 120 cattle.

His wife, Pam Blake-Virostko, 60, hasn't had a great year either. The main attraction at Peaceful Waters, the campground she opened last year with her brother, David Blake, is a well-stocked pond. "Free fishing for campers!" their brochure says.

Water levels dropped 17 inches in a couple months, and the fish took refuge in the deepest part of the pond. "It was hard to catch fish," Blake-Virostko says, and it was too hot for camping anyway. "We're still not breaking even," she says.

Doug and Lori Miller's passion for growing Christmas trees hasn't been dented by the drought, but they took a hit this year: 384 of the 750 seedlings they planted at Holiday Hill Christmas Tree Farm died.

Fortunately, most of their mature trees are fine and they'll have plenty to sell come Christmas. "We're doing cartwheels," says Doug Miller, who like his wife is 45.

At this time of year, Paul and Sherry Staley deck themselves out in orange garb and turn their farm into Pumpkin Works. They sell pumpkins and set up a dozen intricate mazes. Last year, more than 35,000 people came between Sept. 15 and Halloween.

This year things are a little different. The cornfield where some of the mazes are cut is dead and the stalks are too short to create blind paths and dead ends, so they put up a sign dubbing it the "drought maze."

"We find the public very understanding if you're right up front with them," says Paul Staley, 66.

Because the drought damaged apple crops, the price the Staleys paid a wholesaler for cider doubled this year. That forced them to add 50 cents to the cost of the cider sippers they sell. Last year's price was \$1.50.

The 33-acre pumpkin crop is fine, thanks to rain at a key moment in their growing cycle, but the drought "slowed them up a little," he says.

"If we had no pumpkins, we'd be in big trouble," says Sherry Staley, 65.

### Day 2: When the well runs dry

Dennis Green knew in June that this was going to be a difficult year on his 800-acre corn and soybean farm. It had rained in early May, says Green, 59, but he didn't know then that "was going to be the last rain we received."

By the time 1.7 inches of rain fell in July, it was too late for most of his corn crop. "Farming," he says, "is quite a gamble most of the time."

Lisa Barnett, 51, thought the 23-foot well that serves her home would last a lifetime.

Then the drought hit. One day in July, with a house full of family, she turned on a faucet and "it was just barely a trickle."

It cost \$5,000 to dig 8 feet deeper. It was worth it, Barnett says. She doesn't have to haul clothes to the laundromat anymore.

"This is the worst I've ever seen," says Tim Riley, 53, who with his brother-in-law farms 5,000 acres and runs a trucking company and other businesses.

Riley, who grew up here, should be harvesting 170-175 bushels from each acre of corn. He's getting as little as 16 bushels an acre. That means he won't buy new tractors or the semi-truck he's been wanting.

"It's been trying," he says of this miserable year, and his wife, Renae, "says it's put me in a bad mood."

On the worst days, when temperatures soared past 100, Donna Whitley, owner of The Garden Shed, had to water her flowers, plants and trees three times a day. "I can't stand to see them die," she says.

Some of them did anyway — even trees that were 6 or 7 feet tall. Dogwoods, pears and plums were among the drought's victims.

Asked if she's tallied her losses, Whitley, 61, says, "Not yet."

### Day 3: Garden never had a chance

The enemies of the commercial river shipping business don't lurk beneath the water. Long, skinny sandbars are plainly visible in the middle of the river between Paducah, Ky., and Metropolis, Ill. They're plotted on charts to keep boats away and marked by buoys.

Capt. Mike Hays, 51, who has worked on rivers for 30 years, has never seen anything like it. "They're right in the middle of the river," he marvels.

Low water has forced barge companies, including AEP River Operations, which owns the Buckeye State, to load less cargo in barges, string fewer barges together and slow down in the narrower, more shallow river channel. Nobody, Hays says, wants to "bump bottom."

This year, he says, "We've had all sorts of problems with the river."

Arrayed on a table at the Community Farmers Market are plump tomatoes, big onions and hefty sweet potatoes.

Peggy Carter wishes they had come from her 1/4-acre garden, but she drove 90 minutes to pick them up at an Amish community that was blessed with more rain this summer.

Carter, 67, admits she's a little jealous of the bounty. Her green beans never sprouted. Her cucumbers blossomed, but then the flowers fell off and the cukes never grew. She won't be canning this fall.

"Too much heat, not enough water," she says.

The drought has everyone around here "feeling kind of down."

Greg Rodgers, a veterinarian at Coffee Memorial Animal Clinic, doesn't worry about the drought's effects on pets. He brought his two outdoor dogs inside on the hottest days and knows that "most people take good care of their animals."

It's the cattle he worries about, though. A farmer called the other day to ask why some of his cows are aborting their calves.

"Probably heat stress," Rodgers says.

#### Day 4: Homes are ravaged, too

The first thing people notice is that their doors, windows or deadbolts are hard to open and close.

Sometimes homeowners spot their foundations pulling away from exterior walls. Sometimes they hear a noise that sounds like a gunshot.

All are clues to big problems caused by the drought: damage to foundations, basements and walls.

The gunshot sound comes from a cracking foundation. The other symptoms indicate that shrinking dry soil is making foundations, porches and concrete slabs settle. Beneath them, big gaps can open up under a house.

On Thursday, a crew from Helitech, which does structural repair in five states, was shoring up the foundation and porch of a home in a subdivision here. It has the telltale gaps and cracks. Without intervention, much bigger and more expensive problems could visit.

"Little minor problems can all of a sudden become 'holy cow,' " says Burk Watts, a territory manager.

He's seeing a rash of similar issues in Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Indiana and especially Missouri, he says. His 16 estimators are so busy that customers often have to wait two or three weeks to see one, he says. Foundation repair jobs are "tenfold what we would normally see."

Depending on the damage, repairs can start in the hundreds of dollars and soar into the tens of thousands. Vern Ganzer, foreman on this job, recently finished repairs at a Kentucky church that cost \$90,000.

It wasn't a great summer for fishing, says Debbie Kaempfer, who works at Foutz Hunting & Fishing Shop.

It was just too hot, she says, and water levels were so low at some private ponds that fish died. Some pond owners bought aerators to keep enough oxygen in shallow, hot water.

Kaempfer, 54, noticed a shift in the mood around town, too. "People were short, grumpy," she says. "I feel sorry for the farmers."

She's hoping — as so many people are — that next year will be better.

"Everything changes," she says. "Everything goes around."

(Contributing: Doyle Rice)

<a href="#">20120921-03</a>	08:33	Pam	Re: "Midwest Drought Belt: A Changed World Emerges" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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This is so sad. If more rain doesn't fall next year, or the next, do you think the mid-west will turn into desert? Didn't the Sahara used to be filled with trees? I know Afghanistan did, until they cut all the trees down for firewood. We use up the earth, then nature stomps on us yet again. I worry that fracking will open up caverns beneath the surface and cause sinkholes. The only bright spot I see is the fact, so far, that human beings are fairly adept at adapting in the long term.

<a href="#">20120921-02</a>	08:21	Pam	Re: "Empty Chair 'Lynchings'..." (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #231)
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My sentiments exactly.

<a href="#">20120921-04</a>	09:50	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Fight GMO Apples!
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from CREDO Action:

Millions of apples are packed into our children's lunches every day by parents happy to provide a treat they know is healthy and delicious. But now, for the first time, the USDA could let a safe, popular fruit be replaced by a poorly tested and potentially toxic product from a weird science experiment.

Genetically modified apples that won't turn brown when cut are on a fast-track to USDA approval. They're intended for the fresh-sliced apple market, but could find their way into the produce aisle shelves and into juice, juice-sweetened snacks, applesauce and baby foods, all of which are mostly consumed by children. No labeling would be required.

Tell grocery store CEOs to make it clear that they won't be a market for genetically modified apples or processed foods that use them. Click here to sign the petition:

[http://www.credoaction.com/campaign/apples\\_gmo/index2.html](http://www.credoaction.com/campaign/apples_gmo/index2.html).

Like other GMO foods, these apples are likely to be approved without any public, peer-reviewed study of their long-term effects. USDA wants to let food producers experiment further on us in its quest to make a minor cosmetic improvement to a fruit intended for mass human consumption.

Apple growers' industry associations representing over 60 percent of commercial orchards have already come out against GMO apples.<sup>1</sup> Many are concerned about reduced consumer confidence in the apple market, while some organic growers are concerned that pollen contamination from GMO orchards could endanger their organic certification.<sup>2</sup>

Consumer advocates worry that these apples will look fresh when they aren't, posing a new food safety threat — a threat no one has to worry about with conventional apples.<sup>3</sup> And once they're sold into the food processed-food market, they could end up in any product that uses apples.

As an activist and consumer, you are in a powerful position to pressure leading U.S. grocery stores to reject these genetically modified apples, which may turn out to be toxic for our children.

If this unlabeled, potentially dangerous fruit succeeds, it will only be the first of many. If there are long-term consequences to eating genetically modified fruit we won't find out under our current regulatory climate until much too late.

That's why we need to act now, before these apples hit the shelves at our local grocery stores. Tell grocery store owners to keep these mutant apples out of our shopping carts.

Thank you for speaking out. —Becky Bond, Political Director

Sources:

<sup>1</sup>Wenonah Hauter, "One Genetically Engineered Apple Spoils the Bunch," The Dr. Oz Show, Aug. 3, 2012, <http://act.credoaction.com/r/?r=6966066&id=47292-3891339-xgEc0dx&t=12>.

<sup>2</sup>Andrew Pollack, "That Fresh Look, Genetically Buffed," *The New York Times*, July 12, 2012, <http://act.credoaction.com/r/?r=6966067&id=47292-3891339-xgEc0dx&t=13>.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

20120921-05	11:25	SteveB	Fw: UltraViolet Action: Register to Vote!
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from UltraViolet:

This is a notice from UltraViolet's Voter Registration Center: Voter registration deadlines are approaching soon. In order to vote in this year's presidential election, you must be registered to vote.

Take a moment to register or re-register to vote today by clicking this link and going to our Voter Registration Center:

<http://www.weareultraviolet.org/vote/>.

If you have moved in the last year, or gotten married or divorced and changed your name, you may need to re-register to vote in the 2012 election. And if you have never registered to vote before, you need to register to vote in this election.

You can also find helpful information at our website, including information about where and when to vote, and what you need to bring to the polls. You can also check your current registration status.

If you wait too long to register or re-register to vote, you could miss out on this year's election. Don't let that happen. Join millions of other women at the polls on November 6, 2012, and make sure women's voices are heard.

Register to vote!

Thanks, Nita, Shaunna and Kat, the UltraViolet team

PS: Forward this e-mail to five friends today. Don't let your friends miss the voter registration deadline in your state.

20120923-04	20:10	SteveB	Fw: Avaaz Action: Hope for bees — 48 Hours to Act!
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from Avaaz:

Quietly, **billions of bees are dying**, threatening our crops and food. But **if the US Environmental Protection Agency bans a major pesticide, we could save bees from extinction.**

Four European countries have begun banning many of these poisons, and some bee populations are already recovering. But Bayer has lobbied hard to keep their main pesticide on the US market. The EPA has been slow to react, but an Avaaz petition with over a million signers helped force the agency to open a formal consultation to measure public support for action -- and **in 48 hours, the consultation closes.** Let's all act now and call on the EPA to put people before polluters and save our bees!

The pressure is working, and this is our best chance for impact in the fight for bee survival. **Send an urgent message to the EPA at the link below**, and we'll formally submit it before the deadline on Tuesday!

Bees don't just make honey, they **are vital to life on earth**, every year pollinating 90% of plants and crops -- with an estimated \$40bn value, over one-third of the food supply in many countries. **Without immediate action to save bees, many of our favourite fruits, vegetables, and nuts could vanish from our shelves.**

Recent years have seen a steep and disturbing global decline in bee populations -- **some bee species are already extinct and some US species are at just 4% of their previous numbers.** Scientists have been scrambling for answers. Some studies claim the decline may be due to a combination of factors including disease, habitat loss and toxic chemicals. But increasingly, independent research has produced **strong evidence blaming neonicotinoid pesticides**, forcing several European countries to ban one or more of these bee killers. But in the USA, Bayer's poison is still unregulated.

This **issue is now coming to the boil** as major new studies have confirmed the scale of this problem. If **we can get the EPA to act, we could shut down this attack on bees and our food supply.** The real experts -- the beekeepers and farmers -- want these deadly pesticides prohibited until and unless we have solid, independent studies that show they are safe. Let's support them now -- **click to send a message to the EPA:**

[http://www.avaaz.org/en/hope\\_for\\_bees\\_usa/](http://www.avaaz.org/en/hope_for_bees_usa/).

We can no longer leave our delicate food chain in the hands of research run by the chemical companies and the regulators that are in their pockets. Banning this pesticide will move us closer to a world safe for ourselves and the other species we care about and depend on. With hope,

—Iain, Antonia, Mia, Luis, Ricken, Stephanie, Pascal, Alice, Ari and the whole Avaaz team

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<a href="#">20120921-06</a>	11:58	SteveB	"Romney's Perfect Example of the Republican Strategy of Economic Sabotage"
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"Romney's Perfect Example of the Republican Strategy of Economic Sabotage" by Brian Dockstader, NationofChange

Sept. 21, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/romney-s-perfect-example-republican-strategy-economic-sabotage-1348240305>)

For a long time — basically ever since Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell infamously stated that the Republican Party's #1 goal was to defeat President Obama — it has been plainly obvious that the Republican Party was committed to a strategy of economic sabotage to further their political ambitions.

The rationale is simple: The worse the state of the economy, the higher the unemployment rate, the worse President Obama's chances for reelection become. Thus their sabotage strategy: Make sure the economy doesn't recover. Make sure the unemployment rate stays high. Oppose all attempts to create jobs. Kill jobs that have already been created. Turn the public against Obama. Win back the White House and Congress.

Like I said, this has been their transparent plan from the very beginning. Anyone who doesn't think this is the game plan is either disingenuous or blind. And in case you had any doubts, the Romney campaign just laid this strategy out in the most blatant way possible.

First, a little background. You've hopefully heard about something called the "wind production tax credit" (PTC) that is going to expire at the end of the year, unless Congress acts. The tax credit is important because it helps level the energy playing field relative to fossil fuels (a game that is stacked greatly against renewable energy, as I noted here). It also helps create market certainty, which stimulates investment, which stimulates the economy, which creates JOBS (to say nothing of the innumerable other other reasons renewable energy is important, including environmental, public health, national security, etc). But let's focus on the jobs, because that's what the Republican Party is against (refer back to the Grand Strategy to Defeat Obama).

So the PTC is set to expire, and the wind industry has warned that this will destroy 37,000 American jobs. Even Republicans in pro-wind states like Iowa have come out in favor of the PTC, because it doesn't help them politically to sabotage their own local economies. At the national level, however, renewable energy is being demonized by the Republican Party, and Mitt Romney has called for the elimination of the PTC (and all renewable energy incentives that might help clean energy compete with fossil fuels--the GOP's big money corporate donors).

Now, the PTC is about to expire. If the PTC expires, 37,000 jobs will be lost. Thus Romney/Republicans oppose the PTC because they believe a bad economy is good politics for them. Now, as predicted, the possible expiration of the PTC is causing market uncertainty and leading to layoffs in the wind industry. Siemens, a wind turbine manufacturer, just announced that they were being forced to cut 38% of their U.S. workforce due to this political stunt over the PTC (and these aren't the first layoffs caused by these political games). Cue Romney's press release (emphasis mine):

**Today's layoffs at Siemens are yet another unfortunate reminder of the Obama Economy where American families have suffered from chronic unemployment, increased poverty and falling incomes.** There is a fundamental disconnect between President Obama's philosophy of the need for redistribution of wealth and the free market economy which our country was founded on. President Obama has focused on attacking the success of others rather than applauding their accomplishments and urging others to strive for similar success. Mitt Romney's plan for a stronger middle class will foster the dignity of

work, champion innovation, generate new wealth, and create 12 million new jobs in his first term alone in a variety of sectors, including wind.

It doesn't get any more simple than that. Romney knows he is advocating a policy that is killing wind jobs (even Republicans have told him this). Then, when these layoffs start happening, he immediately tries to politicize it by attacking *President Obama's* policies, even though President Obama wants to extend the PTC and create more clean energy jobs.

And there you have it, yet another blatant example of the Republican strategy of economic sabotage in action. Hurt the economy, blame Obama, hope the voters don't notice the sabotage. And why would they? It isn't like the media is going to point out the hypocrisy or the shocking underhandedness of this whole strategy, even though it deserves to be front page news.

20120922-03	07:10	SteveB	"Romney's Tax Return Comedy"
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"Romney's Tax Return Comedy" by Andrew Leonard, Salon

Sept. 21, 2012, ([http://www.salon.com/2012/09/21/romneys\\_tax\\_return\\_comedy/](http://www.salon.com/2012/09/21/romneys_tax_return_comedy/))

(How the candidate "disqualified" himself from the presidency by manipulating his deductions.)

A week that began for Romney with the release of the infamous 47 percent video is ending with the release of his 2011 tax return. Unfortunately for Romney, the details we have learned so far from the return only serve to reinforce the negative fallout from the "secret video."

We'll be poring over the actual returns soon, but an initial release from the Romney campaign **has already told us a couple of amusing things.**

First, Mitt and Ann Romney donated a whole heck of a lot of money to charity in 2011 — \$4,020,772, to be exact, or about 30 percent of their total income. But they chose only to claim \$2.25 million of that total as charitable deductions, because, well, otherwise their overall tax burden would have been a little, shall we say, *light*.

From the campaign:

The Romneys' generous charitable donations in 2011 would have significantly reduced their tax obligation for the year. The Romneys thus limited their deduction of charitable contributions to conform to the Governor's statement in August, based upon the January estimate of income, that he paid at least 13% in income taxes in each of the last 10 years.

Without claiming the total legally possible deduction, Romney ended up paying an effective tax rate of 14.1 percent. If he'd claimed everything he had a right to, he would only have **paid around 12.1 percent.**

There's something both hilarious and pathetic about a presidential candidate manipulating his deductions so he ends up paying what he considers a more politically appropriate tax rate. But it's especially ludicrous in light of Romney's numerous claims that he's always paid the government exactly what he owes, "and not a dollar more," implying that anyone who voluntarily gave the government more than he legally owed was either a fool or a moron.

**Romney is even on record** declaring that the act of paying more than he owed would mean he shouldn't be eligible for the presidency!

From time to time I've been audited, as happens, I think, to other citizens as well, and the accounting firm which prepares my taxes has done a very thorough and complete job pay taxes as legally due. I don't pay more than are legally due and frankly if I had paid more than are legally due I don't think I'd be qualified to become president. I'd think people would want me to follow the law and pay only what the tax code requires.

So! A change in tune. A flip-flop, even.

But the true puzzler is why Romney would imagine that artificially boosting his tax rate to 14.1 percent would help him with any voter who isn't already outraged at how low Romney's tax burden is. As has been pointed out numerous times this week, the average worker's payroll tax rate equals 15.3 percent of their income. So even with the jiggering, Romney paid a smaller percentage of his income as taxes than many members of the 47 percent he trashed in his Boca Raton, Fla., speech to fundraisers.

<a href="#">20120922-04</a>	07:36	MarthaH	"Dependency & Romney's 47 Percenters"
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Just the facts, sir!

"Dependency and Romney's 47 Percenters" by Robert Farley, FactCheck.org

Sept. 18, 2012, (<http://factcheck.org/2012/09/dependency-and-romneys-47-percenters/>)

Mitt Romney was wrong when he said the 47 percent of Americans who pay no federal income taxes are "dependent on the government." Most of them are working people who simply do not earn very much money.

Romney also assumed that all of those in the 47 percent who pay no federal income tax vote Democratic. But polling data suggest that's just not true. President Obama is faring better than Romney among the lowest earners — those most likely to be among the 47 percent who pay no federal income tax — but polls show Romney is supported by some 40 percent of those earning the lowest income. In fact, a healthy chunk of the 47 percent are seniors who tend to vote Republican.

Romney's comments, recorded surreptitiously during a Republican fundraiser in May and reported Sept. 17 by Mother Jones, have touched off a firestorm of analysis. Romney:

There are 47 percent of the people who will vote for the president no matter what. All right, there are 47 percent who are with him, who are dependent upon government, who believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it. That that's an entitlement. And the government should give it to them. And they will vote for this president no matter what. And I mean, the president starts off with 48, 49, he starts off with a huge number.

These are people who pay no income tax. Forty-seven percent of Americans pay no income tax. So our message of low taxes doesn't connect. So he'll be out there talking about tax cuts for the rich. I mean, that's what they sell every four years. And so my job is not to worry about those people.

I'll never convince them they should take personal responsibility and care for their lives. What I have to do is convince the 5 to 10 percent in the center that are independents, that are thoughtful, that look at voting one way or the other depending upon in some cases emotion, whether they like the guy or not.

There are plenty of opinions on Romney's answer, and there is certainly room for reasoned debate about the growth of entitlement programs and the effect on the budget. Whether those who pay no federal income tax are people who "believe that they are victims, who believe the government has a responsibility to care for them, who believe that they are entitled to health care, to food, to housing, to you-name-it" is a matter of opinion. But Romney is wrong to say that all of those in that 47 percent are "dependent upon government."

Romney is a bit out of date with his claim that 47 percent of Americans pay no federal income tax. That was true in 2009, but the number is lower now, and falling as the economy improves and more people are working and getting paychecks.

Figures come from the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, and its most recent analysis in July 2011 put the figure for that year at 46.4 percent. That comes to about 76 million individuals or families who paid no federal income taxes in 2011. TPC projected that the percentage would fall to 46 percent this year, and to 44 percent in 2013, under current tax policies.

Let's take a closer look at the 46.4 percenters.

According to the Tax Policy Center, about half of those who owe no federal income tax are people whose incomes are so low that when standard income tax provisions — personal exemptions for taxpayers and dependents and the standard deduction — are factored in, that simply leaves no income to be taxed. Those are people who earned less than about \$27,000.

But that doesn't mean those folks paid no taxes at all. Many of them paid payroll taxes, those taxes taken out of a paycheck by an employer to fund programs such as Social Security and Medicare. They also pay federal excise taxes, such as those on gasoline, and they may also pay state and local income taxes or property taxes.

So that's half of Romney's 46.4 percenters. The rest pay no federal income tax due to tax benefits and credits. Here's the rest of the breakdown:

- 22 percent receive senior tax benefits — the extra standard deduction for seniors, the exclusion of a portion of Social Security benefits, and the credit for seniors. Most of them are older people on Social Security whose adjusted gross income is less than \$25,000.
- 15.2 percent receive tax credits for children and the working poor. That includes the child tax credit and the earned income tax credit. The child tax credit was enacted under Democratic President Bill Clinton, but it doubled under Republican President George W. Bush. The earned income tax credit was enacted under Republican President Gerald Ford, and was expanded under presidents of both parties. Republican President Ronald Reagan once praised it as "one of the best antipoverty programs this country's ever seen." As a result of various tax expenditures, about two thirds of households with children making between \$40,000 and \$50,000 owed no federal income taxes.
- The rest ended up owing no federal income tax due to various tax expenditures such as education credits, itemized deductions or reduced rates on capital gains and dividends. Most of this group are in the middle to upper income brackets. In fact, the TPC estimates there are about 7,000 families and individuals who earn \$1 million a year or more and still pay no federal income tax.

So when Romney says all of those in the 46 percent are "dependent on government," that's not accurate. Of the estimated 76 million who paid no federal income tax in 2011, 61 percent earned anywhere between \$10,000 and \$50,000.

But it is true that 42 percent of the 76 million who owe no federal income tax had a "negative liability" in 2011, meaning that in addition to not owing any federal tax, they got a check from the federal government due to eligibility of some form of tax expenditure. But the majority did not.

Eric Toder, co-director of the Tax Policy Center, cautions that the TPC report was a one-year snapshot in a particularly difficult economic year. The number of people who owed no federal income tax was unusually high in 2011, which was still a recession year, he said. Some of the temporary tax credits enacted by Obama in reaction to the economic crisis will soon go away, and the numbers should drop in coming years, Toder said

Romney also said the 46.4 percent who pay no federal income tax "will vote for the president no matter what," and, therefore, President Obama starts off with an automatic 48 percent or 49 percent of the vote. But that doesn't jibe with polling data.

It's safe to say that most of the 46.4 percent referred to by Romney are in the lower income brackets. According to the most recent Gallup polls of registered voters, 37 percent of those making less than \$36,000 a year indicate they plan to vote for Romney. Moreover, as we noted earlier, a sizable chunk of 46.4 percenters are retirees, and among

those 65 and older, Romney leads Obama by nine points, 52 percent to 43 percent. According to a Rasmussen Reports poll of likely voters between Sept. 10 and 16, 40 percent of those making less than \$20,000 said they plan to vote for Romney; 50 percent of those making between \$20,000 and \$40,000 said they supported Romney. The Pew Research Center similarly found in its latest poll that 32 percent of those making less than \$30,000 and 42 percent of those making between \$30,000 and \$50,000 support Romney — as do a plurality of seniors.

A map put out by the Tax Foundation of the 10 states with the highest and lowest percentage of filers with no federal tax liability shows that the states with the highest percentage of non-filers are, by-and-large, states that typically vote Republican, while the 10 states with the lowest percentage of non-filers tend to be Democratic-leaning.

That's not a precise measure of the voting habits of those who don't pay federal income taxes, but it suggests Romney is way off when he assumes all of the 46.4 percenters vote Democratic.

<a href="#">20120922-05</a>	11:56	SteveB	"10 Questions Romney Should Answer About His Taxes"
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"10 Questions Romney Should Answer About His Taxes" by Seth Hanlon, NationofChange

Sept. 21, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/10-questions-romney-should-answer-about-his-taxes-1348288044>)

On Friday afternoon, the Romney campaign released the candidate's 2011 tax return, which showed that he paid a tax rate of approximately 14 percent on more than \$13 million of reported income. The campaign also disclosed that Romney voluntarily forfeited about \$1.8 million in charitable deductions to inflate the tax rate he would have to disclose to the public. The campaign continues to refuse to release returns prior to 2010, flunking an accepted standard of transparency, first established by Mitt's father George Romney, of releasing multiple years' returns.

In a blog post, Romney's lawyer and the trustee of his "blind trust" said, "After you have reviewed all of the newly-posted documents, you may have further questions." Yes, we do. Lots.

Here are 10 unanswered questions about Romney's taxes:

1. After the election, when the subject of your tax returns is outside of the public glare, will you file an amended tax return to claim your full deduction of charitable contributions? Was the tax rate you reported for other years similarly manipulated?
2. Why was your 2011 income \$7 million lower than you estimated it to be in January? How does someone overestimate their income by \$7 million?
3. Financial disclosures show that you have as much as \$82 million in your tax-deferred Individual Retirement Account, despite the fact that tax rules limited contributions into such accounts to \$30,000 per year. Did you lowball the value of the assets you put into your IRA, as tax experts suspect? And did you do the same with gifts into your sons' trusts?
4. What was the purpose of your Swiss bank account and the myriad offshore entities shown on your return, based in countries like the Cayman Islands and Luxembourg, if not to avoid taxes?
5. Can you explain what one tax expert has called a "mysterious one-time infusion of foreign tax credits" in 2008?
6. You have not disclosed any foreign bank account reports (FBARs). Did you file all FBARs on all of your offshore accounts with the Treasury Department by the legal deadlines each year?
7. You claim to have paid an average tax rate of 20 percent over the last 20 years based on a flawed calculation. What was your real tax rate?

8. Your 14 percent tax rate — not to mention the approximately 10 percent tax rate you would have paid had you not inflated it — is less than what many middle-class Americans pay. And you paid just 0.2% of your income in payroll taxes, while most Americans pay about 15%. Do you think that is fair?

9. Your tax returns show that the Marriott Corporation paid you \$260,390 in directors' fees in 2011. When you were the company's audit committee chair in the 1990s, were you aware that the company was abusing a notorious illegal tax shelter?

10. You say you've made a "commitment to the public" that your tax rate should not be below 13 percent. If you believe that the richest Americans shouldn't be paying an exceptionally low tax rate, why don't you support President Obama's "Buffett Rule"?

Romney's lack of transparency on his tax returns is especially troubling given that he is similarly evasive on the details of his tax policies. From what we know about his tax plan, Romney would shower massive tax breaks on the wealthiest Americans, which means that it can only add up with a major middle-class tax hike. **How much will Romney raise your taxes in order to cut taxes for people like him? That's the biggest unanswered question of all.**

20120922-06	12:05	SteveB	"What Mitt R0mney Really Represents"
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"What Mitt Romney Really Represents" by Robert Reich, NationofChange

Sept. 21, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/what-mitt-romney-really-represents-1348286322>)

It's not just his giant income or the low tax rates he pays on it. And it's not just the videotape of him berating almost half of America, or his endless gaffes, or his regressive budget policies.

It's something that unites all of this, and connects it to the biggest underlying problem America faces — the unprecedented concentration of wealth and power at the very top that's undermining our economy and destroying our democracy.

Romney just released his 2011 tax returns, showing he paid \$1.9 million in taxes on more than \$13 million of income last year — for an effective tax rate of 14.1 percent. (He released his 2010 return in January, showing he paid an effective tax rate of 13.9 percent.)

America has had hugely wealthy presidents before — think of Teddy Roosevelt and his distant cousin, Franklin D. Roosevelt; or John F. Kennedy, beneficiary of father Joe's fortune.

But here's the difference. These men were champions of the working class and the poor, and were considered traitors to their own class. Teddy Roosevelt railed against the "malefactors of great wealth," and he busted up the oil and railroad trusts.

FDR thundered against the "economic royalists," raised taxes on the wealthy, and gave average working people the right to form unions — along with Social Security, unemployment insurance, a minimum wage, and a 40-hour workweek.

But Mitt Romney is not a traitor to his class. He is a sponsor of his class. He wants to cut their taxes by \$3.7 trillion over the next decade, and hasn't even specified what "loopholes" he'd close to make up for this gigantic giveaway.

And he wants to cut benefits that almost everyone else relies on — Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, food stamps, unemployment insurance, and housing assistance.

He's even a warrior for his class, telling his wealthy followers his job isn't to worry about the "47 percent" of Americans who won't vote for him, whom he calls "victims" and he berates for not paying federal incomes taxes and taking federal handouts.

(He mangles these facts, of course. Almost all working Americans pay federal taxes — and the federal taxes that have been rising fastest for most people are Social Security payroll taxes, which aren't collected on a penny of income over \$110,100. Moreover, most of the "47 percent" whom he accuses of taking handouts are on Medicare or Social Security — the biggest "entitlement" programs — which, not incidentally, they paid into during their working lives.)

Money means power. Concentrated wealth at the top means extraordinary power at the top. The reason Romney pays a rate of only 14 percent on \$13 million of income in 2011 — a lower rate than many in the middle class — is because he exploits a loophole that allows private equity managers to treat their income as capital gains, taxed at only 15 percent.

And that loophole exists solely because private equity and hedge fund managers have so much political clout — as a result of their huge fortunes and the money they've donated to political candidates — that neither party will remove it.

In other words, everything America is learning about Mitt Romney — his tax returns, his years at Bain Capital, the video of his speech to high-end donors in which he belittles half of America, his gaffes, the budget policies he promotes — repeat and reenforce the same underlying reality.

So much wealth and power have accumulated at the top of America that our economy and our democracy are seriously threatened. Romney not only represents this problem. He is the living embodiment of it.

<a href="#">20120923-03</a>	14:35	SteveB	Priebus Says Republicans 'Had a Good Week Last Week''
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Another lie or are Republicans this stupid? (This guy is definitely not a genius!) Losing a Presidential election and maybe Congress is a "good week"? LOL!

[Priebus Says Republicans 'Had a Good Week Last Week''](#) by Jennifer Epstein, Politico

Sept. 23, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/politico-live/2012/09/priebus-republicans-had-a-good-week-last-week-136413.html?hp=l2>)

Mitt Romney had a good week even as his "47 percent" comments dominated the headlines, Republican National Committee chairman Reince Priebus said Sunday.

"I think that we had a good week last week," Priebus said on ABC's "This Week." "I think in retrospect, in that we were able to frame up the debate last week in the sense of, what future do we want and do you want out there."

That came after Priebus said, earlier on in the interview, that Romney has been clear his "47 percent" remark "probably wasn't the best-said moment in the campaign" and, ultimately, this was "probably not the best week in the campaign."

That comes even as many high-profile Republicans, including *Wall Street Journal* columnist and former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan, have begun arguing that the Romney campaign needs a turnaround and that, even more fundamentally, the Republican Party needs to change.

"I respect and I admire people that get very concerned," Priebus said, referring to Romney's critics within the GOP. "Even if they're upset about, you know, something that happens in a campaign or if the week needs to be better, like last week," things will ultimately work out "because I think that this is a different kind of campaign."

"I promise you on my life, I'm not sitting here talking to you because I'm worried about the future of the Republican Party," Priebus said. "We're worried about the future of this country, and that's why, you know, I think that the

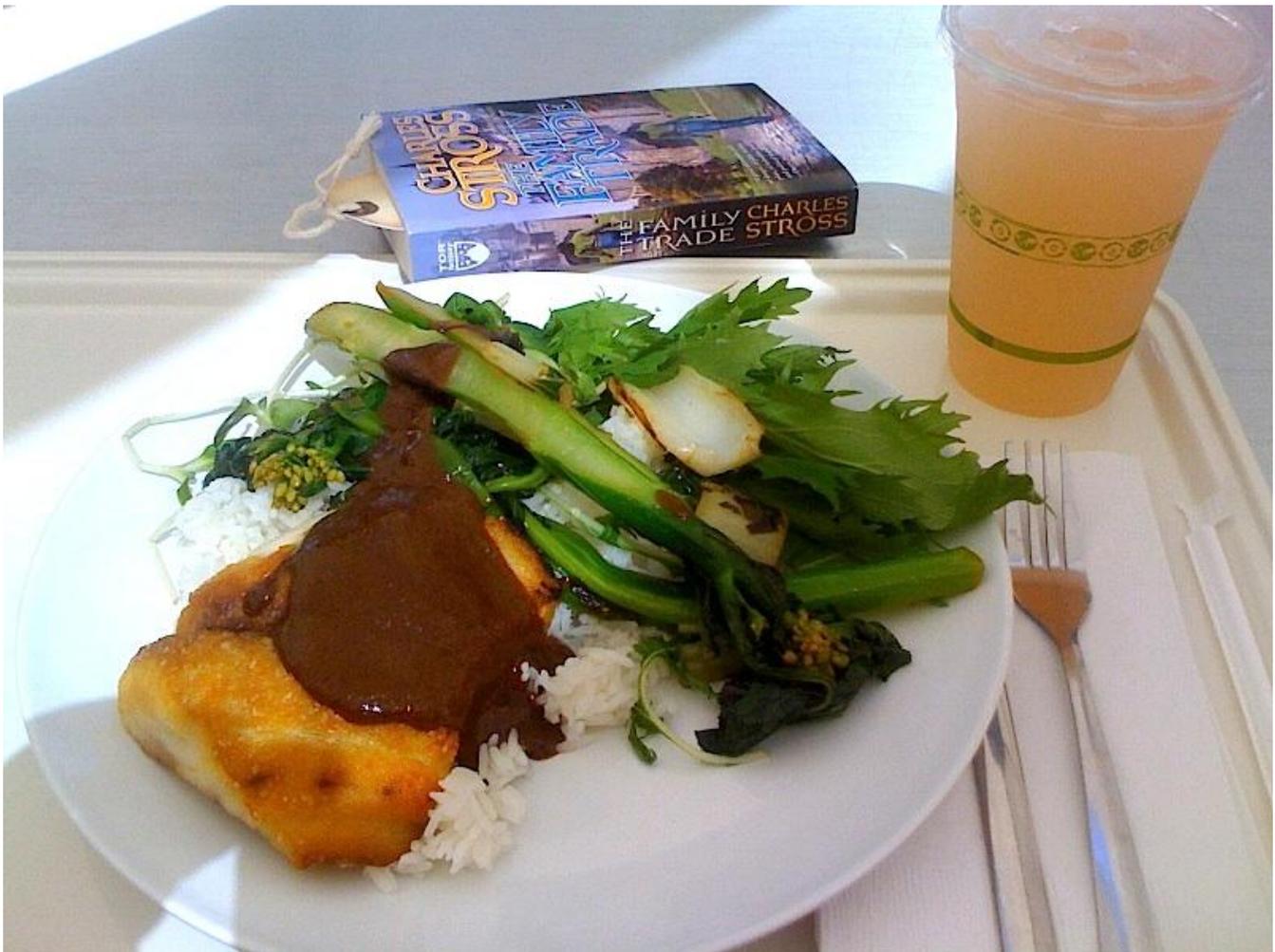
leeway given on our side of the aisle is very small to the likes of Peggy Noonan and other writers that say, hey, listen, guys, you need to -- we need to be ahead, we need to be pounding away."

[20120921-07](#) 15:56 Ben Photo: Today's Lunch at Apple

Lunch with AI again today; it was just too pretty outside to resist.

Another excellent and highly nutritious meal slipped its way down my gullet on this fine Friday

Perfectly seared, lightly crusted, tender, moist flaky delicious ultra-fresh local Texas Gulf OMG black drum: a wonderful sweet fish, very nice over white Nishiki sushi-clone sticky rice. Delicious broccolini and bok choy accompanied this fine dish. I could eat something like this for lunch every day! (And I live by that statement...) One note: the spicy, flavorful black bean sauce was perhaps a bit strongly flavored for such a delicate protein as white fish. Just my opinion, a nuance of my preferences: it sure ate up nicely!



Seared drum with black bean sauce

[Source of original email unknown. –SteveB]

## A DAY IN THE LIFE OF JOE REPUBLICAN

Joe gets up at 6 a.m. and fills his coffeepot with water to prepare his morning coffee. The water is clean and good because some tree-hugging liberal fought for minimum water-quality standards. With his first swallow of coffee, he takes his daily medication. His medications are safe to take because some stupid commie liberal fought to insure their safety and that they work as advertised.

All but \$10 of his medications are paid for by his employer's medical plan because some liberal union workers fought their employers for paid medical insurance - now Joe gets it too. He prepares his morning breakfast, bacon and eggs. Joe's bacon is safe to eat because some girly-man liberal fought for laws to regulate the meat packing industry.

In the morning shower, Joe reaches for his shampoo. His bottle is properly labeled with each ingredient and its amount in the total contents because some crybaby liberal fought for his right to know what he was putting on his body and how much it contained.

Joe dresses, walks outside and takes a deep breath. The air he breathes is clean because some environmentalist wacko liberal fought for laws to stop industries from polluting our air. He walks to the subway station for his government-subsidized ride to work. It saves him considerable money in parking and transportation fees because some fancy-pants liberal fought for affordable public transportation, which gives everyone the opportunity to be a contributor.

Joe begins his work day. He has a good job with excellent pay, medical benefits, retirement, paid holidays and vacation because some lazy liberal union members fought and died for these working standards. Joe's employer pays these standards because Joe's employer doesn't want his employees to call the union. If Joe is hurt on the job or becomes unemployed, he'll get a worker compensation or unemployment check because some stupid liberal didn't think he should lose his home because of his temporary misfortune.

It's noontime and Joe needs to make a bank deposit so he can pay some bills. Joe's deposit is federally insured by the FSLIC because some godless liberal wanted to protect Joe's money from unscrupulous bankers who ruined the banking system before the Great Depression.

Joe has to pay his Fannie Mae-underwritten mortgage and his below-market federal student loan because some elitist liberal decided that Joe and the government would be better off if he was educated and earned more money over his lifetime.

Joe is home from work. He plans to visit his father this evening at his farm home in the country. He gets in his car for the drive. His car is among the safest in the world because some America-hating liberal fought for car safety standards. He arrives at his boyhood home. His was the third generation to live in the house financed by Farmers' Home Administration because bankers didn't want to make rural loans. The house didn't have electricity until some big-government liberal stuck his nose where it didn't belong and demanded rural electrification.

He is happy to see his father, who is now retired. His father lives on Social Security and a union pension because some wine-drinking, cheese-eating liberal made sure he could take care of himself so Joe wouldn't have to.

Joe gets back in his car for the ride home, and turns on a radio talk show. The radio host keeps saying that liberals are bad and conservatives are good. He doesn't mention that the beloved Republicans have fought against every protection and benefit Joe enjoys throughout his day.

Joe agrees: "We don't need those big-government liberals ruining our lives! After all, I'm a self-made man who believes everyone should take care of themselves, just like I have."

The truth: NOTHING TO FAST AND FURIOUS! ALL REPUBLICAN BS!

"Another Conservative Conspiracy Theory Bites the Dust" by Kevin Drum, Mother Jones

Sept. 21, 2012, (<http://www.motherjones.com/kevin-drum/2012/09/another-conservative-conspiracy-theory-bites-dust>)

This week the modern conservative id took center stage when Mitt Romney was caught on video telling a bunch of wealthy donors what they wanted to hear: that the poor are a bunch of lazy parasites who refuse to take personal responsibility for themselves. Coincidentally, the same week another bit of the conservative id reached the end of its road. I'm talking about their obsession with Fast and Furious, the gun-walking operation in Arizona that Republicans have been in a lather about for the past two years.

There's not much question that Fast and Furious was a cockup. ATF agents wanted to track guns that were being sold to Mexican drug cartels, but poor planning, idiotic infighting, and a tangle of laws that got in the way of arresting obvious gunrunners produced little but chaos. Thousands of guns ended up in Mexican hands, one of which was eventually used to kill ATF agent Brian Terry. Katherine Eban wrote the best take on the whole sorry affair three months ago in a long piece for *Fortune* called "The truth about the Fast and Furious scandal."

But this was never enough for Republicans. Rep. Darrell Issa, the Republican attack dog who was the point man for congressional hearings into the affair, insisted that Barack Obama was using Fast and Furious to "somehow take away or limit people's Second Amendment rights." This was pretty much the party line in the fever swamps of the right: It wasn't just a local mess, it was a carefully planned operation from Eric Holder on down to set the stage for a massive new effort to take away people's guns. As Ann Coulter explained things, Fast and Furious put guns in the hands of Mexican drug cartels "to strengthen liberals' argument for gun control...Innocent people dying was the objective of Fast and Furious, not collateral damage."

**On Wednesday that all came crashing down when Michael Horowitz, the Department of Justice inspector general, finally released his lengthy report on the operation. Horowitz is no Democratic hack. As *Time's* Massimo Calabresi reminds us, "Horowitz managed to impress the House GOP in briefings over the past week, and the report itself was met with support from all quarters...Issa himself called Horowitz and his report 'courageous.'" But there's more:**

**What none on the right are admitting is that Horowitz's report systematically reveals how irresponsible and speculative the accusations from their side have been. The report criticizes Holder's Criminal Division chief Lanny Breuer for failing to inform Holder or his deputy that "gun walking" had taken place in the Bush administration in another case in Arizona called "Wide Receiver." But the report shows that Breuer knew nothing about gun walking in Fast and Furious, and that therefore the scandal existed three levels below Holder (let alone the White House)...As for the source of the false statements to Congress, Horowitz finds they were the result of inaccurate reassurances given to Breuer's deputy Jason Weinstein, by the U.S. attorney in Arizona, Dennis Burke.**

...Horowitz destroys the conspiracy theories on both sides of the aisle over 471-pages, but it's the right wing screamers who come out looking worst. Horowitz shows definitively that the Arizona ATF agents and prosecutors in the U.S. Attorney's office there were responsible for the operation, not the White House or the Justice Department in Washington and that the primary source of the inaccurate testimony given to Congress was the U.S. Attorney for Arizona, Dennis Burke.

For over a year, it's been an article of faith on the right that Fast and Furious was a carefully constructed scheme directed by the White House to trash the Second Amendment and build support for more gun control laws. It wasn't. **Neither the White House nor Eric Holder had any idea what was going on. It was just a local**

operation that was badly botched. This makes Fast and Furious officially yet another lunatic conservative conspiracy theory that has bitten the dust in the cold light of reality.

[20120922-02](#) 06:57 SteveB "Tiny Homes Hit the Big City"

"Tiny Homes Hit the Big City" by Emanuella Grinberg, CNN

Sept. 21, 2012, ([http://us.cnn.com/2012/09/21/living/small-homes-irpt/index.html?hpt=us\\_c2](http://us.cnn.com/2012/09/21/living/small-homes-irpt/index.html?hpt=us_c2))



Downsizing from a 1,500-square-foot house to a tiny 168-square-foot dwelling in Floyd, Virginia, Hari Berzins says she loves the freedom when it comes to tiny living. "We live larger on our 3-acre hillside," she said. "We have more time to enjoy each other, tend to our large garden and cultivate a supportive community."

[20120922-07](#) 13:00 MarthaH "Indiana Gubernatorial Candidate Mike Pence Backs Marriage to Curb Poverty"

REALLY???????????????

"Indiana Gubernatorial Candidate Mike Pence Backs Marriage to Curb Poverty" by *Leaf Chronicle*

Sept. 19, (<http://www.theleafchronicle.com/viewart/B2/20120919/NEWS02/309190138/Indiana-gubernatorial-candidate-Mike-Pence-backs-marriage-curb-poverty>)

theleafchronicle.com

INDIANAPOLIS — Republican gubernatorial candidate Mike Pence said Tuesday that marriage is the best route for breaking children out of the cycle of poverty.

Pence said he would ask state regulators to assess how state rules and regulations affect families via "family impact statements," an idea pushed by former President Ronald Reagan and then-adviser Gary Bauer, which calls on regulators to think about whether policies promote or dissuade marriage.

Pence opposes same-sex marriage, along with Democratic candidate John Gregg. Indiana law also bars same-sex marriage, and lawmakers are set to write that ban into the state constitution in the next two years.

The Pence campaign cites research from the Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington-based think tank, showing children raised in two-parent households perform better as adults. The campaign said in its issue paper released Tuesday that the state would be the first in the nation to use marriage and "the success equation" as the basis for combating poverty.

"It is widely accepted in the scholarly literature on poverty and social development that the sure-fire way for a young person to avoid poverty, or what we call 'the success equation,' is quite simple: graduate from high school, work full time or go to college, and wait until you're married before having a child."

But researchers say the answer to ending the cycle of poverty is much more complicated than more Hoosiers marrying.

"We know that kids in single-parent families are at risk," said Ann Huff Stevens, director of the Center for Poverty Research at the University of California-Davis. "There are two problems: We don't know how to make those families be two-parent families instead, and even if we could, it's unclear that those resulting two-parent families would look like the current two-parent families we have on the better outcome."

Stevens also said it's hard to show that a two-parent family would necessarily look like what Pence is expecting, noting that many poor single mothers choose to stay unmarried because potential spouses have limited earning potential.

"One of the leading theories is that the men who are potential partners to these women don't have very good labor market opportunities," she said. "So adding a male to a household who doesn't have a high earning potential is not the same thing as creating these two-parent, middle-income families."

The Republican congressman also said he would seek to expand Indiana's school voucher program for adopted children and foster families by eliminating means testing as a bar for them receiving vouchers. State lawmakers approved the nation's most sweeping voucher school program last year but placed income limits on which families can qualify and set other requirements before a student can receive a voucher.

Pence talked about the ideas in an unannounced meeting in Indianapolis and later responded to emailed questions.

"The state of Indiana can promote marriage by recognizing the importance of two-parent households and supporting the role of the family. By emphasizing the importance of intact families, Indiana can take the lead in minimizing our children's risk of growing up in poverty," Pence wrote.

Pence has been talking more about social issues as the governor's race enters its final weeks. Gregg criticized Pence on Tuesday for re-focusing on social issues instead of jobs.

"Why on earth are we talking about the state promoting marriage when unemployment is over 8 percent?" Gregg asked. "Hoosier families come in all shapes and sizes, and our next governor needs to be a governor for them all, not just those that fit in Congressman Pence's social agenda."

<a href="#">20120922-08</a>	13:15	Pam	Re: "Indiana Gubernatorial Candidate Mike Pence Backs Marriage to Curb Poverty" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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Who says it's the left that wants a nanny state? Talk about social engineering! Don't you just love the hypocrisy of people who carry on about their freedoms want to impose standards of behavior on everyone else. I thought NC was bad, but it's possible Indiana is worse. Why are people so freaked out about gay marriage? All this writing it into the constitutions of states, as if it weren't already illegal enough. Times have changed so much in the last 20 years. I think what we're seeing is the last gasp of homophobia, at least openly expressed--rather like racism. It still exists, but no one cops to it. The generations of hate will have to die off before society can move forward--like Moses wandering in the wilderness until his people had lost their slave mentality. That's just one more reason to make sure the public schools are strong and education fact-based.

20120923-01

06:44 SteveB

"Michael Tomasky: Don't Blame Mitt for the GOP's Problems" (to Republicans)

Doesn't ANYBODY want to bet me \$10,000 on the election? I'll take Obama. You can have the wimp!

But again, here I am talking to an empty chair!

Maybe we should be betting whether the GOP is going to exist after the election?

"Michael Tomasky: Don't Blame Mitt for the GOP's Problems" by Michael Tomasky, The Daily Beast

Sept. 23, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/09/23/michael-tomasky-don-t-blame-mitt-for-the-gop-s-problems.html>)

(Conservative columnists are lining up to dump on Romney. But the real problem isn't the candidate or his campaign. It's the Republican Party and its pathologies.)

Yes, Mitt Romney had a week I wouldn't wish on ... well, Mitt Romney. Yes, his campaign is incompetent, as Peggy Noonan wrote Friday. Yes, there is something really off about the guy personally. But as conservatives like Noonan start in on Romney vilification, I feel the need to stand up and reiterate: Romney's problems aren't all Romney's fault. They're not even half his fault. They're chiefly the fault of a movement and political party that has gone off the deep end. Almost every idiotic thing Romney has done, after all, can be traced to the need he feels to placate groups of people who are way out there in their own ideological solar system, with no purchase at all on how normal Americans feel and think about things. This is much the harder question for Noonan and others to confront, and they really ought to ponder it.

Since he started running, Romney has had to cater to four factions in the GOP, each of which contributes in its way to the party's self-destructiveness: the rich and their apologists, who think Barack Obama has made life in America well-nigh impossible for those earning \$1 million a year; the Tea Party populists, the middle-aged and older white people who feel intense resentment against Obama and his America; the foreign-policy neocons, who invented this fable about Obama apologizing for America and so on; and the rabble-rousers—Rush Limbaugh, Michelle Malkin, etc., whose megaphones announce all these anxieties and others.

These four groups have each been holding guns to Romney's temple. He's a weak man, yes. But in a way—in only this one particular way—I feel a little sorry for him. These groups permit no room to maneuver whatsoever. None. Not an inch. So when something happens that is in their wheelhouse, the expectation immediately arises that Romney will utter every syllable precisely as they want to hear it.

So it was with the neocons after the Cairo and Benghazi riots. Now, I'm sure it's partly true that Romney and his team are one big overeager floppy-eared dog, galumphing across the lawn anxious to please their masters. But the master sets the dynamic in place. There's no doubt whatsoever that if the Romney people didn't feel they had to rush to please that crowd, he wouldn't have issued that statement at an utterly inappropriate time and then tried absurdly to defend it the next morning.

The same can be said with regard to Romney's selection of Paul Ryan. We don't really know that this was forced on him per se by the right, but we have reason to believe that the logic, shall we say, of his naming Ryan was made clear to him. And what good has Ryan done him? Did you notice the poll last week, which deserves more attention than it's received, showing that Ryan was a less popular vice-presidential choice than Sarah Palin? This is the man the gun-holding factions said was a brilliant, game-changing choice. He's game changing all right, though not as they intended.

And it's the same story on the 47 percent. The man who asked that question was speaking very clearly for Faction A above. There can be little doubt that the vast majority of the people in that room, maybe every person, felt his

pain, and Romney knew exactly what he had to say. Again, it's certainly a two-way street; Romney obviously believed every word he said. But he knew the catechism.

And by the way, does anyone think a Republican presidential candidate would have said this, even behind closed doors, in 1992 or 1996 or 2000 or even in 2008? I think there's no chance. It's probably the sort of thing a lot of them thought. But it's something they never, ever would have said. They'd have known better. So the existence of these factions in their precise form is new. The concealed anxieties of all these factions were brought to the surface by the financial crisis and its aftermath, the black guy standing up there representing the America that they don't know and that scares them, and the former Massachusetts governor who seems squishy and must forever prove his loyalty. And boy is the lid ever off now.

What good has Ryan done Romney? Did you notice the poll last week showing that Ryan was a less popular vice-presidential choice than Sarah Palin?

Could Jim Baker fix this campaign, as Noonan asserts or hopes? He's a knife fighter, there's no doubt about that. Look at Florida 2000. But remember, he came in during the late innings to help Poppy Bush's 1992 campaign, and that ended pretty ingloriously. And besides, he's 82 now. Can he work 14-hour days, make crisp, snap decisions? One could argue that Romney's gotten all the help he needs this year from 82-year-old men.

Romney deserves everything that is happening to him (I guess I would wish this past week on him after all). But it isn't happening because of Mitt Romney alone, or even the now-hated Stuart Stevens. It's happening because of the factions and their guns. It's happening because of a party and movement that are out of control and out of touch. There is not a prominent Republican in the country who could be doing any better, with the possible lone exception of Jeb Bush, but it's probably too early yet for another Bush. Face it, Republicans: he was and is your best candidate, and he's tanking now more because of you than because of him.

20120923-02	14:08	Pam	"The Lie Factory"
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From "The Lie Factory," by Jill Lepore, in the Sept. 24, 2012, *New Yorker* magazine.

Nixon adviser William Gavin: "Reason requires a higher degree of discipline, of concentration; impression is easier....Reason pushes the viewer back, it assaults him, it demands that he agree or disagree; impression can envelop him, invite him in, without making an intellectual demand....When we argue with him we demand that he make the effort of replying. We seek to engage his intellect, and for most people this is the most difficult work of all. The emotions are more easily roused, closer to the surface, more malleable." p.59

Demagogues know all about rousing the emotions; look at Hitler, or just about any Arab leader. When people are raging, they feel energized; the adrenalin flows; and they actually feel better. (I believe some people become addicted to this feeling.) Thoughtful consideration requires reflection, time, and the acknowledgement of complexity. That's why sound bites and quick slogans are so effective. "Job Creators," "the 1%," "the 99%," now the "47%." I believe what this election will boil down to is, which candidate do people like more personally. When Obama rolls up his sleeves, he looks natural. When Romney does it, he looks like someone's dad trying to be cool.

"The Lie Factory" by Jill Lepore, the *New Yorker*

Sept. 24, 2012, ([http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/09/24/120924fa\\_fact\\_lepore](http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2012/09/24/120924fa_fact_lepore))

(How politics became a business.)

"I, Governor of California, and How I Ended Poverty," by Upton Sinclair, is probably the most thrilling piece of campaign literature ever written. Instead of the usual flummery, Sinclair, the author of forty-seven books, including, most famously, "The Jungle," wrote a work of fiction. "I, Governor of California," published in 1933, announced Sinclair's gubernatorial bid in the form of a history of the future, in which Sinclair is elected governor in 1934, and

by 1938 has eradicated poverty. "So far as I know," the author remarked, "this is the first time an historian has set out to make his history true."

It was only sixty-four pages, but it sold a hundred and fifty thousand copies in four months. Chapter 1: "On an evening in August, 1933, there took place a conference attended by five members of the County Central Committee of the Democratic party, Sixtieth Assembly District of the State of California." That might not sound like a page-turner, unless you remember that at the time California was a one-party state: in 1931, almost all of the hundred and twenty seats in the state legislature were held by Republicans; not a single Democrat held a statewide office. Also useful to recall: the unemployment rate in the state was twenty-nine per cent. Back to that meeting in August, 1933: "The purpose was to consider with Upton Sinclair the possibility of his registering as a Democrat and becoming the candidate of the party for Governor of California." What if Sinclair, a lifelong socialist, ran as a Democrat? That's one nifty plot twist.

The pace really picks up after Sinclair adopts an acronymic campaign slogan, "END POVERTY IN CALIFORNIA" ("It was pointed out that the initials of these words spell 'EPIC' "); picks a campaign emblem, passing over the eagle and the hawk ("I personally can get up no enthusiasm for any kind of bird of prey," the candidate says) in favor of the busy bee ("she not only works hard but has means to defend herself"); explains a program of cooperative factories and farms that would implement his philosophy of "production for use" rather than for profit; proposes killing the sales tax while levying something like a thirty-per-cent income tax on anyone earning more than fifty thousand dollars a year; and promises not only to raise hell but also, preposterously, to win.

All the same, it was a shock to pretty much everyone that, in August of 1934, Sinclair won the Democratic nomination, with more votes than any primary candidate in California had ever won before. That happens in the novel, too, which is what made reading it so thrilling (or, for many people, so terrifying): watching what Sinclair imagined coming to pass. Chapter 4: "The news that the Democratic voters of California had committed their party to the EPIC plan caused a sensation throughout the country." True! "It resulted in wide discussion of the plan in the magazines, and the formation of an EPIC Committee for the Nation." Sort of! "A statement endorsing Sinclair for Governor was signed by a hundred leading writers, and college groups were formed everywhere throughout the country to recommend the plan for their cities and states. A group of forward-looking economists endorsed the plan, and letters of support were received from a score of United States senators and some fifty congressmen." O.K., that part never happened.

In 1934, Sinclair explained what did happen that election year, in a nonfiction sequel called "I, Candidate for Governor, and How I Got Licked." "When I was a boy, the President of Harvard University wrote about 'the scholar in politics,'" Sinclair began. "Here is set forth how a scholar went into politics, and what happened to him." "How I Got Licked" was published in daily installments in fifty newspapers. In it, Sinclair described how, immediately after the Democratic Convention, the *Los Angeles Times* began running on its front page a box with an Upton Sinclair quotation in it, a practice that the paper continued, every day, for six weeks, until the opening of the polls. "Reading these boxes day after day," Sinclair wrote, "I made up my mind that the election was lost."

Sinclair got licked, he said, because the opposition ran what he called a Lie Factory. "I was told they had a dozen men searching the libraries and reading every word I had ever published." They'd find lines he'd written, speeches of fictional characters in novels, and stick them in the paper, as if Sinclair had said them. "They had a staff of political chemists at work, preparing poisons to be let loose in the California atmosphere on every one of a hundred mornings." Actually, they had, at the time, a staff of only two, and the company wasn't called the Lie Factory. It was called Campaigns, Inc.

Campaigns, Inc., the first political-consulting firm in the history of the world, was founded, in 1933, by Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter. Whitaker, thirty-four, had started out as a newspaperman, or, really, a newspaper boy; he was working as a reporter at the age of thirteen. By nineteen, he was city editor for the *Sacramento Union* and, a couple of years later, a political writer for the *San Francisco Examiner*. He was friendly and gangly, and had big ears, and smoked, and never stopped talking, and typed with two fingers. He started a newspaper wire service, the Capitol News Bureau, distributing stories to eighty papers. In 1930, he sold that business to the United Press. Three years later, he was, for his political ingenuity, hired by, among others, Sheridan Downey, a prominent Democrat, to help defeat a referendum sponsored by Pacific Gas and Electric. Downey also hired Baxter, a twenty-six-year-old widow who had been a writer for the *Portland Oregonian*, and suggested that she and Whitaker join forces.

Baxter was small, fine-featured, red-headed, and elegant. "Oh, he was such a dear," she would say, about someone she liked. Whitaker's suits never looked like they fit him; Baxter's looked like they'd fit Audrey Hepburn. Whitaker and Baxter started doing business as Campaigns, Inc. The referendum was defeated. Whitaker separated from his wife. In 1938, he and Baxter married. They lived in Marin County, in a house with a heated swimming pool. They began every day with a two-hour breakfast to plan the day. She sometimes called him Clem; he only ever called her Baxter.

In 1934, when Sinclair won the Democratic nomination, he chose Downey as his running mate. ("Uppie and Downey," the ticket was called.) Working for Downey had been an aberration for Whitaker and Baxter, people who, it was said, "work the Right side of the street." Campaigns, Inc., specialized in running political campaigns for businesses, especially monopolies like Standard Oil and Pacific Telephone and Telegraph. Pacific Gas and Electric was so impressed that it put Campaigns, Inc., on retainer.

Political consulting is often thought of as an offshoot of the advertising industry, but closer to the truth is that the advertising industry began as a form of political consulting. As the political scientist Stanley Kelley once explained, when modern advertising began, the big clients were just as interested in advancing a political agenda as a commercial one. Monopolies like Standard Oil and DuPont looked bad: they looked greedy and ruthless and, in the case of DuPont, which made munitions, sinister. They therefore hired advertising firms to sell the public on the idea of the large corporation, and, not incidentally, to advance pro-business legislation. It's this kind of thing that Sinclair was talking about when he said that American history was a battle between business and democracy, and, "So far," he wrote, "Big Business has won every skirmish."

Like most California Republicans, Clem Whitaker and Leone Baxter, who headed the California League Against Sinclairism, were horrified at the prospect of Sinclair in the governor's office. They had to work fast. They were hired just two months before the election by George Hatfield, the candidate for lieutenant governor on a Republican ticket headed by the incumbent governor, Frank Merriam, but, mostly, they were hired to destroy Sinclair. They began by locking themselves in a room for three days with everything he had ever written. "Upton was beaten," Whitaker later said, "because he had written books." And, so, those boxes in the *L.A. Times*.

#### SINCLAIR ON MARRIAGE:

The sanctity of marriage...I have had such a belief...I have it no longer.

The excerpt, as Sinclair explained in "How I Got Licked," was taken from a passage in his 1911 novel, *Love's Pilgrimage*, in which one character writes a heartbroken letter to a man having an affair with his wife. (The novel, which Sinclair later found greatly embarrassing, is an autobiographical account of his disastrous first marriage, which ended in 1912 when, citing his wife's adultery, he divorced her; he married his second wife in 1913; their marriage lasted until her death, in 1961.) "Sure, those quotations were irrelevant," Baxter later said. "But we had one objective: to keep him from becoming Governor."

Sinclair lost. He probably would have been a terrible governor. That, though, wasn't really what was at stake.

No single development has altered the workings of American democracy in the last century so much as political consulting, an industry unknown before Campaigns, Inc. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, political consultants replaced party bosses as the wielders of political power gained not by votes but by money. Whitaker and Baxter were the first people to make politics a business. "Every voter, a consumer" was the mantra of a latter-day consulting firm, but that idea came from Campaigns, Inc. Political management is now a diversified, multibillion-dollar industry of managers, speechwriters, pollsters, and advertisers who play a role in everything from this year's Presidential race to the campaigns of the candidates for your local school committee. (Campaigns, now, never end. And consultants not only run campaigns; they govern. Mitt Romney, asked by the Wall Street Journal's editorial board how he would choose his Cabinet, said that he'd probably bring in McKinsey to sort that out.) But for years Whitaker and Baxter had no competition, which is one reason that, between 1933 and 1955, they won seventy out of seventy-five campaigns. The campaigns they chose to run, and the way they decided to run them, shaped the history of California, and of the country. Campaigns, Inc., is shaping American politics still.

In 1934, Upton Sinclair got licked, but a great many End Poverty in California candidates got elected, as Democrats. California became a two-party state. Twenty-four EPIC candidates, among them a Los Angeles lawyer named Culbert Olson, took their seats in the state legislature, and, four years later, Olson, the leader of the state's EPIC caucus, was elected governor. Olson named Carey McWilliams, a Los Angeles attorney, writer, and reporter, as his chief of the California State Division of Immigration and Housing.

In 1938, McWilliams, a friend of Sinclair's, had campaigned for Olson while writing *Factories in the Field: The Story of Migratory Farm Labor in California*. It reads like a nonfiction version of *The Grapes of Wrath*. Both books were published in 1939. Steinbeck's was banned, and Republicans in the state legislature attempted to abolish the Division of Immigration and Housing, just to get McWilliams fired.

In 1942, Republicans backing the state's attorney general, Earl Warren, in a bid to replace Olson in the governor's office urged him to hire Whitaker and Baxter to run his campaign. Warren agreed, somewhat reluctantly. In the years since defeating Sinclairism, Whitaker and Baxter had put a few more items in their campaign tool kit. In 1939, with pamphlets like "Hoaxing the Hungry," Campaigns, Inc., had led the effort to defeat California's Proposition 1, the "Ham and Eggs" referendum, which would have instituted a three-per-cent income tax to provide a thirty-dollar-a-week pension to every citizen over fifty: ham and eggs every Thursday. (*Harper's* later reported, "In a typical campaign they employed ten million pamphlets and leaf-lets; 50,000 letters to 'key individuals and officers of organizations'; 70,000 inches of advertising in 700 newspapers; 3,000 spot announcements on 109 radio stations; theater slides and trailers in 160 theaters; 1,000 large billboards and 18,000 or 20,000 smaller posters.") In 1940, they produced materials for the Republican Wendell Willkie's Presidential campaign, including a speaker's manual that offered advice about how to handle Democrats in the audience: "rather than refer to the opponent as the 'Democratic Party' or 'New Deal Administration' refer to the Candidate by name only."

Whitaker and Baxter worked together flawlessly. They answered the telephone together. They read each other's mail. They swapped jobs every year: one year, Whitaker was president and Baxter vice-president; the next year, the reverse. They made heaps of money. For, say, a referendum campaign, they charged between twenty-five thousand and seventy-five thousand dollars. They required complete control of the budget for campaign expenses. (One of their rules: save seventy-five per cent of your budget for the month before Election Day.) The firm grossed about two hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year. Campaigns, Inc., was only one part of the empire. Whitaker and Baxter also ran the Clem Whitaker Advertising Agency, which charged a fifteen-per-cent commission from clients for every ad. They ran a newspaper wire service, the California Feature Service, which sent a political clip-sheet every week, to fifteen hundred "thought leaders," and cartoons, editorials, and articles to three hundred newspapers. Rural newspapers were so desperate for copy that many printed whatever the California Feature Service sent them, including documents that were basically press releases disguised as editorials endorsing whatever political position Campaigns, Inc., was being paid to advocate. The trick was to send out clippings so sly that a tired editor might not notice that they were written by an advertising outfit. One California newspaper editor used to play a game with his staff, while reading the stuff. It was called "Where's the Plug?"

Whitaker and Baxter weren't just inventing new techniques; they were writing a rule book. Never lobby; woo voters instead. "Our conception of practical politics is that if you have a sound enough case to convince the folks back home, you don't have to buttonhole the Senator," Baxter explained. Make it personal: candidates are easier to sell than issues. If your position doesn't have an opposition, or if your candidate doesn't have an opponent, invent one. Once, when fighting an attempt to recall the mayor of San Francisco, Whitaker and Baxter waged a campaign against the Faceless Man—the idea was Baxter's—who might end up replacing him. Baxter drew a picture, on a tablecloth, of a fat man with a cigar poking out from beneath a face hidden by a hat, and then had him plastered on billboards all over the city, with the question "Who's Behind the Recall?" Pretend that you are the Voice of the People. Whitaker and Baxter bought radio ads, sponsored by "the Citizens Committee Against the Recall," in which an ominous voice said, "The real issue is whether the City Hall is to be turned over, lock, stock, and barrel, to an unholy alliance fronting for a faceless man." (The recall was defeated.) Attack, attack, attack. Whitaker said, "You can't wage a defensive campaign and win!"

Never underestimate the opposition. The first thing Whitaker and Baxter always did, when they took on a campaign, was to "hibernate" for a week, to write a Plan of Campaign. Then they wrote an Opposition Plan of Campaign, to anticipate the moves made against them. Every campaign needs a theme. Keep it simple. Rhyming's good. ("For Jimmy and me, vote 'yes' on 3.") Never explain anything. "The more you have to explain," Whitaker

said, "the more difficult it is to win support." Say the same thing over and over again. "We assume we have to get a voter's attention seven times to make a sale," Whitaker said. Subtlety is your enemy. "Words that lean on the mind are no good," according to Baxter. "They must dent it." Simplify, simplify, simplify. "A wall goes up," Whitaker warned, "when you try to make Mr. and Mrs. Average American Citizen *work or think*."

Fan flames. "We need more partisanship in this country," Whitaker said. Never shy from controversy; instead, win the controversy. "The average American doesn't want to be educated; he doesn't want to improve his mind; he doesn't even want to work, consciously, at being a good citizen," Whitaker advised. "But there are two ways you can interest him in a campaign, and only two that we have ever found successful." You can put on a fight ("he likes a good hot battle, with no punches pulled"), or you can put on a show ("he likes the movies; he likes mysteries; he likes fireworks and parades"): "So if you can't fight, PUT ON A SHOW! And if you put on a good show, Mr. and Mrs. America will turn out to see it."

Winner takes all. "If you launch a campaign for a new car, your client doesn't expect you to lead the field necessarily in the first year, or even the tenth year," Whitaker once said. "But in politics, they don't pay off for PLACE OR SHOW! You have to win, if you want to stay in business."

In 1942, the problem with Earl Warren was that he was grim. Baxter said that, to get women to vote for him, he and his wife had to agree to have a picture of their family taken, and publicized. Warren's wife, Nina, objected. "She didn't want to exploit her family," Baxter said. "But we knew that he had to get that family." They took a picture—Earl, Nina, and their six children. They look like the Von Trapp Family Singers. Campaigns, Inc., distributed three million copies.

Still, there was no denying that Warren was solemn, and unsmiling. Turn your liabilities into assets! Baxter said that a grave, resolute man was just the kind of man California needed, in time of war. "War-time voters live at an emotional pitch that is anything but normal," Whitaker wrote. "This must be a campaign that makes people hear the beat of drums and the thunder of bombs.... This must be A CALL TO ARMS IN DEFENSE OF CALIFORNIA!"

Warren looked strong on defense partly because, as attorney general, he had advocated for the internment of Japanese-Americans. "If the Japs are released," he warned, "no one will be able to tell a saboteur from any other Jap." (Warren later publicly expressed great remorse about this policy and, in a 1972 interview, wept over it.) Carey McWilliams was one of the few people in public office to oppose internment. Warren vowed that his first public act as governor would be to fire McWilliams.

In the last thirty days before the election, Whitaker and Baxter advertised in four hundred newspapers and on five hundred billboards. They flooded the airwaves. They sent out sound trucks, to drive around and honk and blast. They attacked Olson's economic policies. They wrote a speakers' manual, for anyone giving a speech in support of Warren; it included drafts of a "Six-Minute Talk" and a "Fifteen-Minute Talk." (Their stock advice: Try not to speak for more than fifteen minutes—people get bored—and never for more than half an hour.)

Warren won, but he didn't like the way he had won. Just before the election, after Whitaker and Baxter issued a press release without his approval, he fired them. They never forgave him.

In the fall of 1944, Warren got a serious kidney infection. This set him thinking about the rising costs of medical care, and the catastrophic effects that sudden illness could have on a family less well provided for than his own. "I came to the conclusion that the only way to remedy this situation was to spread the cost through insurance," he wrote in his memoirs. He asked his staff to develop a proposal. "We concluded that health insurance should be collected through the Social Security System. After some studies, it was determined that the employers and employees in that system should each contribute one and one half per cent of wages paid by or to them." After conferring with the California Medical Association, he anticipated no objections from doctors. And so, in January of 1945, during his State of the State address, he announced his proposal for comprehensive, compulsory health insurance for the state of California.

Earl Warren began his political career as a conservative and ended it as one of the most hated liberals in American history. What happened to him? One answer is: Whitaker and Baxter.

Retained by the California Medical Association for an annual fee of twenty-five thousand dollars to campaign against the Governor's plan, Whitaker and Baxter took a piece of legislation that most people liked and taught them to hate it. "You can't beat something with nothing," they liked to say. They launched a drive for Californians to buy their own insurance, privately. Voluntary Health Insurance Week, driven by forty thousand inches of advertising in more than four hundred newspapers, was observed in fifty-three of the state's fifty-eight counties. Whitaker and Baxter sent more than nine thousand doctors out with prepared speeches. They coined a slogan: "Political medicine is bad medicine."

They lobbied newspaper editors. Whitaker boasted that "our people have personally called at more than 500 newspaper offices," to persuade editors to change their positions. Many of these newspapers did a vast amount of advertising business with Campaigns, Inc., and received hundreds of words of free copy, each week, from the California Feature Service. "In three years," Whitaker reported, "the number of newspapers supporting socialized medicine has dwindled from fifty to about twenty. The number of papers opposing compulsory health insurance has jumped from about 100 to 432."

They invented an enemy. They sent out twenty-seven thousand copies of a pamphlet called "The Health Question," which featured a picture of a man, a woman, and a child in the woods—"a forest of fear"—menaced by skeletons who have in their mouths, instead of teeth, the word "BILL." Whitaker and Baxter sent out two and a half million copies of another pamphlet, called "Politically-Controlled Medicine." They printed postcards, for voters to stick in the mail:

Dear Senator:

Please vote against all Compulsory Health Insurance Bills pending before the Legislature. We have enough regimentation in this country now. Certainly we don't want to be forced to go to "A State doctor," or to pay for such a doctor whether we use him or not. That system was born in Germany—and is part and parcel of what our boys are fighting overseas. Let's not adopt it here.

In 1945, Warren's bill failed to pass by just one vote. As Warren's biographer G. Edmund White remarked, "The scuttling of his health insurance plan was a confirmation for Warren of the nature of the political process, in which advocates of programs based on humanity and common sense were pitted against selfish, vindictive special interests." Warren reintroduced the bill. And again Whitaker and Baxter defeated it. "They stormed the Legislature with their invective," Warren later wrote, "and my bill was not even accorded a decent burial." It was the greatest legislative victory at the hands of admen the country had ever seen. It was not, of course, the last.

In 1945, months after Earl Warren proposed compulsory health insurance in California, Harry Truman proposed a national program. "The health of American children, like their education, should be recognized as a definite public responsibility," the President said. When Republicans took control of Congress in 1946, Truman's proposed federal health-insurance program, which, like Warren's, was funded by a payroll tax, stalled. In his State of the Union address in 1948, an election year, Truman urged passage of his plan, which enjoyed widespread popular support. In November, Truman won the election. Days afterward, the American Medical Association called up the San Francisco offices of Campaigns, Inc. The A.M.A. retained Whitaker and Baxter at a fee of a hundred thousand dollars a year, and with an annual budget of more than a million dollars, to thwart Truman's plan. The A.M.A. raised the money by assessing twenty-five dollars a year from every one of its members.

At the beginning of 1949, Whitaker and Baxter, the directors of the A.M.A.'s National Education Campaign, entered national politics, setting up headquarters in Chicago, with a staff of thirty-seven. "This must be a campaign to arouse and alert the American people in every walk of life, until it generates a great public crusade and a fundamental fight for freedom," their Plan of Campaign began. "Any other plan of action, in view of the drift toward socialization and despotism all over the world, would invite disaster." But when Whitaker told the Washington press corps, at a luncheon, that the F.B.I. was terrorizing the A.M.A., the Washington Post offered that maybe the A.M.A., at the hands of Whitaker and Baxter, ought to stop "whipping itself into a neurosis and attempting to terrorize the whole American public every time the Administration proposes a Welfare Department or a health program."

Whitaker and Baxter went to Washington and persuaded a hundred congressmen to let them read their constituent mail. At the start of the campaign, Whitaker reported, mail from voters "was running four and half to one in favor" of Truman's plan. Whitaker and Baxter went to work. "Nine months later it was running four to one against."

By then, Campaigns, Inc., had come to seem, at least to a handful of critics, nefarious and mysterious. "There isn't any mystery about it," Whitaker insisted. In a brilliant maneuver, Whitaker had "A Simplified Blueprint of the Campaign Against Compulsory Health Insurance" distributed, by the hundreds of thousands, to reporters and editors, among others, and to every member of Congress.

Meanwhile, inside Campaigns, Inc., a much more detailed Plan of Campaign circulated, in typescript, marked "CONFIDENTIAL:— NOT FOR PUBLICATION." (It can be found with the firm's papers, which are housed at the California State Archives, in Sacramento.) It reads, in part:

1. The *immediate objective* is the defeat of the compulsory health insurance program pending in Congress.
2. The *long-term objective* is to put a permanent stop to the agitation for socialized medicine in this country by:
  - a. awakening the people to the danger of a politically-controlled, government-regulated health system.
  - b. convincing the people, through a Nation wide campaign of education, of the superior advantages of private medicine, as practiced in America, over the State-dominated medical systems of other countries.
  - c. stimulating the growth of voluntary health insurance systems to take the economic shock out of illness and increase the availability of medical care to the American people.

As Whitaker and Baxter put it, in an earlier version of the plan, "Basically, the issue is whether we are to remain a free Nation, in which the individual can work out his own destiny, or whether we are to take one of the final steps toward becoming a Socialist or Communist State. We have to paint the picture, in vivid verbiage that no one can misunderstand, of Germany, Russia—and finally, England." They settled on a slogan: "KEEP POLITICS OUT OF MEDICINE." And they settled on a smear, one that they had used against Warren's plan: they called Truman's plan "socialized medicine."

In an attempt to educate every doctor, nurse, and druggist in the United States about the dangers of socialized medicine, they went on the road. Whitaker, speaking to two hundred doctors at a meeting of the Council of the New England Medical Societies, said:

Hitler and Stalin and the socialist government of Great Britain all have used the opiate of socialized medicine to deaden the pain of lost liberty and lull the people into non-resistance. Old World contagion of compulsory health insurance, if allowed to spread to our New World, will mark the beginning of the end of free institutions in America. It will only be a question of time until the railroads, the steel mills, the power industry, the banks and the farming industry are nationalized.

Political advertising, he said, was the last best hope of democracy: "We're going to put the foes of American medicine on trial before the bar of public opinion, and let the people decide."

To that end, the National Education Campaign sent out millions of pieces of mail. It wasn't always well met. "RECEIVED YOUR SCARE LETTER. AND HOW PITYFUL," an angry pharmacist wrote from Stamford, New York. "I DO HOPE PRESIDENT TRUMAN HAS HIS WAY. GOOD LUCK TO HIM."

Whitaker and Baxter liked to talk about their work as "grass roots" campaigning. The fight against socialized medicine was a case in point: "The A.M.A. in its campaign is carrying its case to the people of America in a grass roots crusade which we hope, with your help, and the help of tens of thousands of others, will reach every corner of this country." Not everyone was convinced that a lavishly paid advertising agency distributing 7.5 million copies of a

pamphlet called "The Voluntary Way Is the American Way" to doctors' offices constituted a "grass roots" movement. "Dear Sirs," one doctor wrote them. "Is it 2 ½ or 3 ½ million dollars you have allotted for your 'grass roots lobby'?"

Whitaker and Baxter's campaign against Harry Truman's national-health-insurance proposal cost the A.M.A. nearly five million dollars, and it took more than three years. But they turned the President's sensible, popular, and urgently needed legislative reform into a bogeyman so scary that, even today, millions of Americans are still scared.

Truman was furious. As to what in his plan could possibly be construed as "socialized medicine," he told the press in 1952, he didn't know what in the Sam Hill that could be. He had one more thing to say: there was "nothing in this bill that came any closer to socialism than the payments the American Medical Association makes to the advertising firm of Whitaker and Baxter to misrepresent my health program."

Carey McWilliams had kept an eye on Whitaker and Baxter since Uppie and Downey, since Ham and Eggs, since Earl Warren and the C.M.A. He pitched to *The Nation* a story about Whitaker and Baxter. His editor, Harold Field, wanted it straightaway, but McWilliams put him off. He said that he needed to go to San Francisco and "dig out the facts."

He wrote Whitaker and Baxter, requesting an interview. "The questions are serious and they are neither barbed nor loaded," he promised. "I really am not captious: I'm simply curious." He met them. He liked them. He just happened to disagree with their political agenda, and, more, he thought that their business was bad for democracy. He wrote the piece and, in May of 1950, sent Whitaker and Baxter a draft. They read it and sent changes, correcting a few small matters of fact. But they were disappointed by a revised draft.

"We are not quite the diabolical characters you have portrayed," Whitaker wrote McWilliams. "I am disappointed that you were disappointed," McWilliams replied. "Don't you agree that about the best we can hope for or expect on this score is the maximum good will, factual accuracy, and the observance of some fundamentals of fair play?"

"Government by Whitaker and Baxter" appeared in *The Nation* in three parts, in April and May of 1951. Whitaker and Baxter wrote McWilliams, "It seems to both of us that while you have not spared the spurs where you feel they will do the most good, you certainly have not done anything to injure Whitaker and Baxter personally. Everything considered, that may have been quite a strain. We are deeply grateful, Carey."

McWilliams, as Whitaker and Baxter must have very well understood, had played by different rules from theirs. He hadn't been simple. He hadn't attacked them. He had taken time to explain. He hadn't invented an enemy. He hadn't taken remarks out of context. He hadn't made anything up. He hadn't lied.

"In labor and liberal circles in California people hiss when Whitaker and Baxter are mentioned," he reported in *The Nation*, "but it must be acknowledged that they know how to reach the people. True, they have had lots of money to spend; but their opponents have not always been broke, either." He talked about how much money unions had, for instance. McWilliams did, however, believe that Whitaker and Baxter had too much power. For the A.M.A., they had written, he said, "a political script in which doctors, originally cast as special-interest heavies, emerge as crusaders for the people's health." It was incredible. And it was dangerous. "This is expert political management; this is government by Whitaker and Baxter." This is how we live now.

The piece was not without effect. By 1952, a number of doctors had resigned from the A.M.A. James H. Means, Jackson professor of Medicine at Harvard and the chief of medicine at the Massachusetts General Hospital, explained that he was no longer willing to pay dues that had been used to support an activity that he considered "contrary to public welfare and unworthy of a learned profession."

That fall, the A.M.A. let Whitaker and Baxter go, explaining that it had decided that keeping the agency on retainer would compromise its nonpartisan status. Whitaker and Baxter were untroubled. They went to work for Eisenhower-Nixon.

In 1952, television was used, for the first time, in a Presidential campaign. In 1948, less than three per cent of American homes had a television; by 1952, that figure was fast approaching fifty per cent. That year, Republicans spent \$1.5 million on television advertising; Democrats spent seventy-seven thousand dollars. On television, spots

for Eisenhower—"I Like Ike" and "The Man from Abilene"—whose themes were based on George Gallup's polling, masqueraded as documentaries; they looked like the March of Time newsreels.

Eisenhower was so unfamiliar with recording equipment that once, in front of a microphone, which was on, he grumbled, "How the hell does this thing work?" But, like everyone running for office after him, he was coached, and groomed, and buffed, and polished. And made up. In a TV spot called "Eisenhower Answers America," a young black man says, "General, the Democrats are telling me I never had it so good." Eisenhower replies, "Can that be true, when America is billions in debt, when prices have doubled, when taxes break our backs, and we are still fighting in Korea? It's tragic." Then he looks, sternly, straight into the camera. "It's time for a change."

In 1953, Earl Warren became Chief Justice of the United States. The "Impeach Earl Warren" campaign began not long after Warren wrote the Court's opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education*, in 1954, declaring school segregation unconstitutional. In 1955, Carey McWilliams became the editor of *The Nation*. In 1956, Whitaker and Baxter did P.R. for the G.O.P. Nominating Convention, in San Francisco. Meanwhile, they were interviewed by a Special Senate Committee to Investigate Political Activities, Lobbying, and Campaign Contributions. Whitaker told the committee he opposed government funding of campaigns and favored lifting restrictions on corporate campaign donations. The committee's investigators puzzled over campaign consultants. Should they be classed as lobbyists? As political-action committees? Shouldn't they be regulated? Whitaker insisted that the work his firm did constituted grassroots organizing, and should not to be subject to any regulation.

Later that year, Whitaker and Baxter, working with the California firm of Baus and Ross, campaigned on behalf of Proposition 4, a ballot measure favoring the oil industry and giving it more license to drill. The measure was written by attorneys for Standard Oil. Whitaker and Baxter prevailed, mainly by getting the referendum's name changed to the Oil and Gas Conservation Act.

In 1958, Whitaker's oldest son by his first marriage, Clem Whitaker, Jr., bought Campaigns, Inc., with two partners. In 1960, when Nixon ran for President, Campaigns, Inc., organized his campaign in California. "The great need is to go on the offensive—and to attack," one of Whitaker's partners advised. Best to forget "the liberal Democrats who wouldn't vote for Nixon if he received the joint personal endorsement of Jesus Christ and Karl Marx via a séance with Eleanor Roosevelt." Nixon won California but lost the election. He was terrible on television. "It was TV more than anything else that turned the tide," Kennedy said. By now, Democrats were beginning to hire political-consulting firms, too. Everyone did. It was an arms race.

Clem Whitaker, Sr., died of emphysema in 1961. Four years later, when Ronald Reagan ran for governor of California, he hired the California firm of Spencer-Roberts. Spencer-Roberts used the Whitaker and Baxter rule book. "You know something, Stu?" Reagan said to Stuart Spencer in 1966. "Politics is just like show business. . . . You begin with a hell of an opening, you coast for a while, and you end with a hell of a closing."

Upton Sinclair died in a nursing home in New Jersey in 1968. That year, H. R. Haldeman left his job as manager of the Los Angeles office of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency to run Nixon's Presidential campaign. Haldeman had offered his services to Eisenhower-Nixon in 1952, and worked for the Vice-President's campaign in 1956. He had learned the tools of the trade from the best of them. "Whitaker and Baxter was the great old campaign," he once said, remembering the old days, "the granddaddy."

"Voters are basically lazy, basically uninterested in making an *effort* to understand what we're talking about," the Nixon adviser William Gavin wrote in a memo. "Reason requires a higher degree of discipline, of concentration; impression is easier," he wrote in another memo. "Reason pushes the viewer back, it assaults him, it demands that he agree or disagree; impression can envelop him, invite him in, without making an intellectual demand. . . . When we argue with him we demand that he make the effort of replying. We seek to engage his intellect, and for most people this is the most difficult work of all. The emotions are more easily roused, closer to the surface, more malleable."

The Nixon campaign studied the tapes of its candidate on television. Insufficient emotion. "He still uses his arms a little too 'predictably' and a little too often," Roger Ailes, Richard Nixon's chief television adviser, said in 1968. "But at this point it is better not to inhibit him." Ailes is now the president of Fox News.

After Clem Whitaker died, Leone Baxter continued to run a firm of her own, Whitaker and Baxter International. She lived in a penthouse apartment at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco. She liked to work behind the scenes. In all her long life—she died in 2001, at the age of ninety-five—she rarely gave interviews. She made an exception in the nineteen-sixties. She was asked, “Do the procedures you designed early in the game and utilized so successfully over the years, Leone, still work today, or have you found it necessary to change them?”

“The basic rules I would say are wholly unchanged,” she said. “The strategies are unchanged.” There was television, of course. “But I would say that the philosophy of political campaigning hasn’t changed a whit. The tools have changed, the philosophy has not.”

She was also asked, “Does political public relations actually transfer political power into the hands of those who exercise it?”

“It certainly could and has in some instances,” she said, carefully. **“In this profession of leading men’s minds, this is the reason I feel it must be in the hands of the most ethical, principled people—people with real concern for the world around them, for people around them—or else it will erode into the hands of people who have no regard for the world around them. It could be a very, very destructive thing.”**

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[http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/endeavour\\_lax.html](http://www.nasa.gov/multimedia/imagegallery/endeavour_lax.html)



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