



## **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #235 — SEPT. 27, 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.**

### **To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler, and *Ohio!***

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

What a strange campaign! Consciously or unconsciously, Mittens wants to lose the election, I swear! This guy is truly weird that he would say something like he did to the working folks of Ohio, while supporting tax cuts for billionaires. Amazing! The President's response:



**"Romney to Middle Class Ohioans: Don't Expect Too Much Tax Relief from Me" by Sam Stein, Huffington Post**

Sept. 26, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/26/romney-ohio-taxes\\_n\\_1915949.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=politics](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/26/romney-ohio-taxes_n_1915949.html?utm_hp_ref=politics))

(WESTERVILLE, Ohio) In a line that event attendees found a bit puzzling, Mitt Romney warned a crowd of mostly middle-class onlookers on Wednesday not to expect too much tax relief under his administration.

"We have got to reform our tax system," Romney said at a morning event here. "Small businesses most typically pay taxes at the individual tax rate. And so our individual income taxes are the ones I want to reform. Make them simpler. I want to bring the rates down. By the way, don't be expecting a huge cut in taxes because I'm also going

to lower deductions and exemptions. But by bringing rates down we will be able to let small businesses keep more of their money so they can hire more people."

**The comments were either a flub on Romney's part or an admission that many of the deductions and exemptions that he will have to target in order to make his tax plan deficit neutral will end up affecting the middle class.**

To date, Romney has said that he will only eliminate deductions and exemptions above a certain income level. He hasn't said what that income level would be. But when asked whether he would make \$100,000 the cutoff, he said that he considered "middle income" to be "\$200,000 to \$250,000 and less." (One of the few Romney-backing studies has said that the only way his tax plan adds up is if he eliminates deductions and exemptions above that \$100,000 income level).

Romney's comment on Wednesday left some in the crowd believing that their deductions and exemptions -- be they on home mortgage interest payments, charitable donations or employer-provided health insurance -- would be targeted if he became president. And it wasn't a top-income-bracket type of crowd. In 2009, the estimated median household income in Westerville was \$76,154. Census data from 2011 shows that the mean household income in Franklin County, which contains part of Westerville, was \$65,607. For Delaware County, which contains another part of Westerville, that number was \$107,231.

"I'm curious what he meant by that," Westerville resident Phil Bentley said of Romney's comment. "I don't know if I have seen those details."

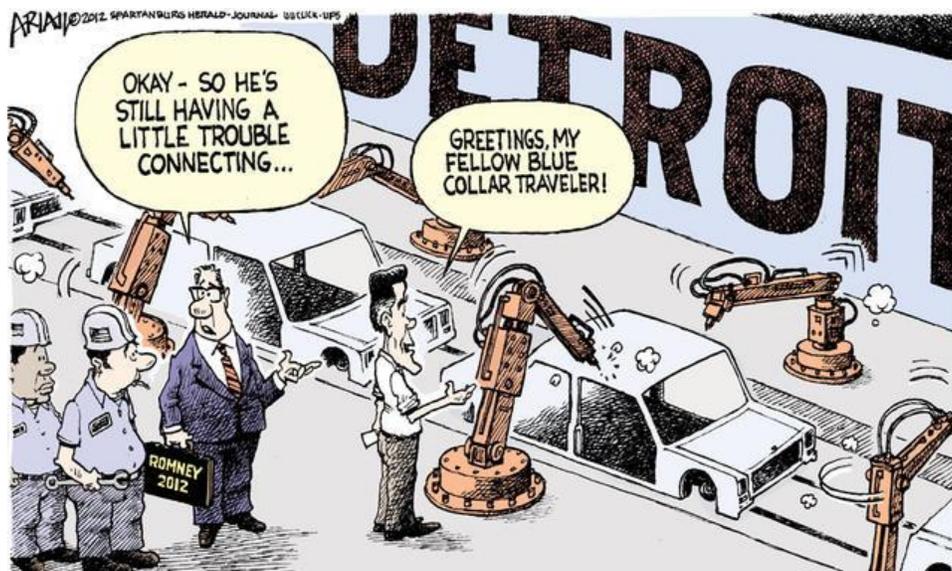
Still, Bentley said, he supported Romney's overall tax plan, which calls for a 20 tax cut across the board for all income brackets, and which Romney insists will remain deficit neutral. In fact, none of the half-dozen attendees interviewed after the event expressed concern about the remarks, offering up lines of explanation that one wouldn't often expect at a Republican presidential candidate's rally.

"We need the taxes to stay the way they are because we have to get the debt down," said Margo Belkofer, of Powell, Ohio.

"He's not promoting a tax cut, he is preventing a tax increase," said Jim Bachelder, of Westerville.

Cynthia Beitman, of Westerville, said she was fine with Romney eliminating deductions and exemptions for people like her, so long as he lowered the rates overall for small businesses. "People run small businesses," she exclaimed.

"I thought that line was really good," said Patty Karst of Gahanna, Ohio. "You have to realize as a society that we have to have the funds for infrastructure, the protection of the country and the social programs we support."



**FotM NEWSLETTER #235 (Sept. 27, 2012)—HYPERTEXT INDEX**

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<a href="#">20120926-03</a>	13:50	SteveB	Re: To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler & <i>Ohio!</i> (reply to Pam, above)
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<a href="#">20120926-11</a>	15:39	Clark	Re: To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler & <i>Ohio!</i> (reply to SteveG, above) & Graphic: Women for Mitt!
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<a href="#">20120926-05</a>	14:06	SteveB	"Bolivia Gives Legal Rights to the Earth"
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<a href="#">20120926-13</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Whanganui River, New Zealand

<a href="#">20120926-02</a>	12:55	Pam	Re: To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler & <i>Ohio!</i> (reply to SteveB, above)
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There is NO way this dude can win. Years from now people will still be making jokes about his many gaffes. (I hope I'm not tempting fate by saying that.) First, the Republicans blame the Democrats for x,y, & z, then they turn right around and commit x,y, & z themselves--and call it progress. If the American people allow themselves to be manipulated and bought into voting for Mr. Mitt, then I'll know my assumptions about most Americans' intelligence are correct.

What are we going to talk about when the election is over? Seriously.

<a href="#">20120926-03</a>	13:50	SteveB	Re: To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler & <i>Ohio!</i> (reply to Pam, above)
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Personally, I'm for trying our best to annihilate the party that brought us Mitt Romney, endless wars, and a dying economy.

<a href="#">20120926-04</a>	14:06	SteveG	Re: To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler & <i>Ohio!</i> (reply to SteveB, above)
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If the Republicans roll themselves back to the middle and provide a respectable contender/contenders that will work toward the betterment of the country, then maybe, just maybe they will be back.

Not that it has much to do with the current crop of republicans, but presently I am reading Jon Meacham's *American Gospel* – gives a good sense of where we started as a country – I believe some people have forgotten our history.

Too late to annihilate, Steve. They've already formed political suicide pact:

# STENCH

**What started as a slight...**

"I hate to say this, but if Ryan wants to run for national office again, he'll probably have to wash the stench of Romney off of him," Craig Robinson, a former political director of the Republican Party of Iowa, told The New York Times on Sunday. (nytimes.com)



**...is now a rift in the campaign.**

"Though Ryan had already decided to distance himself from the floundering Romney campaign, he now feels totally uninhibited. Reportedly, he has been marching around his campaign bus, saying things like, 'If Stench calls, take a message' and 'Tell Stench I'm having finger sandwiches with Peggy Noonan and will text him later.'" (politico.com)



It's the smell of defeat that Ryan can't stand.



Are those two actually going to make it through to the election? I don't have any idea why they want the jobs.

I'm sure, at this point, Ryan would rather stay in Congress.

And Mitt wishes he could remember why he ever wanted to run for President to begin with.

Based on everything that's happened and been said, how can it be otherwise?

Rich people, just sitting around, nothing to do, just making money, bad mouthing other people, just gotta come up with something to keep busy – oh yeah, I'll run for president...

20120926-11

15:39

Clark

Re: To Hell with You, GM, Chrysler & *Ohio!* (reply to SteveG, above) & Graphic: Women for Mitt!

Women for Mitt:



20120926-08

14:21

Jim

"10 Questions Romney Should Answer About His Taxes"

It was revealed when Mitt released his 2011 tax form that he did not claim \$1.8 million dollars in charitable contributions so that he would pay more tax this year to get his rate up for PR purposes.

What a lot of people do not realize is that within three years he could go back and amend his return and get that extra tax refunded after the spotlight is off him.

Here are some other good questions (below). The one about the foreign accounts is also a good one. Anyone who has more than \$10,000 in an account overseas is required to file an annual form reporting that and I would bet Mitt has more than that in overseas accounts.

"10 Questions Romney Should Answer About His Taxes" by Seth Hanlon, NationofChange

<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.

<a href="#">20120926-01</a> 09:34 MarthaH "Conservatives Warily Ponder Prospect of an 'Obama Court'"
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Cat fight...

Since 2000, I have had grave concerns about the INDEPENDENT judicial system; if you don't know why, you must have slept through "it." Then you lived it eight years...with residuals for the 21st Century, I fear. Since (see finances of 2012 campaign) recent decisions going Right, I hope a balance is created in Obama's second term...Now to get the 2d term! Toobin is always worth notice on the US Supreme Court news. Most of us are old enough to remember the Impeach Earl Warren billboards...

"Conservatives Warily Ponder Prospect of an 'Obama Court'" by Tom Curry, NBC News

Sept. 25, 2012, (<http://nbcpolitics.nbcnews.com/news/2012/09/25/14098358-conservatives-warily-ponder-prospect-of-an-obama-court?lite>)

There are still 42 days and four debates left before the presidential election and many signs point to a close outcome, but recent polling both nationally and in key battleground states like Ohio has conservatives concerned about the impact President Obama could have on the judiciary in a second term.

*The New Yorker's* Jeffrey Toobin joins "Morning Joe" to discuss President Obama's relationship with the Supreme Court, Chief Justice John Roberts and his ruling on the Affordable Care Act, and the relationships the justices have with one another.

So far Obama has appointed 159 judges to the federal bench, including his two Supreme Court selections, Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan.

With Sotomayor and Kagan, Obama simply replaced two members of the liberal bloc on the court (John Paul Stevens and David Souter) with two younger liberals. But most of the Obama-appointed judges – 127 of them – are trial judges who exert less influence on the broad direction of the law than do appeals court judges or Supreme Court justices.

Both on the Supreme Court – where "swing vote" Justice Anthony Kennedy and conservative Justice Antonin Scalia are age 76 – and on the courts of appeal, where there are now 14 vacancies, Obama would be able to nudge the courts in a progressive direction if he wins a second term.

In the final push in the 2012 presidential election, candidates Mitt Romney and Barack Obama make their last appeals to voters.

The high court begins its 2012-13 term on Monday and has scheduled arguments on the use of race in undergraduate admissions decisions at the University of Texas and on whether multinational firms can be sued for their alleged role in human rights abuses that occur outside the United States. It's also likely the court will take up challenges to the 1996 Defense of Marriage Act, which defines marriage as solely the union of one man and one woman.

"It would be a bad mistake for conservatives to get gloomy and defeatist. This election is very winnable," said Ed Whelan, president of the Ethics and Public Policy Center and a former Scalia law clerk who served in the Justice Department under President George W. Bush.

But Whelan added, "There are lots of reasons why anyone concerned about America's future should rue the prospect of President Obama's re-election. What President Obama would do to the Supreme Court is high on the list."

"The potential impact of the next president on the Supreme Court is immense," said Carrie Severino, the chief counsel and policy director at the Judicial Crisis Network, a right-of-center advocacy group. "There could easily be three nominations during the next term.... Most people expect there to be at least one vacancy."

She said if Obama were re-elected and got three more high court nominations, "that would put him in the position of having nominated the majority of the justices on the Supreme Court. That's an incredible influence over the way the court shapes American society."

She said there's now a 5-4 split on issues that have been before or are coming before the court, such as whether schools can use applicants' and students' race or ethnicity in admissions or in assigning students to specific public schools.

From racial preferences to gun owners' rights to immigration to same-sex marriage, "you name it – there are so many issues where the outcome turns on one vote at the Supreme Court and the president could easily be shaping that next vote," Severino said. And those concerns extend even to a possible Romney presidency.

Curt Levey, president of the Committee for Justice, a conservative group that tracks judicial nominations, said Chief Justice John Roberts' decision to join the four liberal-leaning justices in upholding Obama's Affordable Care Act "has made conservatives think somewhat differently" about judicial nominees. "There's a lot of sober thinking among conservatives that it is not just enough to appoint somebody who we know to have the right philosophy – you have to appoint somebody who has shown, either as a judge or perhaps in some other setting, that they will stick with that philosophy even when there's political pressure to do otherwise."

Of course, it's not just those on the right who are warily watching the election outcome and its impact on the judiciary. Doug Kendall, president of the Constitutional Accountability Center, a progressive think tank and advocacy group, said, "I think a Romney presidency has a far greater potential to shift the court to the right than a second Obama term would have the potential to shift it to the left."

Kendall said the most likely high court retiree is Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, 79, appointed to the court by President Bill Clinton in 1993. "If President Romney nominates her successor, it will have a huge impact on the ideological balance of the court. If President Obama appoints Justice Ginsburg's successor it will simply continue the current ideological balance and will not move the court to the left at all."

As for appeals court and trial court judges, Severino contends that in his first term Obama has not put great emphasis on appointing them. "Many of us were surprised – and relieved – that he didn't do that in his first term. It will be interesting to see whether his focus shifts" to judicial nominations if he wins a second term, Severino said.

After eight years of Democrats delaying and blocking Bush judicial nominees such as Miguel Estrada and William Pryor, Levey said Senate Republicans decided when Obama became president "they weren't just going to roll over" on his judicial nominees. But "the bigger reason Obama has had a record low number of confirmations, at least taken as percentage of the judiciary, is that Obama hasn't made it a priority."

For example, there are now 14 appeals court vacancies but only 7 Obama nominees for those vacancies.

Senate Republicans have succeeded in blocking a couple of Obama's appeals court picks: Goodwin Liu in California and Caitlin Halligan in the District of Columbia. And they have slowed the pace of confirmation for those whom Obama has nominated.

A report issued last week by the Congressional Research Service (CRS) looked at waiting times for uncontroversial appeals court nominees, defined as nominees whom the Judiciary Committee approved by voice vote or by a unanimous roll call vote, and who were ultimately confirmed by the full Senate by voice vote, or with five or fewer 'nay' votes.

The CRS report found that the average number of days from nomination by the president to Senate confirmation went from 64 days during Ronald Reagan's presidency to 201 days in George W. Bush's presidency to 227 days during Obama's presidency.

"My expectation is that President Obama will have to take that battle on more directly in a second term," Kendall said.

Noting that Republicans had prevented confirmation of Obama's two nominees to the powerful U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit, which hears most regulatory agency appeals, Kendall said, "He needs to fill those seats" and needs to "exercise his constitutional authority as president to fill vacancies on that incredibly important court."

[20120926-12](#)

16:29

SteveG

Video: "Ever Wonder What Real Journalists Think of People Like Bill O'Reilly?"

Worth watching until the end!

"Ever Wonder What Real Journalists Think of People Like Bill O'Reilly?" (w/video) by Mansur Gidfar, Upworthy

Sept. 24, 2012, (<http://www.upworthy.com/ever-wonder-what-real-journalists-think-of-people-like-bill-oreilly?g=2&c=cp2>)

Veteran newsman Ted Koppel stopped by "The O'Reilly Factor" to share his thoughts on what networks like Fox News are doing to this country. I don't think he's a fan.

Highlight: At the end of the clip, O'Reilly states that he thinks he does a noble thing for a living. Koppel's response is priceless.

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=UmXNVdAsudQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=UmXNVdAsudQ).

<a href="#">20120926-05</a>	14:06	SteveB	"Bolivia Gives Legal Rights to the Earth"
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I don't know how this is going to actually be implemented so that there aren't tremendous problems whenever people's needs conflict with nature's. Are the citizens affected actually going to consider the rights of the earth more sovereign than their own short term existence? Tough choices ahead, for us all in any country!

"Bolivia Gives Legal Rights to the Earth" by Eddie, WorldTruth TV

May 30, 2012, (<http://worldtruth.tv/bolivia-gives-legal-rights-to-the-earth-2/>)



Law of Mother Earth sees Bolivia pilot new social and economic model based on protection of and respect for nature.

Bolivia is to become the first country in the world to give nature comprehensive legal rights in an effort to halt climate change and the exploitation of the natural world, and to improve quality of life for the Bolivian people. Developed by grassroots social groups and agreed by politicians, the Law of Mother Earth recognizes the rights of all living things, giving the natural world equal status to human beings.

Once fully approved, the legislation will provide the Earth with rights to: life and regeneration; biodiversity and freedom from genetic modification; pure water; clean air; naturally balanced systems; restoration from the effects of human activity; and freedom from contamination.



The legislation is based on broader principles of living in harmony with the Earth and prioritizing the “collective good.” At its heart is an understanding that the Earth is sacred, which arises from the indigenous Andean worldview of ‘Pachamama’ (meaning Mother Earth) as a living being. An initial act outlining the rights – which was passed by Bolivia’s national congress in December 2010 and paves the way for the full legislation – defines Mother Earth as a dynamic and “indivisible community of all living systems and living organisms, interrelated, interdependent and complementary, which share a common destiny.”

Bolivia’s government will be legally bound to prioritize the wellbeing of its citizens and the natural world by developing policies that promote sustainability and control industry. The economy must operate within the limits of nature and the country is to work towards energy and food sovereignty while adopting renewable energy technologies and increasing energy efficiency. Preventing climate change is a key objective of the law, which includes protecting the lives of future generations. The government is requesting that rich countries help Bolivia adapt to the effects of climate change in recognition of the environmental debt they owe for their high carbon emissions. Bolivia is “particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change,” according to an Oxfam report in 2009, with increasing drought, melting glaciers and flooding.

On the international stage, the government will have a legal duty to promote the uptake of rights for Mother Earth, while also advocating peace and the elimination of all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. Following a change in Bolivia’s constitution in 2009, the law is part of a complete overhaul of the legal system. It represents a shift away from the western development model to a more holistic vision, based on the indigenous concept of *Vivir Bien* (to live well).

The proposal for the law states: “Living Well means adopting forms of consumption, behaviour and and conduct that are not degrading to nature. It requires an ethical and spiritual relationship with life. Living Well proposes the complete fulfilment of life and collective happiness.”

Unity Pact, an umbrella group for five Bolivian social movements, prepared the draft law. They represent over 3m people and all of the country’s 36 indigenous groups, the majority of whom are small scale farmers with many still living on their ancestral lands. The bill protects their livelihoods and diverse cultures from the impacts of industry.

Undarico Pinto, a leader of the social movement *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia*, said: “It will make industry more transparent. It will allow people to regulate industry at national, regional and local levels.” Signifying a fundamental shift away from exploitation of nature, the draft law refers to mineral resources as “blessings” and states that Mother Earth, “is sacred, fertile and the source of life that feeds and cares for all living beings in her womb. She is in permanent balance, harmony and communication with the cosmos.”

A Ministry of Mother Earth is to be established to promote the new rights and ensure they are complied with. But with its economy currently dependent on exports of natural resources, earning nearly a third of its foreign currency – around £300m a year – from mining companies, Bolivia will need to balance its new obligations against the demands of industry.



The full law is expected to pass within the next few months and is unlikely to face any significant opposition because the ruling party, the Movement Towards Socialism, has a considerable majority in parliament. Its leader, President Evo Morales, voiced a commitment to the initiative at the World People's Conference on Climate change, held in Bolivia in April, 2010.

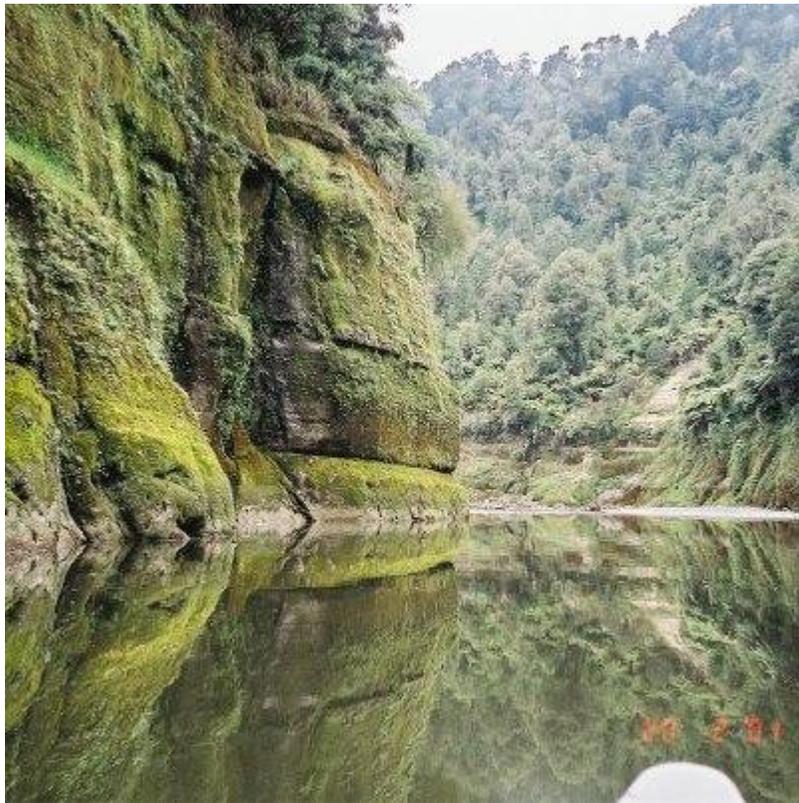
The Law of Mother Earth includes the following:

- The right to maintain the integrity of life and natural processes.
- The right to not have cellular structure modified or genetically altered.
- The right to continue vital cycles and processes free from human alteration.
- The right to pure water.
- The right to clean air.
- The right to balance, to be at equilibrium.
- The right to be free of toxic and radioactive pollution.
- The right to not be affected by mega-infrastructure and development projects that affect the balance of ecosystems and the local inhabitant communities.
- The law also promotes "harmony" and "peace" and "the elimination of all nuclear, chemical, biological" weapons.

Seems at least as reasonable to me as granting personhood to corporations!

"New Zealand Grants a River the Rights of Personhood" by Eddie, WorldTruth TV

Sept. 18, 2012, (<http://worldtruth.tv/new-zealand-grants-a-river-the-rights-of-personhood/>)



From the dawn of history, and in cultures throughout the world, humans have been prone to imbue Earth's life-giving rivers with qualities of life itself — a fitting tribute, no doubt, to the wellsprings upon which our past (and present) civilizations so heavily rely. But while modern thought has come to regard these essential waterways more clinically over the centuries, that might all be changing once again.

Meet the Whanganui. You might call it a river, but in the eyes of the law, it has the standings of a person.

In a landmark case for the Rights of Nature, officials in New Zealand recently granted the Whanganui, the nation's third-longest river, with legal personhood "in the same way a company is, which will give it rights and interests". The decision follows a long court battle for the river's personhood initiated by the Whanganui River Iwi, an indigenous community with strong cultural ties to the waterway.

Under the settlement, the river is regarded as a protected entity, under an arrangement in which representatives from both the iwi and the national government will serve as legal custodians towards the Whanganui's best interests.

"Today's agreement which recognizes the status of the river as Te Awa Tupua (an integrated, living whole) and the inextricable relationship of Iwi with the river is a major step towards the resolution of the historical grievances of Whanganui iwi and is important nationally," says New Zealand's Minister for Treaty for Waitangi Negotiations, Christopher Finlayson.

“Whanganui Iwi also recognize the value others place on the river and wanted to ensure that all stakeholders and the river community as a whole are actively engaged in developing the long-term future of the river and ensuring its wellbeing,” says Finlayson.

Although this is likely the first time a single river has been granted such a distinction under the law, chances are it’s not the last. **In 2008, Ecuador passed similar ruling giving its forests, lakes, and waterways rights on par with humans in order to ensure their protection from harmful practices.**

And, while it may seem an odd extension of rights, in many ways it harkens back to a time when mankind’s fate was more readily acknowledged as being intertwined with that of the rivers, lakes, and streams that sustained us — a time in which our purer instincts towards preserving nature needn’t be dictated by legislation.

[20120926-13](#) 23:59 SteveB Photo: Whanganui River, New Zealand

<http://juliansrockandiceblog.blogspot.com/2009/09/whanganui-river-fossil-beds.html>



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

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