



# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE**

## **DECEMBER, 2012 NEWSLETTERS**

Edited by Steven W. Baker for FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE

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<b>(01-12) 2012 PRIMARIES</b>			
<b>(02-12) 2012 ELECTIONS</b>			
<a href="#">20121205-08</a>	18:28	Art	"Makers Beat Takers"
BARACK OBAMA			
<a href="#">20121204-03</a>	10:22	MarthaH	"Survey: Obama Built Coalition of Moderates"
MITT ROMNEY			
<a href="#">20121212-09</a>	12:45	SteveB	"PolitiFact Names Romney Ad 'Lie of the Year'"
<b>(03) CONSERVATIVE MIND, THE</b>			
<a href="#">20121130-02</a>	11:25	Art	"Cry Babies & Sore Losers"
<a href="#">20121130-03</a>	11:43	Pam	Re: "Cry Babies & Sore Losers" (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121209-02</a>	06:05	SteveB	"Ann Coulter Attacks Latinos in Column, As Conservatives Seek to Reach-Out to Hispanic Voters" & "America Nears El Tipping Pointo"
<a href="#">20121212-15</a>	17:19	SteveB	"The Right's Sham Religion of Rugged Individualism" (to Republicans)
<a href="#">20121220-11</a>	22:22	Tom	Cartoon: 'As Good as It Gets'
<b>(04) DEMOCRATS</b>			
<a href="#">20121227-02</a>	14:13	Dennis	"There Is No American Left"
<a href="#">20121229-07</a>	19:20	SteveB	"Bill Clinton Finally Just Shows America His Penis"
<b>(05) LIBERAL MIND, THE</b>			
<a href="#">20121227-04</a>	16:44	SteveB	Graphic: How to Tell If You're Too Progressive
<b>(06) MISC. POLITICS / CORRESPONDENCE w/ POLITICIANS</b>			
<a href="#">20121213-01</a>	06:04	MarthaH	Weekly Contact
<a href="#">20121213-03</a>	09:54	Pam	Re: Weekly Contact (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121222-02</a>	10:04	SteveB	"The Four Most Important Political Lessons of 2012"
<a href="#">20121224-10</a>	14:54	MarthaH	"Six Political Lessons of 2012"
<a href="#">20121224-14</a>	15:45	Art	Re: "Six Political Lessons of 2012" (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121227-03</a>	15:42	MarthaH	"The Year in Politics – in Quotes"
<a href="#">20121229-04</a>	07:57	MarthaH	"The Top 10 Political Quotes of 2012"
<b>(07) REPUBLICANS</b>			
<a href="#">20121130-01</a>	06:31	James	Re: Is the GOP Lost? (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #281)
<a href="#">20121130-04</a>	12:20	SteveB	Re: Is the GOP Lost? (reply to James, above)
<a href="#">20121130-08</a>	20:32	SteveG	"After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee"
<a href="#">20121130-09</a>	20:39	Dennis	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to SteveG, above)

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<a href="#">20121130-10</a>	21:39	SteveG	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#">20121201-04</a>	14:08	Dennis	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121201-05</a>	16:29	Pam	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to Dennis & SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121201-08</a>	17:10	SteveG	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121202-03</a>	13:25	SteveG	"The 3 Unofficial GOP Rules That Are Making a Deficit Deal Even Harder"
<a href="#">20121204-01</a>	08:16	SteveB	The GOP (to Republicans)
<a href="#">20121204-06</a>	18:42	SteveG	"Two Conservative Republicans Booted from House Budget Panel"
<a href="#">20121204-10</a>	23:57	SteveG	Cartoon: Cutting Off the Elephant's Nose to Spite His Face
<a href="#">20121205-01</a>	09:53	Ann	"Everything We Need to Know, We Learned in Kindergarten. Too Bad Republicans Missed That Day."
<a href="#">20121205-02</a>	10:05	SteveB	Re: "Everything We Need to Know, We Learned in Kindergarten. Too Bad Republicans Missed That Day." (reply to Ann, above)
<a href="#">20121209-01</a>	05:45	SteveB	"Money Can't Buy Them Love"
<a href="#">20121211-03</a>	19:07	SteveB	"Why the Fiscal Cliff Is Causing a Nervous Breakdown on the Right"
<a href="#">20121219-06</a>	18:24	SteveB	"Rearranging the Deck Chairs on the Republican <i>Titanic</i> " & "Why the Formerly Grand Old Party Needs to Change & Won't"
<a href="#">20121226-00</a>		SteveB	<b>My Fellow Citizens...</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Fall of Plan B: Self-Destruction in the Cause of the 0.3 Per Cent" & "Two Debacles in 12 Hours" & "Fox News Calls Early End to Interview That Turned Critical" & "What Americans Should Learn from the 'Republican Apocalypse'" & "The GOP Brings Politics to a Crisis Point" & "Realigning American Politics: Towards a Mass Party of the Center")
<a href="#">20121226-01</a>	14:13	Art	Re: My Fellow Citizens... (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #297)
<a href="#">20121226-02</a>	14:18	Pam	Re: My Fellow Citizens... (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121222-08</a>	22:43	Tom	Cartoon: John Boehner as Britney Spears
<a href="#">20121228-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Gloom &amp; Doom (for Profit)</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("When Prophecy Fails")
<a href="#">20121229-08</a>	19:29	SteveB	"Filthy Mitt Romney Delivers Campaign Speech to Audience of Confused Shoppers in Ohio Safeway"
<b>(08) STATE / LOCAL POLITICS</b>			
<b>(09) THIRD PARTIES</b>			
<b>(10) CONSTITUTION</b>			
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<b>(12) EDUCATION</b>			
<a href="#">20121212-08</a>	11:33	Ben	Graphic: When I Grow Up I Want to Be an Exotic Dancer Like Mommy
<a href="#">20121213-04</a>	10:35	Art	"In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty"
<a href="#">20121213-06</a>	12:43	Pam	Re: "In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty" (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121216-02</a>	13:35	SteveB	"America's Teachers: Heroes or Greedy Moochers at the Public Trough?"
<b>(13) ELECTION REFORM</b>			
<a href="#">20121208-01</a>	12:27	SteveB	"James Taylor Calls for Election Reform"
<b>(14) EXECUTIVE BRANCH</b>			

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<b>(15) GUNS / INSURRECTION / CRIME</b>			
<a href="#">20121203-01</a>	11:41	Tom	Fw: \$29.99 Bates Boots (\$300 Value)
<a href="#">20121203-07</a>	17:36	SteveG	"Sportscaster Bob Costas Condemns U.S. Gun Culture During NFL Game" (w/ video)
<a href="#">20121203-08</a>	18:10	SteveB	Re: "Sportscaster Bob Costas Condemns U.S. Gun Culture During NFL Game" (reply to SteveG, above) & "NRA President Suggests Jovan Belcher's Girlfriend Should've Been Armed" (w/video)
<a href="#">20121204-07</a>	20:25	SteveG	"Texas Church Offers Firearms Classes to Train Parishioners to Defend Against Imaginary Bands of Mexicans"
<a href="#">20121205-03</a>	11:58	Art	Re: "Texas Church Offers Firearms Classes to Train Parishioners to Defend Against Imaginary Bands of Mexicans" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #284)
<a href="#">20121206-10</a>	22:42	Tom	Graphic: Something about Martial Law...
<a href="#">20121212-13</a>	13:30	Tom	Graphic: Stir It Up!
<a href="#">20121214-05</a>	18:16	SteveB	Connecticut School Deaths vs. Chinese Injuries ("22 Children, 1 Adult Injured in Knife Attack at China School")
<a href="#">20121214-06</a>	19:26	Art	Re: Connecticut School Deaths vs. Chinese Injuries (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121215-01</a>	10:49	Tom	Graphic: More Guns Needed
<a href="#">20121215-02</a>	10:54	Tom	Graphic: Deer Hunting After the Obama Gun Ban
<a href="#">20121215-03</a>	10:59	Tom	Graphic: Evil People Exist
<a href="#">20121218-00</a>		SteveB	<b>When a President Must Try to Heal a Nation...</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Obama Newtown Speech: President Addresses Vigil for Sandy Hook Shooting Victims" w/ video and full text)
<a href="#">20121217-01</a>	8:50	MarthaH	Guns and Schools
<a href="#">20121218-01</a>	07:05	SteveB	From the Right: "Invincible Ignorance"
<a href="#">20121218-02</a>	07:57	MarthaH	"Mr. Rogers Photo, Words of Advice Go Viral in Wake of Shootings"
<a href="#">20121218-03</a>	12:35	SteveB	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell the NRA to Stand Down!
<a href="#">20121218-05</a>	15:10	SandyI	Just Thinking about the Newtown Tragedy
<a href="#">20121218-06</a>	15:35	Pam	Re: Just Thinking about the Newtown Tragedy (reply to SandyI, above)
<a href="#">20121218-07</a>	16:09	Art	Re: Just Thinking about the Newtown Tragedy (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121220-00</a>		SandyI & MarthaH	<b>Lock and Load</b> by SandyI & MarthaH ("On Guns, Take Action Now")
<a href="#">20121219-01</a>	14:48	Pam	Re: Lock and Load (reply to SandyI & MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121219-03</a>	15:20	Dennis	Re: Lock and Load (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121219-05</a>	17:05	Pam	Re: Lock and Load (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#">20121219-07</a>	19:15	Dennis	Re: Lock and Load (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121219-08</a>	20:35	SteveG	Cartoon: Guns, Guns, and More Guns
<a href="#">20121219-02</a>	15:00	Tom	Graphic: Don't
<a href="#">20121220-02</a>	10:55	Pam	Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Tom, FotM Newsletter #295)
<a href="#">20121220-04</a>	11:03	SteveB	Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121220-09</a>	12:41	SteveB	Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121220-05</a>	11:17	Pam	Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121220-06</a>	11:36	SteveB	Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121220-08</a>	12:36	Pam	Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121220-01</a>	08:48	MarthaH	"Even Before Newtown Tragedy, NRA Was Losing Democratic Support"
<a href="#">20121220-12</a>	22:51	Tom	Fw: Gun Seller Says Business Is Good
<a href="#">20121222-01</a>	06:27	SteveB	"NRA Leader Wayne LaPierre's Much-Criticized Sandy Hook Speech Was Actually Quite Effective"
<a href="#">20121222-04</a>	14:29	Dennis	"The Real Rationale for the 2nd Amendment, That Right-Wingers Are Totally Ignorant About"
<a href="#">20121223-01</a>	07:45	MarthaH	NRA Spin

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<a href="#">20121223-02</a>	13:37	SteveB	Quotes: Second Amendment
<a href="#">20121224-01</a>	01:40	Tom	Graphic: Gun Free Zone
<a href="#">20121225-01</a>	03:41	SteveB	"Celebrating the Prince of Peace in the Land of Guns"
<a href="#">20121228-01</a>	18:22	SteveB	Cartoon: An Odd Sort of Patriot...
<b>(16) IMMIGRATION</b>			
<b>(17) JUDICIAL BRANCH</b>			
<b>(18) LEGISLATIVE BRANCH</b>			
<a href="#">20121202-01</a>	08:25	MarthaH	"It's a Close Call on Susan Rice"
<a href="#">20121204-05</a>	12:14	SteveG	Fw: Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster!
<a href="#">20121204-09</a>	20:45	SteveG	Fw: Response from Sen. Maria Cantwell to Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster! (above)
<a href="#">20121205-04</a>	12:02	Art	Re: Response from Sen. Maria Cantwell to Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster! (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #284)
<a href="#">20121205-10</a>	20:38	SteveG	"UN Disability Treaty Rejected by Senate"
<a href="#">20121206-03</a>	11:12	Art	Re: "UN Disability Treaty Rejected by Senate" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #285)
<a href="#">20121206-04</a>	11:21	Pam	Re: "UN Disability Treaty Rejected by Senate" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #285 & Art, above)
<a href="#">20121230-03</a>	22:49	SteveB	"Our Pathetic Congress"
<b>(19) MISC. GOVERNMENT / CORRESPONDENCE w/ OFFICIALS</b>			
<b>(20) REPRODUCTION / WOMEN / LGBT</b>			
<a href="#">20121214-04</a>	11:17	SteveG	"U.S. Judge Says Victims' Bodies Can Prevent Rape"
<a href="#">20121217-03</a>	16:29	SteveB	Plan B? (to Republicans) & Dominos Pizza
<b>(21) SOCIAL SECURITY / RETIREMENT</b>			
<a href="#">20121222-06</a>	19:48	SteveB	Fw: SignOn Petition: No Cuts to Social Security!
<b>(22) STATE / LOCAL GOVERNMENT</b>			
<b>(23) TAXES</b>			
<a href="#">20121201-03</a>	05:59	SteveB	"Told You So"
<a href="#">20121202-02</a>	09:36	SteveB	"Tax Burden for Most Americans Is Lower Than in the 1980's"
<a href="#">20121202-10</a>	23:06	SteveG	"Grover Norquist, Enemy of the State?"
<a href="#">20121203-04</a>	16:17	SteveG	Fw: Tell Speaker Boehner to Extend Tax Cuts for the Middle Class!
<a href="#">20121203-06</a>	16:27	Pam	Re: Tell Speaker Boehner to Extend Tax Cuts for the Middle Class! (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121205-05</a>	13:12	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell Rep. Hastings: Help End the Bush Tax Cuts for the Wealthy!
<a href="#">20121205-09</a>	19:45	SteveG	Fw: League of Conservation Voters Petition: Tell Congress to End Oil Subsidies & Support Clean Energy!
<a href="#">20121207-00</a>		Jim	<b>Post-Cliff Income Taxes</b>
<a href="#">20121206-02</a>	10:13	SteveB	"Top Two Percent to GOP: Tax Us"
<a href="#">20121206-11</a>	23:09	SteveB	"Ann Coulter Says GOP Should Give In to Obama on Taxes: 'We Lost the Election'" (w/ video)

<b>DATE-ID</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>FROM</b>	<b>SUBJECT/TITLE</b>
<a href="#">20121206-12</a>	23:55	SteveB	"Offshore Tax Haven Money Could Save Us from the Fiscal Cliff"
<a href="#">20121206-13</a>	23:57	SteveG	Cartoon: Grover the Grinch
<a href="#">20121226-10</a>	22:27	Jim	The AMT Monster
<a href="#">20121230-01</a>	07:48	MarthaH	Cartoon: Starbucks Rich
<b>(24) TRADE / INT'L RELATIONS</b>			
<b>(25) WAR / SECURITY</b>			
<a href="#">20121224-04</a>	11:26	SteveG	"Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows"
<a href="#">20121224-06</a>	13:12	Pam	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121224-07</a>	13:58	Dennis	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121224-08</a>	14:15	SteveG	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121224-09</a>	14:40	Art	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121224-11</a>	15:07	Bill	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Art & SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121224-12</a>	15:35	Pam	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Bill, above)
<a href="#">20121224-15</a>	16:29	SteveG	Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121224-05</a>	12:27	Tom	"Navy SEAL Commander Dead in Afghanistan in Suspected Suicide"
<a href="#">20121229-02</a>	05:34	SteveB	"Bob Hope and the Persistent Military Presence"
<a href="#">20121229-05</a>	14:26	Tom	"Georgetown Veteran Slain in Vietnam to Receive Medal after 45 Years"
<b>(26) ART / LITERATURE / WRITING / MOVIES / MUSIC</b>			
<a href="#">20121212-18</a>	18:50	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #1 (Salvador Dali, <i>Woman at the Window</i> , 1925)
<a href="#">20121213-12</a>	23:58	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #2 (Alfred Stevens, <i>The Bath</i> , 1867)
<a href="#">20121216-04</a>	23:58	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #3 (Ingres, <i>Grande Odalisque</i> , 1814)
<a href="#">20121217-06</a>	23:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #4 (Joseph Ducreux, <i>Self Portrait Yawning</i> , 1780)
<a href="#">20121218-09</a>	23:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #5 (Mary Cassat, <i>Breakfast in Bed</i> , 1897)
<a href="#">20121219-10</a>	23:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #6 (Carlo Dolci, <i>St. Catherine Reading A Book</i> , Late 17th Century)
<a href="#">20121220-14</a>	24:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #7 (Titian, <i>Venus of Urbino</i> , 1538)
<a href="#">20121225-09</a>	23:58	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #8 (Edgar Degas, <i>Two Dancers on Stage</i> , 1874)
<a href="#">20121226-13</a>	23:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #9 (John William Waterhouse, <i>Echo And Narcissus</i> , 1903)
<a href="#">20121227-05</a>	23:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #10 (Guido Reni, <i>Repentance Of St. Peter</i> , 1635)
<a href="#">20121230-04</a>	23:57	SteveB	Photo: Cats Imitating Art #11 (Mariano Fortuny, <i>Odalisque</i> , 1861)
<a href="#">20121221-01</a>	08:40	Tom	Film: <i>Jack Reacher</i> , from the book <i>One Shot</i>
<b>(27) BUSINESS / MONEY / ECONOMICS</b>			
<a href="#">20121206-06</a>	13:15	SteveB	"Will Obama Beat Back a 'Nuclear' Attack by the Big Banks?"
<a href="#">20121212-04</a>	08:17	MarthaH	"Chained Explained"

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<b>(28) CLASS WAR / POVERTY / RICH &amp; POOR</b>			
<a href="#">20121201-01</a>	05:18	MarthaH	"Facing Facts on Fiscal Cliff"
<a href="#">20121202-06</a>	16:03	SteveB	Re: "Facing Facts on Fiscal Cliff" (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121202-07</a>	16:19	MarthaH	Re: "Facing Facts on Fiscal Cliff" (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121201-07</a>	17:06	SteveG	"How to Stop Psychopath CEOs from Looting & Destroying Their Own Companies"
<a href="#">20121203-03</a>	15:11	SteveG	Fw: Video: "Dear Democrats, Please Stick to These 8 Principles from Robert Reich"
<a href="#">20121205-00</a>		Art	<b>'Into the Wild Blue Yonder'</b> by Art ("Five Reasons Obama Will Rout GOP in Lame Duck Budget Battle")
<a href="#">20121203-09</a>	23:32	SteveG	Cartoons: Who's Sinking the Boat?
<a href="#">20121205-11</a>	23:57	SteveG	Cartoons: Fiscal Cliff Hot Air & Tea Party Tattoo Removal
<a href="#">20121211-00</a>		SteveB	<b>The 'Real Villains'</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("5 Biggest Threats to the Middle Class")
<a href="#">20121215-04</a>	18:37	SteveB	"Dean Baker: The Biggest Myth in Obama-GOP Spending Showdown Is the 'Fiscal Cliff' Itself" (w/ video)
<a href="#">20121219-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Capitulator-in-Chief?</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Capitulation Is Never Popular. Or Effective.")
<a href="#">20121221-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Cliff Update</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("And Now for the Republican Freakout..." & "Republicans Push 'Plan B' as White House Says Fiscal Cliff Talks Have Ceased")
<a href="#">20121223-03</a>	14:13	SteveG	Cliff
<a href="#">20121224-02</a>	09:53	Art	"Enough!"
<a href="#">20121224-13</a>	15:42	Pam	Re: "Enough!" (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121226-03</a>	15:10	Dennis	"No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior"
<a href="#">20121226-04</a>	15:24	Pam	Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#">20121226-05</a>	16:03	Art	Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Dennis, above)
<a href="#">20121226-07</a>	19:18	Bill	Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121226-08</a>	19:51	Art	Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Bill, above)
<a href="#">20121226-06</a>	16:48	MarthaH	"Congress Awaits Obama's Return for Late Push on Fiscal Cliff"
<a href="#">20121226-09</a>	20:11	SandyI	Re: "Congress Awaits Obama's Return for Late Push on Fiscal Cliff" (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121229-03</a>	06:51	SteveB	"The Human Casualties of the War on Drugs"
<b>(29) DAILY PHOTOS / PHOTOGRAPHY</b>			
<a href="#">20121202-11</a>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #19 (The Sky Walker)
<a href="#">20121203-10</a>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #20 ('Crystal' Ice Cave in Skaftafell , Iceland)
<a href="#">20121204-11</a>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #21 (Festival of Lanterns in Chiang Mai, Thailand)
<a href="#">20121205-12</a>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #22 (Fields of Lavender in Provence , France)
<a href="#">20121206-14</a>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #23 ('Yarn Bombing' in Germany)
<a href="#">20121209-06</a>	23:58	Marci	Cool Photos #24 (The Runaway Tree)
<a href="#">20121202-12</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Wild Montana
<a href="#">20121203-11</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Kilauea, Hawaii
<a href="#">20121204-12</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Time to Go
<a href="#">20121205-13</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Mysterious Moon
<a href="#">20121206-15</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Sunrise over Hamilton Island, Whitsunday Islands, Queensland, Australia
<a href="#">20121209-07</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Bolivian Jungle (in Beni)

<b>DATE-ID</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>FROM</b>	<b>SUBJECT/TITLE</b>
<a href="#">20121210-09</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Ice Sulpture
<a href="#">20121211-06</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: The Green Honeycreeper (Bolivia)
<a href="#">20121212-24</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Peruvian Hummingbird
<a href="#">20121213-13</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Lake Chiarkota, Bolivia
<a href="#">20121216-05</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Habana, Cuba, 2012 (not 1959)
<a href="#">20121217-08</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Andean Condor over Colca Canyon, Peru
<a href="#">20121218-11</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: The Montana Rock Barack Must Be
<a href="#">20121219-12</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Children Doing What Children Should Do
<a href="#">20121220-16</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photos: The Preikestolen (Pulpit Rock), Norway
<a href="#">20121225-10</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Blizzard
<a href="#">20121226-15</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Black Marble
<a href="#">20121227-07</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Solar Waterfall for 2016 Olympics, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
<a href="#">20121230-05</a>	23:59	SteveB	Photo: Inquisitive Cat ('Inquiring Minds Want to Know!')
<a href="#">20121225-07</a>	23:09	Jim	Photos: Snow Quilts #1
<a href="#">20121226-14</a>	23:58	Jim	Photos: Snow Quilts #2
<a href="#">20121227-06</a>	23:58	Jim	Photos: Snow Quilts #3
<b>(30) ENERGY / TRANSPORTATION / WATER</b>			
<a href="#">20121222-07</a>	21:25	SteveG	Ethanol Producer
<b>(31) FOOD / DRINK</b>			
<a href="#">20121203-02</a>	15:01	Ben	Photo: Today's Poultry Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121206-01</a>	06:45	SteveB	Where's the Beef (or Seafood or Poultry)? (to Ben, after receiving no Apple lunch photo/description for two days)
<a href="#">20121206-05</a>	13:00	Ben	Photo: Yesterday's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121206-08</a>	15:10	Ben	Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121207-01</a>	09:27	GaryF	Re: Today's Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121207-03</a>	11:13	SteveB	Re: Today's Lunch at Apple (reply to GaryF, above)
<a href="#">20121207-04</a>	11:22	GaryF	Re: Today's Lunch at Apple (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121211-02</a>	16:28	Ben	Photo: Today's Poultry Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121212-16</a>	18:04	Ben	Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121213-07</a>	17:09	Ben	Photos: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121217-04</a>	17:53	Ben	Photo: Today's Healthy Lunch at Apple (Major Meat Weekend Precipitates Monday Salad Day)
<a href="#">20121218-04</a>	15:35	Ben	Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121219-04</a>	15:49	Ben	Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121220-10</a>	Ben	15:29	Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
<a href="#">20121210-03</a>	17:23	SteveB	"Grapefruit Is Disgusting"
<a href="#">20121221-04</a>	18:13	Tom	Photo: Gingerbread House Contest Winner
<b>(32) FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE</b>			
<a href="#">20121130-05</a>	15:12	SteveB	Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13
<a href="#">20121130-06</a>	15:20	Pam	Re: Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13 (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121202-05</a>	15:43	SteveB	Re: Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13 (reply to Pam, above)
<a href="#">20121130-07</a>	16:24	Art	Re: Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13 (reply to SteveB, above) & Re: Beautiful Swords (reply to Tom & SteveB, FotM Newsletter #280)
<a href="#">20121202-04</a>	15:41	SteveB	Re: Beautiful Swords (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121212-01</a>	07:12	MarthaH	Photo: Christmas Tree
<a href="#">20121212-05</a>	09:22	Pam	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121212-06</a>	10:08	Art	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<a href="#">20121212-21</a>	19:24	SandyI	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121212-02</a>	07:40	SteveB	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121212-03</a>	08:11	MarthaH	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121212-22</a>	22:22	SandyI	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121213-02</a>	09:53	Pam	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)
<a href="#">20121213-05</a>	10:44	Art	Re: Christmas Tree (reply to Pam, above & SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)
<a href="#">20121212-12</a>	13:27	Tom	Photo: Christmas List
<a href="#">20121220-03</a>	10:26	Art	FotM Newsletter #295
<a href="#">20121220-07</a>	12:12	SteveB	Re: FotM Newsletter #295 (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121221-02</a>	10:51	Pam	FotM Newsletter #296 & Merry Christmas!
<a href="#">20121225-02</a>	15:54	MarthaH	Snow
<a href="#">20121225-03</a>	16:04	SteveB	Re: Snow (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121225-04</a>	16:14	SteveB	Re: Snow (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121225-05</a>	16:38	Pam	Re: Snow (reply to all, above)
<a href="#">20121225-06</a>	16:57	SteveB	Re: Snow (reply to Pam & all, above)
<b>(33) FUN / DIVERSION</b>			
<a href="#">20121201-02</a>	05:45	SteveB	"Joan Rivers' Best Insults (w/Videos)"
<a href="#">20121206-09</a>	21:38	Ann	Video: "How To Wrap a Cat for Christmas"
<a href="#">20121209-03</a>	11:50	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #1
<a href="#">20121210-08</a>	23:58	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #2
<a href="#">20121211-05</a>	23:58	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #3
<a href="#">20121212-23</a>	23:58	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #4
<a href="#">20121213-11</a>	23:57	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #5
<a href="#">20121216-03</a>	23:57	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #6
<a href="#">20121217-05</a>	23:56	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #7
<a href="#">20121218-08</a>	23:56	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #8
<a href="#">20121219-09</a>	23:56	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #9
<a href="#">20121220-13</a>	24:56	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #10
<a href="#">20121225-08</a>	23:57	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #11
<a href="#">20121226-12</a>	23:56	Tom	Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #12
<a href="#">20121212-10</a>	12:51	SteveB	Video: Cute Dog
<a href="#">20121212-11</a>	13:26	SteveB	Video: Why Marijuana Should Maybe Not Be Legal
<a href="#">20121212-14</a>	13:35	SteveB	Video: Drive-Bys
<a href="#">20121212-19</a>	19:03	SteveB	Videos (GIF): People Who Are Having a Worse Day Than You Are
<a href="#">20121213-08</a>	19:03	MarthaH	Cartoon: Caught!
<a href="#">20121213-10</a>	19:55	SteveB	Re: Cartoon: Caught! (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121213-09</a>	19:33	Tom	Graphic: Bonus Appliance Bundle: ;-)
<a href="#">20121214-01</a>	06:08	MarthaH	Cartoon: Christmas #1
<a href="#">20121217-07</a>	23:58	MarthaH	Cartoon: Christmas #2
<a href="#">20121218-10</a>	23:58	MarthaH	Cartoons: Christmas #3
<a href="#">20121219-11</a>	23:58	MarthaH	Cartoons: Christmas #4
<a href="#">20121220-15</a>	24:58	MarthaH	Cartoons: Christmas #5
<b>(34) HEALTH CARE / HEALTH / MEDICINE</b>			
<a href="#">20121207-02</a>	11:08	SteveB	"Cat Parasite Toxoplasma Uses 'Trojan Horse' to Infect Human Brain & May Cause Suicidal Thoughts & Risk-Taking"
<a href="#">20121210-04</a>	17:30	SteveB	"Why the War on Drugs Is a War on Human Nature"
<a href="#">20121212-00</a>		Art	'Heal Thyself!' by Art ("How Much for an MRI? \$500? \$5,000? A Reporter Struggles to Find Out")

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<a href="#">20121211-01</a>	16:02	Pam	Re: Heal Thyself! (reply to Art, above)
<a href="#">20121214-00</a>		SteveB	<b>'The Future Is Upon Us'</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Obamacare Begins")
<a href="#">20121214-02</a>	10:07	MarthaH	"Health Insurance: U.S. Paying More for Less, Report Finds"
<a href="#">20121214-03</a>	10:51	Pam	Re: "Health Insurance: U.S. Paying More for Less, Report Finds" (reply to MarthaH, above)
<a href="#">20121229-06</a>	17:06	SteveB	"How Your Cat Is Making You Crazy"
<b>(35) HISTORY</b>			
<a href="#">20121209-05</a>	19:29	MarthaH	"What James Madison Would Tell Grover Norquist"
<a href="#">20121210-01</a>	10:08	Pam	Re: "What James Madison Would Tell Grover Norquist" (reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #287)
<b>(36) JOBS / LABOR</b>			
<a href="#">20121203-00</a>		SteveB	<b>'You Didn't Build That!'</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("As Companies Seek Tax Deals, Governments Pay High Price")
<a href="#">20121204-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Nobody Builds Much Here Anymore</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("How Wall Street Hollowed Out Industrial America")
<a href="#">20121204-02</a>	09:59	Teresa	Re: Nobody Builds Much Here Anymore (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #283)
<a href="#">20121204-04</a>	12:11	Art	Re: "How Wall Street Hollowed Out Industrial America" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #283)
<a href="#">20121206-07</a>	13:50	SteveB	"America's 'Actually Existing' Worker-Owned Capitalism"
<a href="#">20121210-00</a>		SteveB	<b>'Wealth Without Work...'</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("The Forgotten Millions")
<a href="#">20121210-02</a>	12:28	Pam	Re: "The Forgotten Millions" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #287)
<a href="#">20121210-07</a>	22:17	SteveB	"Robots and Robber Barons"
<a href="#">20121212-17</a>	18:48	Art	"Walmart CEO Mike Duke: 'We Do Pay Competitive Wages'"
<b>(37) LIFE / PHILOSOPHY / SPIRITUALITY</b>			
<a href="#">20121210-05</a>	20:46	Marci	Graphic: "Still Think Atheists Have No Morals?"
<a href="#">20121211-04</a>	19:14	SteveB	from Pale <i>Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space</i>
<a href="#">20121215-05</a>	18:49	SteveB	"Why We Cannot Lead Humankind to a Sustainable World"
<a href="#">20121221-03</a>	10:56	SteveB	"Tiny House, Big Freedom"
<a href="#">20121223-04</a>	14:17	SteveG	Re: "Tiny House, Big Freedom" (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121223-05</a>	17:18	SteveB	Re: "Tiny House, Big Freedom" (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121223-06</a>	20:32	SteveG	Re: "Tiny House, Big Freedom" (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121222-03</a>	10:23	Tom	Graphic: Booooooooooooo!
<a href="#">20121222-05</a>	16:59	SteveB	Re: Graphic: Booooooooooooo! (reply to Tom, above)
<a href="#">20121229-09</a>	19:39	SteveB	"Study Finds Millennial Generation Stays on Phone with Parents Throughout Entire Day"
<b>(38) MEDIA / NEWS MEDIA</b>			
<a href="#">20121209-04</a>	18:43	SteveB	"How the Mainstream Press Bungled the Single Biggest Story of the 2012 Campaign"
<a href="#">20121210-06</a>	22:05	Tom	Cartoon: KFC Serving Big Bird
<a href="#">20121213-00</a>		SteveB	<b>The Conservative News 'Racket'</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Is Conservative Media One Big 'Racket'?")
<a href="#">20121229-01</a>	01:23	SteveB	Fw: Congratulations!

<u>DATE-ID</u>	<u>TIME</u>	<u>FROM</u>	<u>SUBJECT/TITLE</u>
<b>(39) MISC. REALITY</b>			
<b>(40) OCCUPY WALL ST.</b>			
<b>(41) PETITIONS / ACTIONS / CAUSES</b>			
<a href="#">20121201-06</a>	17:01	SteveG	Fw: Citizen.org Petition: President Obama, Tell Corporate America Your Inauguration is NOT for Sale!
<a href="#">20121201-09</a>	17:48	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Harry Reid to Put Elizabeth Warren on the Senate Banking Committee!
<a href="#">20121201-10</a>	20:02	Pam	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Harry Reid to Put Elizabeth Warren on the Senate Banking Committee! (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121203-05</a>	16:23	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Get Pepsi to Help Stop the "Kill the Gays" Bill in Its Tracks!
<a href="#">20121204-08</a>	20:30	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Tell CEO's to Fix the Debt!
<a href="#">20121208-05</a>	20:50	SteveG	Fw: SignOn.org Petition: Demand Fair Compensation for Members of Congress!
<a href="#">20121212-07</a>	10:09	SteveB	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell the Senate: No Cuts to Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid Benefits & No Tax Cuts for the Wealthy!
<a href="#">20121212-20</a>	19:24	SteveG	Fw: Democrat Senators.org Petition: Support Middle-Class Tax Cuts!
<b>(42) SCIENCE / TECHNOLOGY</b>			
<a href="#">20121202-08</a>	19:20	MarthaH	"Who's Got a More Presidential Brain?"
<a href="#">20121202-09</a>	21:15	Tom	How to Hack an Electronic Road Sign
<a href="#">20121205-06</a>	17:24	SteveG	"Moon Was Violently Pummeled by Early Impacts, Probes Find"
<a href="#">20121205-07</a>	18:10	Art	Re: "Moon Was Violently Pummeled by Early Impacts, Probes Find" (reply to SteveG, above)
<a href="#">20121208-02</a>	14:20	SteveB	Mixed Breed? ("Venus the Two-Faced Cat a Mystery")
<a href="#">20121208-03</a>	15:25	Marty	Re: Mixed Breed? (reply to SteveB, above)
<a href="#">20121208-04</a>	19:10	SteveB	Re: Mixed Breed? (reply to Marty, above)
<a href="#">20121217-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Our Boon or Doom?</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Why Making Robots Is So Darn Hard")
<a href="#">20121217-02</a>	10:37	Jim	Re: Our Boon or Doom? (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #292)
<a href="#">20121216-01</a>	06:22	SteveB	"Whoa: Physicists Testing to See if Universe Is a Computer Simulation" & "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"
<a href="#">20121227-00</a>		SteveB	<b>'Yes, We Have No Bananas'</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Why Bananas Are a Parable for Our Times")
<a href="#">20121227-01</a>	10:28	Pam	Re: 'Yes, We Have No Bananas' (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #298)
<a href="#">20121224-03</a>	11:24	SteveB	"In Praise of Snow"
<a href="#">20121228-02</a>	18:50	SteveB	Sign: Creationism? Prove It!
<b>(43) U.S.A., THE</b>			
<a href="#">20121231-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Fear Is Our Greatest Enemy</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Oliver Stone: 'US Has Become an Orwellian State'")
<a href="#">20121230-02</a>	22:43	SandyI	Fw: Video: Our History in Two Minutes
<b>(44) WORLD, THE</b>			
<a href="#">20121206-00</a>		SteveB	<b>Oh, Ya...the End Is Near!</b> by Steven W. Baker / SteveB ("Safe Haven from the Mayan Apocalypse? Sorry, We're Closed")
<a href="#">20121224-16</a>	22:32	Tom	Video: Punjabi Jingle Bell
<a href="#">20121226-11</a>	23:32	Jim	Video: Landfill Harmonic





## **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #282 — DEC. 3, 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.**

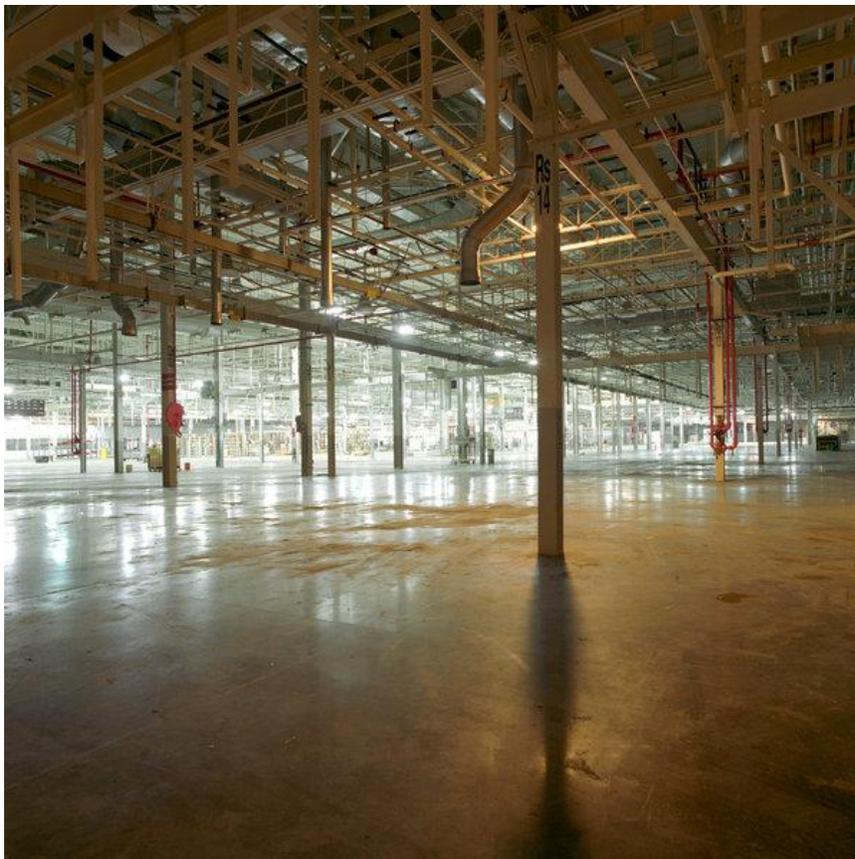
### **'You Didn't Build That!'**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 3, 2012)

And lest we forget, the real victims of all these taxpayer-paid entitlements to business are our children—their education and their future!

"As Companies Seek Tax Deals, Governments Pay High Price" by Louise Story, *The New York Times*

Dec. 1, 2012, ([http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/us/how-local-taxpayers-bankroll-corporations.html?hp&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/02/us/how-local-taxpayers-bankroll-corporations.html?hp&_r=0))



General Motors pushed hard for tax breaks in Ypsilanti Township, Mich. Some \$200 million later, this is what remains. (Fred R. Conrad/*The New York Times*)

In the end, the money that towns across America gave General Motors did not matter.

When the automaker released a list of factories it was closing during bankruptcy three years ago, communities that had considered themselves G.M.'s business partners were among the targets.

For years, mayors and governors anxious about local jobs had agreed to G.M.'s demands for cash rewards, free buildings, worker training and lucrative tax breaks. As late as 2007, the company was telling local officials that these sorts of incentives would "further G.M.'s strong relationship" with them and be a "win/win situation," according to town council notes from one Michigan community.

Yet at least 50 properties on the 2009 liquidation list were in towns and states that had awarded incentives, adding up to billions in taxpayer dollars, according to data compiled by *The New York Times*.

Some officials, desperate to keep G.M., offered more. Ohio was proposing a \$56 million deal to save its Moraine plant, and Wisconsin, fighting for its Janesville factory, offered \$153 million.

But their overtures were to no avail. G.M. walked away and, thanks to a federal bailout, is once again profitable. The towns have not been so fortunate, having spent scarce funds in exchange for thousands of jobs that no longer exist.

One township, Ypsilanti, Mich., is suing over the automaker's departure. "You can't just make these promises and throw them around like they're spare change in the drawer," said Doug Winters, the township's attorney.

Yet across the country, companies have been doing just that. And the giveaways are adding up to a gigantic bill for taxpayers.

A *Times* investigation has examined and tallied thousands of local incentives granted nationwide and has found that states, counties and cities are giving up more than \$80 billion each year to companies. The beneficiaries come from virtually every corner of the corporate world, encompassing oil and coal conglomerates, technology and entertainment companies, banks and big-box retail chains.

The cost of the awards is certainly far higher. A full accounting, *The Times* discovered, is not possible because the incentives are granted by thousands of government agencies and officials, and many do not know the value of all their awards. Nor do they know if the money was worth it because they rarely track how many jobs are created. Even where officials do track incentives, they acknowledge that it is impossible to know whether the jobs would have been created without the aid.

"How can you even talk about rationalizing what you're doing when you don't even know what you're doing?" said Timothy J. Bartik, a senior economist at the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research in Kalamazoo, Mich.

The *Times* analyzed more than 150,000 awards and created a searchable database of incentive spending. The survey was supplemented by interviews with more than 100 officials in government and business organizations as well as corporate executives and consultants.

A portrait arises of mayors and governors who are desperate to create jobs, outmatched by multinational corporations and short on tools to fact-check what companies tell them. Many of the officials said they feared that companies would move jobs overseas if they did not get subsidies in the United States.

Over the years, corporations have increasingly exploited that fear, creating a high-stakes bazaar where they pit local officials against one another to get the most lucrative packages. States compete with other states, cities compete with surrounding suburbs, and even small towns have entered the race with the goal of defeating their neighbors.

While some jobs have certainly migrated overseas, many companies receiving incentives were not considering leaving the country, according to interviews and incentive data.

"If you're looking at the competitiveness of a region, the most important thing a region can do is to focus on education. And this use of incentives is really transferring money from education to businesses." Donald J. Hall Jr., Hallmark C.E.O.

Despite their scale, state and local incentives have barely been part of the national debate on the economic crisis. The budget negotiations under way in Washington have not addressed whether the incentives are worth the cost, even though 20 percent of state and local budgets come from federal spending. Lawmakers in Washington are battling over possible increases in personal taxes, while both parties have said that lower federal taxes on corporations are needed for the country to compete globally.

The *Times* analysis shows that Texas awards more incentives, over \$19 billion a year, than any other state. Alaska, West Virginia and Nebraska give up the most per resident.

For many communities, the payouts add up to a substantial chunk of their overall spending, the analysis found. Oklahoma and West Virginia give up amounts equal to about one-third of their budgets, and Maine allocates nearly a fifth.

In a few states, the cost of incentives is not significant. But several of them have low business taxes — or none at all — which can save companies even more money than tax credits.

Far and away the most incentive money is spent on manufacturing, about \$25.5 billion a year, followed by agriculture. The oil, gas and mining industries come in third, and the film business fourth. Technology is not far behind, as companies like Twitter and Facebook increasingly seek tax breaks and many localities bet on the industry's long-term viability.

Those hopes were once more focused on automakers, which for decades have pushed cities and states to set up incentive programs, blazing a trail that companies of all sorts followed. Even today, G.M. is the top beneficiary, public records indicate. It received at least \$1.7 billion in local incentives in the last five years, followed closely by Ford and Chrysler.

A spokesman for General Motors said that almost every major employer applied for incentives because they help keep companies competitive and retain or create jobs.

"There are many reasons why so many Ford, Chrysler and G.M. plants closed over the last few decades," said the G.M. spokesman, James Cain. "But these factors don't mean that the companies and communities didn't benefit while the plants were open, which was often for generations."

Mr. Cain cited research showing that the company received less money per job than foreign automakers operating in the United States.

Questioned about incentives, officials at dozens of other large corporations said they owed it to shareholders to maximize profits. Many emphasized that they employ thousands of Americans who pay taxes and spend money in the local economy.

(Search our database to see how much your state awards in business incentives:  
<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2012/12/01/us/government-incentives.html>.)

For government officials like Bobby Hitt of South Carolina, the incentives are a good investment that will raise tax revenues in the long run.

"I don't see it as giving up anything," said Mr. Hitt, who worked at BMW in the 1990s and helped it win \$130 million from South Carolina.

Today, Mr. Hitt is the state's secretary of commerce. South Carolina recently took on a \$218 million debt to assist Boeing's expansion there and offered the company tax breaks for 10 years.

Mr. Hitt, like most political officials, has a short-term mandate. It will take years to see whether the state's bet on Boeing bears fruit.

In Michigan, Gov. Rick Snyder, a Republican in his first term, has been working to eliminate most business tax credits but is bound by past awards. The state gave General Motors \$779 million in credits in 2009, just a month after the company received a \$50 billion federal bailout and decided to close seven plants in Michigan.

G.M. can use the credits to offset its state tax bill for up to 20 years. "You don't know who will take a credit or when," said Doug Smith, a senior official at the state's economic development agency. "We may give a credit to G.M., and they might not take it for three years or 10 years or more."

One corporate executive, Donald J. Hall Jr. of Hallmark, thinks business subsidies are hurting his hometown, Kansas City, Mo., by diverting money from public education. "It's really not creating new jobs," Mr. Hall said. "It's motivated by politicians who want to claim they have brought new jobs into their state."

For Mr. Hall and others in Kansas City, the futility of free-flowing incentives has been underscored by a border war between Kansas and Missouri.

Soon after Kansas recruited AMC Entertainment with a \$36 million award last year, the state cut its education budget by \$104 million. AMC was moving only a few miles, across the border from Missouri. Workers saw little change other than in commuting times and office décor. A few months later, Missouri lured Applebee's headquarters from Kansas.

"I just shake my head every time it happens, it just gives me a sick feeling in the pit of my stomach," said Sean O'Byrne, the vice president of the Downtown Council of Kansas City. "It sounds like I'm talking myself out of a job, but there ought to be a law against what I'm doing."

### Outgunned by Companies

For local governments, incentives have become the cost of doing business with almost every business. The *Times* found that the awards go to companies big and small, those gushing in profits and those sinking in losses, American companies and foreign companies, and every industry imaginable.

Workers are a vital ingredient in any business, yet companies and government officials increasingly view the creation of jobs as an expense that should be subsidized by taxpayers, private consultants and local officials said.

Even big retailers and hotels, whose business depends on being in specific locations, bargain for incentives as if they can move anywhere. The same can be said for many movie productions, which almost never come to town without local subsidies.

When Oliver Stone made the 2010 sequel to *Wall Street*, in his mind there was only one place to shoot it: New York City. Nonetheless, the film, a scathing look at bankers' greed, received \$10 million in tax credits, according to 20th Century Fox.

In an interview, Mr. Stone criticized subsidies for industries like banking and agriculture but defended them for Hollywood, saying that many movies can be shot anywhere and that their actors and crew members pay state income taxes. "It's good," Mr. Stone said of the film subsidies. "Or like basically the way business is done. I don't understand what the moral qualm is."

The practical consequences can be easily seen. The Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, a conservative group, found that the amount New York spends on film credits every year equals the cost of hiring 5,000 public-school teachers.

Nationwide, billions of dollars in incentives are being awarded as state governments face steep deficits. Last year alone, states cut public services and raised taxes by a collective \$156 billion, according to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal-leaning advocacy group.

Incentives come in many forms: cash grants and loans; sales tax breaks; income tax credits and exemptions; free services; and property tax abatements. The income tax breaks add up to \$18 billion and sales tax relief around \$52 billion of the overall \$80 billion in incentives.

Collecting data on property tax abatements is the most difficult because only a handful of states track the amounts given by cities and counties. Among them is New York, where businesses save an estimated \$1.1 billion a year in property taxes. The American International Group, the insurance company at the center of the 2008 financial crisis, continued to benefit from a \$23.8 million abatement from New York City at the same time it was being bailed out with \$180 billion in federal money.

Since 2000, *The New York Times* Company has received more than \$24 million from the city and state.

"The management owes it to their stockholders to try to get the best economic deal that they can." Marilyn P. Nix, former G.M. real estate manager.

In some places, local officials have little choice but to answer the demands of corporations.

"They dictate their terms, and we're not really in a position to question their deal terms," Sarah Eckhardt, a commissioner in Travis County, Tex., said of companies she has dealt with recently, including Apple and Hewlett-Packard. "We don't have the sophistication or the resources to negotiate with a company that has the wherewithal the size of a country. We are just no match in negotiating with that."

Local officials can find themselves across the table from conglomerates like Shell Oil and Caterpillar, the world's largest maker of construction equipment.

Shell has been offered a tax credit worth as much as \$1.6 billion over 25 years from Pennsylvania, which competed with West Virginia and Ohio for an energy production facility. Royal Dutch Shell, the parent company, made \$31 billion in profits in 2011 — about \$3.5 million every hour. The company's chief executive made \$13.1 million last year, according to Equilar, an executive compensation firm. Pennsylvania predicts that the plant will create thousands of long-term jobs, but it did not require them in exchange for the tax credit.

Caterpillar has received more than \$196 million in local aid nationwide since 2007, though it has chastised states, particularly its home base, Illinois, for not being business-friendly. This year, Caterpillar announced a new plant in Georgia, which offered \$44 million in incentives. Local counties chipped in free land and other aid, including \$15 million in tax breaks and \$8.2 million in road, water and sewer repairs.

The company, whose profits are soaring, recently froze workers' pay for six years at several locations, arguing that it needed to remain competitive. A spokesman for the company, Jim Dugan, said it employed more than 50,000 people and invested billions of dollars nationwide.

Local officials typically have scant information about the track record of corporations, like whether they lived up to job assurances elsewhere. And some officials acknowledged that they did not know to what extent incentives were a deciding factor for companies.

"I don't know that there's a way to know other than talking to the businesses, and the businesses telling us that that was a factor in creating jobs," said Ken Striplin, the city manager of Santa Clarita, Calif., which gives tax breaks in a designated enterprise zone. "There's no box that says 'I would have created this job without the enterprise zone.' "

California is one of the few states that have been cutting back on incentives. But that does not mean its cities are following suit. When Twitter threatened to leave San Francisco last year, officials scrambled to assuage the company.

Twitter was not short on money — it soon received a \$300 million investment from a Saudi prince and \$800 million from a private consortium. The two received Twitter equity, but San Francisco got a different sort of deal.

The city exempted Twitter from what could total \$22 million in payroll taxes, and the company agreed to stay put. The city estimates that Twitter's work force could grow to 2,600 employees, although the company made no such promise.

A Twitter spokeswoman said the company was "very happy to have been able to stay in San Francisco." City officials did not respond to inquiries.

Like many places, San Francisco has been cutting its budget. Public parks have lost about \$12 million in recent years, though workers at Twitter will not lack for greenery. The company's plush new office has a rooftop garden with great views and amenities. Enjoying the perks, one employee sent out a tweet: "Tanned on Twitter's new roof deck this morning as some dude served me smoothie shots. This is real life?"

### A Zero-Sum Game

It was the company every state had to have. In 1985, General Motors was looking for a spot to manufacture its Saturn, a new compact car that would compete with Japanese imports and create thousands of American jobs.

Incentives were not in wide use, and several states had only recently begun to allow more of them.

In fact, when G.M. announced the search, its chairman, Roger Smith, said the perks would not be a predominant factor. "Tax breaks can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear," Mr. Smith told *The Detroit Free Press*. He said G.M. planned to avoid states that had large debts or lackluster schools.

Undeterred, some 30 states stepped forward in what became a full-out competition. One official, Bill Clinton, then the governor of Arkansas, traveled to Detroit offering income tax credits and sales tax exemptions worth nearly \$200 million.

Mr. Smith essentially kept his word and chose Tennessee, which had put together a relatively small package. Reid Rundell, a retired G.M. executive, said in a recent interview that it had come down to geography. "The primary factor was distribution for incoming parts, as well as outgoing vehicles," Mr. Rundell said.

But the gates had been opened. In 1992, South Carolina lured BMW with a \$130 million package; the next year, Alabama got Mercedes-Benz at a price tag that topped \$300 million.

"What the auto incentives did back then was really raise the profile of economic incentives both within companies, in government and in the public's eye," said Mark Sweeney, who worked for the South Carolina Commerce Department in the 1990s and now advises companies on obtaining government grants.

By 1993, governors were regaling one another at a national conference with stories of deals beyond the auto industry, including a recent bidding war for United Airlines that drew more than 90 cities. The airline had set up negotiations in a hotel, and its representatives ran floor to floor comparing bids, said Jim Edgar, then the governor of Illinois.

Mr. Edgar said he had called for a truce, concerned that the practice was unfair to companies that did not receive incentives. But many states would not sign on, he said, particularly those in the South, where businesses were moving.

"If you've got some states doing it, it's hard for the others not to do it," Mr. Edgar said. "It's like unilaterally disarming."

Soon after, economists at Federal Reserve branches were questioning the use of incentives. One, in Minnesota, used mathematical proofs and game theory to show that competition between states did not increase overall economic value. Several other economists have since called the practice a zero-sum game.

A group of taxpayers in Michigan and Ohio went as far as suing DaimlerChrysler after Ohio and the City of Toledo awarded the automaker \$280 million in the late 1990s. The suit argued that it was unfair for one taxpayer to be given a break at the expense of all others.

The suit made its way to the Supreme Court, and G.M. and Ford signed on to briefs supporting Daimler, as did local governments. The National Governors Association warned the court that prohibiting incentives could lead to jobs moving overseas. "This is the economic reality," the association said in a brief.

The governors offered no hard evidence of the effectiveness of tax credits, but the Supreme Court did not consider whether they worked anyway. In 2006, the court concluded that the taxpayers did not have the legal standing to challenge Ohio's tax actions in federal court.

The tab for auto incentives has grown to \$13.9 billion since 1985, according to the Center for Automotive Research, a nonprofit group in Ann Arbor, Mich. G.M., the top recipient, was awarded \$3.3 billion of the aid. Since 1979, automakers also closed more than 267 plants in the United States, about half of which still sit empty, according to the center.

The auto industry and some local officials have long argued that auto companies create so many jobs and draw in so many supporting suppliers that all taxpayers benefit. Even if companies shut down years later, as Saturn did in Tennessee for a few years, the trade-off is worth it, they said.

"I do believe that if a state ever is going to create incentives," said Lamar Alexander, who was Tennessee's governor in 1985 when Saturn selected the state, "the auto industry would be by far the No. 1 target, because an auto assembly plant is a money target."

Still, Mr. Alexander, now a United States senator, said that recruiting a large factory today would be more expensive. "It has changed a lot," he said. "It's almost become a sweepstakes."

### G.M. Gets Into the Act

G.M. may have initially minimized the role of local dollars, but as the company's financial problems grew, incentives became a big part of its math.

"These economic development deals with a company just serve to guarantee that the nation's largest companies can receive tax breaks wherever they go." Sarah Eckhardt, county commissioner, Travis County, Texas.

The actions of the company were described in more than two dozen in-depth interviews with former company officials, tax consultants and governors and mayors who have dealt with G.M.

The automaker's real estate division, Argonaut Realty, oversaw the hunt for the most lucrative deals. Up and down the corporate ladder, employees were encouraged to push governments for more, according to transcripts of public meetings and interviews. Even G.M. plant managers knew that the future of their facilities depended in part on their ability to send word of big discounts back to Detroit.

Union representatives were enlisted to attend local hearings, putting a human face on the jobs at stake. G.M.'s regional tax managers often showed up, armed with tax abatement wish lists and highlighting the company's gifts to local charities.

"We knew what our investment of X amount meant to the community, and we knew we needed to partner with the community to be successful," said Marilyn P. Nix, who worked as a real estate executive at G.M. for 31 years until retiring in 2005.

At the top of G.M., executives reviewed the proposals from various locations and went where the numbers added up.

"I know people like to blame the industry for taking advantage of the incentives, but you go back to what your fiduciary responsibility is to the stockholders," Ms. Nix said. "As long as you've got people that are willing to better the deals, the management owes it to their stockholders to try to get the best economic deal that they can."

For towns, it became a game of survival, even if the competition turned out to be a mirage.

Moraine, Ohio, was already home to a G.M. plant in 1997 when the company pushed hard for additional incentives. G.M. said it was looking for a place to accommodate more manufacturing.

Wayne Barfels, the city manager at the time, said a G.M. representative had told officials that Moraine was competing with Shreveport, La., and Linden, N.J. After the local school board approved property tax breaks, The Dayton Daily News reported that the other towns had not been in discussions with G.M.

The school board considered rescinding the deal, but allowed G.M. to keep it after a company official apologized. In 2008, G.M. shut the Moraine facility.

In towns where General Motors remains, local officials praised the company. "I can say they have been a great partner to us," said Virg Bernero, the mayor of Lansing, Mich. "It would do something to the psyche of this community if they were not here. I mean, I just praise God every day."

Looking to lure businesses beyond automakers, states have routinely bolstered their incentive tool kits. In 2010 alone, states created or expanded about 40 tax credits and exemptions, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The nature of the credits has also changed. New ones are geared toward attracting technology and green energy companies, but it is hard to know whether 15 years down the road they will thrive or wind up stumbling like the automakers. And many modern companies, like those in digital technology, can easily pack up and leave.

"I don't see anything that suggests that Twitter and Facebook are better bets in the long run," said Laura A. Reese, the director of the Global Urban Studies Program at Michigan State University. Ms. Reese advises local governments to invest in residents through education and training rather than in companies where "it's hard to pick winners."

Yet states try to do it all the time. In 2010, Rhode Island, which has the nation's second-highest unemployment rate, recruited Curt Schilling, a former Red Sox pitcher, to move his video game company from Massachusetts. The company, 38 Studios, had never released a game and was not making money, but the governor at the time had the state guarantee \$75 million in loans.

The company failed and dismissed all of its roughly 400 workers this May. Rhode Island taxpayers are now on the hook for the loans.

Officials said part of the difficulty was that communities do not get much say in a company's business strategy.

"We, as communities, stake our futures with these people who are supposed to know what they're doing, and sometimes they don't," said Arthur Walker, a businessman in Shreveport and former chairman of the city's chamber of commerce.

Mr. Walker and other officials in Shreveport know firsthand. In 2000, they were worried that G.M. would close a plant in their area and responded with a generous proposal: the city would cut the company's gas bill and provide work force training grants. In addition, G.M. would benefit by a recent increase in one of the state's income tax credits.

Eager to encourage innovation, Shreveport officials suggested ways the city could assist G.M. in building electric cars. "We wanted to be part of the future," said Mr. Walker, whose brother worked at the plant.

G.M. took the city's incentives but not its business advice and began building the giant Hummer there.

"We knew they needed to build green cars — I mean, who builds a Hummer for the 21st century?" Mr. Walker said. "It was a losing proposition that we found ourselves in. We couldn't win because those people weren't making the correct business decisions, in my view. When it didn't work, we're the ones left holding the bag."

The Hummer was discontinued in 2010, and the Shreveport factory closed this August, the final victim of G.M.'s bankruptcy.

### Ypsilanti's Losing Battle

For much of the last 20 years, Doug Winters has been agitating for General Motors to be held accountable.

Mr. Winters, the attorney for Ypsilanti Township and several other places around Ann Arbor, has lived in Ypsilanti all his life. His grandmother labored at the local plant, Willow Run, during World War II, when it made bomber planes. People in town still proudly point out that a woman known as Rosie the Riveter worked there as well. After the war, when G.M. moved into the plant to manufacture its automatic transmission system, his father got a job.

Mr. Winters loves the history of Willow Run but hates what he views as corporate hypocrisy: G.M. asked for government help on the one hand and then appealed to free-market rationales for closing shop.

Over the years, Ypsilanti granted G.M. more than \$200 million in incentives for two factories at Willow Run, Mr. Winters said. "They had put basically a stranglehold on the entire state of Michigan and other places across the country by just grabbing these tax abatements by the billions," he said. "They were doing it with a very thinly disguised threat that if you don't give us these tax abatements, then we'll have to go somewhere else."

"We're their own private ATM. When they need money, they come begging, but when they don't want oversight, they say 'get out of the way.'" Doug Winters, attorney for Ypsilanti Township, Mich.

Ypsilanti first sued G.M. in the 1990s to prevent the company from closing the factory at Willow Run that made the Chevrolet Caprice.

The town had granted the company tax incentives after the factory manager argued that G.M.'s ability to compete with other carmakers was at stake, documents in the lawsuit show. The tax break and "favorable market demand," said the plant manager, Harvey Williams, would allow the automaker to "maintain continuous employment."

Nevertheless, G.M. shut the factory. A lower court found in favor of Ypsilanti, but the ruling was reversed on appeal. The judge said that a company's job assurances "cannot be evidence of a promise."

In 2010, when the company closed the remaining factory at Willow Run, Mr. Winters sued again. This time, Ypsilanti argued that the automaker should have been forced to close overseas factories instead, especially since American taxpayers had bailed out G.M. In addition, Ypsilanti sought to recover money from G.M., saying the company had agreed to reimburse the town for some incentives if it left.

So far, Ypsilanti's claims have not been addressed. They were complicated by G.M.'s bankruptcy, which allowed the carmaker to emerge as a new company and leave some of its liabilities and contractual obligations behind.

When asked whether the new G.M. has civic responsibilities to its former factory towns, Mr. Cain, the company spokesman, said: "Our obligation to the communities where we do business is to run a successful business. And when we prosper, it allows us to do more than just turn the lights on and make cars."

He also said that since the bailout, "G.M. has invested more than \$7.3 billion in its U.S. facilities, and we've created or retained almost 19,000 jobs in communities all over the country."

Matthew P. Cullen, who oversaw real estate and economic development for G.M. until he left the company in 2008, said the automaker was aware of its impact on communities. He said that what happened with G.M. was the result of an entire industry changing and that there had been no bad intentions.

"If you go forward in good faith doing everything you can and make the investment, then you're partners," Mr. Cullen said. "Sometimes partnerships in business work, and they work for 60 years. And in some cases, they don't, and it doesn't make you a bad partner."

Some towns that are still dealing with the fallout of plant closings might disagree. In Pontiac, Mich., tax revenues have fallen 40 percent since 2009 after the old G.M. knocked down buildings on its property, resulting in lower tax assessments, according to the city's emergency manager.

In Ypsilanti, an entity set up to sell off G.M. property is marketing the plant as valuable. At the same time, it has been arguing for lower property taxes on the grounds that its plant is not worth much.

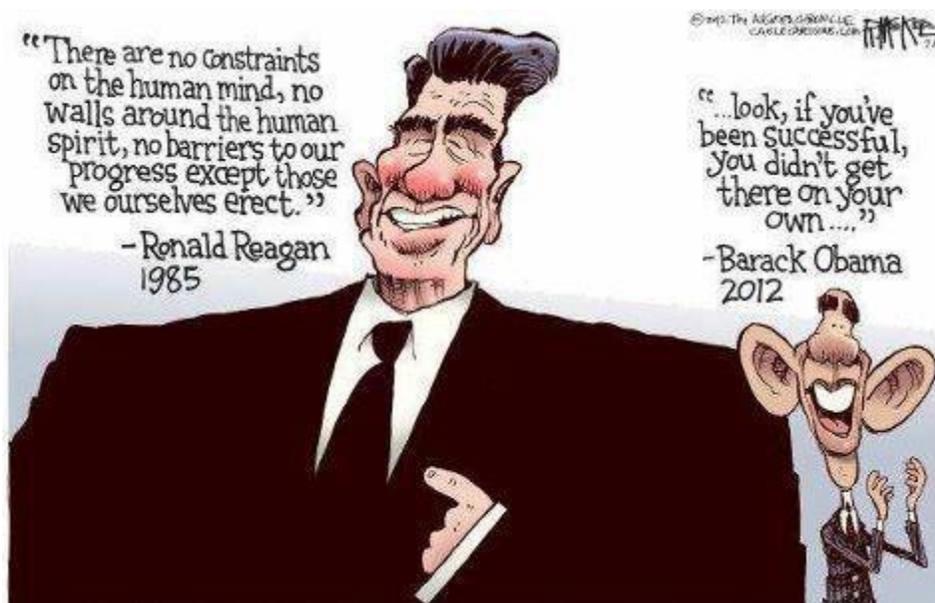
Ypsilanti's supervisor, Brenda Stumbo, said the township would be stung hard by further revenue cuts. Ypsilanti has already slimmed down its Fire Department, and city workers are juggling multiple jobs. There are seven to 10 home foreclosures a week, giving the township the highest foreclosure rate in the county, Ms. Stumbo said.

"Can all of it be traced back to General Motors?" she said, listing auto suppliers that closed after G.M. did. "No, but a great deal of it can."

Nonetheless, Ms. Stumbo said that if G.M. would bring jobs back to town, she would be willing to grant the company more incentives.

But Mr. Winters is not so sure. He said he would never support more incentives without stronger protections for Ypsilanti. "They've done a lot of damage to a lot of people and a lot of communities, and they've basically been given a clean slate," he said. "It's a 'get out of jail free' card."

(Lisa Schwartz and Ramsey Merritt contributed research.)



Unfortunately, the "little" guy with the big ears is actually more correct.

The fact is the Democrats had to cheat to win and now they are blowing their horn. Stuffing the ballot box is not a stunning victory.

Republicans stand by no new taxes for everybody and we don't like class warfare. You would think the blacks would understand that, and you, Brad, should understand it too. I simplified it: teachers should not have to pay more than anyone else. It is that simple.

Raped women, you got to be kidding me. One candidate spouts off with his hair-brained idea and you try to label it on all of us. Speaks volumes about your party. Distortions and lies make good talking points for the Democrats, or so you think.

We don't want war, but we do want to be so strong no one will try to take us over. We need to keep updating and staying with the times.

We need to make jobs, not lose 936,000 jobs in a month.

I appreciate your taking the time to communicate. You sound like a reasonable man to me, though we may differ on certain specifics. I think we both want what's best for our country as a whole. You make me think that communications across the barriers between us is possible. I will always keep trying.

One month from now, when our *FotM Newsletter* takes a hiatus, maybe until 2016 or so, I will still be right in there, exchanging emails, arguing my views, contacting politicians, signing petitions, contributing a little where it does the most good, keeping informed, and helping to keep others informed, especially of the truth, but also warning of the lies that circulate and are broadcast masquerading as truth. Perhaps you agree with me, James, that knowingly disseminating lies in a democracy to achieve personal agendas in public matters is the ultimate act of treason?

So, in the interest of understanding one another, please allow me to react to your response to my above-mentioned comments:

1. "Democrats (including Mr. Obama, I assume) cheated to win the 2012 elections."

I'm going to assume you don't mean things like stuffing the ballot box, voter fraud, etc., which clearly did not happen in anything like significant numbers. Even Republicans, who were at all precinct polling places, seem to agree. If you are saying that Obama's supporters turned out to vote (unexpectedly to Romney's inept team), but Romney's supporters did not (also unexpectedly to Romney's inept team), well, in what way does that constitute cheating? Something so completely unexpected might well seem like cheating or magic, but the unexpectedness is simply the ineptness of the Romney camp and the Republican media. A surprise does not constitute cheating, in and of itself.

But if you are talking about the issue Romney himself raised after the election, when he accused President Obama and the Democrats of buying votes with government doles, I believe the facts would counter your argument. (Though voters receiving such lavish government "hand-outs" as Social Security, disability, aid to children, Veteran's benefits, Medicare, Medicaid, student loans and scholarships, public education, and unemployment benefits—all very largely paid for by the very taxpayers themselves (with little help from the rich, by the way)—well, yes, these people were afraid of Republican hatchets and voted as their pocketbooks dictated, for the safer Democrats. So?

This hardly constitutes cheating. The largest recipients of public largess, by far, are the billionaires and giant corporations. Go back and read the history of the Great Recession. How many \$trillions did they get? Do we have the answer to that question even now? Yet those Wall Street crooks are

all Republican heroes. And, believe me, they all vote as their pocketbooks dictate, so why shouldn't everyone, at least to some extent? And when it comes to protecting things like education, I'll trust American families over large corporations to do the right thing every time. That's why we have locally-controlled public education to begin with. That's what made us great—egalitarian public education.

## 2. "Republicans stand by no new taxes."

This is simply a paradox. When I was an engineer, we had a sort of true joke that we might tell clients in certain situations. It goes something like this: any engineering project has three factors involved, three goals that are most desirable. The end result should be:

1. Inexpensive.
2. High quality.
3. Rapidly completed.

The clients would always nod their heads, "Ya, that's what we want, those three things" Then we'd say, "OK, pick two out of three, because all three, at once, are impossible."

It's really the same thing with government. You can't have it all. We all want the following:

1. No new taxes.
2. No wars.
3. Pay down the deficit.

You can't have all three things at once. That was Bush's mistake (except he obviously didn't try too hard on the last two).

The constituents of the GOP, the millionaires and billionaires, are simply going to have to step up to the plate and pay their fair share (easily measured). Upper income tax rates are at historic lows and are obviously hurting us. And despite whatever it was these rich constituents lost \$1 billion on Romney alone to achieve, the budget is not going to be balanced on the backs of the middle class and poor again. It will simply not be permitted. Not after the bail-outs of the billionaires, not after their bubbles and scams, not after the suffering the people have already endured. Those are the political facts, whether you subscribe to them or not. Romney and his team tried to hide their heads in the sand. It didn't work.

## 3. "Democrats lie when they say the GOP is not the party of women, even that it is anti-women."

When a minority (the evangelicals) try to impose their contraception and abortion hang-ups on the rest of society, women are going to run in the opposite direction. They aren't stupid, despite what some of the Republican Neanderthals might think. We're talking here about a pervasive pattern, not just one man's gaffe (There were actually two incredible ones that actually cost Senate seats! Expensive mistakes!) Read the 2012 GOP Platform. Listen to Mitt Romney try to figure out what he stands for on women's issues.

All this worried women. Read the exit polling.

Exactly what "distortions and lies" are you referring to?

At least you admit that Akin and Mourdock had "hair-brained" ideas. Maybe we can build on that. I agree with you!

## 4. "We need a strong defense."

We have one. It's time to tone it down a notch. I'm not too worried about anyone "trying to take us over" except conservative radicals.

5. "We need to make jobs not lose 936,000 jobs in a month."

I agree with the first part. And, thanks to the President, we're gaining jobs every month, not losing them as you imply by dragging out the worst of the post-Bush jobs numbers. Ultimately, when we've made small business competitive again with the huge monopolies, even more jobs will start returning to American workers. I think you would agree that this is better than government jobs, though not all government jobs are a bad thing per se, right?

The people have spoken. The people of the Constitution. It's time for Republicans and Democrats to move beyond the stupid non-compromising and get their work done. We need dialogue. We need communications. We need action. We need cooperation, not more Republican obstruction in the name of billionaires.

20121130-02 11:25 Art "Cry Babies & Sore Losers"

Good one...

"Cry Babies And Sore Losers" by Samuel Warde, Liberals Unite

Nov. 8, 2012, (<http://samuel-warde.com/2012/11/cry-babies-and-sore-losers/>)



I'm seeing Americans post photos of our Flag hung upside down because the President won reelection. They're defending this action as a "Naval sign of distress". Let me tell you something: you are not on a battleship, you are a manager at McDonalds in Follansbee, WV, and you are in fact, a lunatic.



I've avoided "spiking the football" over a great night for the President and for common sense in the Senate – Richard Murdock and Todd Akin deserved more than a loss. But I've held off, because I respect, am friends with, and on certain issues agree with, many patriotic Republicans who work hard to make this country a better place and simply disagreed with who should be Commander in Chief. That's fair and healthy.

And, I also didn't spike the football because I've lost elections before and I know how terrible it feels.

It's called maturity and not enough people in either party have it.

The following jaw punch is not directed at common sense Republicans, nor does it condone radicals on the Left. It is directed at the right wing fanatics who put party before country, conspiracy before reality, and ideology before science and intellect.

#### To Tea Party Patriots and Hardcore Religious Engineers:

Republicans lost because their party leadership and most candidates feared you, listened to you, and looked the other way on important issues as you picked the dumbest, craziest nominees in key primaries (Murdock and Akin), or converted otherwise sensible, experienced candidates to Crazy Town (Romney).

There's nothing wrong with wanting limited government. I do. There's nothing wrong with believing in God, the Golden Rule, or wanting to reduce abortions. I do, too. But you've taken it too damn far and scare the shit out of people you could otherwise persuade.

Yes, the message and messenger matter (you're failing at both, BTW), but no Madison Avenue P.R. firm, K Street lobbying firm, Fox News "analyst", or local chapter of "Freedom Works" can sell the flaming dung you're slinging.

Smart people can lose. But smart people always learn.

You didn't lose because you "weren't conservative enough" or because the country has become full of lazy "takers" who don't want to earn a living or just want America to "turn into Europe".

You didn't lose because of Hurricane Sandy or because Chris Christie hugged the President on TV – they were both doing their jobs.

You didn't lose because of a liberal media, liberal college campuses, liberal polls that were "weighted to Democrats" (mostly because they were accurate), or because of "election fraud"... actually, that probably benefited you this time.

No. You lost because your policies, tone, conspiracies, rigid inflexibility and irrational rhetoric helped align enough moderates, swing voters, and minority groups whom otherwise could be persuaded by Republicans, to align with Democrats and a beatable incumbent.

It's not that you didn't get your message out, it's that we all actually heard it and threw up a little in our mouths.

There isn't a mandate for Democrats in this election. Liberalism wasn't rewarded in this election. However, calm pragmatism, compassion, working together, compromise, and sincerity were rewarded. People may not have agreed with President Obama, but more felt he was sincere and that he understood their daily problems, fears, and dreams. If you don't trust what the polls say, take a look at who is sworn in on January 20th. I thought you'd at least believe in Math when it came to counting to 270.

Sincerity is the only thing in politics you can't fake. You can't teach it. No matter how shiny a candidate's bio is, how smooth he is, or how perfect the gray hairs rest on his temples — any average Joe on the street can spot a bullshitter.

Mitt is a generous and good man, but he didn't know who he was or "needed" to be at any given time in that campaign. That's largely his fault for lacking core convictions or personal toughness (Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush possessed both traits — that's why they won).

But you, the right wing base of the party, who drove so many of us moderate republicans out the door years ago, were the main catalyst. Your inability to reason, compromise, or let new facts and evidence challenge your predetermined outcomes led millions of moderates to no longer be able to stand on stage with you.

Frankly, you're embarrassing — more so than a crazy family member at dinner, or having your mom drop you off at a high school dance.

You say stupid shit and look stupid saying it.

You pass amendments to ban flag burning and then hang it upside down and post it on Facebook when you lose.

You preach limited government in the economy when Democrats are in charge and then look the other way when you're in charge.

You want a government small enough to stay out of corporations and banks but big enough for bedrooms and hospital respirators (see Schiavo, Terri).

There's a hatred inside of you that burns in a way that scares normal people.

You made unlikely allies in large corporations who are more interested in tax breaks and loopholes even if the government has to cut your Medicare and Social Security or cut education to a point where states and local governments have no financial choice but to educate your children in portable trailer classrooms with 35 other students.

Would these corporations do this just to help pad their quarterly earnings reports with certain tax and regulatory policies? You bet your sweet ass they do. And you better believe they're happy to have you make the "freedom" argument as "concerned citizen patriots" on their behalf.

Yet, after those corporations spent billions on TV adds and herded you like sheep over the last half decade to discredit Barack Obama for everything from being a "Godless communist" — to his "being born in Kenya and hatching a secret plot to take down America" — to Obamacare's "death panels and job killing regulations" -- YOU still lost.

After having a Senate Republican Leader state that his party's top priority in Congress was to make "Obama a one term President" and a House of Representatives that blocked everything he tried to do and then had the brass to criticize him for "not getting anything done" -- YOU still lost.

After attacking gay people who want equal protection under the law (BTW, I'm referring to the 14th amendment to the constitution, I know you forget most of the amendments after the 2nd one) -- YOU still lost.

After attacking the Hispanic community who's tired of being spoken "at" like criminals, attacking low income women who rely on Planned Parenthood for services of which 98% have nothing to do with abortion, and attacking relatively trivial things like PBS that children and adults enjoy as "1" damn television channel that doesn't include Honey Boo Boo or a "Fox News Breaking Alert" announcing Obama's latest "Czar" appointment -- YOU still lost.

And after throwing all the red meat in your warped political base out to the rest of the country to eat, the majority of Americans weren't hungry for it and didn't trust ordering from your unhealthy, de-regulated menu -- YOU still lost.

You can read me the constitution, but you clearly don't have a practical understanding of what you've read, heard on television, or forwarded to your entire email list of like minded xenophobes. This country is great because our founders were smart enough to limit the government's power and give the people enough freedom and authority to correct their own mistakes in pursuit of a "more perfect union" (it's in the first damn line of the Preamble, in case you can't find it in your Tea Party Constitution Cliffs Notes).

Our founders were utterly brilliant and sophisticated. I don't like to speak for them, but I doubt they would have been friends with Glenn Beck or Rush Limbaugh or Sarah Palin. Nah, they wouldn't have made the guest list at Mt. Vernon or Monticello.

But let's be clear, our founders weren't perfect. They owned slaves. Only White male property owners had a say in things. Women, blacks, Native Americans, and other constituencies had to wait for an American dream and in many cases, are still waiting and working for it. Speaking of work, children were working 12-16 hour days with zero safety protections in statute. Zero.

The constitution, subsequent amendments and Supreme Court rulings and opinions since 1800 aren't perfectly clear (those who think they are tend to have had a healthy serving of Kool-Aid and have never watched oral arguments at the Supreme Court).

The founders knew that they, and the constitution they drafted, weren't perfect. This is why they added a Bill of Rights and why they created a Supreme Court and a process that has allowed us to add 27 amendments to their work of art.

Their imperfection is what led to a Civil War to prove that human and civil rights aren't a "states' rights issue" -- they're endowed by our creator, not by legislatures in Mississippi or Alabama, and they're protected equally in our constitution, but also in our democratically passed laws.

I run from the Capitol steps to the Lincoln Memorial most mornings that I'm in Washington. I may not be fast or smart, but I can read what's carved in stone.

Please. I welcome a challenge to what I've said. If you think because I voted for President Obama that I'm a socialist or that I don't want a better America, I'm happy to take time from running a business I've co-founded and time from money I'm trying to raise for Big Brothers Big Sisters of America to pause and give you a fresh one. At no charge.

But I do ask this: be a real Patriot. Look at that flag you've hung upside down. Look at what you've done to it and what that means. Thousands of our bravest men and women, braver than me, just lost limbs and in many cases their lives so that Iraqis and Afghans could vote however they see fit. I did that on Tuesday

and so did you. That's what that flag stands for – equal access to a process, not a guarantee for any of our desired outcomes.

A country that defeated Hitler, Mussolini, and bin Laden won't crumble because the guy you wanted to be President got beat.

You lost. Now learn from it.

Sincerely, Guest Contributor, Rob Ellsworth, "A Proud American"



[20121130-03](#) 11:43 Pam Re: "Cry Babies & Sore Losers" (reply to Art, above)

Love it!

[20121130-05](#) 15:12 SteveB Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13

Dear FotM Members and Readers,

Our newest PDF eBook — containing all the November, 2012 issues of the *FotM Newsletter* has been published and is available online for download or reading at:

<http://www.friendsofthemiddle.org/2012-newsletters/201211-FotM-Newsletters.pdf>.

It contains 434 pages out of a total of 7129 pages in all 13 eBooks.

I also regretfully have to announce that this iteration, at least, of the *FotM Newsletter* will only operate for one more month—December, 2012 will be our last month of publication. There will be 19 more issues, with #300 coming out on Dec. 31, 2012, with the final December eBook #14 compilation.

The Bolivian bakery biz is keeping me very busy, plus I have my normal writing. Next year, we plan to travel a lot more, including three months in the U.S. to, hopefully, visit a bunch of you folks, among other things.

But I'm not going to stop reading and writing about these issues. We'll still keep sending around emails. I'll be saving them for the future.

In the meantime, if there is anything you have left unsaid here in the last five years, NOW IS THE TIME TO WRITE. Your grandchildren and great grandchildren will want to know who you were, will want to know all about you. This may be your last chance to get it into a book. I hope you will.

The letter below shows, I think, why our work is important.

Thank you, everyone, for making all this possible. You've taught me so much! No one ever had a better bunch of friends!

[20121130-06](#) 15:20 Pam Re: Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13 (reply to SteveB, above)

I was afraid this might be coming. You have every right to step back and devote your energies to other things, but FotM will be missed by this avid reader. This forum has gotten me through tough political times and helped me navigate some turbulent personal times as well. Sometimes I think it's about the only thing that kept me sane. Knowing I was not alone was worth its weight in gold. So thank you, dear Steve, for all you've done. Don't be a stranger.

[20121202-05](#) 15:43 SteveB Re: Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13 (reply to Pam, above)

Thank you so much, Pam. You are truly a treasure. Am so happy about your Thanksgiving!

[20121130-07](#) 16:24 Art Re: Announcing FotM PDF eBook #13 (reply to SteveB, above) & Re: Beautiful Swords (reply to Tom & SteveB, FotM Newsletter #280)

Hi, Steve. We are all sorry to hear you are going out of business but fully understand. I marvel at your continued perseverance, especially when dealing with people like James, above...

Speaking of that, you were talking about swords the other day... Here's a picture of one I picked up in Omdurman a few years ago. I can't swear it was used by one of the Mahdi's foot soldiers to attack Kitchener's boys but I think maybe it was. Also a couple of pictures of my real hobby:









[20121202-04](#) 15:41 SteveB Re: Beautiful Swords (reply to Art, above)

I love the sword pictures, especially. Looks like a real beauty!

I always wanted to model a big small-scale train layout, but I never could come up with the time or the space. It remains one of my minor unrealized dreams.

I've surmised that these "making small things" urges come from a long but unknown lineage of voodoo witch doctors used to crafting their little spell dolls. I know, when I was a kid, I was fascinated both by the plastic models we'd build, but also by those realistic shrunken heads they used to like to sell. Mmmmm...

...and I'll never forget my Fort Apache and our wars with little plastic "men" and firecrackers...where I practiced all kinds of war things...

Thanks for the pictures and, as always, the encouragement, my friend!

[20121130-08](#) 20:32 SteveG "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee"

For some reason I continue to be amazed at the stupidity of the Republicans. They certainly do not have a clue about reality.

"After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" by Luke Russert, NBC News

Nov. 30, 2012, (<http://firstread.nbcnews.com/news/2012/11/30/15574035-after-criticism-gop-adds-woman-to-chair-house-committee?lite>)

After enduring negative headlines that all of the House Republican committee chairmanships will be filled by men in the next Congress, Republicans have found their woman.

NBC News has learned that Rep. Candice Miller (R-Mich.) will be named chair of the House Administration Committee. Miller did not serve on the committee during the 112th Congress.

Lack of diversity has been an issue for the GOP, and many strategists believe that the party's problems with women and minorities led to President Obama's re-election.

Miller has been in Congress since 2003, and her highest committee level post is on the House Homeland Security Committee.

The House Administration Committee deals with the pertinent administrative business of the House. The committee can decide such mundane things as whether or not the House cafeterias will use paper or Styrofoam plates -- or more serious matters such as benefit packages for congressional workers and how the Library of Congress operates. The Committee also monitors the expense accounts of House members.

House Speaker John Boehner issued this statement:

From ensuring the House runs efficiently and smoothly, to making Congress more open and accessible, Candice has a big job ahead as chairman of the House Administration Committee. In her new post, Candice will provide the leadership needed to keep operating costs down, save taxpayer dollars, and help lawmakers use new technology to better engage with their constituents. And her experience as Michigan secretary of state will be invaluable given the committee's oversight of campaign finance and election laws.

<a href="#">20121130-09</a>	20:39	Dennis	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Well, if you're going to add a token woman, do it after all the other appointments to make sure it's obvious.

<a href="#">20121130-10</a>	21:39	SteveG	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to Dennis, above)
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And make certain most of the duties are token.

<a href="#">20121201-04</a>	14:08	Dennis	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to SteveG, above)
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Before running for Congress, Miller was Michigan's Secretary of State, which means she ran the DMV.

<a href="#">20121201-05</a>	16:29	Pam	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to Dennis & SteveG, above)
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I guess she'll be up to setting the calendar then. She's probably a perfectly nice woman, and here we are all dumping on her. I blame the GOP.

<a href="#">20121201-08</a>	17:10	SteveG	Re: "After Criticism, GOP Adds Woman to Chair House Committee" (reply to Pam, above)
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I don't believe we are dumping on her, but Bonehead and the GOP.

"Facing Facts on Fiscal Cliff" by Eugene Kiely, Robert Farley, and D'Angelo Gore, FactCheck.org

Nov. 30, 2012, (<http://factcheck.org/2012/11/facing-facts-on-fiscal-cliff/>)

(How did the U.S. reach a 'fiscal cliff' and what does it mean? Here are the facts.)

The U.S. faces the possibility of another recession — the third in 11 years — if President Obama and Congress cannot find a way to avoid the so-called fiscal cliff. The one-two combination of massive tax increases and spending cuts scheduled to take effect, beginning Jan. 1, would push the unemployment rate back above 9 percent, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

There's a growing consensus in Washington that some combination of spending cuts and increased revenues is needed to reduce annual deficits and slow the federal debt — without going over the fiscal cliff. The disagreement is over the details, particularly over how and how much to increase tax revenues and where to cut spending.

Some Republicans, including House Speaker John Boehner, say the president's tax proposals would "destroy nearly 700,000 jobs," which is an exaggeration. Many Democrats would prefer not to cut entitlement programs as part of the negotiations, even though the three largest entitlement programs — Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security — would consume 55 percent of all federal spending by 2022, compared with 43 percent in 2011, according to the CBO.

We take no position on what Congress should do. But we can offer some factual context to help understand the scope of what the CBO calls the nation's "fundamental budgetary challenges."

#### Some facts to consider:

- The scheduled tax increases, if allowed to take effect, would net an additional \$536 billion in fiscal year 2013, according to the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center, raising more than \$5 trillion in 10 years. Nearly 90 percent of Americans would pay more in taxes, TPC says, with the average increase being nearly \$3,500.
- The automatic spending cuts scheduled to take effect would cut \$1.2 trillion over 10 years, split roughly in half between domestic and military spending.
- Obama's plan calls for increasing revenue by \$1.6 trillion over 10 years. Republican congressional leaders have not proposed a counter offer for revenues, but during the so-called "grand bargain" negotiations in the summer of 2011, Boehner reportedly had agreed to \$800 billion worth of increased revenue.
- As a percentage of the nation's economy, the federal government now spends 22.7 percent and collects in revenue 15.7 percent — a large gap that has persisted for years and has contributed to four straight years of \$1 trillion deficits.
- A bipartisan fiscal commission created by Obama has proposed capping revenues at 21 percent by the year 2022, and getting spending below 22 percent.

The Analysis below provides details on these and other facts.

#### Analysis

The fiscal cliff was created by a series of actions by Congress, beginning with the approval of the Bush-era tax cuts in 2001 and 2003.

The Bush tax cuts were extended by the Tax Relief Unemployment Insurance Reauthorization and Job Creation Act of 2010. But the 2010 tax legislation did more than that. It also extended some of the tax breaks in President Obama's 2009 stimulus bill and temporarily reduced the Social Security payroll taxes.

A year later, Congress passed the Budget Control Act of 2011, which Obama signed into law. That law imposed spending caps on discretionary spending through 2021 that are supposed to save \$917 billion over 10 years, according to an August 2011 analysis by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office.

The law also created a special bipartisan congressional committee charged with reducing the deficit by at least \$1.5 trillion over 10 years. But the so-called super committee failed to agree on a deficit-reduction plan and, under the Budget Control Act, \$1.2 trillion in automatic budget cuts over 10 years are now scheduled to take effect, beginning in January. At the same time, the temporary tax cuts approved under both Bush and Obama are due to expire.

### Tax Increases Looming

In an Oct. 1 report on the fiscal cliff, the nonpartisan Tax Policy Center estimates that the scheduled tax increases, if allowed to take effect, would net an additional \$536 billion in fiscal 2013. How significant is that? Federal revenues were about \$2.45 trillion in the fiscal year that ended Sept. 30 — meaning the scheduled tax increases alone would raise revenues by about 22 percent.

In its report, TPC lists six reasons why taxes are scheduled to increase by so much:

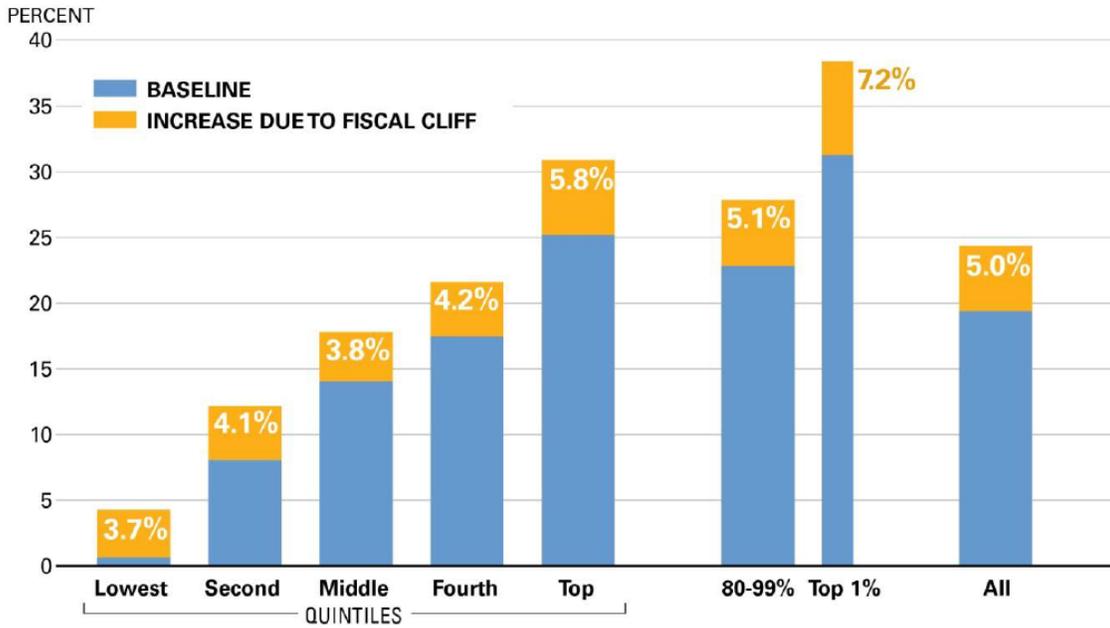
- The Bush-era tax cuts enacted in 2001 and 2003 and extended for two years at the end of 2010 are set to expire. *Cost: \$254 billion.*
- Temporary tax breaks that were part of Obama's stimulus law and extended at the end of 2010 will expire. *Cost: \$27 billion.*
- Congress has yet to act on short-term tax breaks, mostly for businesses, that are routinely extended but have yet to be approved. *Cost: \$75 billion.*
- A temporary payroll tax cut enacted for 2011 was extended through 2012, but is now set to expire at the end of this year. *Cost: \$115 billion.*
- Tax increases contained in the Affordable Care Act on upper-income taxpayers will go into effect: a 3.8 percent tax on unearned income, 0.9 percent increase in Medicare payroll taxes and a higher income threshold for deducting medical expenses. *Cost: \$24 billion.*
- The Alternative Minimum Tax, which was designed to make sure wealthy Americans pay a minimum tax, was never indexed to inflation on a permanent basis. As a result, Congress must fix this problem — as it has every year since 2001 — or 28 million more taxpayers will pay higher taxes. *Cost: \$40 billion.*

If all that happened, taxes would increase an average of \$3,466 per household, according to the TPC. Middle-income households — those earning nearly \$40,000 to about \$64,500 a year — would see an average increase of \$1,984.

The chart below from the Tax Policy Center shows the impact on average tax rates for taxpayers in different income groups (as defined in a footnote on the last page of the report):



**FIGURE 1**  
**Average Federal Tax Rate by Cash Income Percentile, 2013**



Source: Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center Table T12-0207

Congressional leaders say they are confident that they will negotiate a deal that will avoid some if not most of these tax increases from taking effect.

What is likely to happen?

Congress is widely expected to “patch” the AMT. In its report on the fiscal cliff, the TPC ranked the AMT tax the least likely to increase among nine categories of pending tax increases. In urging Congress to pass an AMT “patch,” the IRS said 28 million taxpayers, “many of them middle-class families,” would pay more in taxes if Congress fails to act.

On the other hand, the tax increases contained in the Affordable Care Act are expected to take effect next year now that Obama has won reelection. Those taxes would fall most heavily on upper-income taxpayers. TPC says taxpayers earning more than \$108,266 would see an average increase of \$1,141 a year.

There is less certainty about the other scheduled tax increases — particularly the Bush-era tax cuts, which reduced tax liability on earned income, capital gains and dividends, and the estate tax.

Under current law, the marginal individual income tax rates would all snap back to pre-2001 levels. As the TPC explains, the 10 percent tax bracket will disappear, making the lowest bracket 15 percent, and the “25 percent, 28 percent, 33 percent, and 35 percent rates will revert to 28 percent, 31 percent, 36 percent, and 39.6 percent respectively.”

Allowing the Bush-era tax cuts to expire for individuals earning less than \$200,000 and married couples earning less than \$250,000 would cost those taxpayers \$171 billion, or nearly a third of the total \$536 billion “cliff,” according to the TPC.

If Congress does extend the Bush tax cuts for those taxpayers, as the president has proposed, then the total average tax increase for middle-income taxpayers would drop from \$1,984 to \$1,096, according to the Tax Policy Center. The AMT “patch” would reduce the potential tax hike for those same taxpayers another \$104 a year on average — dropping the average tax increase for middle-income taxpayers to less than \$1,000 by virtue of those two actions.

The Bush-era tax cuts for the upper-income taxpayers appear to be at a greater risk of expiring — unless the parties can negotiate an agreement to raise revenue elsewhere to keep the lower tax rates in place. TPC estimates that the income tax changes would raise \$44 billion from individual taxpayers who earn \$200,000 and couples earning \$250,000.

In addition to the individual income tax changes, other major changes slated to take place that will affect the wealthy include these:

- **The estate tax:** The current \$5.1 million per-person exclusion from the federal estate tax is scheduled to fall to \$1 million, and the top tax rate is scheduled to rise to 55 percent in 2013. That would raise an estimated \$31 billion in 2013.
- **Capital gains and dividends:** The tax rate is 15 percent on long-term capital gains (assets held at least one year) and qualified dividends for taxpayers in the top four tax brackets (currently ranging from 25 percent to 35 percent). The capital gains rate is scheduled to increase to 20 percent for those taxpayers, while dividends would return to being taxed at regular income tax rates. Estimated impact: \$8 billion.

There's uncertainty for low- and middle-income taxpayers, too.

As we mentioned earlier, the 2010 tax legislation cut the employee portion of the Social Security payroll tax. The rate fell from 6.2 percent to 4.2 percent in 2011 and 2012.

Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner testified before the election that he did not support extending the payroll tax cut again. The *New York Times* quoted him as saying: "This has to be a temporary tax cut. I don't see any reason to consider supporting its extension." Now, however, the administration is negotiating to "include an extension of the payroll tax cut or an equivalent policy aimed at working-class families," the *Times* reported on Nov. 29.

The expiration of the payroll tax cut would mean that middle-income taxpayers would see an average tax increase of \$672 per year, according to the TPC.

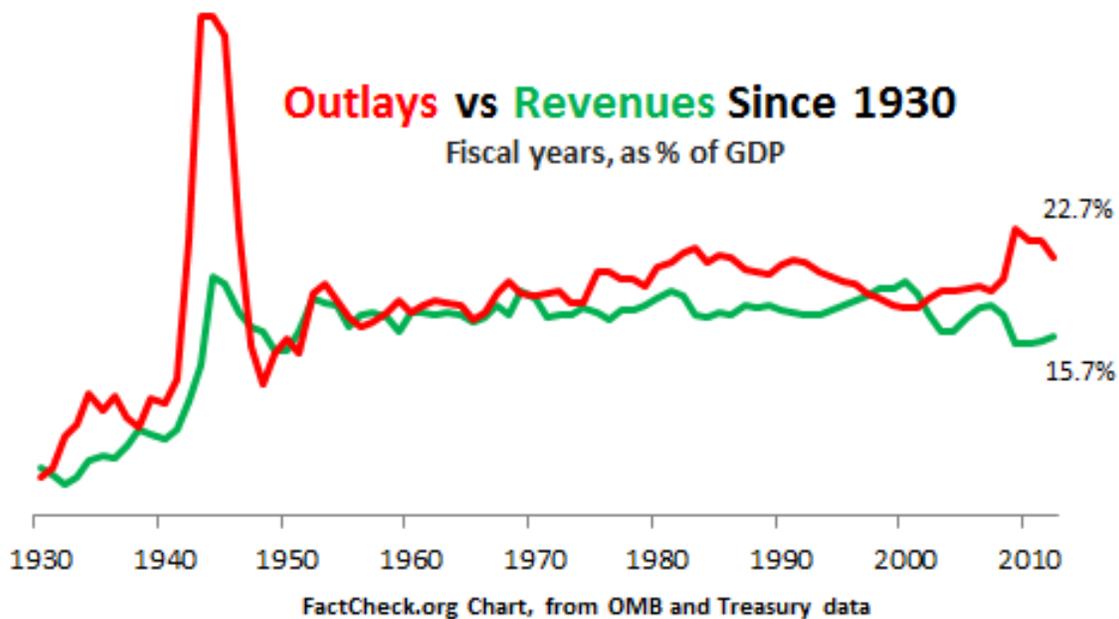
In addition to the expiration of the payroll tax cut, there were a host of tax credits in the president's 2009 stimulus legislation that were extended in 2010 and are now due to expire. Obama expanded the earned income tax credit, increased the value of the child tax credit for low-income families, and expanded and increased the college tuition credit.

The Tax Policy Center says the credits benefit about 152 million taxpayers, and more than half of them earn less than \$50,000 a year. For example, a taxpayer earning \$20,113 or less would pay an average of \$209 more in taxes if the credits expire, the TPC analysis shows (Table 6). That's about half of what that taxpayer's total increased tax liability would be — \$412 — if *all* of the fiscal cliff tax changes went into effect as scheduled.

### Closing the Gap

There is a growing consensus in Washington that there needs to be a combination of increased revenues and spending cuts to close the big gap that has developed in recent years between revenues and outlays.

As a percentage of the nation's economy, the gap between what Washington spends (22.7 percent) and collects in revenues (15.7 percent) narrowed slightly in the last fiscal year. But the federal government is still a long way from the times when revenues more closely matched spending — as you can see from the chart below. We created the chart using historical budget data from the federal Office of Management and Budget, updated with Treasury Department figures for the fiscal year ending Sept. 30, 2012.



Since fiscal year 1946, a post-World War II federal government has run surpluses in 12 of 68 years — most recently for a period of four straight years, beginning in 1998 under President Bill Clinton.

The government's checkbook benefited in the Clinton years from the effects of a large tax increase pushed by the Democratic president in 1993, his first year in office. That tax increase fell most heavily on those making more than \$200,000 — which is why the tax rates under Clinton are cited frequently (but not entirely accurately) by Obama in his push to allow the marginal individual tax rates to rise in the top two brackets. (We'll get to Obama's plan later.)

Clinton's fiscal 1994 budget also contained limits on spending, particularly in the military following the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of 1991. When the House passed that budget, the *New York Times* reported that there was roughly a 1-for-1 ratio between spending reductions and tax increases over a five-year period.

The surpluses evaporated as the nation went through two wars and two recessions — the first triggered by the dot-com bust, which began in mid-2000. Deficit spending returned in fiscal 2002 and worsened after the second recession. The federal government has now posted four straight years of \$1 trillion deficits.

In March, the Congressional Budget Office projected that under the president's proposed budget for 2013, spending would equal 23.4 percent of GDP while revenues would be 17.2 percent. The deficit, CBO said, would equal 6.1 percent of the economy that year and average 3.2 percent over the 10-year period ending in 2022. But the CBO currently projects that a continuation of current policies — including the Bush-era tax cuts and an AMT "patch" — would push the deficit to 6.5 percent of GDP in 2013, with spending and revenues equal to 22.8 percent and 16.3 percent, respectively.

In an op-ed piece, Warren Buffett, the chairman and chief executive of Berkshire Hathaway, wrote that the government should aim to raise revenues to 18.5 percent of GDP while keeping spending to around 21 percent. Acknowledging that this wouldn't eliminate deficits, he wrote that "this ratio of revenue to spending will keep America's debt stable in relation to the country's economic output."

The president's bipartisan fiscal commission, on the other hand, called for more revenues in a report issued back in December 2010. As part of its "six-part plan to put our nation back on a path to fiscal health, promote economic growth, and protect the most vulnerable among us," the commission proposed capping revenues at 21 percent by the year 2022, and getting spending below 22 percent and eventually to 21 percent by 2035.

And the CBO issued a report in November saying that there are many options for reducing our deficits. But continuing on the current path, CBO said, was not one of them.

## The Opening Proposals

Both Democrats and Republicans have been talking about the need to compromise on the fiscal cliff. But what is their starting position in these negotiations?

Obama laid out his vision in his 2013 budget proposal

(<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2013/assets/budget.pdf>). Overall, his plan calls for increasing revenues by \$1.6 trillion over 10 years. (During the “grand bargain” negotiations between Obama and House Speaker Boehner in the summer of 2011, Boehner had agreed to \$800 billion worth of increased revenue.)

There are a number of corporate tax implications in Obama’s plan, but here are the major parts affecting individual taxpayers:

- Allow the Bush tax cuts to expire for couples making over \$250,000. Specifically, that would increase the top tax rate from 35 to 39.6 percent. That’s expected to generate \$442 billion over 10 years. (page 219)
- Reduce the value of itemized deductions and other tax preferences to 28 percent for families with incomes over \$250,000. That is expected to generate \$584 billion over 10 years. (page 220)
- Increase capital gains tax rates from 15 percent to 20 percent, raising \$36 billion over 10 years.
- Increase taxes on dividends from 15 percent to 39.6 percent. That’s expected to raise \$206 billion over 10 years.  
That’s the meat of Obama’s plan, but as he said in a news conference on Nov. 9, “I’m not wedded to every detail of my plan. I’m open to compromise. I’m open to new ideas.”

There has been no consensus plan yet proffered by Republicans, though last year the House passed a bill to extend the Bush tax cuts for everyone for another year.

More recently a number of Republican leaders have floated the idea of capping itemized deductions as a way to raise revenue without raising tax *rates*.

For example, on ABC’s “This Week” on Nov. 25, Sen. Lindsey Graham said:

Graham, Nov. 25: I’m willing to generate revenue. It’s fair to ask my party to put revenue on the table. We’re below historic averages. I will not raise tax rates to do it. I will cap deductions. If you cap deductions around the \$30,000, \$40,000 range, you can raise \$1 trillion in revenue, and the people who lose their deductions are the upper-income Americans.

During the presidential campaign, GOP nominee Mitt Romney floated a proposal during the second debate to cap itemized deductions at \$25,000.

Romney, Oct. 16: And so, in terms of bringing down deductions, one way of doing that would be to say everybody gets — I’ll pick a number — \$25,000 of deductions and credits. And you can decide which ones to use, your home mortgage interest deduction, charity, child tax credit and so forth.

The Tax Foundation analyzed a \$25,000 cap and concluded it would raise about \$1.3 trillion over 10 years.

So why do some Republicans prefer caps on itemized deductions to higher tax rates? Mark Duggan, professor of business economics and public policy at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, said a higher rate “hurts incentive to work.” Second, he said to us in an email, “when you exclude some things from the tax base you introduce distortions. By excluding health insurance, mortgage interest, etc. you subsidize certain goods (health care and housing) but not others. Furthermore the subsidies are bigger for those with high incomes where rates are highest.”

One option not being considered is doing nothing — thus allowing the spending cuts and the tax increases to take effect. What's the consequence of that? CBO projects that the nation will most likely slide into a recession and the unemployment rate, which was 7.9 percent in October, would rise to 9.1 percent.

But short-term pain would be followed by long-term gain, the CBO says.

CBO, Nov. 8: CBO projects that the significant tax increases and spending cuts that are due to occur in January will probably cause the economy to fall back into a recession next year, but they will make the economy stronger later in the decade and beyond. In contrast, continuing current policies would lead to faster economic growth in the near term but a weaker economy in later years.

On the spending side of the equation, Obama's position has not budged much from the position he outlined in September 2011 in his President's Plan for Economic Growth and Deficit Reduction (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/budget/fy2012/assets/jointcommitteereport.pdf>).

The president's plan boasts of \$4 trillion in "savings" from spending over 10 years. To get to that figure, the president included roughly \$1 trillion in spending cuts that he had already signed into law in the Budget Control Act; savings from drawing down the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and \$580 billion in "cuts and reforms" to an array of mandatory programs — everything from agricultural subsidies to federal civilian worker retirement plans. Also included in that figure is \$248 billion in reduced spending on Medicare and \$73 billion on Medicaid.

### The Spin

There are an awful lot of numbers and scenarios being thrown around by politicians regarding the fiscal cliff. We find that some are false and misleading, while others are accurate, but show an incomplete picture.

For example, Obama several times has stated that if the Bush tax cuts are not extended for families making under \$250,000, "A typical middle-class family of four would see its taxes rise by \$2,200." The White House has even launched a campaign asking Americans to, "Tell us what \$2,000 means to you and your family." The White House is also encouraging people to "keep the conversation going online" on Facebook and Twitter using the hashtag #My2K.

The White House construction is accurate, but very specific. Note that in the online appeal, Obama is pictured at a table with two parents and their two children. According to a White House fact sheet, a married couple with two children with income between about \$50,000 and \$85,000 would see a tax increase of \$1,000 because of a Child Tax Credit reduction; a tax increase of \$890 due to the merging of the 10 percent tax bracket into the 15 percent tax bracket; and a tax increase of \$310 because of the expiration of marriage penalty relief that provides a larger standard deduction for married couples. In total, that comes to \$2,200.

As this breakdown makes clear, the biggest part of the tax increase comes from the fact that they are married and have two kids. The tax impact is much less for unmarried people without children, or even married people with one or no children.

According to calculations by the Tax Policy Center, those in the middle-income quintile, who earn roughly between \$40,000 and \$64,000 would see — on average — a \$961 tax increase next year if the Bush tax cuts are not extended. (It comes to about \$1,100 for those earning between \$50,000 and \$75,000 — which is closer to Obama's parameters.)

The Tax Policy Center has created a tax calculator with which taxpayers can determine how much various fiscal cliff scenarios may affect them.

Other claims from politicians include:

- Raising taxes on upper-income earners would "destroy nearly 700,000 jobs in our country." We looked at this when Boehner said it recently. It's based on a report from the accounting firm Ernst & Young that

assumed revenue from the taxes would be used “to finance a higher level of government spending,” even though Obama would use the added revenue to reduce the deficit.

- Among wealthy taxpayers who would be hit with an increase under Obama’s proposal, Boehner said, “more than half of them are small-business owners.” According to a 2011 report from the Treasury Department’s Office of Tax Analysis, more than 90 percent of small-business owners wouldn’t be affected by Obama’s proposal. But upper-income taxpayers do account for 57 percent of the income of small-business owners, which is what Boehner’s spokesman says he meant to say.

- “Social Security does not add one penny to our debt.” We fact-checked that claim when Democratic Sen. Richard Durbin said it on ABC’s “This Week” on Nov. 25. It’s false. The federal government for the first time in its history had to borrow money in 2010 to cover Social Security benefits to retired and disabled workers — a trend that worsened in 2011 and will not change at any point in the future unless changes are made.

Sources: [Continue reading at FactCheck.org...](#)

[20121202-06](#) 16:03 SteveB Re: “Facing Facts on Fiscal Cliff” (reply to MarthaH, above)

Really excellent article, Martha. Thank you!

Hope Larry’s leg (and your running legs) are doing well. :-)

[20121202-07](#) 16:19 MarthaH Re: “Facing Facts on Fiscal Cliff” (reply to SteveB, above)

Thanks. He is without the ortho boot and in laced hiking shoes now. It swells when down too long, and he will have to work to regain strength. No one says it will be a quick trip to normal. Live and learn! Thanks for asking. Warm here today--got hot walking the dogs. Colts 21, Detroit 23, 3d quarter and 4:45 left in it yet. *SI* has a new article (cover) on Luck

[Wow! The Colts ended-up winning 35-33, must have been a good game to watch! –SteveB]

[20121201-02](#) 05:45 SteveB “Joan Rivers’ Best Insults (w/Videos)”

Are they the “best” or the “worst” insults? Regardless, they are very funny and irreverent...

“Joan Rivers’ Best Insults (w/Videos)” by Kevin Fallon, The Daily Beast

Nov. 30, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/11/30/joan-rivers-s-best-insults-video.html>)

(As “Fashion Police” hits its 100th episode, The Daily Beast looks at its host’s shockingly unfiltered barbs. From Oprah to Sarah Palin, here’s a retrospective of the comedienne’s most outrageous moments.)

Joan Rivers turns 100 today!

Rather, the vaunted comedienne’s E! channel talk show, “Fashion Police”, airs its 100th episode Friday, commemorating countless barbs about emaciated fashionistas, ceaseless ribbing on frumpy fashion fails, and years of her signature mixing of sartorial criticism with tell-it-like-it-is wit. As viewers of the show—which is co-hosted by Kelly Osbourne, Giuliana Rancic, and George Kotsiopoulos—and as fans can confirm, you come for the best-dressed lists, but stay for Rivers’s notoriously devastating barbs ridiculing the rich and famous.

As such, the “Fashion Police” milestone is a fitting occasion to look back at the trailblazing funnily lady’s long career, revisit a few of the **79-year-old’s** most offensive moments—fashion-related or otherwise. (Her uncouth joke about

Princess Diana, for example: "If you ever want to go to Paris, fly. Don't take the tunnel.") Here's a sampling of Rivers at her most outrageous:

### Costco Is Like 'Nazi Germany'

"Attention, Costco buyers ... " Rivers bellowed through a bullhorn at the Burbank, Calif., location of the superstore chain. Irked that the franchise refused to carry her memoir, *I Hate Everything... Starting with Me*, she told customers, "This is like the beginning of Nazi Germany," before handcuffing herself to a shopping cart in protest. A sampling of the book's racy content: "I hate Houston ... it's crawling with bugs. Oh wait, that's Whitney Houston; I'm sorry, my bad. (Can I just mention that Whitney looked fabulous at the Grammys? She was in mahogany from head to toe.)" For context, Houston had died just months before.

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=7FgQONJBjDs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=7FgQONJBjDs).

### Michelle Obama Is 'Blackie O'

Not sure this counts, Joan. Rivers appeared on Howard Stern's radio show in 2011 and told an anecdote about how she once ditched a joke because she feared she'd be accused of racism. But then she told Stern the joke. The punchline, which Rivers argued was complimentary, concerned the first lady: "We used to have Jackie O, now we have Blackie O!" Even Stern's sidekick Robyn Quivers questioned the joke's taste: "Where's the compliment in that? I'm looking and looking, I'm trying to find it."

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=NOBj2vloQMY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=NOBj2vloQMY).

### Oprah Needs to Lose Weight

In 1985, Oprah Winfrey—rocking some fierce shoulder pads, bedazzled fringe, white leggings, an electric-shock updo, and some extra weight—appeared on Rivers's short-lived late-night talk show. She regaled her glory days as a beauty-pageant winter "50 pounds ago." Rivers then went on the attack. "You shouldn't let that happen to you!" Rivers chastised. "You're a pretty girl, and you're single. You need to lose the weight!"

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=JMwX2Ikjkes](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=JMwX2Ikjkes).

### Sarah Palin Is 'Stupid and a Threat'

Things started off surprisingly cordial when TMZ asked Rivers about Sarah Palin in 2011. "I think she's everything a strong woman should be," Rivers began. "And she should go to another planet and show them, and get out of our face." She also blamed Palin for the mass shooting in Arizona that killed six and injured Rep. Gabby Giffords and dozens more, calling her "stupid and a threat." Rivers's scheduled appearance on Fox & Friends was mysteriously canceled after her comments went viral.

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=JMwX2Ikjkes](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=JMwX2Ikjkes).

### Tommy Lee Jones, Worse than Hitler?

Over the years, Rivers and her daughter, Melissa, have gabbed with an endless parade of celebrities. When asked on HDNet's *Naughty But Nice With Rob* show who was the nastiest of all the A-listers they've talked to, both Rivers girls unequivocally said Tommy Lee Jones. "He makes Hitler look warm and fuzzy," Mom Rivers said.

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=OdZeoKH9eps](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=OdZeoKH9eps).

### Elizabeth Taylor Is Fat

With Lifetime's risible Liz and Dick movie earning reviews that read more like humor pieces than film criticism—and star Lindsay Lohan barreling her way back into late-night monologues with her recent arrest—it's hard to remember

that it used to be the film's subject, Elizabeth Taylor, that was once the butt of everyone's jokes. This 1983 clip mocking Taylor's hard-to-ignore weight gain is a prudent reminder.

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=bfAkB64HaKk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=bfAkB64HaKk).

### Chelsea Handler Is a 'Whore'

Most female comedians working today are effusive in their reverence for Rivers, who paved the way for women in the industry and made it acceptable for them to be as raunchy as the boys. Chelsea Handler is not one of them. Handler told Howard Stern, "What the fuck do I care about Joan Rivers? I don't think about her ever." Appearing on Stern's show soon after, Rivers ripped Handler a new one, saying she slept her way to the top (referring to ex-boyfriend, E! head honcho Ted Harbert) and for having no respect. "No. 1, the girl made it on her back fucking the president, we all know that, of the network," Rivers ranted. "No. 2, she's fine, she's ordinary. She's not a genius."

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X6yQSM3tMvc>.

### Stars Are Insufferable

Not all of Rivers's most brutal lines have been captured on camera. There's her thoughts on Britney Spears: "I can't wait for her career to be over so she can serve me coffee at 7-Eleven. She's such white trash." On Christina Aguilera: "Fatso ... with that no-neck look." And Madonna's fashion sense: "... like a disco ball that had sex with a quilt." In this clip, Rivers does lighting-round riffing on Lindsay Lohan ("she and the other car were smashed"), Justin Bieber ("a little lesbian"), and more.

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=IkVI47bVQSo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=IkVI47bVQSo).

### Roasting the Roasters

Last year, Rivers threw herself to the comedic wolves and allowed herself to be the honoree of a Comedy Central roast. Semi-stars took her to task, including Kathy Griffin, Robin Quivers, and Brad Garrett. But taking the stage for her seven-minute rebuttal, Rivers had the last laugh, skewering comedian Greg Giraldo ("When I heard Greg Giraldo was going to be on the dais, I said 'Who the fuck is Greg Giraldo?' So I went and I Googled him and you know what it said? 'Who the fuck is Greg Giraldo?'") and telling Gilbert Gottfried that he was so ashamed to be Jewish that he was "going to go to Malibu and give Mel Gibson a blow job!"

Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=8\\_ITBq023KU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=8_ITBq023KU).

### An Early Ed Sullivan Appearance

As deliciously unfiltered as Rivers has been over the decades and as many pampered celebrities as she has burned, it's best to conclude this roast retrospective with proof the comedienne earned her place at the top of the industry by being genuinely funny, not just mean. This vintage clip of Rivers performing standup on a 1967 episode of "The Ed Sullivan Show" illustrates just that.

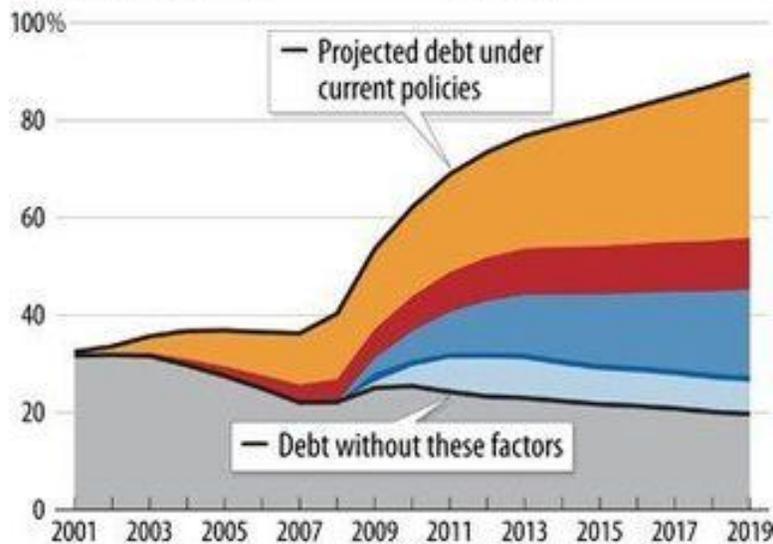
Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=EpPCFoXXhF0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=EpPCFoXXhF0).

"Told You So" by Andrew Sullivan, The Daily Beast

Nov. 26, 2012, (<http://andrewsullivan.thedailybeast.com/2012/11/told-you-so.html>)

## Tax Cuts, Wars Account For Nearly Half Of Public Debt By 2019

Debt held by the public as a share of GDP



Source: CBPP analysis based on Congressional Budget Office estimates.

Center on Budget and Policy Priorities | cbpp.org

Bruce Bartlett takes a tiny bit of pleasure - after years of grief - at being proven right about the GOP's suicidal trajectory since the early Bush-Cheney years. But what's striking to me about the piece, published in the best conservative magazine in America, *The American Conservative*, is his account of what generally happens to intellectual honesty in today's polarized Washington.

It is actively *punished*.

Bruce had three intellectual crises, as he calls them. He was shocked, as I was, by the Bush administration's shameless bribery of the voters and utter contempt for fiscal balance or parliamentary procedure, as Medicare D proved. He was shocked when two costly- incompetently run wars were not even budgeted. He was shocked again when he observed that not only were criticisms of such recklessness not allowed, they were not even heard because the right had created its own media chamber, which kept any dissidence or intellectual challenge firmly out of earshot. So Bruce wrote a book, explaining Bush's attack on core conservative principles: balanced budgets, just wars, individual liberty and states' rights. The result? He was swiftly fired from his think-tank job, banned from Fox News, and turned into a non-person like an airbrushed-out member of an intellectual Politburo. (Bush tools, mediocrities and war criminals, on the other hand, were gladly ushered into AEI and the op-ed pages of the *Washington Post*.)

I endured the same kind of thing, although I was much less polite than Bruce and had an independent platform. But it's still remarkable to me that I have not been invited on Fox for a decade - even to discuss or debate my book on, er, conservatism and fundamentalism. My book, *The Conservative Soul*, was not reviewed in the *Wall Street*

*Journal*, and given a formal excommunication/evisceration by *National Review's* Jonah Goldberg. Compare this with my first book, *Virtually Normal*, which was reviewed positively in the *Wall Street Journal* and got a review in *National Review* that any writer would die for by a distinguished professor of political theory, Kenneth Minogue. So a radically conservative book about homosexuality was admissible, even welcome, in conservative media in 1995, but a critique of modern conservatism's decline was verboten in 2006. No links to this blog were allowed at *National Review's* Corner. No mention of my name ever crossed the lips of a Republican loyalist.

What Bruce and I shared was a belief that the conservatism of the 1980s, while defensible in its time with a few obvious exceptions, was irrelevant for the world that Reaganism had created. He puts it this way:

I had written an op-ed for the *New York Times* in 2007 suggesting that it was time to retire "supply-side economics" as a school of thought. Having been deeply involved in its development, I felt that everything important the supply-siders had to say had now been fully incorporated into mainstream economics. All that was left was nutty stuff like the Laffer Curve that alienated academic economists who were otherwise sympathetic to the supply-side view. I said the supply-siders should declare victory and go home.

That was also my theory about tax rates and the more socially liberal society that economic freedom had helped accelerate. Taxes were way lower than they had historically been, and conservatives should be glad about this but vigilant about debt and spending - not eager to cut taxes even more, especially in wartime. America was more multicultural, and one minority, gay citizens, was actively seeking greater responsibility and inclusion. But by the new millennium, low taxes were unbreakable theological truths on the right and gays were Biblically repellent and had to be re-ostracized - by amending the federal constitution no less. Then came the crash of 2008 and a whole set of ideas about self-regulating markets and risk had to be re-thought (as intellectually honest libertarians like Alan Greenspan and Richard Posner conceded). Facing this reality, Bartlett rediscovered Keynes as he actually was and recognized the salience of Keynesianism for a new crisis that was an almost textbook case for government intervention:

Annoyingly, I found myself joined at the hip to Paul Krugman, whose analysis was identical to my own. I had previously viewed Krugman as an intellectual enemy and attacked him rather colorfully in an old column that he still remembers. For the record, no one has been more correct in his analysis and prescriptions for the economy's problems than Paul Krugman. The blind hatred for him on the right simply pushed me further away from my old allies and comrades... The economy continues to conform to textbook Keynesianism. We still need more aggregate demand, and the Republican idea that tax cuts for the rich will save us becomes more ridiculous by the day.

We can easily become cynical about Washington. It contains a hundred times more schmoozers and social climbers and lobbyists and parasites than it does individuals genuinely committed to the common good in different ways. And of those earnest individuals, only a few are ballsy enough to follow their own reason doggedly enough to suffer social ostracism, removal from all conservative media outlets, and loss of a job - because their mind is not for sale or rent.

Bruce Bartlett is that kind of guy. We need so many more. But I'm thankful for one. And a legacy and example that will live on.

(Chart from TPM: <http://tpmdc.talkingpointsmemo.com/2011/05/chart-bush-policies-dominant-cause-of-debt.php>.)

20121201-06

17:01

SteveG

Fw: Citizen.org Petition: President Obama, Tell Corporate America Your Inauguration is NOT for Sale!

from Citizen.org:

Wow.

In just three days, more than 20,000 activists like you have joined our campaign encouraging President Obama to keep corporate money out of his inauguration.

That's more than 6,600 signatures every day, 275 signatures every hour, four signatures every minute — or one signature every 15 seconds.

Help keep up the momentum.

Forward this message TODAY to five friends, family members, neighbors and colleagues.

Ask them to sign the petition urging President Obama to refuse corporate funding for his inauguration. (There's more information about our campaign in my previous email, copied below.)

In order for the president to carry out the will of the people, the people must push the president in the direction they want him to go. As a newly elected Franklin Roosevelt said in 1932 to fighters for progress when they presented him with a list of their priorities for him: "I agree with you, I want to do it, now make me do it."

Based on his past actions President Obama probably agrees that refusing corporate money for his inauguration is the right thing to do.

But still, we have to make him do it. Thanks, Rick

If corporate stooges close to the Obama campaign get their way, President Obama will spend the first day of his second term at lavish parties sponsored by multinational corporations like Bank of America, General Electric and Coca-Cola.\*

Why would President Obama want to start his second term by cozying up to these profit-hoarding, progress-thwarting corporate antagonists and the same CEO hucksters that are daily distorting our democracy with legions of lobbyists and million-dollar propaganda campaigns?

President Obama should start his second and final term as a fighter for the people — NOT as panderer-in-chief.

Urge President Obama to refuse corporate contributions for his inauguration.

Corporate contributions are being considered, according to The Wall Street Journal, because the political mega-donors that politicians typically hit up to help pay for inauguration day fanfare are feeling "drained" after spending so much during this year's record-breaking, \$6 billion election.

But the fact is, an inauguration without excess fanfare and without funding from corporations or the ultra-rich will do just fine.

A corporate-sponsored inauguration — which, coincidentally, will fall on the third anniversary of the U.S. Supreme Court's infamous Citizens United ruling — would fundamentally undermine the Obama administration's efforts to rein in the damage caused by that decision.

Public Citizen's Craig Holman, a longtime expert on the corrupting influence of corporate money in politics, warned in The Wall Street Journal that allowing corporations to pay for Obama's inauguration would "essentially codify this idea that corporations should be financing politics."

To his credit, President Obama refused corporate money for his first inauguration back in 2008.

It was the right decision then. And it's the right decision now.

Tell Obama: Don't allow your inauguration to be bought by Corporate America:

Action: [http://action.citizen.org/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=11996](http://action.citizen.org/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=11996).

Letter: <http://www.citizen.org/documents/obama-second-term-inauguration-weissman-letter.pdf>.

Thanks for all you do, Rick Claypool, Public Citizen's Online Action Team ([action@citizen.org](mailto:action@citizen.org))

\*Bank of America, General Electric and Coca-Cola were among the corporate contributors to the Democratic National Convention, according to *Bloomberg News*; *The Wall Street Journal* reported last week that corporate funding is being considered for the inauguration, to be held on January 21, 2013.

<a href="#">20121201-09</a>	17:48	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Harry Reid to Put Elizabeth Warren on the Senate Banking Committee!
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The gall of these people!

from Sum of Us:

For years now, Wall Street has held sway over the Senate Banking Committee. The committee is stacked with industry-friendly Republicans and Democrats whose largest donors are big banks. Through this cozy influence, Wall Street has managed to ride out scandal after scandal relatively unscathed.

Which is exactly why Wall Street is terrified of Elizabeth Warren. After spending millions to defeat Senator-elect Warren, Wall Street is opening its purse again in a frantic attempt to block her from the Senate Banking Committee and prevent themselves from being held accountable for their greed. On this decision, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid has the final say, which is why we need to get him to stand strong. Americans finally have someone in the Senate who will stand up to Wall Street, but first we need to make a stand for her.

Tell Majority Leader Harry Reid: Don't block Elizabeth Warren from the Senate Banking Committee.

Senator-elect Warren is incredibly qualified for the position. She is a bankruptcy law expert, has served as Congress' lead watchdog overseeing the \$700 billion bank bailout from 2008 to 2010, and she conceived of and helped launch the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). In the words of hedge fund manager Shah Gilani, "At exactly the time that big banks don't want more oversight—or another potentially activist regulator—that's what they're getting."

Currently, the Senate Banking Committee is chaired by Senator Tim Johnson, whose two biggest donors have been Citigroup and JP Morgan, and is stacked with a number of Republicans that are in big banks' back pocket. Together, we can let Harry Reid know that we voted for financial oversight, not for more of the same politicians bought out by Wall Street.

Sign our petition to ensure that Wall Street won't block Elizabeth Warren from the Senate Banking Committee:

<http://action.sumofus.org/a/warren-senate-banking-committee/69/173/>.

Thank you, Claiborne, Kaytee and the rest of us

Further information:

*Forbes*: "Elizabeth Warren's Big Win Is A Crushing Defeat For Big Banks," Nov. 7, 2012, (<http://act.sumofus.org/go/986?t=5&akid=1074.25700.HfAB1c>).

*Mother Jones*: "Big Banks v. Elizabeth Warren: It's On (Again!)", Nov. 19, 2012, (<http://act.sumofus.org/go/987?t=6&akid=1074.25700.HfAB1c>).

<a href="#">20121201-10</a>	20:02	Pam	Re: SumOfUs Petition: Tell Harry Reid to Put Elizabeth Warren on the Senate Banking Committee! (reply to SteveG, above)
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I'm pinning a lot of my hopes on her.

<a href="#">20121201-07</a>	17:06	SteveG	"How to Stop Psychopath CEOs from Looting & Destroying Their Own Companies"
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"How to Stop Psychopath CEOs from Looting and Destroying Their Own Companies" by Mitchell Anderson, AlterNet

Nov. 26, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/corporate-accountability-and-workplace/how-stop-psychopath-ceos-looting-and-destroying-their-own>)

(There are ways to weed them out.)

Have bankers gone psycho? It seems hardly a week passes without another example of corporate fraud, rogue traders, rate fixing, and money laundering. Five years after the 2007 economic meltdown that wiped out \$14 trillion of U.S. household wealth, the world's financiers seem to be behaving badly as ever and don't care who knows it. Perhaps expecting normal human behavior from many of these individuals is unrealistic because they are not normal -- they are psychopaths.

Corporate corruption linked to personal psychopathy presents both a problem and an opportunity. Rather than further futile efforts at regulation, solving the creditability crisis of global financial institutions may instead involve psychological screening to exclude certain individuals from occupying positions of trust they are medically unqualified for. And if so, cleansing of the capitalist Star Chamber will not be lead by government, but by the private insurance industry -- guided by the invisible hand of Adam Smith.

Let's start with the fascinating and frightening subject of psychopathy. This condition is neither insanity nor a treatable mental illness. It is instead linked to physical abnormalities in the amygdala region of the brain and is perhaps best described by experts as "emotional deafness." While psychopaths can often convincingly feign normal human reactions in order to manipulate others, inside they feel nothing but shark-like self-interest.

This ancient scourge has likely plagued humankind since the dawn of time, undermining our ability to trust each other and build cohesive societies. While sometimes glamorized by Hollywood as a super power, psychopathy shows little evidence of evolutionary advantage even though the condition has a strong genetic signature. After 100,000 years of human history, only one percent of the general population exhibits this affliction -- indicating that it is more parasitic than powerful.

#### A threat that can be screened

Only recently have scientists developed reliable screening methods to reveal people with this emotional disability, and such tests have been widely adopted in the criminal justice system. And while our jails are filled with people exhibiting this frightening trait, Dr. Robert Hare, a leading researcher in the field warns, "not all psychopaths are in prison. Some are in the boardroom."

Some researchers have directly linked the global financial crisis of 2007 to a growing prevalence of psychopaths in senior management of the financial sector. Dr. Clive Boddy believes that increasingly fluid corporate career paths have helped psychopaths conceal their disruptive workplace behavior and ascend to previously unattainable levels of authority. Boddy points out psychopaths are primarily attracted to money, status and power -- currently found in unparalleled abundance in the global banking sector. As if to prove the point, many of the world's money traders self identify as the "masters of the universe."

What little research has been done in field indicates that individuals with psychopathic traits are five times more common in senior management than the general population. And while psychopaths are tireless self-promoters, they are in fact poor performers and toxic managers. A study by Dr. Paul Babiak of 203 senior managers found

those with psychopathic scores on screening tests scored lower on leadership, team building, performance and effective management. They are also 25 times more likely to engage in workplace bullying than normal humans.

### How psychopaths get in

In spite of evidence to the contrary, employers often misjudge psychopaths as having strong characters that are "cool under fire." Babiak's study concluded, "our finding that some companies viewed psychopathic executives as having leadership potential, despite having negative performance reviews and low ratings on leadership and management by subordinates, is evidence of the ability of these individuals to manipulate decision makers. Their excellent communication and convincing lying skills, which together would have made them attractive hiring candidates in the first place, apparently continued to serve them well in furthering their careers."

Most importantly, besides being lousy leaders prone to risky or criminal behavior psychopaths fundamentally lack the ability to act in the interests of anyone but themselves. So how can they credibly act on behalf of their clients? Why do we tolerate a disproportionate number of people with this pathology being in charge of large aspects of global financial systems?

The banking sector has done little to address this issue, and may actively be making it worse. According to a first hand account by Brian Basham of The Independent, a banking colleague once confided to him, "At one major investment bank for which I worked, we used psychometric testing to recruit social psychopaths because their characteristics exactly suited them to senior corporate finance roles."

An accumulation of psychopaths in upper management would go a long way to explain the rash of reckless behavior and corporate fraud in the last decade. It also indicates that efforts by regulators to impose normal morality and lawfulness on the financial sector will continue to be futile.

Likewise, the legal tools available to shareholders or internal HR departments are also largely useless. Refusing to hire someone on the basis of psychopathic screening would be considered "prohibited discrimination" since it is unlawful to presume in advance that someone will commit a crime. Few companies would dare to internally screen senior managers for psychopathy, especially if there is no legal recourse to fire them.

### A risk insurers can't afford

Which brings us to the insurance industry. Every company requires a variety of underwriting policies including, for directors and officers, liability insurance or fidelity coverage. Insurers are rightly fixated on risk management since they (and their shareholders) are on the hook when executives they underwrite go the way of Gordon Gekko.

Senior managers of financial companies have what is called "fiduciary duty" -- a legal obligation to act in the best interests of their clients and investors rather than themselves. Here's the rub: psychopaths simply cannot do that. They are medically impaired from acting in good faith on behalf of others.

Why isn't the insurance industry already insisting on psychopathic screening of senior managers for the companies they are covering? The rationale would be straightforward: psychopathy is a leading indicator of illegal or reckless behavior. Psychopaths should be excluded from positions that legally require fiduciary responsibility in the same way that blind people are not allowed to be airline pilots.

Insurance companies taking the lead on weeding out corporate psychopaths would also avoid a number of thorny legal issues that would face shareholders, employers or regulators seeking the same goal.

Any psychopaths identified through insurance pre-screening would not be denied employment, they would simply be deemed uninsurable. The result would be the same -- these dangerous individuals would need to find another, less influential line of work. But since insurance policies are simple legal contracts between two parties, there would be no recourse for psychopaths to launch costly legal challenges against employers based on wrongful dismissal.

### Free capitalism to function rationally

This solution would also negate the need for government intervention -- a nightmarish scenario by anyone's yardstick. No right-thinking person would support regulation based on aberrant brain chemistry. That said, if psychopaths were weeded out of critically important roles in the global banking sector, governments and taxpayers would be a primary beneficiary. Public institutions the world-over have been mopping up the mess made by reckless bankers since 2007, and beyond. These massive bailouts have crippled the real economy and inflicted untold economic hardship on those that actually create wealth, not merely accumulate it.

Rather than regulation, insurance screening would be guided by free market capitalism. Insurers have a strong self-interest to limit risk, and a clear legal obligation to act in the interests of their investors. Shareholders of insurance companies should be demanding answers as to why the companies they are investing in are not using the most up-to-date science to limit exposure to costly risk.

A 2012 study by the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners found that companies lose fully five per cent of revenues to employee fraud each year, totaling \$400 billion in the U.S. and \$3.5 trillion worldwide. Scams perpetrated by executives or owners were three times more costly than those by managers, and nine times more than employees. Fraud in the banking and financial sector was more common than any other industry surveyed.

These rates are also rising. A survey of 500 Certified Fraud Examiners found that between 2008 and 2009, workplace fraud incidents increased by 55 per cent, and losses by 49 per cent. Almost 90 per cent of these experts felt that fraud levels would continue to rise in the future.

There will of course be inertia within the insurance industry to address this issue, especially amongst early adopters who do not want to be put at a competitive disadvantage. Yet until psychopathic screening becomes the industry standard we will continue to build our global financial house on sand -- an obvious risk to the world at large and insurers in particular.

They say there's no free lunch in this world. Yet a small number of abnormal individuals feigning free market ideals have racked up a towering tab that future generations will struggle to pay off for decades to come. This is both unacceptable and unsustainable. We have the tools to start excluding people incapable of behaving responsibly from some of the most powerful positions in the world.

We need to stop ignoring this problem and start solving it. The world will be a far better place for it.

<a href="#">20121202-01</a> 08:25 MarthaH "It's a Close Call on Susan Rice"
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"It's a Close Call on Susan Rice" by David Ignatius, *The Washington Post*

Nov. 30, 2012, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-a-close-call-on-susan-rice/2012/11/30/fbcd3316-3b23-11e2-8a97-363b0f9a0ab3\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/david-ignatius-a-close-call-on-susan-rice/2012/11/30/fbcd3316-3b23-11e2-8a97-363b0f9a0ab3_story.html))

The Republican assault on Susan Rice is a fabricated scandal, attacking her for repeating CIA talking points, almost verbatim, to explain the Benghazi attacks. The U.N. ambassador's version, even with its omissions, may turn out to be closer to the truth than some of the inflammatory GOP rhetoric.

But just because Rice is being unfairly pilloried, this doesn't mean she would be a good secretary of state. And it's a close call on the merits: Given her friendship with President Obama, she would be uniquely able to speak as his emissary. But she would also carry some baggage — not least from the political fight that would follow her nomination.

Rice would be a high-risk, high-reward nominee for secretary of state. She would represent a gambler's choice for Obama, a sign that his second term really would be different from the cautious style of the first. Her appointment would signal that Obama will play a stronger personal role in foreign policy and that he's ready to break some crockery to get things done.

Rice's problem, to be blunt, is that some people don't like her. They find her abrasive, self-promoting, mercurial. Some have argued that this critique is sexist, but Rice's defects are similar to those of the abrasive, self-promoting Richard Holbrooke, an immensely talented diplomat who never became secretary of state.

Given the political inflammation over Rice, the White House should let the issue cool for a week or two: Wait for the official investigation of Benghazi, which will make Rice's television statements look better and show that they were a blip in the tragedy of what happened. Wait for Obama to assemble a full national security team in which Rice would be a key player, rather than a lone wolf. Wait for the president to consider if he wants a special envoy for Israeli-Palestinian peace talks (did anyone say Bill Clinton?) to assist the secretary of state.

If State Department officials could select their own boss, they would probably pick Sen. John Kerry. He presents himself (as has Hillary Clinton) in the practiced, reassuring way that a seasoned politician can. And to a surprising extent, Kerry thinks outside the box. He was early to understand the importance of engaging America's adversaries in Iran, Syria and even Hamas. He has operated as Obama's private emissary in Pakistan, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and has been loyal and discreet.

But picking a secretary of state isn't anyone's choice but the president's (with the "advice and consent" of the Senate). And if Obama concludes after a period of reflection that he wants to roll the dice with Rice — and gain the potential rewards — then he should go for it. She probably wouldn't be a bad secretary, and she might be an outstanding one.

To get a sense of Rice's strengths and weaknesses, I talked last week to many people who worked for her at the United Nations and alongside her in the administration. The pluses far outweigh the minuses, but I'll offer a selection of both.

Rice's strengths are that she's smart, strategic and forthright. She has been a deft negotiator at the United Nations, with a subtle sense of the Chinese and Russians, and perhaps even played them against each other on occasion. She strengthened Security Council resolutions on Iran and North Korea. And for all her reputation as a tough boss, her staff generally likes her, especially the younger members.

Rice's biggest advantage is her closeness to the president. She understands his vision of a changing world better than anyone else in government. Her instincts match his on the Arab revolutions, the need to engage Iran, the importance of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. She understood that her job at the United Nations was to reset America's relations with the world, after the George W. Bush years, and she did it.

The negatives with Rice are mostly matters of style. She's pushy and profane and sometimes seems to shoot from the hip (a mistaken impression, since she, like the president, tends to read all the briefing papers). She was standoffish toward Hillary Clinton, prizing her special relationship with Obama and her Cabinet status. That offended some people.

Rice did two things at the United Nations that demonstrated her "A" game. First, she was tough enough to stand up against Russia's sometimes bullying diplomats. Second, she provided a secret back channel for communicating urgent messages with Iran. As secretary, Rice would be Obama's young, dynamic face to the world and a good, if also risky, choice.

20121202-02	09:36	SteveB	"Tax Burden for Most Americans Is Lower Than in the 1980's"
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"Tax Burden for Most Americans Is Lower Than in the 1980's" by Binyamin Appelbaum and Robert Gebeloff, *The New York Times*

Nov. 29, 2012, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/30/us/most-americans-face-lower-tax-burden-than-in-the-80s.html?src=twr&pagewanted=all>)

(What Is a Fair Tax Code?: Taxes are still a hot topic after the presidential election. But as a country that spends more than it collects in taxes, are we asking the right taxpayers to pay the right amounts?)

(BELLEVILLE, IL) Alan Hicks divides long days between the insurance business he started in the late 1970s and the barbecue restaurant he opened with his sons three years ago. He earned more than \$250,000 last year and said taxes took more than 40 percent. What's worse, in his view, is that others — the wealthy, hiding in loopholes; the poor, living on government benefits — are not paying their fair share.

"It feels like the harder we work, the more they take from us," said Mr. Hicks, 55, as he waited for a meat truck one recent afternoon. "And it seems like there's an awful lot of people in the United States who don't pay any taxes."

These are common sentiments in the eastern suburbs of St. Louis, a region of fading factory towns fringed by new subdivisions. Here, as across the country, people like Mr. Hicks are pained by the conviction that they are paying ever more to finance the expansion of government.

But in fact, most Americans in 2010 paid far less in total taxes — federal, state and local — than they would have paid 30 years ago. According to an analysis by *The New York Times*, the combination of all income taxes, sales taxes and property taxes took a smaller share of their income than it took from households with the same inflation-adjusted income in 1980.

Households earning more than \$200,000 benefited from the largest percentage declines in total taxation as a share of income. Middle-income households benefited, too. More than 85 percent of households with earnings above \$25,000 paid less in total taxes than comparable households in 1980.

Lower-income households, however, saved little or nothing. Many pay no federal income taxes, but they do pay a range of other levies, like federal payroll taxes, state sales taxes and local property taxes. Only about half of taxpaying households with incomes below \$25,000 paid less in 2010.

The uneven decline is a result of two trends. Congress cut federal taxation at every income level over the last 30 years. State and local taxes, meanwhile, increased for most Americans. Those taxes generally take a larger share of income from those who make less, so the increases offset more and more of the federal savings at lower levels of income.

In a half-dozen states, including Connecticut, Florida and New Jersey, the increases were large enough to offset the federal savings for most households, not just the poorer ones.

Now an era of tax cuts may be reaching its end. The federal government depends increasingly on borrowed money to pay its bills, and many state and local governments are similarly confronting the reality that they are spending more money than they collect. In Washington, debates about tax cuts have yielded to debates about who should pay more.

President Obama campaigned for re-election on a promise to take a larger share of taxable income above roughly \$250,000 a year. The White House is now negotiating with Congressional Republicans, who instead want to raise some money by reducing tax deductions. Federal spending cuts also are at issue.

If a deal is not struck by year's end, a wide range of federal tax cuts passed since 2000 will expire and taxes will rise for roughly 90 percent of Americans, according to the independent Tax Policy Center. For lower-income households, taxation would spike well above 1980 levels. Upper-income households would lose some but not all of the benefits of tax cuts over the last three decades.

Public debate over taxes has typically focused on the federal income tax, but that now accounts for less than a third of the total tax revenues collected by federal, state and local governments. To analyze the total burden, *The Times* created a model, in consultation with experts, which estimated total tax bills for each taxpayer in each year from 1980, when the election of President Ronald Reagan opened an era of tax cutting, up to 2010, the most recent year for which relevant data is available.

The analysis shows that the overall burden of taxation declined as a share of income in the 1980s, rose to a new peak in the 1990s and fell again in the 2000s. Tax rates at most income levels were lower in 2010 than at any point during the 1980s.

Governments still collected the same share of total income in 2010 as in 1980 — 31 cents from every dollar — because people with higher incomes pay taxes at higher rates, and household incomes rose over the last three decades, particularly at the top.

There are now many more millionaires, in other words, paying more than they did in 1980, but they are paying less than they would have if tax laws had remained unchanged. And while they still pay a larger share of income in taxes than the rest of the population, the difference has narrowed significantly.

The trend can be seen by comparing three examples:

- A household making \$350,000 in 2010, roughly the cutoff for the top 1 percent, on average paid 42.1 percent of its income in taxes, compared with 49 percent for a household with the same inflation-adjusted income in 1980 — a savings of about \$24,100.
- A household making \$52,000 in 2010, roughly the median income, on average paid 27.7 percent of its income in taxes, compared with 30.5 percent in 1980, saving \$1,500.
- A household making \$22,000 in 2010 — roughly the federal poverty line for a family of four — on average paid 19.4 percent in taxes, compared with 20.2 percent, saving \$200.

Jared Bernstein, who served as chief economist to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., said the *Times* analysis highlighted the need to raise taxes on the affluent and cut taxes for the poor. He cautioned that the middle class most likely would need to pay more, too.

“When you look at these numbers, you understand why we’re not collecting the revenue we need to support the spending we want,” said Mr. Bernstein, a senior fellow at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a liberal research group. “We’ve really gutted the system.”

But Douglas Holtz-Eakin, a prominent conservative economist, said the changes in taxation over the last three decades reflected a conscious and successful strategy to encourage economic growth that should be reinforced, not reversed.

Mr. Holtz-Eakin, a former director of the Congressional Budget Office who is the president of the American Action Forum, said government should reduce deficits primarily through spending cuts, particularly to Medicare and Medicaid, the health programs that are the largest source of projected increases in the federal debt.

“We can’t grow our way out of it, and we can’t tax our way out of it,” he said of the government’s fiscal predicament. “We have a spending problem, period.”

Mr. Hicks, like many residents of Belleville, views this debate with unhappiness. He would like the government to cut spending but not reduce services. He is certain that the government should not raise taxes on the middle class, a group in which he includes himself, but he is ambivalent about asking anyone to pay more. Higher taxes would hurt his businesses, he said, so raising taxes on those who make more money seems likely to hurt their businesses, too.

“At this point, I guess it’s inevitable in order to get us out of this hole,” Mr. Hicks said of higher taxes. “Illinois is in bad shape, along with a lot of the nation. But I don’t feel like we should tax the middle class any more than we are right now. There’s going to come a point where they take the incentive out of working hard.”

If the government cut his taxes, Mr. Hicks said, he would use the money to put a roof over the picnic tables outside the restaurant, expanding the year-round seating area. He already employs 14 people; then he could hire more.

And if taxes rose? Would Mr. Hicks, who started working when tax rates were higher, really choose to slow down?

He smiled. "No," he said. "I like it. What else would I do with my time?"

### Cutting from Both Ends

The federal income tax, which will turn 100 next year, is in decline.

Congressional Republicans and Democrats have repeatedly voted to reduce the share of income that people must pay. Over the last decade, annual revenues from federal taxation of individual and corporate income averaged just 9.2 percent of the nation's gross domestic product, the lowest level for any 10-year period since World War II.

The recession and new rounds of tax cuts further reduced revenues, to 7.6 percent of economic output in the 2009 and 2010 fiscal years. Stronger economic growth has produced a modest increase in tax collections, but the White House budget office estimates that collections for the fiscal year that ended in September will total 9 percent of economic output, still less than before the financial crisis.

Federal spending, meanwhile, grew faster than the economy over the last decade — particularly during the recession. To pay those bills, the government borrowed more money than it collected in income taxes in each of the last three fiscal years, something it had not done in even a single year since World War II, federal data show.

Congress could have eliminated those deficits by cutting spending. It might also have averted those deficits by leaving the tax code unchanged. The government on average would have collected an additional \$800 billion in each year from 2006 to 2010 if the 1980 code had remained in effect and economic activity had continued at the same pace, the *Times* analysis found. The annual federal deficits during those years averaged \$714 billion.

Leaving the tax code as it was in 1980, however, would not have solved the nation's long-term fiscal problems. Increases in federal spending, driven primarily by the rising cost of health care, are projected to outstrip even the revenue-raising capacity of the 1980 tax code in the coming decades, necessitating some combination of spending cuts and tax increases.

The income tax stands apart from other forms of taxation. It is the reason that upper-income households pay a larger share of their income in taxes than the rest of the population. The combined burden of all other federal, state and local taxes takes roughly the same share from all taxpayers. And many Americans — even in a middle-class, Democratic stronghold like Belleville — have misgivings about imposing higher tax rates on the affluent, an important reason that income taxation has declined.

The share of Americans who said high-income households paid too little in taxes fell from 77 percent in 1992 to 62 percent in 2012, according to Gallup, even as income inequality rose to the highest levels since the Great Depression.

Some people in Belleville subscribe to the argument that higher tax rates impede economic growth by discouraging investment. For others, it is a matter of fairness.

Anita Thole, a middle-income safety supervisor for a utility contractor, is not wealthy. She does not expect that she ever will be. She is a single mother with a daughter in college, and she said she regarded the wealthy with a mixture of envy and admiration. But she does not want them to pay higher taxes.

"They work their butt off to get what they got," she said. "I wouldn't want them to pay more so that I can pay less."

Do they work harder than you?

"What? No. I work my butt off," Ms. Thole, 46, said. "But you got to believe in the American dream. You got to love them for what they did, for what they made of themselves and for being more aggressive than me."

Ms. Thole, like many in Belleville, is also convinced that governments could avoid raising taxes by adopting more frugal habits.

"There's some days we stay home and we eat peanut butter," she said.

What would she like governments to cut?

"I really like it when they cut the weeds along the highway," she said. "I like it when there's good roads to drive on. The schools, I don't know, I don't want to pull back from the schools. I don't have the answer of where to pull back.

"I want the state parks to stay open. I want, I want, I want. I want Big Bird. I think it's beautiful. What don't I want? I don't know."

### To Tax or Not to Tax?

William L. Enyart is a rarity in Belleville: he wants to raise his own taxes.

Mr. Enyart and his wife are lawyers, although for the last five years he led the Illinois National Guard. The couple made \$380,587 in 2011 and paid \$104,864 in federal taxes. His conviction that they should have paid more may not be shared by many of the area's higher-income residents. But as the newly elected Democratic congressman for southwestern Illinois, Mr. Enyart, 63, is also the only man in town with a direct vote on federal tax policy.

Mr. Enyart, who won the seat of a retiring Democratic congressman, campaigned in part on his support for Mr. Obama's tax plan. He defeated a Republican candidate who opposed it, 52 percent to 43 percent. But Mr. Enyart said he heard little enthusiasm for tax increases in his district. What has changed, he said, is that people are increasingly concerned about cuts to government benefits and services.

"Nobody likes to pay taxes. Nobody wants to raise taxes on anybody," Mr. Enyart said. "But nobody wants to cut veterans services, nobody wants to give up that Interstate highway, nobody wants — pick the service that you like. These are necessary services, and they need to be paid for."

The tax increase proposed by Mr. Obama, on taxable income — income after deductions and other adjustments — above \$250,000 a year, would pay for only a small part of those services. It would reduce the projected deficit over the next decade by a little less than 10 percent, according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Nonetheless, Mr. Enyart said that he did not support broader tax increases. The focus, he said, should be on requiring the rich to pay more.

"We have the greatest disproportion of wealth since 1928, and I don't think that's a healthy thing," he said. "How much money is enough? Do hedge fund traders really need to make a billion dollars a year and pay only 15 percent in taxes when we have teachers making \$50,000 and paying 20 percent?"

John Siemens, who did not vote for Mr. Enyart, said that kind of "raise taxes" talk was a crowd-pleasing distraction from the need for painful spending cuts.

Mr. Siemens and his wife, Jan, both 59, own a company with a pair of factories in southwestern Illinois where workers assemble dollar-bill scanners for vending machines, dashboard lights for automobiles, magnetic probes for hospitals and other electronic equipment. They earned about \$250,000 last year, so Mr. Obama's plan would not have increased their income taxes. But it would raise the estate taxes they would have to pay to pass the company to their children someday.

Like many opponents of the president's plan, Mr. Siemens thinks higher taxes will discourage investment and slow economic growth.

"There's some tax rates that probably do need to be raised," he said. "There are some that need to be lowered. But the politicians are not having an honest discussion. Is it fair or not fair is not the question. The question is, If you want to raise revenues, does that make sense or not?"

He noted as an example that interest on municipal bonds is tax-exempt, which encourages the wealthy to lend to local governments.

"Those lower tax rates were put into place for a reason," he said. "It's not just, let's give the wealthy a break."

Mr. Siemens does have a concern about fairness. He believes that lower-income households are not paying enough in taxes.

"By any measure, the wealthy are still paying a disproportionate amount of their income in taxes," he said. "Is that fair or not fair? I don't know, but I have an issue with the dramatic reduction of taxes at the low end because I think everybody needs some skin in the game."

The debate is no longer theoretical here in Illinois. Facing perhaps the deepest budget crisis of any state, the Illinois legislature last year raised the state income tax rate to 5 percent from 3 percent. Unlike the federal income tax, Illinois taxes all income at the same rate.

Mr. Enyart said that the state needed more revenue, but that it should move to a tax system that imposed a heavier burden on high-income households. Mr. Siemens said the state should have cut spending.

The higher taxes have increased his costs and given an advantage to competitors in other states. And there are broader ripples, too: he said he was planning to buy some used machines, rather than new ones, to save money.

"We feel the burden of that, but it hasn't gotten to the threshold of pain yet where we would move," Mr. Siemens said. "There's a lot of expense that would be incurred in moving, including a disruption of the work force, which you are always loath to do."

### View From the Lower End

Taylor McCallister, 20, works the front window at Mr. Hicks's barbecue restaurant, taking orders from customers. She also works a second job and attends Southwestern Illinois College. She earned about \$30,000 last year and, like her boss, she wishes the government would take less of that money.

"When I see my check it's like, damn, that's a huge chunk that was taken out," she said. "I could have been making \$450 instead of \$378."

Mitt Romney's remarks about the "47 percent" focused public attention on the rising share of Americans who do not pay federal income taxes, a trend that has encouraged the public perception that lower-income households are getting a sweetheart deal. The share of Americans who think lower-income households pay too little in taxes increased to 24 percent in 2012 from 8 percent in 1992, according to Gallup.

But low-wage workers like Ms. McCallister still pay federal payroll taxes, which provide financing for Social Security and Medicare. They still pay sales taxes. Even if they are renters, they still bear the cost of property taxes in the form of higher rents.

And those taxes have climbed most quickly in recent decades.

The average American in 2010 paid 30 percent more of income in payroll taxes than in 1980, even while paying 27 percent less in federal income taxes. As a result, revenue from the payroll tax almost equaled income tax revenue before a temporary payroll tax cut took effect in 2011. The cut is scheduled to expire at the end of this year.

The rise of the payroll tax reflects the general movement away from requiring upper-income households to pay a larger share of income in taxes. All workers pay the same Social Security tax on wages below a threshold, which stood at \$106,800 in 2010. The Medicare tax imposes a single rate on all wages, without a threshold.

Some experts argue, however, that payroll taxes are a special case because workers are entitled to Social Security benefits based in part on the amounts that they pay in taxes — a system more akin to a pension plan than an income tax.

In Illinois, the average burden of state and local taxes rose to 10.2 percent of income in 2010 from 8.8 percent in 1980, even before the latest round of tax increases last year.

And Illinois, like most states, takes a larger share of income from those who make less. Illinois households earning less than \$25,000 a year on average paid 14.3 percent of income in state and local taxes in 2010, while those earning more than \$200,000 paid 9.4 percent, according to the *Times* analysis.

Ms. McCallister said she and her friends worry about the nation's financial problems. Their answer is simple: Someone has to pay more, and the affluent can best afford to do so. She said it was time to reverse a trend that had been going on so long it predated her birth by a decade.

"I want to know honestly how the more wealthy feel," she said between tending to customers. "You'd think that they would want to help. We're working these kinds of jobs and that's what we have to do to make it through, and there's other people making all this money. I don't get it, honestly.

"I feel that maybe people who don't make as much shouldn't have to pay as much in. But who makes the rules?"

"Not me."

**20121202-03** 13:25 SteveG "The 3 Unofficial GOP Rules That Are Making a Deficit Deal Even Harder"

"The 3 Unofficial GOP Rules That Are Making a Deficit Deal Even Harder" by David Welna, NPR

Dec. 2, 2012, (<http://www.npr.org/blogs/itsallpolitics/2012/12/02/166268748/the-3-unofficial-gop-rules-that-are-making-a-deficit-deal-even-harder>)

Making an already head-splittingly difficult deal on the fiscal cliff even harder to resolve is a set of three rules by which the Republicans who run the House play.

These are not official regulations; they're more shibboleths that House GOP leaders have adopted in recent years. And those rules are leaving House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, little room to maneuver as lawmakers try to avoid a set of tax increases and spending cuts set to take effect at the end of the year.

#### 1. "The majority of the majority"

According to President Obama, keeping tax rates unchanged for the bottom 98 percent of taxpayers come Jan. 1 should be simple.

The Senate has already passed a bill freezing all but the top two rates of the Bush-era tax cuts, he told a group of factory workers on Friday. "If we can just get a few House Republicans on board, we can pass the bill in the House, it will land on my desk, and I am ready — I have got a bunch of pens ready — to sign this bill."

But that Senate bill has been stymied by the House GOP leadership's deference to what's known as "the majority of the majority." Under this de facto rule, no bill is brought up for a vote when Republicans control the House unless a majority of their caucus supports it.

So while there may well be enough Republicans willing to break ranks and vote with Democrats to pass that Senate bill, Rep. Tom Cole of Oklahoma, the GOP's deputy whip, said that's just not going to happen: "You're not going to come up here and be able to put together a deal with 170 Democrats and 40 Republicans — that's just not in the cards."

Longtime Congress-watcher Norm Ornstein of the American Enterprise Institute said the majority of the majority rule is a major reason why bills passed on a bipartisan basis in the Senate don't come up in the House.

"We've got the Republicans now as a parliamentary-style minority. In a parliamentary system, it is just a matter of course that the parties unite together in opposition to the other side," he said. "But you can't function that way with divided government."

## 2. Any increase in the debt ceiling must be matched by an equal decrease in spending

With the rise of the Tea Party came this rule governing increases in the nation's borrowing limit — and one has to happen very soon.

Boehner's insistence on such a dollar-for-dollar deal led to last year's debt ceiling crisis; last week he said he'll do the same this time.

"I continue to believe that any increase in the debt limit has to be accompanied by spending reductions that meet or exceed it," he said.

Ornstein says that when Boehner became speaker nearly two years ago, he privately warned fellow Republicans they would have to make some concessions as the governing party, especially when it came to raising the debt ceiling.

Boehner's new rule, Ornstein said, is "a very real change from where he had been initially, and partly reflecting, I think, the reality of his leadership, which is he's got to run a little faster to get out in front of his mob."

## 3. No new taxes

After Obama's re-election, Boehner softened this rule a bit, though not enough to accommodate the tax rate increases on the wealthy that the president seeks.

"We're willing to put revenues on the table, but revenues that come from closing loopholes, getting rid of special interest deductions, and not raising rates," Boehner said Friday.

Some of the speaker's fellow House Republicans are now saying there's nothing in this rule that keeps them from extending tax cuts for most people now rather than risk all those cuts expiring Jan. 1.

One such Republican is Cole, the deputy whip.

"I don't think in this situation nailing down the Bush tax cuts and making them permanent for 98 percent is somehow a violation," he said.

All three rules have left Boehner on the hot seat, Stanford political scientist Bruce Cain said.

"He clearly can't adhere to these rules and cut a deal with Obama, but at the same time, if he breaks these rules he could be undermining his position as leader," Cain said. "So he's in a very difficult position."

If there's to be a deal, Cain said, Boehner may well have to break at least one of his rules.

"Who's Got a More Presidential Brain?" by Helen Fisher, *Newsweek/The Daily Beast*

Oct. 29, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/2012/10/28/obama-romney-and-the-genetics-of-politics.html>)

Barack Obama and Mitt Romney may appear to be originals. But they—like all the rest of us—have inherited some of their political perspectives.

The "genetics of politics," as academics call this budding field, is beginning to establish some of the biological foundations of conservative and liberal attitudes and voting habits. Recently, Peter Hatemi of Pennsylvania State University and Rose McDermott of Brown University reevaluated much of the evidence, concluding that "genetic influences account for a substantial portion of individual differences in political traits"—perhaps as much as 40 to 60 percent.

Pundits have saturated us with accounts of Obama's childhood and Romney's Mormonism. But though each man's history may play a role, that history isn't the whole story: we need to know who they are, biologically and genetically speaking.

From my research, I have come to believe that humankind has evolved four broad primary styles of thinking and behaving, each associated with one of four universal brain systems: the testosterone, estrogen, serotonin, and dopamine systems. Each of us is a unique mix of all of these, of course, but we express the traits of some more than others. Hence those who are particularly expressive of traits linked with testosterone I call Directors; those primarily expressive of estrogen I call Negotiators; of serotonin, Builders; and of dopamine, Explorers. My information comes from multiple sources, including brain scanning, genetics, neurotransmitter and hormone systems, and a scientific questionnaire I constructed, which resides on the dating site Chemistry.com, a subsidiary of Match.com, and which has been taken by more than 12 million people. (Match.com is owned by IAC, which also owns Newsweek.)

Obama and Romney share several of the Director traits, but beyond these, their similarities end. Which man is better built (biologically) to improve bipartisanship in Congress? Which is likely to win the game of brinksmanship with Iran? Personality has patterns. And analyzing those patterns may give voters a deeper perspective into these somewhat enigmatic men.

#### Testosterone: Obama and Romney Score High

Much is known about testosterone and its effects on behavior. As fetal testosterone washes over the developing brain, it enhances visual and spatial perception, and builds the capacity for deep but relatively few interests and a keen understanding of "rule-based systems," from mechanics to computers, math, engineering, or music. This is Romney to a T. If R.B. Scott, a fellow Mormon who has followed Romney's career for more than 20 years, has it right in his book *Mitt Romney: An Inside Look at the Man and His Politics*, Romney likes nothing better than to be tucking into a mountain of spreadsheets. Testosterone is linked with an acute sensitivity to rank and the drive to be top dog, No. 1. Romney has worked assiduously to achieve high rank in the Mormon Church.

Data also link testosterone with the tendencies to be less socially aware, with poorer emotion recognition, less eye contact, and less verbal fluency. Perhaps this is why Romney makes so many gaffes. He appears to be less empathetic, too. A prominent member of Boston's business community who has known Romney for years said of him, "But there's no heart, like the Tin Man." To be fair, this lack of emotional expression may stem from another testosterone-related trait, "emotional containment."

Obama shares some of Romney's testosterone-linked traits. Some regard him as aloof, a variation of "emotional containment." Both men also tend to be self-confident, assertive, independent, and competitive. Scott writes that to Romney, a game of pickup basketball in the driveway almost always turns into a "blood sport"; Obama is apparently equally competitive, even in a game of tennis with Michelle. Additionally, both men appear to be acutely analytical, exacting, and data-driven—all traits linked with elevated-testosterone activity.

Will this style of thinking and behaving be good for the U.S. today? It will certainly challenge Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (another high-testosterone individual), but it may be lethal when dealing with the far more socially nuanced leaders of China and the rest of Asia.

### Estrogen: Obama Scores High

If Romney shows more traits of the testosterone system, Obama is noticeably more expressive of traits linked with estrogen—which is not strictly a female hormone; football players often express elevated estrogen. The effects of estrogen begin in the womb, contributing to a more contextual, holistic, big-picture, long-term view, as well as superb linguistic skills. Obama expresses these traits in spades. Jodi Kantor, in *The Obamas*, reports that he retreats to his office after Michelle and the girls have gone to bed to pour over information on the issues of the day. Absorbing vast quantities of data and ideas on a broad range of topics is Obama's forte. He also has verbal talents, and is known as a gifted public speaker.

<a href="#">20121202-09</a>	21:15	Tom	How to Hack an Electronic Road Sign
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Don't try this!

<http://imgur.com/gallery/ihUTS>

<a href="#">20121202-10</a>	23:06	SteveG	"Grover Norquist, Enemy of the State?"
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[I messed-up getting this in last Friday's *FotM Newsletter*. Sorry. –SteveB]

"Grover Norquist, Enemy of the State?" by Thom Hartmann, AlterNet

Nov. 26, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/grover-norquist-enemy-state>)

(Norquist has connived over the years to get hundreds of members of Congress to violate their own oath of office by pledging to keep billionaires' taxes low.)

Is it possible that Grover Norquist, the multi-millionaire K-Street lobbyist long funded by billionaires, is an enemy of the state?

Pretty strong language, but consider that he has connived over the years to get hundreds of members of Congress to violate their own oath of office by pledging a higher oath to keep billionaires' taxes low than their pledge to the Constitution itself.

The requirement for Members of Congress to swear an oath to our country is in the Constitution itself, in Article Six: "The Senators and Representatives ... shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution..."

So, starting with the first Congress, in 1789, members were sworn in by saying, "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States."

But during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln supported, and Congress passed on July 2nd, 1862, legislation requiring an oath that added that members of Congress had not previously engaged in any "criminal or disloyal conduct," which would have included pledging loyalty to the Confederacy. It was called the "Ironclad Test Oath," and was designed to keep Confederate sympathizers out of Congress. If a member swore it, and it was discovered he'd previously violated it by swearing an oath to the Confederacy, he would be prosecuted for perjury.

After the Civil War, that oath was replaced with one that didn't specifically exclude former members of the Confederacy, but still required members to pledge an oath, first and foremost, to the Constitution. Now called the

"Modern Oath," it was enacted in 1884 and is used to this day. Its first sentence says: "I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion..."

And the Constitution, to which they take the Modern Oath, explicitly says that Congress has the explicit power to impose taxes, both to pay for our defense and to provide for the General Welfare of the nation. The very first sentence of Article One, Section Eight, says: "The Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States;..."

So, how is it possible that, when the Constitution explicitly says that one of the specific jobs of Congress is to "lay and collect taxes," and the oath they take explicitly says that they take will do so "without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion," that a member of Congress could possibly swear an oath to a multimillionaire K-Street lobbyist to refuse to perform one of their Constitutional duties?

And what sort of member of Congress would willingly swear an oath to a front man for a small group of billionaires, that that member of Congress would violate the oath he or she swore to follow the Constitution without "mental reservations" or "purpose of evasion"? Is not a man who essentially uses threats – blackmail – that billionaire money will be used to politically destroy members of Congress who refuse to sign his pledge an enemy of the state itself – or at least an enemy of the very Constitution that lawmakers have sworn to uphold without mental reservation or evasion?

Grover Norquist has led hundreds of Republican lawmakers to the brink of treason, swearing to him that they will carry into office mental reservations about the taxation power the Constitution gives them. It's high time to dethrone Grover, and let Congress go back to doing its Constitutionally-mandated job of taking care of the nation's defense and general welfare, instead of just looking out for the nation's defense contractors and cranky billionaires.



<http://www.wildmontana.org/photocontest/>



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #283 — DEC. 4, 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.**

## **Nobody Builds Much Here Anymore**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 4, 2012)

The decline of America may be invisible in the short run, but, unless you are very young, look back at your life and you will see the decline all around you. A particularly sad example is my little hometown of Greencastle, Indiana, which feels like a ghost town compared to when I grew up there. More examples of American exceptionalism and universal progress toward Heaven on Earth follow in today's lead article:

"How Wall Street Hollowed Out Industrial America" by Steve Fraser, *Mother Jones*/TomDispatch

Dec. 3, 2012, (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/12/how-wall-street-hollowed-out-industrial-america>)

(Forget the fiscal cliff. America's real problem is a Wall Street that has eaten up industrial America and threatens to consume the rest of us.)



"Debtocalypse" looms. Depending on who wins out in Washington, we're told, we will either free fall over the fiscal cliff or take a terrifying slide to the pit at the bottom. Grim as these scenarios might seem, there is something confected about the *mise-en-scène*, like an un-fun Playland. After all, there is no fiscal cliff, or at least there was none—until the two parties built it.

And yet the pit exists. It goes by the name of "austerity." However, it didn't just appear in time for the last election season or the lame-duck session of Congress to follow. It was dug more than a generation ago, and has been getting wider and deeper ever since. Millions of people have long made it their home. "Debtocalypse" is merely the latest installment in a tragic, 40-year-old story of the dispossession of American working people.

Think of it as the archeology of decline, or a tale of two worlds. As a long generation of austerity politics hollowed out the heartland, the quants and traders and financial wizards of Wall Street gobbled up ever more of the nation's resources. It was another Great Migration— instead of people, though, trillions of dollars were being sucked out of industrial America and turned into "financial instruments" and new, exotic forms of wealth. If blue-collar Americans were the particular victims here, then high finance is what consumed them. Now, it promises to consume the rest of us.

### Scenes from the Museum

In the mid-1970s, Hugh Carey, then governor of New York, was already noting the hollowing out of his part of America. New York City, after all, was threatening to go bankrupt. Plenty of other cities and states across what was then known as the "Frost Belt" were in similar shape. Yankeedom, in Carey's words, was turning into "a great national museum" where tourists could visit "the great railroad stations where the trains used to run."

As it happened, the tourists weren't interested. Abandoned railroad stations might be fetching in an eerie sort of way, but the rest of the museum was filled with artifacts of recent ruination that were too depressing to be entertaining. True, a century earlier, during the first Gilded Age, the upper crust used to amuse itself by taking guided tours of the urban demi-monde, thrilling to sites of exotic depravity or ethnic strangeness. They traipsed around "rag-pickers alley" on New York's Lower East Side or the opium dens of Chinatown, or ghoulishly watched poor children salivate over toys in store window displays they could never hope to touch.

Times have changed. The preference now is to entirely remove the unsightly. Nonetheless, the national museum of industrial homicide has, city by city, decade by decade, grown more grotesque.

Camden, New Jersey, for example, had long been a robust, diversified small industrial city. By the early 1970s, however, its reform mayor Angelo Errichetti was describing it this way: "It looked like the Vietcong had bombed us to get even. The pride of Camden... was now a rat-infested skeleton of yesterday, a visible obscenity of urban decay. The years of neglect, slumlord exploitation, tenant abuse, government bungling, indecisive and short-sighted policy had transformed the city's housing, business, and industrial stock into a ravaged, rat-infested cancer on a sick, old industrial city."

That was 40 years ago and yet, today, news stories are still being written about Camden's never-ending decline into some bottomless abyss. Consider that a measure of how long it takes to shut down a way of life.

Once upon a time, Youngstown, Ohio, was a typical smokestack city, part of the steel belt running through Pennsylvania and Ohio. As with Camden, things there started turning south in the 1970s. From 1977 to 1987, the city lost 50,000 jobs in steel and related industries. By the late 1980s, the years of Ronald Reagan's presidency when it was "morning again in America," it was midnight in Youngstown: foreclosures, an epidemic of business bankruptcies, and everywhere collapsing community institutions including churches, unions, families, and the municipal government itself.

Burglaries, robberies, and assaults doubled after the steel plants closed. In two years, child abuse rose by 21%, suicides by 70%. One-eighth of Mahoning County went on welfare. Streets were filled with dead storefronts and the detritus of abandoned homes: scrap metal and wood shingles, shattered glass, stripped-away home siding, canning jars, and rusted swing sets. Each week, 1,500 people visited the Salvation Army's soup line.

The *Wall Street Journal* called Youngstown "a necropolis," noting miles of "silent, empty steel mills" and a pervasive sense of fear and loss. Bruce Springsteen would soon memorialize that loss in "The Ghost of Tom Joad."

If you were unfortunate enough to live in the small industrial city of Mansfield, Ohio, for the last 40 years, you would have witnessed in microcosm the dystopia of destruction unfolding in similar places everywhere. For a century, workshops there had made a kaleidoscope of goods: stoves, tires, steel, machinery, refrigerators, and cars. Then Mansfield's rust belt started narrowing as one plant after another went shut down: Dominion Electric in 1971, Mansfield Tire and Rubber in 1978, Hoover Plastics in 1980, National Seating in 1985, Tappan Stoves in 1986, a Westinghouse plant and Ohio Brass in 1990, Wickes Lumber in 1997, Crane Plumbing in 2003, Neer Manufacturing in 2007, and Smurfit-Stone Container in 2009. In 2010, General Motors closed its largest, most modern US stamping factory, and thanks to the Great Recession, Con-way Freight, Value City, and Card Camera also shut down.

"Good times" or bad, it didn't matter. Mansfield shrank relentlessly, becoming the urban equivalent of skin and bones. Its poverty rate is now at 28%, its median income \$11,000 below the national average of \$41,994. What manufacturing remains is non-union and \$10 an hour is considered a good wage.

Midway through this industrial *auto-da-fé*, a journalist watching the Campbell Works of Youngstown Sheet and Tube go dark, mused that "the dead steel mills stand as pathetic mausoleums to the decline of American industrial might that was once the envy of the world." This dismal record is particularly impressive because it encompasses the "boom times" presided over by Presidents Reagan and Clinton.

### The "Pit" Deepens

In 1988, in the iciest part of the Frost Belt, a *Wall Street Journal* reporter noted, "There are two Americas now, and they grow further apart each day." He was referring to Eastport, Maine. Although the deepest port on the East Coast, it hosted few ships, abandoned sardine factories lined its shore, and its bars were filled with the under- and unemployed. The reporter pointed out that he had seen similar scenes from a collapsing rural economy "coast to coast, border to border": shuttered saw mills, abandoned mines, closed schools, rutted roads, ghost airports.

Closing up, shutting down, going out of business: last one to leave please turn out the lights!

Such was the case in cities and towns around the country. Essential public services—garbage collection, policing, fire protection, schools, street maintenance, health-care—were atrophying. So were the people who lived in those places. High blood pressure, cardiac and digestive problems, and mortality rates were generally rising, as was doubt, self-blame, guilt, anxiety, and depression. The drying up of social supports, even among those who once had been friends and workmates, haunted the inhabitants of these places as much as the industrial skeletons around them.

In the 1980s, when Jack Welch, soon to be known as "Neutron Jack" for his ruthlessness, became CEO of General Electric, he set out to raise the company's stock price by gutting the workforce. It only took him six years, but imagine what it was like in Schenectady, New York, which lost 22,000 jobs; Louisville, Kentucky, where 13,000 fewer people made appliances; Evendale, Ohio, where 12,000 no longer made lights and light fixtures; Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where 8,000 plastics makers lost their jobs; and Erie, Pennsylvania, where 6,000 locomotive workers got green slips.

Life as it had been lived in GE's or other one-company towns ground to a halt. Two travelling observers, Dale Maharidge and Michael Williamson, making their way through the wasteland of middle America in 1984 spoke of "medieval cities of rusting iron" and a largely invisible landscape filling up with an army of transients, moving from place to place at any hint of work. They were camped out under bridges, riding freight cars, living in makeshift tents in fetid swamps, often armed, trusting no one, selling their blood, eating out of dumpsters.

Nor was the calamity limited to the northern Rust Belt. The South and Southwest did not prove immune from this wasting disease either. Empty textile mills, often originally runaways from the North, dotted the Carolinas, Georgia, and elsewhere. Half the jobs lost due to plant closings or relocations occurred in the Sunbelt.

In 2008, in the sunbelt town of Colorado Springs, Colorado, one-third of the city's street lights were extinguished, police helicopters were sold, watering and fertilizing in the parks was eliminated from the budget, and surrounding suburbs closed down the public bus system. During the recent Great Recession one-industry towns like Dalton, Georgia ("the carpet capital of the world"), or Blakely, Georgia ("the peanut capital of the world"), or Elkhart, Indiana ("the RV capital of the world") were closing libraries, firing police chiefs, and taking other desperate measures to survive.

And no one can forget Detroit. Once, it had been a world-class city, the country's fourth largest, full of architectural gems. In the 1950s, Detroit had a population with the highest median income and highest rate of home ownership in urban America. Now, the "motor city" haunts the national imagination as a ghost town. Home to two million a quarter-century ago, its decrepit hulk is now "home" to 900,000. Between 2000 and 2010 alone, the population hemorrhaged by 25%, nearly a quarter of a million people, almost as many as live in post-Katrina New Orleans. There and in other core industrial centers like Baltimore, "death zones" have emerged where whole neighborhoods verge on medical collapse.

One-third of Detroit, an area the size of San Francisco, is now little more than empty houses, empty factories, and fields gone feral. A whole industry of demolition, waste-disposal, and scrap-metal companies arose to tear down what once had been. With a jobless rate of 29%, some of its citizens are so poor they can't pay for funerals, so bodies pile up at mortuaries. Plans are even afoot to let the grasslands and forests take over, or to give the city to private enterprise.

Even the public zoo has been privatized. With staff and animals reduced to the barest of minimums and living wages endangered by its new owner, an associate curator working with elephants and rhinos went in search of another job. He found it with the city—chasing down feral dogs whose population had skyrocketed as the cityscape returned to wilderness. History had, it seemed, abandoned dogs along with their human compatriots.

### Looking Backward

But could this just be the familiar story of capitalism's penchant for "creative destruction"? The usual tale of old ways disappearing, sometimes painfully, as part of the story of progress as new wonders appear in their place?

Imagine for a moment the time traveler from *Looking Backward*, Edward Bellamy's best-selling utopian novel of 1888 waking up in present-day America. Instead of the prosperous land filled with technological wonders and egalitarian harmony Bellamy envisioned, his protagonist would find an unnervingly familiar world of decaying cities, people growing ever poorer and sicker, bridges and roads crumbling, sweatshops a commonplace, the largest prison population on the planet, workers afraid to stand up to their bosses, schools failing, debts growing more onerous, and inequalities starker than ever.

A recent grim statistic suggests just how Bellamy's utopian hopes have given way to an increasingly dystopian reality. For the first time in American history, the life expectancy of white people, men and women, has actually dropped. Life spans for the least educated, in particular, have fallen by about four years since 1990. The steepest decline: white women lacking a high school diploma. They, on average, lost five years of life, while white men lacking a diploma lost three years.

Unprecedented for the United States, these numbers come close to the catastrophic decline Russian men experienced in the desperate years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Similarly, between 1985 and 2010, American women fell from 14th to 41st place in the United Nation's ranking of international life expectancy. (Among developed countries, American women now rank last.) Whatever combination of factors produced this social statistic, it may be the rawest measure of a society in the throes of economic anorexia.

One other marker of this eerie story of a developed nation undergoing underdevelopment and a striking reproach to a cherished national faith: for the first time since the Great Depression, the social mobility of Americans is moving in reverse. In every decade from the 1970s on, fewer people have been able to move up the income ladder than in the previous 10 years. Now Americans in their thirties earn 12% less on average than their parents' generation at the same age. Danes, Norwegians, Finns, Canadians, Swedes, Germans, and the French now all enjoy higher rates

of upward mobility than Americans. Remarkably, 42% of American men raised in the bottom one-fifth income cohort remain there for life, as compared to 25% in Denmark and 30% in notoriously class-stratified Great Britain.

### Eating Our Own

Laments about "the vanishing middle class" have become commonplace, and little wonder. Except for those in the top 10% of the income pyramid, everyone is on the down escalator. The United States now has the highest percentage of low-wage workers—those who earn less than two-thirds of the median wage—of any developed nation. George Carlin once mordantly quipped, "It's called the American Dream because you have to be asleep to believe it." Now, that joke has become our waking reality.

During the "long nineteenth century," wealth and poverty existed side by side. So they do again. In the first instance, when industrial capitalism was being born, it came of age by ingesting what was valuable embedded in pre-capitalist forms of life and labor, including land, animals, human muscle power, tools and talents, know-how, and the ways of organizing and distributing what got produced. Wealth accumulated in the new economy by extinguishing wealth in the older ones.

"Progress" was the result of this economic metabolism. Whatever its stark human and ecological costs, its achievements were also highly visible. America's capacity to sustain a larger and larger population at rising levels of material well-being, education, and health was its global boast for a century and half.

Shocking statistics about life expectancy and social mobility suggest that those days are over. Wealth, great piles of it, is still being generated, and sometimes displayed so ostentatiously that no one could miss it. Technological marvels still amaze. Prosperity exists, though for an ever-shrinking cast of characters. But a new economic metabolism is visibly at work.

For the last 40 years, prosperity, wealth, and "progress" have rested, at least in part, on a grotesque process of auto-cannibalism—it has also been called "dis-accumulation" by David Harvey—of a society that is devouring its own.

Traditional forms of primitive accumulation still exist abroad. Hundreds of millions of former peasants, fisherman, craftspeople, scavengers, herdsmen, tradesmen, ranchers, and peddlers provide the labor power and cheap products that buoy the bottom lines of global manufacturing and retail corporations, as well as banks and agribusinesses. But here in "the homeland," the very profitability and prosperity of privileged sectors of the economy, especially the bloated financial arena, continue to depend on slicing, dicing, and stripping away what was built up over generations.

Once again a new world has been born. This time, it depends on liquidating the assets of the old one or shipping them abroad to reward speculation in "fictitious capital." Rates of US investment in new plants, technology, and research and development began declining during the 1970s, a fall-off that only accelerated in the gilded 1980s. Manufacturing, which accounted for nearly 30% of the economy after the Second World War, had dropped to just over 10% by 2011. Since the turn of the millennium alone, 3.5 million more manufacturing jobs have vanished and 42,000 manufacturing plants were shuttered.

Nor are we simply witnessing the passing away of relics of the nineteenth century. Today, only one American company is among the top ten in the solar power industry and the US accounts for a mere 5.6% of world production of photovoltaic cells. Only GE is among the top ten companies in wind energy. In 2007, a mere 8% of all new semi-conductor plants under construction globally were located in the US. Of the 1.2 billion cell phones sold in 2009, none were made in the US. The share of semi-conductors, steel, cars, and machine tools made in America has declined precipitously just in the last decade. Much high-end engineering design and R&D work has been offshored. Now, there are more people dealing cards in casinos than running lathes, and almost three times as many security guards as machinists.

### The FIRE Next Time

Meanwhile, for more than a quarter of a century the fastest growing part of the economy has been the finance, insurance, and real estate (FIRE) sector. Between 1980 and 2005, profits in the financial sector increased by 800%, more than three times the growth in non-financial sectors.

In those years, new creations of financial ingenuity, rare or never seen before, bred like rabbits. In the early 1990s, for example, there were a couple of hundred hedge funds; by 2007, 10,000 of them. A whole new species of mortgage broker roamed the land, supplanting old-style savings and loan or regional banks. Fifty thousand mortgage brokerages employed 400,000 brokers, more than the whole US textile industry. A hedge fund manager put it bluntly, "The money that's made from manufacturing stuff is a pittance in comparison to the amount of money made from shuffling money around."

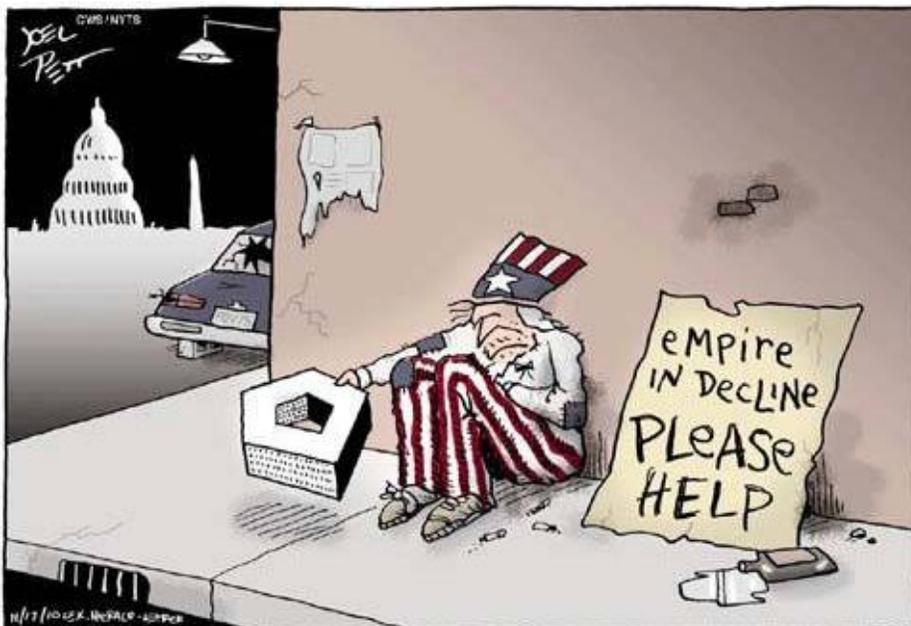
For too long, these two phenomena—the eviscerating of industry and the supersizing of high finance—have been treated as if they had nothing much to do with each other, but were simply occurring coincidentally.

Here, instead, is the fable we've been offered: Sad as it might be for some workers, towns, cities, and regions, the end of industry is the unfortunate, yet necessary, prelude to a happier future pioneered by "financial engineers." Equipped with the mathematical and technological know-how that can turn money into more money (while bypassing the messiness of producing anything), they are our new wizards of prosperity!

Unfortunately, this uplifting tale rests on a categorical misapprehension. The ascendancy of high finance didn't just replace an industrial heartland in the process of being gutted; it initiated that gutting and then lived off it, particularly during its formative decades. The FIRE sector, that is, not only supplanted industry, but grew at its expense—and at the expense of the high wages it used to pay and the capital that used to flow into it.

Think back to the days of junk bonds, leveraged buy-outs, megamergers and acquisitions, and asset stripping in the 1980s and 1990s. (Think, in fact, of Bain Capital.) What was getting bought and stripped and closed up supported windfall profits in high-interest-paying junk bonds. The stupendous fees and commissions that went to those "engineering" such transactions were being picked from the carcass of a century and a half of American productive capacity. The hollowing out of the United States was well under way long before anyone dreamed up the "fiscal cliff."

**For some long time now, our political economy has been driven by investment banks, hedge funds, private equity firms, real estate developers, insurance goliaths, and a whole menagerie of ancillary enterprises that service them. But high times in FIRE land have depended on the downward mobility of working people and the poor, cut adrift from more secure industrial havens and increasingly from the lifelines of public support. They have been living instead in the "pit of austerity." Soon many more of us will join them.**





Lovely Lunch!

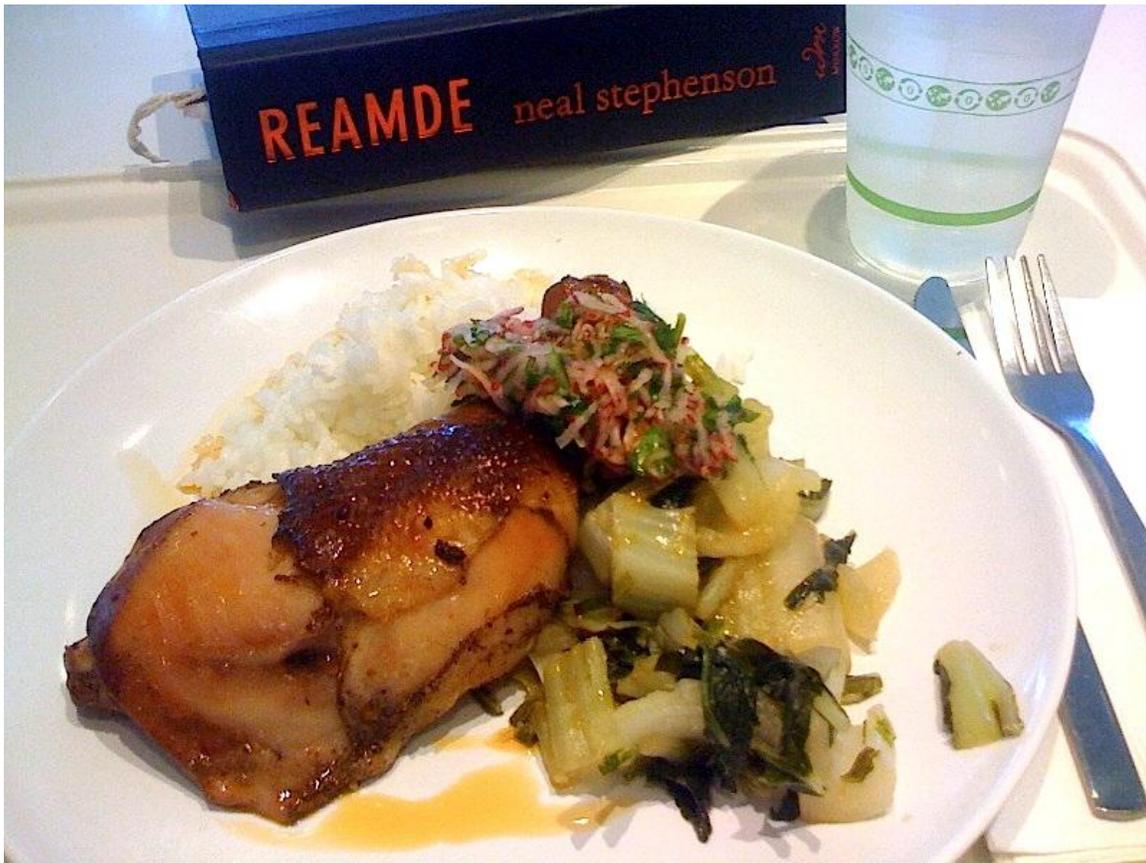
The Far East line got me today. I'd figured, from the menu, of hitting Chef Patricia's station for an irresistible does of her fine pasta in the form of scampi, knowing it was sure to be fine, but was headed off by at least fifteen people, perhaps twenty, who had had the same idea and were queued up accordingly.

This unplanned decision turned out well. I did a quick re-survey, tempted strongly by a grilled pimento cheese sandwich at the Bistro; as I am not a big greens guy, though, I kept circulating and met my match: the Far East line's tea-smoked chicken quarters were shining darkly, and the braised bok choy vegetable component look fresh and beautiful and temptingly vegetabular. I was in; I was there: even after a Sunday lunch of auschicken (this is a bad/loose, inside, cross-cultural pun), these smoky, aromatic chicken quarters just looked spectacular.

Mine was. The smoked tea aroma was in my face all the way from the Line through checkout and the filling of a cup of water at the drinks station, and was still wafting up entrancingly as I slid my tray up against the considerable bulk of "Reamde" (yes, that IS how it's spelled: look carefully!), which I'd left to mark a spot along the window wall. It smelled so doggone primordially good (smoked meat in the cave) that it required real discipline to get the picture taken before disturbing my plate.

Brined smoked fowl is a wonderful thing. Smoking a bird, particularly a smaller one, can really dry out the meat, but brining it (curing, in the words of the menu, so probably more than salt was involved) causes the meat to absorb moisture, and to acquire a slight salty tang that just does wonders in a smoky dish. The result is a springy plumpness, tender and yet resilient; just delightful to eat, and tender enough to strip easily from the bones. I doubt there was much more than a gram of chicken left on the skeletal remains. The Bok Choy was braised in a gingery preparation enhanced with a properly mild dose of star anise that elevated it beyond its expected blandness and gave it a bit of aroma all its own; it was topped with a generous dollop of intriguingly bitter radish-cilantro micro-julienned salad. Following my urologist's guidelines, I had selected the white Nishiki rice, tempted as I was to select the very black rice instead; this turned out to be a great choice anyway, as I doubt that the seasoning in the bok choy would have been as fragrant in contrast with brown/black rice flavors.

Had there been fish today, I'd have missed this, and I am glad that I did not: it was a really yummy plate; I am still smelling and tasting it as I write:



Tea-Smoked Chicken with Bok Choy and Nishiki Rice

[20121203-03](#)

15:11

SteveG

Fw: Video: "Dear Democrats, Please Stick to These 8 Principles from Robert Reich"

from MoveOn.org:

The first thing to know about the so-called "fiscal cliff" is that it's not a cliff—it's a choice. It's a choice between making the 1% richer at the expense of everyone else, or lifting up 100% of Americans. It's a choice between American prosperity and European austerity.

In this sharp new video, former Labor Secretary Robert Reich breaks down the fiscal choice in 2 minutes and 30 seconds—with pictures too. And he gives Democrats the inside scoop on how to fight and win this fiscal showdown for the middle class.

Even if you don't usually watch videos like this, you've got to watch this one. Reich's video on Mitt Romney's economic plan went viral—half a million people watched and shared it—because it was so illuminating. Share this one with your friends and family so they understand what's at stake now, and how we can win.

Watch the video: <http://front.moveon.org/dear-democrats-please-stick-to-these-8-principles-from-robert-reich>.

Thanks for all you do. –Ilya, Garlin, Mark, Elena, and the rest of the team

[20121203-04](#)

16:17

SteveG

Fw: Tell Speaker Boehner to Extend Tax Cuts for the Middle Class!

from Sen. Patty Murray (D. WA):

I'm sure you've heard about the ongoing negotiations on the "fiscal cliff." Let me tell you, it's not just idle talk in Washington D.C.

This conversation is about the lives and futures of middle-class families across America, and whether those families should head into the holiday season not knowing if their taxes will go up.

There's just no reason that should happen.

During the campaign, President Obama and Democrats around the country promised to fight for a budget deal that works for the middle class and calls on the wealthiest Americans to pay their fair share. Republicans countered with plans that would balance the budget on the backs of families who have already sacrificed so much.

The voters spoke loud and clear: middle-class families need a tax cut extension immediately.

Join President Obama and me and tell Speaker Boehner to pass an extension of the middle-class tax cuts right now! Thankfully, the Senate has already passed a bill that would extend tax cuts for 98 percent of Americans and 97 percent of small businesses, and let tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans expire as scheduled.

President Obama is ready to sign that bill, but House Republicans have to pass it first.

There's no reason for them not to. Republicans and Democrats agree that we should extend the middle-class tax cuts. The problem is that House Republicans are trying to hold the bill -- and the middle class -- hostage to protect the wealthy.

With the holiday season approaching, middle-class families should not have to suffer through uncertainty, and potentially even a tax hike.

Tell Speaker Boehner and House Republicans to pass an extension of the middle-class tax cuts right now!

[http://www.democratsenators.org/o/45/p/dia/action3/common/public/index.sjs?action\\_KEY=675](http://www.democratsenators.org/o/45/p/dia/action3/common/public/index.sjs?action_KEY=675)

A few Republicans have come forward and said that we should ensure tax cuts for the middle-class now, and only then finish our serious conversation about the debt. But we need more Republicans to do so.

If we build enough momentum -- and remind Speaker Boehner what the American people said on Election Day -- we can make that happen.

Thank you for your support, Patty Murray, U.S. Senator

<a href="#">20121203-06</a>	16:27	Pam	Re: Tell Speaker Boehner to Extend Tax Cuts for the Middle Class! (reply to SteveG, above)
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What is it with Bonehead and the turtle man? I wonder how much traveling abroad Boehner has done. He needs to see just what desperation is, and he needs to see countries that have the welfare of their citizens uppermost. Canada, Finland, Denmark. We hear about the travails of the Middle East, the drug trade in Latin America, the "threat" of China, but we never see anything about places where things work better and people are more secure and happier than we are here. Americans can be so myopic.

<a href="#">20121203-05</a>	16:23	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Get Pepsi to Help Stop the "Kill the Gays" Bill in Its Tracks!
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from SumOfUs:

In Uganda, it's already illegal to be gay. But some government officials -- with support from American evangelicals - want to take government-sanctioned homophobia a step further. They've proposed the Anti-Homosexuality Bill

that would, among other things, institute the death penalty for repeated same-sex activity, which the bill's author has dubbed "aggravated homosexuality".

This bill could pass any day now -- a "Christmas gift" to Uganda, in the words of the Speaker of Uganda's Parliament.

But our allies on the ground tell us that if Pepsi, which has a huge presence in Uganda, speaks out against the bill and the harmful effect it would have on investment and economic development in Uganda, it would force Ugandan officials to put the bill on hold -- or even pull it entirely.

Add your name to our petition telling Pepsi to speak out against this horrific "Kill the Gays" bill that's racing through the Ugandan Parliament.

As citizen-consumers, we have tremendous influence over Pepsi. It has customers all over the world -- meaning that, unlike the MPs in Uganda who are pushing this bill, Pepsi cares what we think and say about them. And for this piece of legislation, our position is clear -- Pepsi must use its power as a major company in Uganda to communicate clearly to Ugandan legislators that this hateful bill must be stopped.

The goal of this bill isn't secret. David Bahati, the bill's author, has said publicly that he believes every single gay person in Uganda should be killed. Bahati has extensive, well-documented ties to a secretive group of evangelicals called The Family that includes American Senators and well-known American pastors. When he initially proposed the bill two years ago, a global outcry forced the government to drop consideration of the bill last May. But now it's back -- and all of our voices are needed to stop this bill once and for all.

Let's band together to stop this hateful piece of legislation in its tracks. Click here to sign our petition telling Pepsi to speak out now.

Pepsi is a big deal in Uganda. Through its subsidiary Crown Beverages Ltd., Pepsi has grown to be one of the largest beverage companies in the country, seeing its market share grow year after year. According to the Ugandan Prime Minister, Pepsi is making a "great contribution... to the growth of our economy in Uganda and to the well-being of our people." If Pepsi speaks out against this bill, Ugandan officials who are pushing this bill through will have to stop and listen.

This isn't the first time Pepsi has had the chance to distance itself from homophobia in the wake of consumer concern. After Pepsi was caught sponsoring a concert in Kampala by Beenie Man, an artist who gets rich spouting homophobic lyrics, Pepsi was forced to back away from its sponsorship of the concert.

Now, Pepsi is silent on one of the most horrific pieces of legislation ever considered, and it won't speak out against the "Kill the Gays" bill unless we make it.

Can you add your name to our petition demanding Pepsi publicly reject the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Bill now?

<http://action.sumofus.org/a/uganda-bill/74/181/>

Thanks for standing up for LGBTI Ugandans, Kaytee, Rob and the rest of us

<a href="#">20121203-07</a>	17:36	SteveG	"Sportscaster Bob Costas Condemns U.S. Gun Culture During NFL Game" (w/ video)
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"Sportscaster Bob Costas Condemns U.S. Gun Culture During NFL Game" (w/ video) by Arturo Garcia, The Raw Story

Dec. 3, 2012, (<http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/12/03/sportscaster-bob-costas-condemns-u-s-gun-culture-during-nfl-game/>)

NBC sportscaster Bob Costas used his regular halftime segment Sunday night to speak out in favor of gun control in the wake of the murder-suicide incident involving a professional football player.

"You knew it was coming," said Costas, who is perhaps best known for anchoring the network's coverage of the past few Olympic Games. "In the aftermath of the nearly unfathomable events in Kansas City, that most mindless of sports clichés was heard yet again, 'Something like this really puts it all in perspective.' Well if so, that sort of perspective has a very short shelf life since we will inevitably hear about the perspective we have supposedly again regained the next time ugly reality intrudes upon our games. Please."

The broadcaster's commentary came just over 24 hours after Kansas City Chiefs player Jovan Belcher shot and killed his girlfriend, Kasandra Perkins, at the couple's home before driving to his team's practice facility and killing himself in front of Chiefs head coach Romeo Crennel and general manager John Pioli.

"Those who need tragedies to continually recalibrate their sense of proportion about sports, would seem to have little hope of ever truly achieving perspective," Costas said, before citing a piece by Fox Sports.com columnist Jason Whitlock criticizing National Football League Commissioner Roger Goodell for allowing the Chiefs' game with Carolina to proceed as scheduled.

"Football is our God," Whitlock wrote. "Its exaggerated value in our society has never been more evident than Saturday morning in my adopted hometown. There's just no way this game should be played."

According to *The Kansas City Star*, several players defended the decision after the game.

"The least-worst option was to play the game," center Ryan Lilja said. "Suffering a tragedy like that, maybe the best thing was to be together and do what we do — and that's what we do, we play football."

But in his column, Whitlock — who Costas said he does not always agree with — said such reasoning spoke to how numb Americans had become to gun-related violence, and that he believed that if Belcher did not own a gun, he and Perkins would still be alive.

"Handguns do not enhance our safety," Whitlock wrote. "They exacerbate our flaws, tempt us to escalate arguments, and bait us into embracing confrontation rather than avoiding it."

<a href="#">20121203-08</a>	18:10	SteveB	Re: "Sportscaster Bob Costas Condemns U.S. Gun Culture During NFL Game" (reply to SteveG, above) & "NRA President Suggests Jovan Belcher's Girlfriend Should've Been Armed" (w/video)
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An interesting follow-up article to the above... I suppose the coaches should have been armed too?

["NRA President Suggests Jovan Belcher's Girlfriend Should've Been Armed" \(w/ video\) by Eric W. Dolan, The Raw Story](#)

Dec. 3, 2012, (<http://www.rawstory.com/rs/2012/12/03/nra-president-girlfriend-of-jovan-belcher-shouldve-been-armed/>)

NRA president Wayne LaPierre and reporter Ginny Simone railed against Bob Costas on Sunday, insisting the NBC sportscaster was wrong to advocate gun control after a murder-suicide incident.

Kansas City Chiefs player Jovan Belcher allegedly shot and killed his girlfriend Kasandra Perkins before committing suicide on Saturday. Both LaPierre and Simone suggested the incident could have been averted if Perkins had owned a gun.

LaPierre said Costas "wouldn't have said a thing last night" if Perkins "had saved her life by having a firearm." He accused Costas of using the tragic shooting to "spew [his social agenda] all over America" and insisted crime would be reduced if more Americans owned guns.

Simone added that Costas "gave the public a bunch of lies."

"As you mentioned, the victim, I mean, she was totally defenseless against this six-foot guy that weighs 240 pounds," she said. "What if she had a firearm?"

"Well, that is exactly right," LaPierre responded.

LaPierre complained that the media was biased against guns, unlike the "vast majority" of Americans who knew guns made them safer.

20121203-09 23:32 SteveG Cartoons: Who's Sinking the Boat?

Cliff? What cliff?





[20121203-10](#) 23:58 Marci Cool Photos #20 ('Crystal' Ice Cave in Skaftafell , Iceland)



[http://www.kidsread.net/Naughty\\_Volcano.htm](http://www.kidsread.net/Naughty_Volcano.htm)



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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>  
[FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

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# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #284 — DEC. 5, 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.**

## **'Into the Wild Blue Yonder'**

(posted by Art, Dec. 5, 2012)

Beyond "winning" is the fact this just makes sense.

"Five Reasons Obama Will Rout GOP in Lame Duck Budget Battle" by Robert Creamer, Huffington Post

Nov. 30, 2012, (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-creamers/five-reasons-obama-will-r b 2218245.html>)

The odds are increasing that President Obama and the Democrats will rout the Republicans in the current battle over the "fiscal cliff."

I realize that all of the "wise men" of Washington are clamoring for a bi-partisan solution to fix the nation's deficit -- a "solution" that involves "shared sacrifice." But the plain fact is that the deficit is not a bi-partisan problem. Democrat Bill Clinton left Republican George Bush surpluses as far as the eye could see.

Today's deficit was caused when the Republicans cut taxes for the wealthiest Americans and started two wars for which they refused to pay. The deficit got worse when Republican policies caused the financial markets and the economy to collapse in the Great Recession.

That was the Republican legacy inherited by incoming President Barack Obama. Now, after having saved the economy from falling into a depression, laid the groundwork for economic recovery and soundly won reelection, President Obama is poised to force Republicans to do what is critically necessary to right the nation's fiscal situation: raise tax rates on the wealthiest Americans.

And he is likely to be successful without yielding to Republican demands that much of the bill to close the federal deficit be paid by the still-struggling middle class.

The fact is that Obama and the Democrats are holding all the cards.

There are five reasons why Obama is likely to succeed:

1. The "fiscal cliff" is very different than the "debt ceiling."

In 2011, the Obama administration believed it was critically important to the economy to avoid a default on the nation's debt.

In that standoff, the GOP held so many cards because many of its members were willing to allow the nation to go into default. They were like terrorists who are willing to blow up themselves -- and everyone else -- to make a political point.

As a result, the Obama administration had to use every tool it could to avoid yet another GOP-induced economic disaster. It was bargaining with a gun to its head. In the circumstances, the outcome was not bad for Democrats. Though the deal did not include increased revenue from the wealthy -- and many key programs that benefit the poor and middle class took a hit -- Democrats avoided disastrous permanent structural changes in Medicare, Social Security and Medicaid. And they took the debt ceiling timebomb out of the GOP's hands until after the fall elections.

Most importantly, they struck a deal that changed the battlefield for the next engagement to a much more advantageous time and place -- after the elections when the Bush Tax cuts were about to expire by law.

It would not be an economic disaster for the country to go over the "fiscal cliff." In fact, going over the cliff will only increase Democratic leverage to reach a deal which eliminates the dreaded "sequester," avoids massive cuts, and most importantly raises taxes on the wealthy.

## 2. Expiration of the Bush Tax Cuts.

If Congress takes no action at all -- something the Republican Congress is very good at doing -- all tax rates in America will go up to their Clinton-era levels at year's end. The pressure on Republicans will then be enormous to vote yes on the Democratic bill to restore the Bush tax cuts for the 98% of the population that makes less than \$250,000 per year -- leaving wealthy Americans paying Clinton-era rates.

After the first of the year, Americans will start seeing an average of over \$2,000 per year coming out of their paychecks in withholding. If the Republican leadership refuses to take up the Democratic tax measure, the GOP will be blamed by the voters for the tax increase; it's that simple.

Once the Republican leadership in the House is forced to face reality and bring the bill to a vote, most Republicans will join Democrats in supporting the measure -- whether or not it is coupled with any further "spending cuts." Otherwise they will risk being attacked in the 2014 elections for voting against tax cuts for the middle class simply to protect tax breaks for people like Donald Trump.

The president has been clear he will veto any bill that extends the Bush Tax cuts for the wealthy. In the end GOP lawmakers will have no choice but to fold.

## 3. Republicans are afraid to propose specific cuts to Medicare.

Don't get me wrong, Republicans want to destroy Medicare. But their proposal to do that -- the Ryan plan to eliminate Medicare and convert it to a voucher program -- was soundly discredited in the election.

The GOP understands the power and popularity of Medicare. Without any shame, it ran ad after ad in 2010 and 2012 accusing Obama and Democrats in Congress of "cutting" Medicare by \$716 billion as part of ObamaCare. They were, of course, perfectly willing to ignore that benefits actually improved and that these "cuts" were really reductions of insurance company subsidies for the so-called "Medicare-Advantage" program and other forms of inefficiency and waste.

But the point is that the GOP understands that Medicare is very popular and the everyday voters don't want to see it cut to fix the deficit. They understand its electoral power.

That's why yesterday, when Obama administration representatives met with Republicans to present Obama's bargaining position, the Republicans refused to say what additional cuts they wanted in Medicare as the price for tax increases. They demanded that the administration itself detail cuts they might be willing to accept. They want to be able to claim that they supported cuts in Medicare proposed by the Democrats.

Well that isn't going to happen. Democrats have no interest in falling into that trap -- or negotiating with themselves -- even if they were willing to inflict economic pain on ordinary Americans to fix a deficit problem that ordinary people didn't cause in the first place.

The Republican's best hope for political cover when it comes to Medicare was some kind of bi-partisan panel or "grand bargain" negotiation. But by forcing the GOP to name its own price -- to put its cards on the table in public -- Obama has forced them to accept full political responsibility for cutting Medicare. That is a big problem for them.

And let's be clear, the GOP understands that it is impossible for them to run a national mobilization to demand cuts in Medicare.

#### 4. Obama has political momentum and public support.

Obama and the Democrats just won major victories at the polls. Most Americans favor closing the deficit by raising taxes on the rich. Most Americans opposed closing the deficit by cutting Medicare and Medicaid.

And Obama plans to press this advantage by mobilizing the massive organization he created during the campaign. His allies have organized events all over America starting this weekend to demand action from GOP Members of Congress -- rallying its forces around TheAction.org.

The Labor movement has joined the fight with issue ads, press events and thousands of phone calls to Congress.

Progressive organizations like MoveOn and Americans United for Change have swung into action.

Capitalizing on the momentum from his campaign victory, the President is poised to barnstorm around the country to mobilize support his demand that the taxes of ordinary Americans should not be held hostage to tax breaks for the rich.

#### 5. The GOP base, on the other hand, is divided and dispirited.

The Romney campaign and Republican operatives had -- against all evidence -- convinced them that they could and would win the fall elections. They were wrong. The long knives are out in the Republican Party.

Worse, the organizing principle uniting the Tea Party -- ousting Obama -- is gone. Many of the Tea Party faithful are unlikely to get too worked up about defending tax breaks for Donald Trump and Paris Hilton.

Even in the election campaign, it's hard to argue that Republicans had a real unifying leader they could believe in and follow. Romney will not be remembered as an inspiring figure. But now they have no one. Does anyone expect to see John Boehner barnstorming the country?

A fundamental principle of warfare is that when you have them on the run, that's the time to chase them.

Both the timing of the Lame Duck battle, and Obama's willingness to press his advantage, have denied the Republicans the opportunity to regroup after their devastating election defeat. They are leaderless and disorganized. It's hard to press a counter attack when you are in full retreat.

If the president and Democrats continue to press their advantage, history will remember the battle of the "Lame Duck Fiscal Cliff" as a rout.

[20121204-01](#) 08:16 SteveB The GOP (to Republicans)

The Republicans believed their own lies. What a sad state of affairs.

Having to face the truth is proving unbearable to the upside-down-flag, Obama-is-destroying-the-country fringe.

Do Fox and Rush and Glenn and all the other money grubbers in the media do the country (or the discussion) any good? Then there is Grover...

How to wake-up the rest of the party that a stinging loss could not rouse? Will the GOP ultimately split when more pressure is applied?

[20121204-02](#) 09:59 Teresa Re: Nobody Builds Much Here Anymore (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #283)

Hey, Steve!

Unfortunately, you are right on the money, in my opinion.

Take good care, amigo!

[20121204-04](#) 12:11 Art Re: "How Wall Street Hollowed Out Industrial America" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #283)

This is quite good article on what is fundamentally wrong in America today. I don't think anyone can argue with the facts presented. I suppose discussion can be held as to who is at fault, but it is a fact that while the country has lost thousands of manufacturing jobs and seen parts of the economy crash, the rich have gotten much richer and the Stock Market is booming. Good news if you're in the Market, maybe not so good otherwise.

When you study military history you rarely hold the NCOs or troops (read workers and unions) responsible for a defeat. You generally hold the generals and the leadership (read CEOs) responsible, unless maybe you're a general.

[20121204-03](#) 10:22 MarthaH "Survey: Obama Built Coalition of Moderates"

"Survey: Obama Built Coalition of Moderates" by David Jackson, USA Today

Dec. 4. 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/theoval/2012/12/04/obama-third-way-survey-liberals-moderates/1744845/>)

Republicans cast President Obama as an out-of-touch liberal during the recent election, but a new survey says Obama won thanks to moderate voters.

"Our data reveals that the Obama Coalition is far more moderate than people may suspect," reports the poll from the Third Way organization.

"From the role of government, the size of deficits, and the level of taxes to social issues and the notion of compromise, the Obama Coalition holds center-left positions on a range of issues," it added.

"Democrats were victorious this year not because they played to the wings, but because President Obama effectively built a center-out coalition."

Third Way says its data show that Obama voters "place themselves in the center ideologically."

"The Obama Coalition is composed primarily of moderates and liberals, with slightly more, 42%, identifying as a moderate and 40% as a liberal. Another 14% call themselves conservatives," Third Way says.

"According to our poll, nearly three-fifths of the president's support came from self-described moderates and conservatives.

"This breakdown tracks closely with exit poll data, which shows that 42.7% of Obama voters were liberal, 45.6% were moderate, and 11.8% were conservative."

<a href="#">20121204-05</a>	12:14	SteveG	Fw: Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster!
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from Common Cause:

Washington is broken. As we start December, the 112th Congress has met only 134 days during 2012 and passed just 2 percent of the bills introduced. It's on track to be the most polarized and least productive Congress ever.

Things are especially bad in the Senate, where just 41 of 100 senators have used the filibuster rule to block even routine business, stopping debates before they start.

Email your senators and tell them it's time to fix the filibuster and break the gridlock crippling our nation's recovery. America deserves better.

The Senate's breakdown is stifling vital legislation to stimulate job growth, reform our immigration laws and take care of our troops. Filibuster use has more than doubled since 2009.

Common Cause has filed a federal lawsuit to have the filibuster rule declared unconstitutional. It gets a hearing Monday in federal court, but lawsuits take time and we need a working Congress now.

You can help.

Tell your senators to support filibuster reform and get back to work on the real challenges facing our country:

<http://www.commoncause.org/site/apps/ka/ct/contactus.asp?c=dkLNK1MQIwG&b=8090653&en=cnJzGGOmFdKDIKMrF6ICKOOTFeKAKIPoFiIOIUNyHnIXH>

Let's get on with the people's business.

Thanks for all you do, Bob Edgar and the rest of the team at Common Cause

<a href="#">20121204-09</a>	20:45	SteveG	Fw: Response from Sen. Maria Cantwell to Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster! (above)
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Below is a response from a petition I signed earlier today.

from Sen. Maria Cantwell (D., Wash.):

Thank you for taking the time to contact me. Every day, as I represent Washington State in the United States Senate, I appreciate hearing the voices of people in Washington.

As you may know, the filibuster is a procedural tool that allows any Senator to speak on the floor of the Senate for an unlimited amount of time, thereby preventing consideration and/or passage of legislation. Under the standing rules of the Senate, Senators who have been recognized may speak for as long as they wish and they cannot be

forced to cede the floor, or be interrupted, without their consent. When that first Senator concludes and yields the floor, another Senator seeks recognition and continues the debate. The debate can proceed in this way until all the participating Senators have spoken. Because there are no time limits imposed on the speeches, this process can last for days, even weeks.

Historically, filibusters were rare occurrences. Unfortunately, in recent years, the process has become far too common. Today, almost any bill that does not have the unanimous support of all 100 Senators may need a cloture vote to proceed. As such, many important, bipartisan bills and nominees are either delayed or unable to be passed because of a potential filibuster.

I have concerns about the widespread use of "anonymous holds" which allow one Senator to prevent a motion from reaching the floor of the United States Senate by notifying their party leadership of their objection. Senators were never required to disclose their identities when placing holds. In response to this practice, I joined 92 of my fellow Senators in passing Senate Resolution 28, which established a standing rule in the Senate requiring a Senator to publically disclose any hold he or she may have on legislation. I also supported the passage of Senate Resolution 29 allowing for the reading the legislation to be waived if the bill has been posted online for a minimum of 72 hours which passed by a vote of 81 to 15 on Jan. 27, 2011. Please know that I will continue to work to reduce the abuse of the filibuster in the United States Senate and will keep your thoughts in mind should any additional legislation come before the Senate.

I was elected to the United States Senate on a pledge to honor the hard work, aspirations, and faith of the people of Washington State. It is a great honor for me to serve the people of Washington, and I am proud of the successes I have achieved during my tenure. I have worked to create affordable opportunities for consumers, business, and families, to make our nation more secure today, to foster innovation for tomorrow, and to stand with parents as they educate and care for their children.

As your Senator, I've worked to cut taxes for Washington families by extending the sales tax deduction to ensure fairness for residents of our state. I also have continued to fight for investment in clean energy jobs, access to affordable health care, and quality education for Washington families.

Our state and our country face serious challenges as we emerge from the recession brought on by the collapse of our financial institutions in 2008. As your Senator, I'm continuing to fight to generate economic growth, invest in job creation, and promote the innovations that will turn our economy around. I'm also working to rein in spending and ensure that government lives within its means, while continuing to invest in job growth.

This economic downturn started on Wall Street, but it will turn around on Main Street. That's why I have worked to improve access to credit for Main Street small businesses, which account for at least 60 percent of the job creation in our country. I have also fought for meaningful Wall Street Reform that holds big banks accountable and protects us from a future collapse like we saw in 2008.

I believe we can best address our nation's concerns by working together and inviting solutions from inside and outside government. The innovation and breadth of the suggestions and comments that are sent to me by Washington State residents is impressive.

Thank you again for contacting me to share your thoughts. Please do not hesitate to contact me in the future if I can be of further assistance.

Sincerely, Maria Cantwell, United States Senator

(For future correspondence with my office, please visit my website at <http://cantwell.senate.gov/contact/>.)

from SomeOfUs:

The CEOs of bailed-out banks, military contractors, and profitable corporations that paid negative taxes last year say we need to "fix the debt" by cutting Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and other critical social programs.

The CEOs are claim that they're trying to reduce the deficit. But they're really worried because the Bush tax cuts are going to expire automatically on January 1, and by ginning up panic about the so-called "fiscal cliff," they hope they can trick us into cutting the programs that we all rely so they don't have to pay more.

Tell these CEOs that if they want to "fix the debt," they can start by paying their taxes:

<http://action.sumofus.org/a/fix-the-debt/77/185/>.

Brian Moynihan, the CEO of Bank of America, which got a \$45 billion dollar bailout, thinks we need to fix the deficit by cutting Medicare. Jeffery Immelt, the CEO of General Electric, which paid negative income tax for the last two years, thinks we need to fix the debt by taking health care from poor kids. Jamie Dimon, the CEO of JPMorgan Chase, who lobbied for the financial deregulation that caused a global economic crisis thinks we need to keep his taxes low. Many of these CEOs have looted their own employees' retirement plans, and they think they're qualified to tell us how to run Social Security.

These CEOs must think we're idiots if they think we're going to let them tell us how to run the economy. Let's let them know that we know we aren't going to be fooled: we know big corporations and the rich need to pay more, and we're not going to cut Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and spending on infrastructure, education, and anti-poverty programs just so the 1% can keep their tax breaks.

Tell the Fix the Debt CEOs: don't tell us how to run the economy until you pay your fair share.

Thank you, Rob and the rest of us at SumOfUs

Maybe, just maybe, something positive will now happen.

"Two Conservative Republicans Booted from House Budget Panel" by David Lawder, Reuters

Dec. 4, 2012. (<http://news.yahoo.com/two-conservative-republicans-booted-house-budget-panel-154212850--business.html>)

(WASHINGTON) Two of the most conservative Republicans in the House of Representatives have been kicked off the House Budget Committee, a rare move that could make it easier for the panel to advance a deal with Democrats to cut fiscal deficits.

Representatives Tim Huelskamp of Kansas and Justin Amash of Michigan - both favorites of the anti-tax Tea Party movement - are among those Republicans voting most often against House Speaker John Boehner.

Huelskamp and Amash, who both will begin second terms in the House next month, voted against last year's deal to raise the federal debt limit and staunchly oppose any tax increases. Boehner has now included new revenue in his latest offer to avert the "fiscal cliff" of year-end tax hikes and automatic spending cuts. Given their voting records, winning support from Huelskamp and Amash for such a compromise seemed an uphill battle.

Huelskamp released a statement saying the Republican leadership "might think they have silenced conservatives but removing me and others from key committees only confirms our conservative convictions.

"This is clearly a vindictive move and a sure sign that the GOP establishment cannot handle disagreement," he said.

Huelskamp and Amash had said that despite sweeping changes to the Medicare and Medicaid healthcare programs, committee chairman Paul Ryan's budget did not make deep enough cuts to entitlement programs and military spending.

Boehner spokesman Michael Steel declined to be specific on the reasons for their ouster by the House Republican Steering Committee, which occurred Monday in a closed-door meeting.

"The Steering Committee makes decisions based on a range of factors," Steel said.

Huelskamp said he was given "limited explanation" for his removal from the Budget Committee, a move he called "vindictive." A spokesman for Amash could not be immediately reached for comment.

Huelskamp and Amash cast the only House Budget Committee votes against Ryan's budget plan earlier this year.

While there is often wrangling over committee chairmanships just before a new Congress takes office, it is rare for rank-and-file committee members to be stripped of their assignments.

The 34-member Republican steering committee is headed by Boehner and includes members of House leadership, committee chairs and other lawmakers representing different regions of the country.

The same group last week recommended that Ryan, the conservative former Republican vice presidential candidate, be renewed as Budget Committee chairman.

[20121204-07](#)

20:25

SteveG

"Texas Church Offers Firearms Classes to Train Parishioners to Defend Against Imaginary Bands of Mexicans"

"Texas Church Offers Firearms Classes to Train Parishioners to Defend Against Imaginary Bands of Mexicans" by Ian Millhiser, ThinkProgress

Dec. 4, 2012, (<http://thinkprogress.org/justice/2012/12/04/1272981/texas-church-offers-firearms-classes-to-train-parishioners-to-defend-against-imaginary-marauding-bands-of-mexicans/>)

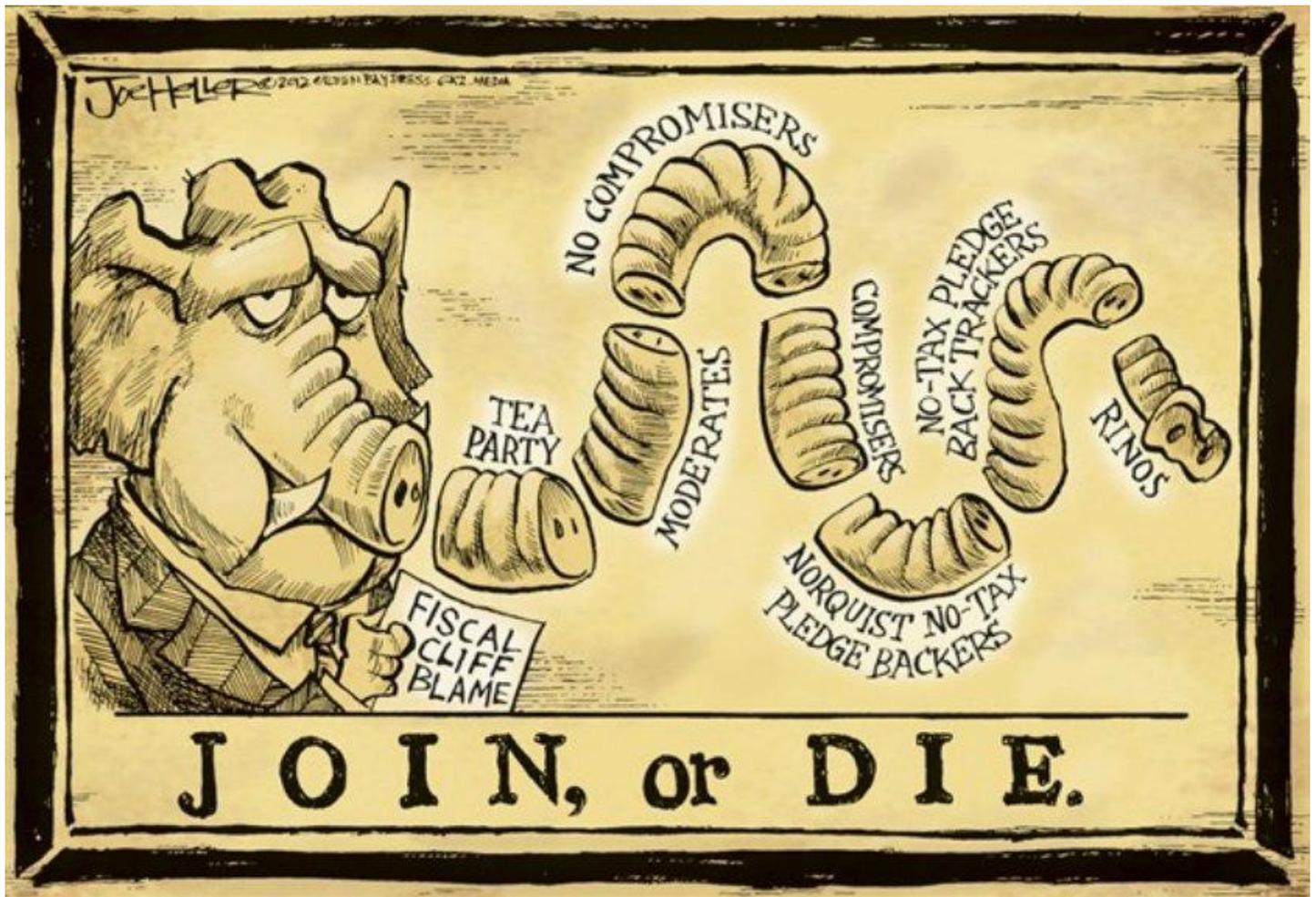
The *Times of London* reports that several American churches are now offering concealed firearms training in order to attract worshipers to their pews. One of these churches, Heights Baptist in San Angelo, Texas offers a particularly unusual reason why they are now training their parishioners to pack heat — in order to prevent worship services from being disrupted by armed Mexicans:

In Texas, where it's legal to carry guns into any church without a specific no-firearms policy, Heights Baptist in remote San Angelo began offering concealed carry classes in June. The class was a response to security concerns among congregants.

"We're about 150 miles from the border with Mexico and we're very unsure about our insecure borders — about what's coming into our cities," Pastor James Miller told NRA News. "Personally, I feel more secure that should our worship time be interrupted by a life-threatening intrusion, that we would at least stand some kind of a chance in stopping either a mass killing or terrorizing experience."

Miller also claims there is a spiritual component to carrying a Glock hidden beneath your Sunday best: "Jesus advises his disciples to sell their cloak and buy a sword. He instructed his people to be prepared to defend themselves."

[I would feel so much safer! –SteveB]





<http://jackholesrealm.wordpress.com/2011/10/24/night-page-2/amazing-nature-wallpaper-1280x1024-1001089/>



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

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## **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #285 — DEC. 6, 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.**

### **Oh, Ya...the End Is Near!**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 6, 2012)

If you were looking for an excuse to go out and get drunk every night this month, look no further. Please don't forget to turn out the lights...

"Safe Haven from the Mayan Apocalypse? Sorry, We're Closed" by Sorcha Pollak, *Time*

Dec. 5, 2012, (<http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/12/05/safe-haven-from-the-mayan-apocalypse-sorry-were-closed/>)



Do you fear the apocalyptic end to humanity scheduled for Dec. 21? Well, there may be hope: a safe haven from the fast-approaching Armageddon in the form of a small, tranquil village in the south-west of France named Bugarach.

Unfortunately, it's now closed.

For reasons that still aren't entirely clear, several websites that have been trumpeting the coming end of the world have also named Bugarach the only place on earth that will be saved on Dec. 21st. When the town's mayor, Jean-Pierre Delord, was alerted to this fact two years ago, his first reaction was not to rejoice in the knowledge that he and his townspeople would be spared the apocalypse but to order special security measures and plans to shut down the village in preparation for a deluge of news agencies, esotericists and Doomsday cultists.

It has been widely reported in recent years that ancient Mayan calendars predicted that the world would end on Dec. 21st, 2012. According to *National Geographic*, it is true that the Mayan "long count" calendar, which spans around 5,125 years, will reach the end of its cycle in December of this year. Dec. 21st will see the end of the 13th Bak'tun, which represents the end of an old cycle and the beginning of a new one. And while everyone from NASA to astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson are insisting that this doesn't mean the end of the world any more than December 31, 1999 meant the end of modern computing, people across the globe are preparing for Armageddon. However, the question as to why the inhabitants of this tiny French village will survive unscathed remains unanswered.

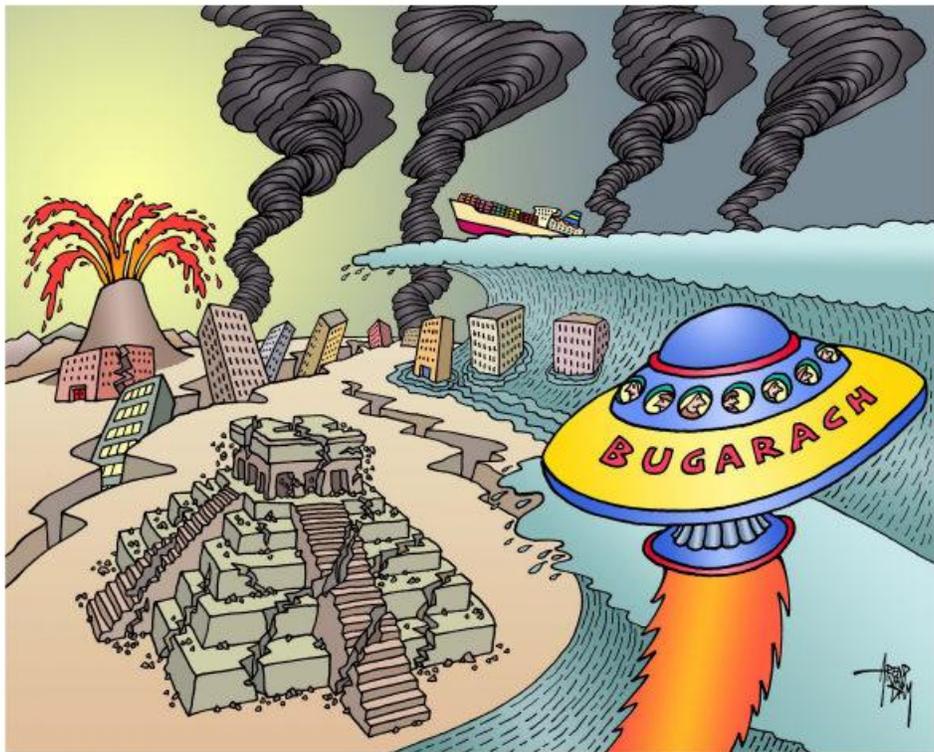
So why would the inhabitants of this tiny French village be spared? Nicolas D'Estienne d'Orves, who recently released a book on Bugarach titled *The Village of the End of the World*, explained in a documentary on the life of the villagers that it has been "impossible" to get to the bottom of the Mayan Bugarach rumor. Why this town? Why in Europe? "It was grabbed on to because this is a place where there's nothing, so you can easily project your fantasies on to it. It's like filling a balloon with air," says the French novelist.

Bugarach is located in the Languedoc-Roussillon region of southern France. This sleepy hamlet of 176 residents has always attracted people with more "esoteric beliefs," Delord recently told the *Guardian*. For years this area of southern France has been known for folklore and magic as well as plenty of conspiracy theories. "It's all about the mountain," says Delord.

He's talking about the 4,300-foot tall Pic de Bugarach, which towers over the village. It is known locally as the 'upside-down mountain' due to the lower layers of rocks that are inexplicably younger than those at the top of the peak. The flat-topped mountain is also reported to emit strange gurgling sounds, which has probably helped make it a prime UFO-spotting site as well. Many actually believe the mountain contains an "alien garage," writes the Telegraph, where extraterrestrials are waiting in a massive cavity beneath the rock for the world to end.

Delord fears that many of these Doomsday believers are planning to descend upon his small hometown in the coming weeks in an attempt to avoid what they believe is mankind's imminent demise. Already, the numbers of hikers climbing the mountain have jumped from 10,000 in 2010 to 20,000 in 2011, writes the Guardian. So as to be completely sure of the locals' safety, the mayor has made the decision to shut down the area to tourists for the four days prior to Dec. 21st. Meanwhile, the French government has put the anti-cult watchdog agency Miviludes on the case so as to head off any apocalyptic group activities or possible mass suicides, such as those which were carried out by the Order of the Solar Temple in the Alps between 1994 and 1997.

Some of the locals in Bugarach are still happily taking advantage of their new worldwide fame. One local winery has an end-of-the-world vintage on sale, while a local man is renting out his home for up to \$1,600 a night. "I possess a rare asset, the land of immortality," the landowner proudly told the French newspaper *Depeche du Midi*.



21 december 2012 (Mayan calendar): the world will end except in Bugarach...

20121205-01 09:53 Ann

"Everything We Need to Know, We Learned in Kindergarten. Too Bad Republicans Missed That Day."

"Everything We Need to Know, We Learned in Kindergarten. Too Bad Republicans Missed That Day." by Helen Philpot, Margaret and Helen (Best Friends for Sixty Years and Counting)

Dec. 5, 2012, (<http://margaretandhelen.com/2012/12/05/everything-we-need-to-know-we-learned-in-kindergarten-too-bad-republicans-missed-that-day/>)

Margaret, I am beginning to wonder if there are any grownups left in the Republican party .

I've been asking myself that question since 2004 when George Bush got 35 more electoral votes and 4.1 million more popular votes than John Kerry. The next day he announced that he had political capital and he "intended to spend it 'cause that's the kind a guy I am." I swear that man was the biggest jackass ever to live in the White House.

It was so good to see an adult take office in 2008 when Barack Obama won 192 more electoral votes and almost 10 million more popular votes than John McCain. But then the Republicans obstructionism in the Senate started and eventually, thanks to the dumb asses in the Tea Party, the complete collapse of any type of governing ramped up 2 years later in the House. They vowed Obama would be a one term President, and everything we learned in kindergarten went right out the window.

This year, Obama won by 126 electoral votes and more than 4 million popular votes. Always changing the rules of the game, the Republicans are demanding that Democrats need to compromise. I hear that McConnell and Boehner actually bragged to the press that they laughed at the President's plan. Just who the hell are these guys? Even Fox News eventually had to call the election for Obama. You know what, Margaret? If Obama were to leave a flaming bag of shit outside Boehner and McConnell's office doors, I'd cheer him on. Higher taxes for the wealthy was pretty much the central theme of the election. Mitt was against it. Obama was for it. Mitt lost. End of story.

How about the Republicans finally tell Grover Norquist and the other wackos in their party to sit down and shut the hell up? I know if we leave it up to those Tea Party nut jobs, they'll be digging up Ronald Reagan's dead body and running him in 2016.

The Republicans want compromise? How's this:

- In exchange for Republicans agreeing to once and for all get out of our vaginas and our bedrooms, we Democrats will let you start another war just as soon as you get another Bush in the White House.
- In exchange for Republicans agreeing to fully fund the social safety net for this nation's poor and elderly, we Democrats will do everything in our power to starve camels and make the eye of the needle wider.
- And here's the really big one - If Republicans will agree to take Rush Limbaugh and Karl Rove and make them simply "disappear", we Democrats will not let Bill Clinton speak at the 2016 Democratic Convention.

In truth, I am pretty disgusted with all politicians right now. They've all gotten a little too predictable for my taste. Republicans want more money for the wealthy and more war. Democrats want to take care of the poor, the elderly and want more money for education programs... On second thought, I'm really just disgusted with Republican politicians.

If this is the best we can expect from Republican leadership, we have a bigger problem than going over some cliff. How about we just pass the President's plan? If it fails, the Republicans might actually stand a chance in the next election. If it succeeds, the Republicans might finally have to move into the 21st Century.

Show me a fiscal cliff and I will gladly push McConnell and Boehner over the edge. Maybe then the grown ups can roll up their sleeves and get something done. Because how the hell is any deep thinking going to happen if those two insist on spending the whole day pissing in the baby pool? I mean it. Really.

<a href="#">20121205-02</a>	10:05	SteveB	Re: "Everything We Need to Know, We Learned in Kindergarten. Too Bad Republicans Missed That Day." (reply to Ann, above)
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Hilarious and all so true. Thanks, Ann!

<a href="#">20121205-03</a>	11:58	Art	Re: "Texas Church Offers Firearms Classes to Train Parishioners to Defend Against Imaginary Bands of Mexicans" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #284)
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Unbelievable.

<a href="#">20121205-04</a>	12:02	Art	Re: Response from Sen. Maria Cantwell to Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster! (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #284)
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Good letter.

<a href="#">20121205-05</a>	13:12	SteveG	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell Rep. Hastings: Help End the Bush Tax Cuts for the Wealthy!
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from CREDO Action:

With just 27 days left in the 112th Congress, we are headed for a major showdown in this lame duck session. We know what the Republicans want: to keep taxes on the wealthy and large corporations unconscionably low and military spending sky-high; to gut Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security; and to make brutal cuts to important domestic programs like food stamps and unemployment insurance.

Fortunately Democrats in the House of Representatives, under the leadership of Nancy Pelosi, are fighting back. Just yesterday, House Democrats filed a discharge petition to force a vote that will finally end the Bush tax cuts for people making more than \$250,000 a year. We need Representative Doc Hastings to sign the discharge petition to allow a vote on the Bush tax cuts as soon as possible.

At a time when the political and media establishment in Washington, DC, are ginning up panic over the so-called "fiscal cliff," speaking up in support of this discharge petition is a major opportunity to send a loud and clear message to Congress. If they are serious about addressing the national debt and deficit, there is a simple way to do it: letting the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy permanently expire at the end of 2012.

More than a decade after they were signed into law, it is clear now that the Bush tax cuts were a huge mistake. Without the implementation of those disastrous cuts, our economy "would have been in much stronger shape to weather all the fiscal storms of the past 10 years and much better prepared for those of the next 10." There is absolutely no reason for Congress to repeat that mistake by extending the Bush tax cuts yet again.

Tell Representative Hastings: Sign on to House Democrats' discharge petition to force a vote on expiration of the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy.

This is a fight we can win if we are relentless. We need to speak up and lay down our marker today to let our elected representatives in Washington, DC, know that we expect them to hold the line against what has turned out to be one of the most disastrous economic policies enacted in our nation's history. Click below to sign our petition:

[http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/bush\\_taxcut\\_discharge/](http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/bush_taxcut_discharge/).

Thank you for fighting to end the Bush tax cuts once and for all.

Murshed Zaheed, Deputy Political Director, CREDO Action from Working Assets

[20121205-09](#)

19:45

SteveG

Fw: League of Conservation Voters Petition: Tell Congress to End Oil Subsidies & Support Clean Energy!

from the League of Conservation Voters:

We've got an idea for Congress: How about instead of cutting investments that support our families, protect our health, and preserve our environment, we finally get rid of those handouts that give oil companies billions of our taxpayer dollars every year to keep polluting our air and waterways?

It seems like the most obvious plan, but right now Big Oil's congressional allies are pushing hard to do just the opposite as Congress looks for a way to deal with the so-called "fiscal cliff." Big Oil's allies in Congress want to protect special tax breaks for dirty energy companies while cutting investments in conservation, clean energy, and public health. That makes no sense. But unless Congress hears from us now, they might just have their way.

Email your members of Congress today: Tell them to throw Big Oil off the fiscal cliff, not the environmental programs that we all depend on!

Big Oil has already recorded over \$90 billion in profits so far in 2012. Yet the oil industry continues to receive \$4 billion in taxpayer subsidies every year. It is unacceptable that Big Oil's congressional cronies would have us fork over our tax dollars to these corporate polluters, while being forced to cut programs that protect our health and our environment. But even though environmental programs only make up 1.25% of the national budget, some members of Congress think we can somehow balance the budget by further decimating these critical programs. They would:

- Eliminate tax credits that have helped the wind industry grow.
- Starve our National Parks of funding.
- Cut programs for clean energy research and innovation.
- Undermine efforts to clean up contaminated waterways.
- End programs that support more than 130 National Wildlife Refuges.

We can't afford to lose these programs that keep our water clean, protect the places and wildlife we love, and build the infrastructure we need to curb global warming. So we need to make sure that Congress hears loud and clear that their constituents will not allow our health and our future to be traded away — especially not while they keep doling out billions to dirty energy companies.

Send a message to your members of Congress right now urging them to put an end to Big Oil handouts, not our environmental protection programs.

If we ended the handouts that we currently give to oil and gas companies, it would save more than \$40 billion over the next 10 years. Given the furor over cutting wasteful spending, this should be a no-brainer. But Congress won't do it without hearing from you today:

<https://secure3.convio.net/lcv/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=949>.

So we hope you'll join us in asking your member of Congress to stop subsidizing an industry that harms our health, and invest instead in clean energy jobs that will that strengthen our environment, our economy, and our energy independence.

Thanks, Gene Karpinski, President, League of Conservation Voters

[Source of original email unknown, but it's based on the article below. –SteveB]

Thanks to Ebb and Flow, Grail spacecraft orbiting the Moon. [see image #1, below]

Red = Stronger gravity.  
Blue = Weaker gravity.

Neat, eh?

The other sides of the moon 120 degrees apart. [see image #2, below]

Gravity measured in Bouguers. !!??

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bouguer\\_gravity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bouguer_gravity)

The Bouguer anomaly is related to the observed gravity as follows:

Here,  $g_B$  is the Bouguer anomaly,  $g_F$  is the free-air gravity anomaly,  $g_\lambda$  is the correction for latitude (because the Earth is not a perfect sphere) and  $\delta g_F$  is the free-air correction and  $\delta g_B$  is the correction for terrain called the Bouguer reduction.

The Bouguer anomaly is related to the observed gravity  $g_{obs}$  as follows:

$$g_B = g_{obs} - g_\lambda - \delta g_F - \delta g_B$$

$$g_B = g_F - \delta g_B$$

Here,  $g_B$  is the Bouguer anomaly,  $g_F$  is the free-air gravity anomaly,  $g_\lambda$  is the correction for latitude (because the Earth is not a perfect sphere) and  $\delta g_F$  is the free-air correction and  $\delta g_B$  is the correction for terrain called the *Bouguer reduction*.

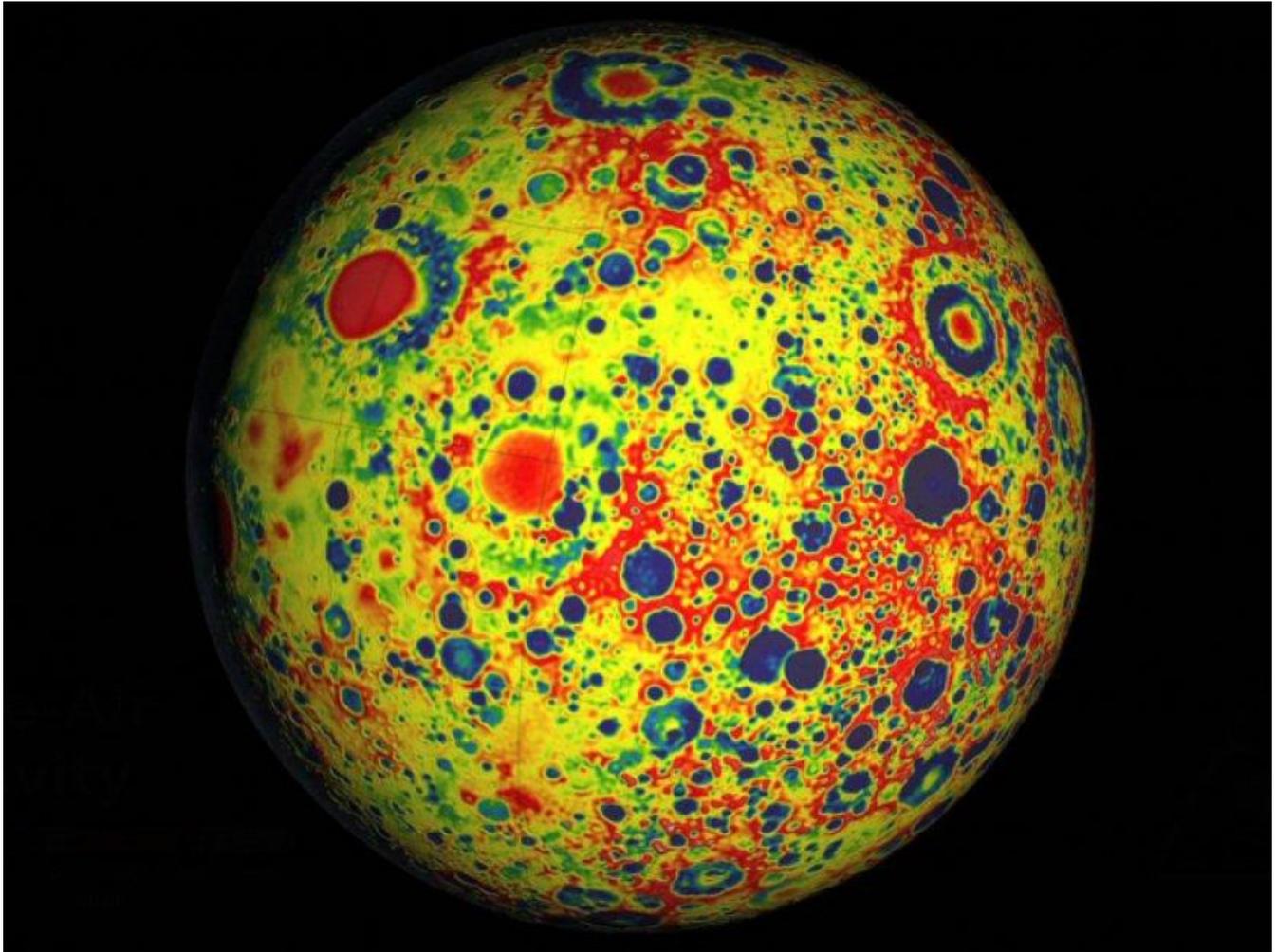
Study this. There will be a test.

Really useful if you are looking for Oil, Water, Metal ores, etc on the Moon. (Anything more or less dense than the average density.) (Works and is used on the Earth too.)

"Moon Was Violently Pummeled by Early Impacts, Probes Find" by Mike Wall, NBC News

Dec. 5, 2012, ([http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/50091114/ns/technology\\_and\\_science-space/#.UL\\_RtoN9Iig](http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/50091114/ns/technology_and_science-space/#.UL_RtoN9Iig))

(Gravity map made by twin Grail probes shows lunar crust almost completely pulverized.)



NASA's Gravity Recovery and Interior Laboratory (Grail) made this new high-resolution map of the moon's gravity field. (NASA / JPL-Caltech / MIT / GSFC)

(SAN FRANCISCO) The moon and other rocky bodies in the inner solar system were pounded by long-ago impacts far more violently than previously thought, two NASA spacecraft have found.

NASA's twin Grail probes have created an ultra-precise gravity map of the moon, revealing that its crust is almost completely pulverized. The surprising find suggests that Earth, Mercury, Venus and Mars endured a similar beating billions of years ago, researchers said.

The discovery "really opens a window to this early stage of just what a violent place the surfaces of all terrestrial planets were early in their history," Grail principal investigator Maria Zuber of MIT said during a press conference here Wednesday at the annual fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union.

The new results shed light on how the moon formed, and they may help scientists better understand where life might be found today on Mars, if it ever existed, Zuber added.

Graphic: How the Grail Probes Work: <http://www.space.com/12497-nasa-moon-gravity-probes-grail-mission-infographic.html>.

### Formation Flying

The \$496 million Grail mission launched in September 2011 to map the moon's gravity field with unprecedented precision.

The twin probes, named Ebb and Flow, fly in formation around the moon, detecting the tiny changes in the distance between them caused by lunar mountains, craters and subsurface mass concentrations.

The Grail team has used such measurements to create a new lunar gravity map, which researchers say is the highest-resolution map of this kind ever generated for a celestial body. And it revealed some interesting information about the moon.

For starters, the lunar crust is incredibly porous, suggesting it was fractured by countless impacts long ago. The crust is also thinner than previously thought — just 21 to 27 miles (34 to 43 kilometers), compared to earlier estimates ranging from 30 to 40 miles (48 to 64 km).

### Support for the Giant Impact Theory

Ebb and Flow also spotted many large, linear structures under the moon's surface that can run for up to 300 miles (480 km). These subsurface "dikes" of solidified magma are covered by craters, suggesting that they predate most of the moon's violent impacts.

The dikes could only have formed if the moon's crust were extending, making room for the magma, researchers said. This would happen if the moon's interior were heating up and expanding, as predicted by the leading theory for the moon's origin — the Giant Impact hypothesis.

This idea posits that a Mars-size body smashed into Earth about 4.5 billion years ago, and the moon coalesced from pieces of our planet that were blasted into space.

"The process of building a moon out of that debris should result in a situation where the moon is cooler on the inside and warmer on the outside," said Grail guest scientist Jeff Andrews-Hanna of the Colorado School of Mines. "And then what naturally happens is that the interior will warm up and expand during that first billion years."

"This had been predicted theoretically a long time ago, but there was no direct observational evidence to support this period of early lunar expansion until this Grail data," Andrews-Hanna added.

### Martian Life Deep Underground?

Grail's revelations about the violent early history of the inner solar system suggest that the upper crusts of its rocky planets are highly and deeply fractured, Zuber said.

Such cracks could provide a pathway for fluids, perhaps explaining what happened to the ocean that some scientists think existed long ago on the surface of Mars.

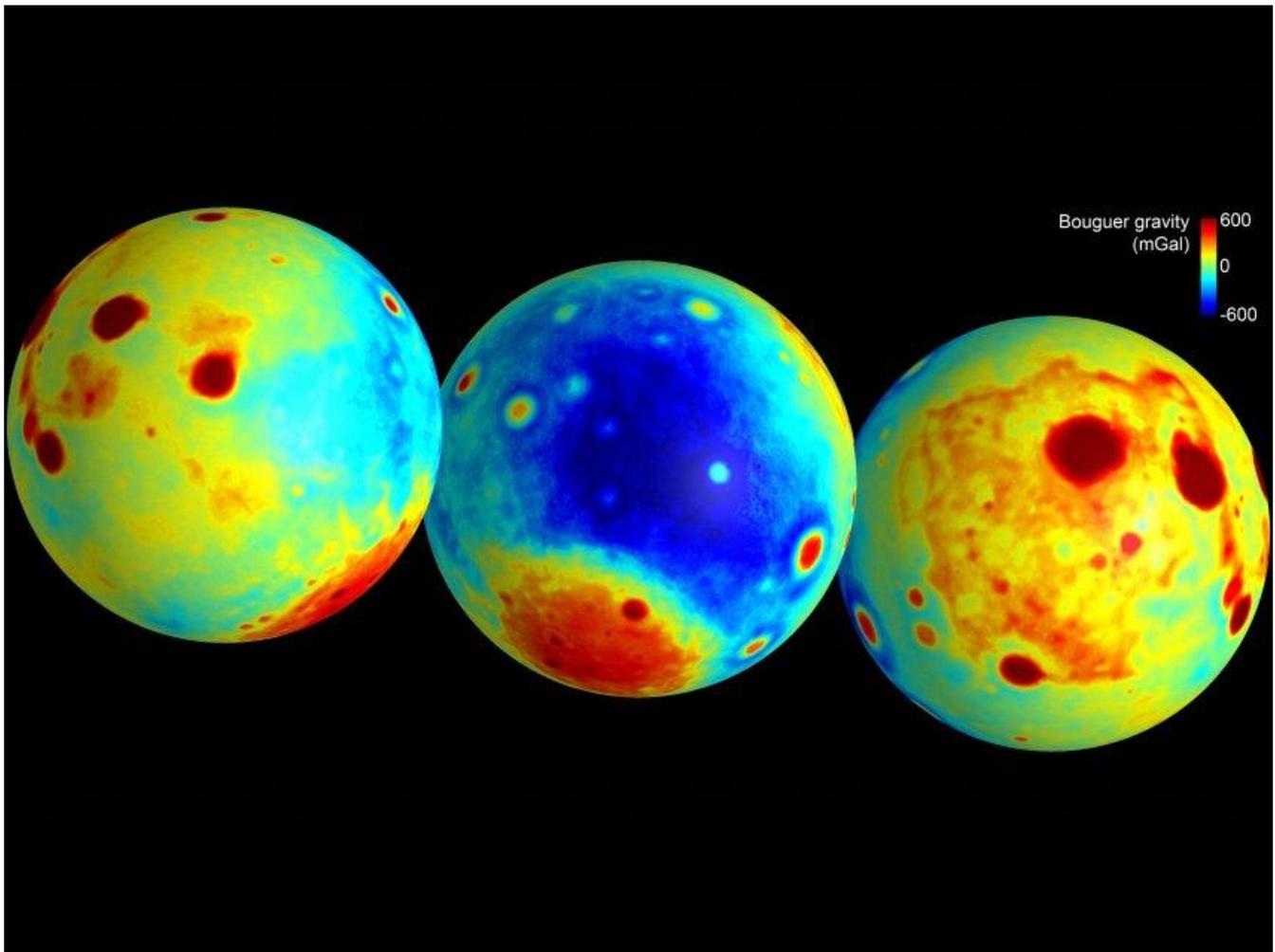
"That ocean could well be underground," Zuber said.

As the Martian surface dried out over the years, such underground water may have provided a refuge for surface microbes, if they ever existed. Microbes "could have gone very deep within the crust of Mars," Zuber said.

Ebb and Flow wrapped up their primary science mission in May and are currently embarked on an extended mission that will end in mid-December. Shortly thereafter, they will be crashed intentionally onto the lunar surface; exactly where and when that will happen is still being worked out, researchers said.

The results presented today were from the primary mission. The spacecraft have been circling even closer to the moon during the extended phase — an average altitude of 14 miles (23 km) as opposed to 34 miles (55 km) — so the Grail team thinks the gravity map will get even better.

"We expect a lot more exciting results in the future, so stay tuned," said Grail project scientist and co-investigator Sami Asmar of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, Calif.



These maps of the moon show gravity anomalies measured by NASA's Grail mission. (NASA / JPL-Caltech / CSM)

[20121205-07](#)

18:10

Art

Re: "Moon Was Violently Pummeled by Early Impacts, Probes Find" (reply to SteveG, above)

Ouch and I'm on my third try.

[20121205-08](#)

18:28

Art

"Makers Beat Takers"

"Makers Beat Takers" by Harold Meyerson, *The Washington Post*

Dec. 4, 2012, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/harold-meyerson-in-this-election-makers-beat-takers/2012/12/04/d672e6f6-3e4d-11e2-ae43-cf491b837f7b\\_story.html?tid=pm\\_opinions\\_pop](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/harold-meyerson-in-this-election-makers-beat-takers/2012/12/04/d672e6f6-3e4d-11e2-ae43-cf491b837f7b_story.html?tid=pm_opinions_pop))

The rich may be different from you and me, as F. Scott Fitzgerald once noted, but bankers are increasingly different from the rest of the rich. In this year's election, Wall Street's campaign contributions and voting patterns, as best we can discern them, bear no resemblance to the contributions and votes from our other most highly paid sectors — particularly high tech.

A cruise through two haunts of the rich — the techies' Silicon Valley and the banker towns of Connecticut's Fairfield County — turns up strikingly different voting patterns. President Obama carried Santa Clara County, the epicenter of high tech, by 43 points over Mitt Romney. In such leafy Wall Street burbs as Greenwich and New Canaan, Conn., by contrast, Romney prevailed by 11 and 29 points, respectively. Outside the most banker-dense villages, Romney's

totals plummeted: Obama carried the whole of Fairfield County by 11 points, much as he carried most of the affluent suburbs of New York, San Francisco, Washington and Los Angeles.

The differences between finance and other wealthy sectors are even more pronounced in their campaign contributions. Romney's five largest contributors, by employer, are, in order, Goldman Sachs, Bank of America, Morgan Stanley, JPMorgan Chase and Credit Suisse. Wells Fargo comes in sixth. ("Contributors by employer" refers to the total of contributions from employees of a particular company.) There are no tech companies on the list of Romney's top 20 contributors by employer. There aren't even any tech companies on the list of Romney's top 10 contributors by employer in California.

Open Secrets, the campaign finance monitor, has tallied the contributions of each American industry (both employees and the companies themselves) to super PACs this year and found that "Securities and Investment," which donated more than any other industry — \$75,036,769 — gave \$4 to conservative super PACs for every \$1 they gave to a liberal one. (The number-two industry by donations, "Casinos/Gambling" — that is, Sheldon Adelson and Steve Wynn — donated \$31,729,520, of which 99 percent went to conservative super PACs. Those who contend that the differences between finance and casinos are largely cosmetic now have one more argument they can invoke.)

On the list of Obama's five largest contributors by employer, the University of California heads the pack, with Microsoft, Google, the federal government and Harvard rounding out the top five. IBM and Apple are also on the list of the top 20, as are four other universities, but just one bank: Wells Fargo, which placed 19th and which is the only major bank based in Northern California. Open Secrets' tally of super PAC contributions from the "Computers/Internet" industry — they totaled \$9,292,448 — showed that 58 percent went to liberal groups. The New York Times' Nate Silver has calculated that Obama received 97 percent of the presidential campaign contributions of Google employees, 91 percent of Apple employees, 81 percent of those at Microsoft and 77 percent of those at IBM.

Generalizations are now in order. Obama won overwhelming backing from the most productive and innovative sector of American capitalism. Romney won the backing of finance and casinos, whose contributions to American productivity and well-being are more difficult to discern, and which are industries based on reshuffling resources in games the house almost always wins. Obama, if you will, won the makers; Romney, the takers.

The makers, moreover, haven't shown themselves at all averse to raising taxes on the rich. On Election Day, Californians voted to end their 10 years of annual budget deficits and fiscal crises — and underfunding schools and universities — by passing, 55 percent to 45 percent, Proposition 30, which hiked marginal tax rates on incomes above \$250,000. Santa Clara County gave the measure 63 percent support. The state's tech sector, which historically has supported more funding for education, contributed virtually nothing to the campaign to defeat Proposition 30, which was financed almost entirely by right-wing ideologues.

How do we explain the gulf that separates the techies from the bankers? Part of the explanation may be demographic: The techies are younger, and a new survey by the *San Jose Mercury News* concludes that fully half of the Bay Area's tech workforce is Asian American, a group that backed Obama in California at a rate of 79 percent. Wall Street, by contrast, is overwhelmingly white.

More broadly and at the risk of oversimplifying, techies are into making products while bankers are into making money. In the age of Obama, where the big money dwells, invention is Democratic; sweet deals are Republican.

Explain the thinking behind rejecting this. I really do not understand. Modeled on our Americans with Disabilities Act and ratified by 126 other countries and rejected by our congress.

"UN Disability Treaty Rejected by Senate" by AP

Dec. 4, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/story/2012/12/un-disability-treaty-rejected-by-senate-84570.html>)

(WASHINGTON) Led by Republican opposition, the Senate on Tuesday rejected a United Nations treaty on the rights of the disabled that is modeled after the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act.

With 38 Republicans casting "no" votes, the 61-38 vote fell five short of the two-thirds majority needed to ratify a treaty. The vote took place in an unusually solemn atmosphere, with senators sitting at their desks rather than milling around the podium. Former Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, looking frail and in a wheelchair, was in the chamber to support the treaty.

The treaty, already signed by 155 nations and ratified by 126 countries, including Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia, states that nations should strive to assure that the disabled enjoy the same rights and fundamental freedoms as their fellow citizens. Republicans objected to taking up a treaty during the lame-duck session of the Congress and warned that the treaty could pose a threat to U.S. national sovereignty.

"I do not support the cumbersome regulations and potentially overzealous international organizations with anti-American biases that infringe upon American society," said Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla.

They were not swayed by support for the treaty from some of the party's prominent veterans, including the 89-year-old Dole, who was disabled during World War II; Sen. John McCain, who also suffered disabling injuries in Vietnam; Sen. Dick Lugar, the top Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee; and former Attorney General Dick Thornburgh. Eight Republicans voted to approve the treaty.

The treaty also was widely backed by the disabilities community and veterans groups.

Democratic support for the convention was led by Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Sen. John Kerry, Senate Democratic Whip Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, one of the key players in writing the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act.

"It really isn't controversial," Kerry, D-Mass., said. "What this treaty says is very simple. It just says that you can't discriminate against the disabled. It says that other countries have to do what we did 22 years ago when we set the example for the world and passed the Americans with Disabilities Act."

The ADA put the United States in the forefront of efforts to secure equal rights for the disabled, and it became the blueprint for the U.N. treaty, formally the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The treaty was negotiated by the George W. Bush administration. It was completed in 2006 and President Barack Obama signed it in 2009.

The United Nations estimates that 650 million people around the world are disabled, about 10 percent of world population.

Kerry and other backers stressed that the treaty requires no changes in U.S. law, that a committee created by the treaty to make recommendations has no power to change laws and that the treaty cannot serve as a basis for a lawsuit in U.S. courts.

They said the treaty, by encouraging other countries to emulate the rights and facilities for the disabled already existing in the United States, would be of benefit for disabled Americans, particularly veterans, who want to work, travel or study abroad.

Supporters also rejected the argument that it was inappropriate to consider an international treaty in a post-election lame-duck session. They said that since the 1970s the Senate had voted to approve treaties 19 times during lame-duck sessions.

But in September, 36 Republican senators signed a letter saying they would not vote for any treaty during the lame duck.

The opposition was led by tea party favorite Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah, who argued that the treaty by its very nature threatened U.S. sovereignty. Specifically he expressed concerns that the treaty could lead to the state, rather than parents, determining what was in the best interest of disabled children in such areas as home schooling, and that language in the treaty guaranteeing the disabled equal rights to reproductive health care could lead to abortions. Parents, Lee said, will "raise their children with the constant looming threat of state interference."

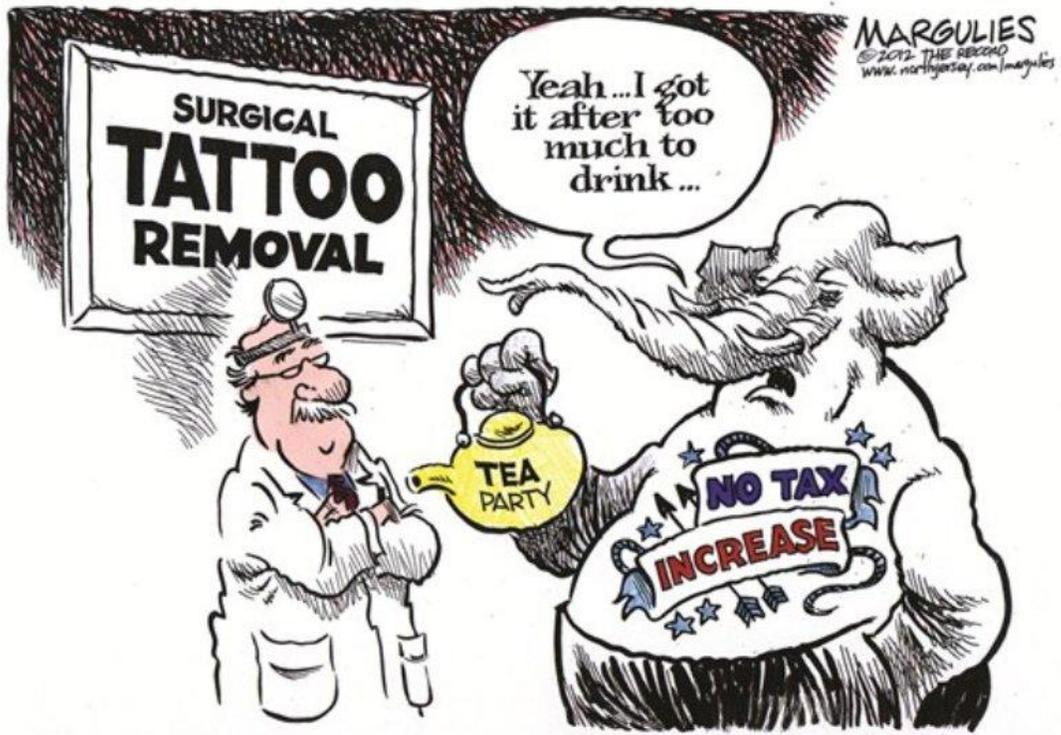
Supporters said such concerns were unfounded.

"I am frankly upset," said Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., "that they have succeeded in scaring the parents who home school their children all over this country." He said he said his office had received dozens of calls from homeschooling parents urging him to vote against the convention.

The conservative Heritage Action for America urged senators to vote no against the treaty, saying it would be recorded as a key vote on their scorecard. It repeated the argument that the treaty "would erode the principles of American sovereignty and federalism."

20121205-11 23:57 SteveG Cartoons: Fiscal Cliff Hot Air & Tea Party Tattoo Removal





20121205-12 23:58 Marci Cool Photos #22 (Fields of Lavender in Provence , France)



<http://wallsa.com/index.php/NATURE-WALLPAPERS/Webshots-Premium---October/Mysterious-Moon>



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

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# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #286 — DEC. 7, 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.**

## **Post-Cliff Income Taxes**

(posted by Jim, Dec. 7, 2012)



There is a lot of panic talk about the "fiscal cliff" and what it will do to your family. You can discount a lot of that.

If the Congress does nothing -- which we have come to expect-- then the Bush tax cuts expire like they were supposed to do years ago. They were sold as a temporary thing or they could not have been passed in the Congress. They knew they were reducing the government income and they had to balance that with cuts so they made the cost seem less by limiting the years it would be in effect. Then they extended them two or three times.

But when (if) the rates go back up where they were the first sign most people would see would be a new withholding table that would withhold a little more from your pay.

As soon as those smaller paychecks show up the Congress will get a lot of pressure to "do something" and they will. And new tax tables will be generated and people can adjust their withholding again and will not end up paying more taxes (unless you are in the 1%)

The Congress has the power to pass new tax laws and make them retroactive. So most people will soon get tax rates back down again. The trick is going to be to not restore the low rates on the high incomes.

I prepare income tax returns for people. I have done this since 1968 so I have seen a lot of tax rates. We have had cases in the past when Congress passed laws this time of year extending tax cuts that were set to expire the preceding December 31, and making them retroactive to the preceding January 1 so that they were available for the whole year even though the year was almost done when they were passed.

The IRS had already printed up the tax forms under the assumption that the provisions had expired and they had to be creative to find ways for us to file returns to give people the tax breaks.

I just received my software for the 2012 tax returns. It does not have most of the forms that I will need because they are waiting to see if Congress does anything in December that will change everything.

It would be nice if they settled things sooner so that there would be less uncertainty, but it would be better if they got it done right than rushing through something stupid.



WASHINGTON'S **STALE** MATES.

"Top Two Percent to GOP: Tax Us" by Ryan Grim and Sabrina Siddiqui, Huffington Post

Dec. 5, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/05/top-two-percent-tax\\_n\\_2245596.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=politics](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/05/top-two-percent-tax_n_2245596.html?utm_hp_ref=politics))

(WASHINGTON) Congressional Republicans' opposition to any tax rate hike on the top two percent of earners shows few signs of letting up as the debate wears on. But the beneficiaries of that opposition, the nation's wealthiest executives, have themselves begun opening up to the possibility of a rate hike.

On Tuesday, FedEx Chairman and CEO Fred Smith, an adviser to Sen. John McCain's presidential campaign, said that the notion that tax hikes on the richest Americans would kill jobs was simply "mythology."

And on Monday, a gathering of the nation's top defense executives took a surprising turn when they endorsed tax rate increases on the wealthy and cuts of up to \$150 billion to the Pentagon's budget. Top executives from Northrop Grumman, Pratt & Whitney, TASC and RTI International Metals appeared at the National Press Club at an event organized by the Aerospace Industries Association, the top defense contractor lobbyist.

David Langstaff, CEO of TASC, said that the executives were speaking out because so far leaders of the defense industry were "talking a good game, but are still unwilling to park short-term self-interest." After the event, he told a defense reporter for Politico that tax rates need to go up.

"In the near term, [income tax rates] need to go up some," Langstaff said. "This is a fairness issue -- there needs to be recognition that we're not collecting enough revenue. In the last decade we've fought two wars without raising taxes. So I think it does need to go up."

David Hess, head of Pratt & Whitney, said his parent company, United Technologies Corp, believed personal income tax rates should be on the table; Dawne Hickton, CEO of RTI, said he would back a rate hike if it led to a deal.

The CEOs join other high-profile executives who are willing to chip in more. Following a meeting with President Barack Obama last week at the White House, executives emerged to endorse higher rates. "There needs to be some revenue element to this, and [Obama] started with rates," said Joe Echeverria, CEO of Deloitte LLP. "And he started with rates on what we would define [as] the upper two percent ... that we have to pay our fair share. And I think everybody was in agreement with that notion."

AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson, who was also at the meeting, said in a statement that a deal "will require a compromise involving an increase in both tax rates and revenue."

Goldman Sachs Chief Executive Lloyd Blankfein, meanwhile, told CNN after the meeting that "if we had to lift up the marginal rate, I would do that."

When asked Wednesday about increasing support among wealthy executives for higher taxes on the rich, Republicans on Capitol Hill showed no signs of letting up.

Sen. John Thune (R-S.D.) said he had not heard the CEOs' remarks this week but insisted he would not support rate increases. He would rather see revenue generated through capping deductions, he told The Huffington Post.

"The reason deductions is a more attractive way to do this is because it doesn't hit small businesses nearly as hard as rate increases do," Thune said. "That is a concern to me, because ultimately what we need to be thinking about is economic growth. Do our policies inhibit or facilitate economic growth? And rate increases on small businesses are going to be counterproductive in terms of growing the economy and creating jobs."

Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) struck a similar chord with respect to rates, saying he would not support any deal allowing tax rates for the top two percent to expire.

"I'm deeply concerned that raising rates or further complicating the tax code is going to make it harder for us to generate the revenue we need to get out of this hole that we're in," Rubio said in an interview. "To me, it's not about a pledge -- it isn't about protecting millionaires and billionaires. It's about creating new taxpayers, because that's the only way we're going to get out of this."

But Sen. Dan Coats (R-Ind.) was slightly more flexible. While he reiterated the need for comprehensive tax reform, the senator acknowledged that he did not think restructuring the tax code would be possible before the end of this year, when the Bush-era tax cuts are set to expire.

"It's very hard to see that we can get that done in a quick two to three week process here. So I'm hoping that whatever comes down will have enforceable instructions that certain goals must be reached through comprehensive tax reform at a date certain in 2013," Coats told HuffPost. "To cherry-pick right now on tax would be -- what we'd have to do is come back and revisit and revise, and we need more certainty."

Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) said he did not want to deal in hypotheticals, but added that he has been considering the opinions of a wide variety of sources. Asked about executives expressing a willingness to see their rates go up, he responded, "I am always glad to receive advice ... I can't speculate on what might happen, [but] I have some confidence in the Speaker and Sen. McConnell in arriving at a resolution."

Still, some Republicans have broken with their party and indicated their support for accepting President Barack Obama's proposal to extend tax cuts only for the first \$250,000 of income. Last week, Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.) urged fellow Republicans to agree to the president's tax plan, and since then a number of Republicans have made similar statements, including Sen. Olympia Snowe (R-Maine.), Sen. Tom Coburn (R-Okla.), Rep. Kay Granger (R-Texas) and Rep. Robert Dold (R-Ill.).

[20121206-11](#)

23:09

SteveB

"Ann Coulter Says GOP Should Give In to Obama on Taxes: 'We Lost the Election'" (w/ video)

"Ann Coulter Says GOP Should Give In to Obama on Taxes: 'We Lost the Election'" (w/ video) by Huffington Post

Dec. 6, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/06/ann-coulter-gop-taxes-obama-hannity\\_n\\_2249545.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=mostpopular](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/06/ann-coulter-gop-taxes-obama-hannity_n_2249545.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular))

Ann Coulter shocked Sean Hannity on Wednesday when she conceded that she thinks Republicans should let tax rates for the rich go up.

House Republicans are currently battling President Obama over whether or not to hike taxes on the top 2 percent of earners in the negotiations over the so-called "fiscal cliff."

After Coulter started to say that Republicans should concede on taxes on the very rich, Hannity wondered why the House didn't just pass a bill extending the Bush tax cuts for everyone.

"OK fine, let's do that, but in the end, at some point, if the Bush tax cuts are repealed and everyone's taxes go up, I promise you Republicans will get blamed for it," she said. "It doesn't mean you cave on everything, but there are some things Republicans do that feed into what the media is telling America about Republicans."

"So are you saying that, for PR purposes, that they should give in to Obama on the tax rate?" Hannity asked.

"Not exactly, I--" Coulter said, before stopping herself and saying, "Well, yeah, I guess I am."

"You're saying capitulate to Obama?" Hannity stammered. "We don't have a revenue problem, Ann."

"We lost the election, Sean!" Coulter replied.

Other right-wing pundits, such as Bill Kristol, have echoed Coulter's argument. Kristol famously said that it wouldn't "kill the country" if taxes on millionaires went up.

20121206-12 23:55 SteveB "Offshore Tax Haven Money Could Save Us from the Fiscal Cliff"

"Offshore Tax Haven Money Could Save Us from the Fiscal Cliff" by Erika Eichelberger, *Mother Jones*

Dec. 6, 2012, (<http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2012/12/offshore-tax-havens-fiscal-cliff>)



(lweissman/Shutterstock)

Offshore tax havens—like the ones Mitt Romney has relied on—screw the federal treasury out of some \$150 billion a year, but as Congress and the president haggle over where to scrimp and save, there's been nary a mention of this potential deficit-busting gold mine. Today, the consumer group USPIRG released a report detailing what we could do with all that cash.

At least 83 of the top 100 publicly traded corporations in America shield large chunks of their income from taxes by keeping it overseas, according to the Government Accountability Office. In fact, according to the USPIRG report, 30 of the nation's biggest, richest companies actually profited off the tax code between 2008 and 2010, by avoiding taxes and getting tax refunds from the government. USPIRG notes that one of the techniques Google used to save \$3.1 billion over that time period is called "double Irish," and involves two Irish subsidiaries and one in the tax haven Bermuda.

Minus all that revenue, Congress is looking to American taxpayers to pick up the deficit tab by raising Medicare co-payments and cutting food stamps and such.

Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), chairman of the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, weighed in on the report, saying, "Closing corporate tax loopholes should be part of the conversation about how to avoid the fiscal cliff... Congress has to choose whether it will protect offshore corporate loopholes that enable many multinationals to pay little or no tax, or close them to address our deficit problem and to fund national defense, education, health care, and other critical needs."

The \$150 billion could either wipe out the fiscal cliff spending cuts for 2013, according to the report, or generate over a third of the debt reduction goal of \$4 trillion over 10 years. Here are some of the other fun things the report says \$150 billion could buy us:

- **Job creation:** Loan guarantees for half a million small businesses.

- **Student aid:** Pell grants for 10 million students every year for four years.
- **Green energy:** Thirty years of tax incentives for the production of renewable energy production.
- **21st century Transportation:** The construction of 15 commuter rail lines, 50 light rail transit lines, and over 800 bus rapid transit lines.
- **Healthcare:** Three times the current funding for domestic violence and sexual abuse programs over 50 years.

<a href="#">20121206-03</a>	11:12	Art	Re: "UN Disability Treaty Rejected by Senate" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #285)
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A paranoid rejection of anything not originated in a self serving, science denying, Christian church in mid AMERICA?

<a href="#">20121206-04</a>	11:21	Pam	Re: "UN Disability Treaty Rejected by Senate" (reply to SteveG, FotM Newsletter #285 & Art, above)
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Alan Simpson was on the "Daily Show" last night--he's a funny guy--bashing the teabaggers and blaming them for everything. He said no one trusts anyone, not even people in the same party. Everyone is looking over his shoulder for the guy behind him with a shiv. These Republicans will NEVER vote for anything, no matter how good for the country and the world it might be. They would rather see complete doom and destruction than give an inch on when the dinosaurs lived. They all need a stiff dose of Jonathan Swift--and a kick in the pants. They make me sick.

<a href="#">20121206-01</a>	06:45	SteveB	Where's the Beef (or Seafood or Poultry)? (to Ben, after receiving no Apple lunch photo/description for two days)
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OK, here it is...

You get my 800+ readers all salivating about that iFood you eat for (usually) lunch...

They start to expect to see that "column" in every issue of the *FotM Newsletter*...

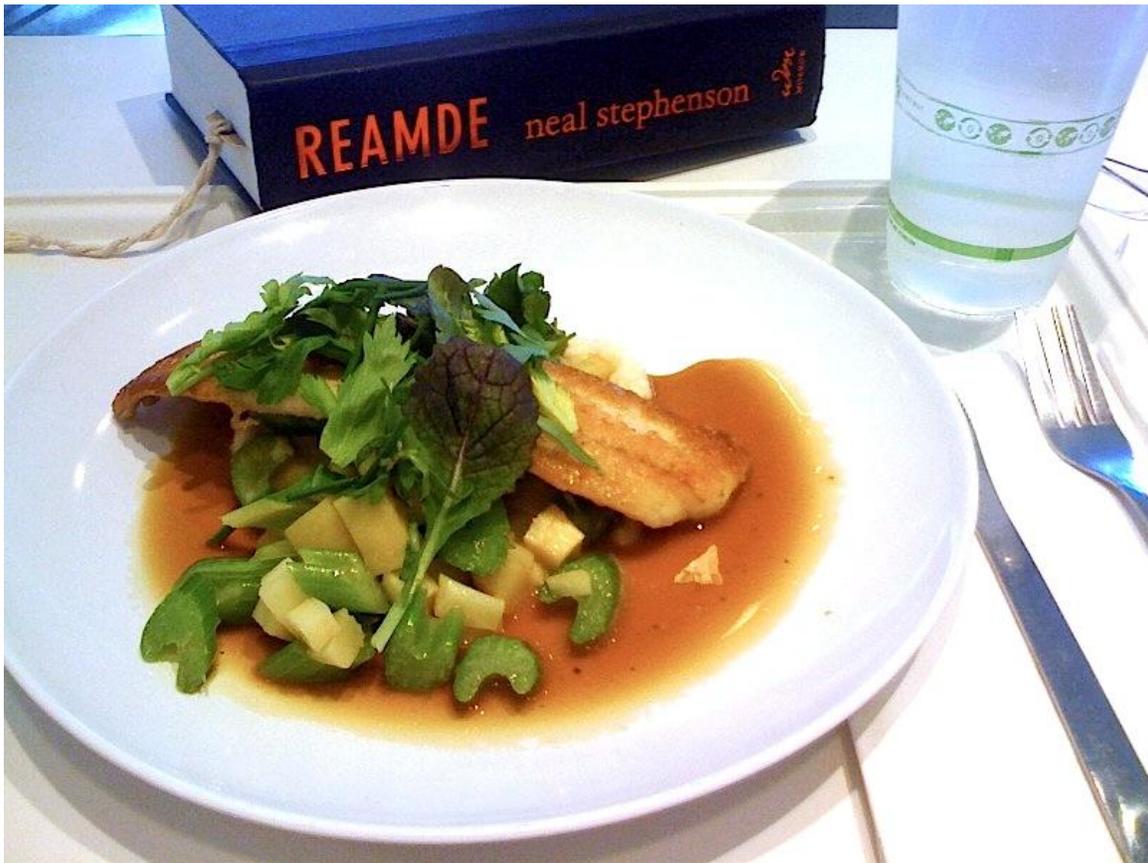
Then you pull the wool out from under their eyes and start skipping meals or what?

I've already started receiving death threats from the far right...this isn't some kind of diet, is it?

Anyway, *salud* to you, my friend.

<a href="#">20121206-05</a>	13:00	Ben	Photo: Yesterday's Seafood Lunch at Apple
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Yesterday's lunch, pan-roasted flounder, with sauteed celery, parsnip. and rutabaga over a creamy celeriac puree with a lovely and aromatic cider reduction, was just the kind of dish I want to find often at Caffe Macs. Chef Kelli chose a marvelous complement of vegetable preparations to accompany the delicately flavored fresh flounder, which had a delicious crispy pellicle that provided a beautiful golden glaze of the titanium-white flounder flesh. It's becoming quite evident that I am not the only one who goes gaga over a really fine fish-and-vegetables plate, as the Bistro line jammed up a minute after the line opened, and remained flooded with supplicants all the time I was in the cafeteria. There were a LOT of flounder-eaters about yesterday!



Pan-Roasted Flounder with Sautéed Celery, Parsnip, and Rutabaga

20121206-08 15:10 Ben Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple

Today, it was off to the Pasta Line on the opening bell. I had about eight folks ahead of me, drawn by the siren's call of fresh tuna filets... atop Chef Patricia's perfect polenta. My thick, luxurious albacore filet was delicious, if a bit more done than I prefer, still very moist, very flavorful, and (for the benefit of fish skeptics, but no surprise to me) completely un-fishy (as any very fresh fish must be, with the possible exception of certain members of the mackerel family). Delicious, lightly crusty, fork-flakable, scrumptious albacore... Chef Patricia's remarkable polenta includes a stiff dose of a sharp Italian cheese, giving rich flavor to this rather bland-to-the-eye pasta of which I have become a fan in recent months. Half a dozen sturdy spears of roasted asparagus, crunchy, properly slightly charred added a richly flavored vegetable to the dish, which was garnished with something I haven't had before, caponata. I correctly identified firm pieces of nicely roasted eggplant, golden raisins, capers, and tomatoes, and learned afterward that onions were present, as well; this cubed stuff (apart from the capers and raisins, of course!) reminded me of vera cruz from the Mexican venue, but has much broader flavor band: over a mild fish, it was an absolutely delicious accent. Yum!



Seared Albacore Filet of Chef Patricia's Perfect Polenta

20121206-06 13:15 SteveB "Will Obama Beat Back a 'Nuclear' Attack by the Big Banks?"

"Will Obama Beat Back a 'Nuclear' Attack by the Big Banks?" by Erika Eichelberger, *Mother Jones*

Dec. 6, 2012, (<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2012/11/financial-reform-dodd-frank-volker-rule-obama>)

(Financial regulators are scrambling to finalize the Volcker rule—and Wall Street has mounted a full-on blitz to defang it.)

Wild bets by taxpayer-insured banks helped put the US economy in the toilet four years ago. With financial regulators scrambling post-election to finalize long overdue rules for Wall Street, banks have intensified their war on regulation. In particular, the financial industry is lobbying like mad to add key loopholes to the Volcker rule, a provision of the sweeping 2010 Dodd-Frank financial reform act that is supposed to restrict high-risk speculation by commercial banks.

During the campaign, Mitt Romney vowed to repeal Dodd-Frank, and regulatory agencies were waiting to finish crafting the details of the Volcker rule. Whether that rule will emerge as Congress intended, or as a watered-down half-measure, is what's at stake in the current battle between reformers and industry.

Though regulators, under intense pressure from industry, have been dragging their feet on finalizing its exact parameters of the rule, the need for it was reinforced as recently as May, when JPMorgan Chase lost \$2 billion on a monster credit derivatives trade.



(Sergey Nivens & pterwort/Shutterstock)

At issue are several provisions that would allow lucrative exemptions to the rule's ban on proprietary trading (that is, when a firm trades for its own benefit). Bart Chilton, a commissioner on the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, one of the regulatory agencies charged with writing the regulations, says one of the most important sections is the one that permits banks to engage in some trading to hedge against risk. Chilton says that depending on how the definition of "hedging" is drawn up, banks could rely on this provision to make speculative and dangerous bets. "We would say, 'Bad banks!'" he notes. "And [the banks] would just say, 'No! We're just hedging!'" Chilton says if "we don't get it right," this could be a giant loophole. "The largest speculators on the planet want a loophole they can drive a large truck through," he says. "It would make the entire Volcker rule ineffectual."

Professor Michael Greenberger, a law professor at the University of Maryland who previously worked at the CFTC, agrees that if the definition of hedging isn't watertight, banks could claim that almost any investment is a hedge against risk.

Chilton and Greenberg point out that another problematic provision concerns "market-making," which is when banks hold inventories of stocks and bonds to meet customer demand. Depending on how the rules define market-making, Greenberger says, this provision could allow banks to "go out and create the very kinds of trades you don't want banks doing on a proprietary basis." This would "eat away" the entire Volcker rule, he says.

Semantics are worth a lot here. According to Better Markets, a financial reform advocacy organization, proprietary trading represents tens of billions of dollars annually to the biggest banks. It's "the biggest pot of gold for Wall Street," says Dennis Kelleher, president and CEO of the group. As a recent report by Standard & Poor's notes, a stiff Volcker rule would cut \$10 billion in combined profits for the eight largest banks.

So it's not surprising that the finance industry is fiercely attacking the rule. "It's relentless, nonstop, day and night lobbying," says Kelleher. "It is absolute total nuclear war that Wall Street is engaged in here."

Chilton feels the pressure up close. "They're not kidding around," he says. "These guys are not a couple of guys out in the countryside. They're the most powerful banks in universe."

Anna Pinedo, a partner at the law firm Morrison Foerster, who advises financial institutions on regulatory issues, says that banks' interest in clarifying the rule is technical. They just want to know "which activities are covered and which are not covered." Others are more dire. Next week, the House Financial Services will hold a hearing on the status of the rule's implementation, at which "[w]itnesses from the private sector will speak to the destructive effects the Volcker Rule will have on businesses seeking access to the capital markets and on individual investors." The American Bankers Association, in a September letter to Rep. Spencer Bachus (R-Ala.), the chair of the House Financial Services Committee, advocated repealing the Volcker section of Dodd-Frank. The industry group claimed the rule would do "harm to credit availability and market liquidity," "impair traditional banking services," and "impose costs on banks." The Association complained that the "scope of activities was far too...complicated."

Paul Volcker would agree. Last year, in his first public comments on his namesake proposal, "I'd write a much simpler [Volcker rule]. I'd love to see a four-page bill that bans proprietary trading."

That's not going to happen, with multiple provisions of the Volcker rule still up in the air at various agencies, according to Chilton. Reformers, though, hope that it gets set in stone soon. Senators Carl Levin (D-Mich.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), the authors of the Volcker section of Dodd-Frank, recently sent regulators a letter telling them to hurry it up.

Greenberg says whether the final rule favors consumers or banks may hinge on Obama's appointments for Treasury secretary, and chairmen of the CFTC and Securities and Exchange Commission. (Bloomberg called the president's recent SEC chair appointment, Elisse Walter, a "Wall Street lapdog.") Greenberg notes that for the Volcker rule, and Dodd-Frank as a whole to work, the Obama administration will have to be more aggressive this term. "We will need support from the President and Secretary of the Treasury to ensure the rules are properly implemented." That is, after the nuclear war is over.

<a href="#">20121206-07</a>	13:50	SteveB	"America's 'Actually Existing' Worker-Owned Capitalism"
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"America's 'Actually Existing' Worker-Owned Capitalism" by Moira Herbst, *The Guardian*

Dec. 4, 2012, (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/dec/04/america-actually-existing-worker-owned-capitalism>)

(Little-known fact: about one in ten US workers has ownership in the company they work for. It's a growing trend because it works.)



Owner Joe Lueken in the aisles at the Lueken's Village Foods store in Minnesota. Lueken, soon to retire, is selling the business to his 400 employees. Photograph: David Joles/AP

Last week, retiring Minnesota grocery chain owner Joe Lueken did something unusual: he gave his business to his 400 employees. The story received widespread attention as a heartwarming, It's A Wonderful Life-esque act of beneficence.

But Lueken's decision was no one-off Christmas fairytale. In fact, Bob Moore, owner of Oregon-based cereal producer Bob's Red Mill Natural Foods, did exactly the same thing two years ago.

Their actions reflect the under-the-radar but growing trend of worker ownership in the United States. The surprising truth is that there are thousands of successful, majority worker-owned businesses in the United States. We're not just talking small-scale hippie co-ops: the largest majority employee-owned business is Florida-based Publix Super Markets, a \$27bn company that employs 152,000 people. That's more workers than Costco (COST) and Whole Foods (WFM) combined.

At a time of high unemployment, soaring corporate profits and diminishing job quality, employee ownership offers an appealing, viable alternative to mainstream corporate capitalism. It's a way for workers to own "the means of production" without overthrowing the system – and without asking a gridlocked Congress to create a jobs program.

Far from some communist ideal, employee ownership is an all-American third way that both left and right can embrace. Worker advocates can applaud the model's more democratic structure, while free marketeers can admire its entrepreneurial spirit.

Workers who directly reap the fruits of their labor – rather than toil for higher returns for anonymous investors – are more motivated, productive, and creative. According to a study by Harvard and Rutgers researchers, companies with substantial employee ownership often outperform those without, because of lower staff turnover and stronger trust relationships at work.

Fortunately, the idea is catching on. Since 1975, the number of companies with partial employee ownership in the US has grown from 1,600 to more than 10,000 – about 10% of the American workforce. We sorely need these alternatives. For a nation fixated on the idea of individual liberty, Americans have a remarkable tolerance for undemocratic, top-down leadership at our workplaces, where, after all, we spend most of our waking hours.

In recent decades, the playing field between employers and employees – that is, between capital and labor – has become severely warped. Especially at the lower end of the skills spectrum, workers often face a lack of respect by management, erratic schedules, and punishment for trying to form a union. The vast majority of American workers are "at-will" – meaning, you can be fired for any reason. Perhaps your performance has lagged, or perhaps the boss doesn't like your new shoes.

If more enterprises were employee-owned, fewer workers would face this daily exploitation. Labor's share of the national income – now at its lowest point in recorded history – would rise. The ratio of average of CEO pay to worker pay (currently, an astounding 380:1) would shrink. Inequality, which harms society and hampers economic growth, would lessen.

Here's why. In publicly-traded corporations, the board of directors – nominated by a tiny number of outside investors – decides who runs the show and how profits are distributed. In employee-owned companies, workers themselves are the shareholders. Because stock does not trade publicly, the business is insulated from the pressures of the stock market and its obsession with short-term profit. Instead, the worker-owners can focus on long-term growth, sustainability, and fairness.

Part of that focus is executive pay. The base salary of the CEO of Publix, for example, was about \$810,000 last year, far lower than that of his grocery chain CEO counterparts. Publix isn't a slave to Wall Street's tendency to set bloated executive pay packages on expectations that share prices will magically balloon under new leadership.

Another focus is creating and maintaining good jobs for the long haul. While publicly-traded firms slash workers in a downturn, for example, an employee-owned company might choose to cut hours or pay for everyone to avoid layoffs.

To be sure, employee ownership is no panacea. Publix, for example, has faced employment lawsuits, including one over overtime pay. That's why proponents call for workplaces to be not only employee-owned, but also employee-directed. This is a more robustly democratic model in which workers become the board of directors of a company, making all decisions about what it produces how the spoils are distributed. Economist Richard Wolff details these kinds of models in his book, *Democracy at Work*: he often cites Mondragon, a successful Spanish conglomerate, as an example.

And then, there are the worker-owned John Lewis department stores in Britain, a \$13bn-plus business. The company grows at a faster rate than competitors as it defies the low-wage retail business model, and offers workers solid compensation and pensions. The company's purpose, according to its constitution, is "the happiness of all its members, through their worthwhile and satisfying employment in a successful business". Sounds utopian...but it's happening every day.

Another example is *Der Spiegel*, the leading German consumer magazine, which is part-owned and managed by its employees. As print media collapses elsewhere, *Spiegel* is still going strong. When I did a fellowship there, a writer told me he and his colleagues skimp on travel expenses because they know it's their bottom line, too.

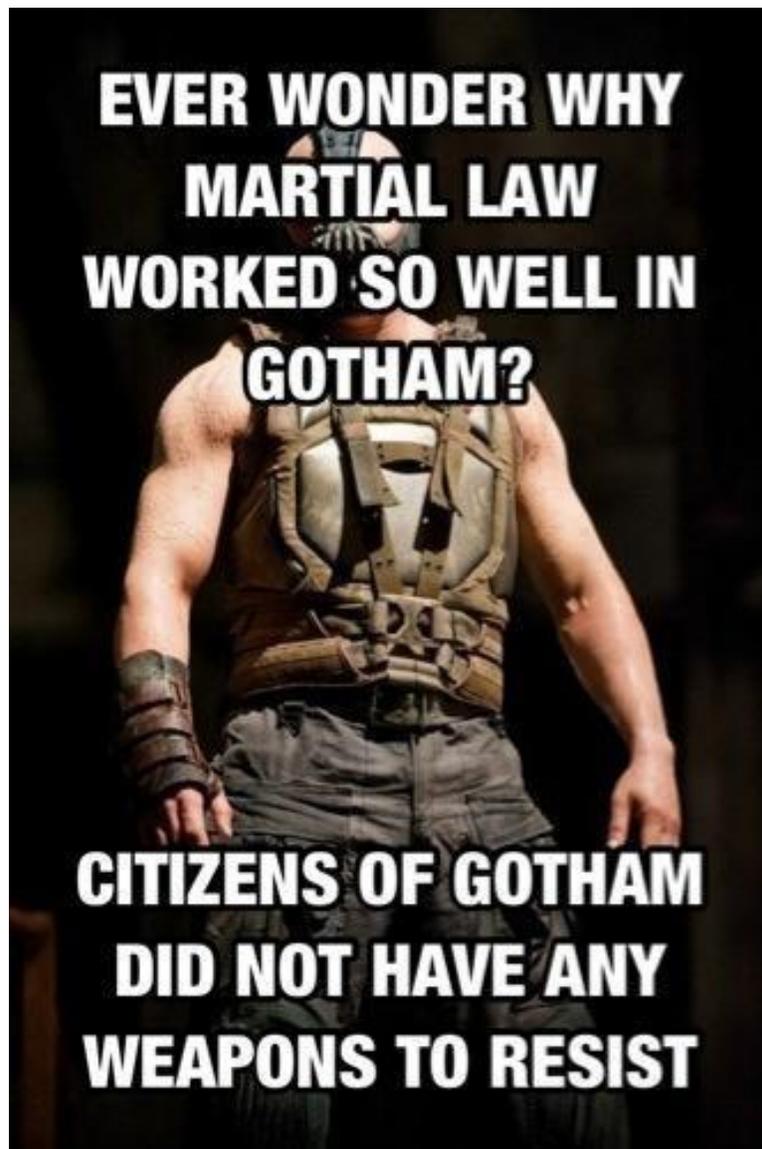
Academic studies show they're not alone. When you and your colleagues own the place, you're not going to steal a stapler or pad your hours. Trust and workplace ethics: isn't that what all those company retreats and office birthday celebrations have failed to accomplish?

<a href="#">20121206-09</a>	21:38	Ann	Video: "How To Wrap a Cat for Christmas"
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A happy little video for cat lovers...

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jm3dm5J5r0A>.

[...and in a lighter vein... --SteveB :-)]







[20121206-15](#)

23:59

SteveB

Photo: Sunrise over Hamilton Island, Whitsunday Islands, Queensland, Australia

<http://www.donteverlookback.com/2012/08/photo-friday-58-hamilton-island-sunrise/>



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #287 — DEC. 10, 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.**

## 'Wealth Without Work...'

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 10, 2012)

It seems that the public beast can only think of one thing at a time. We just finished the ugliest election in the history of America, but election reform is forgotten. Our priceless schools and public infrastructure are crumbling. The war rages on. And employment, seemingly slowly on the mend, has been put on the back burner, though jobs are the engine of commerce—private and public, and of our recovery and future. But the Fiscal Cliff is out to get us and consumes the public's attention. Oh...yawn...woe is us...now, please pass me the Twinkies...

"The Forgotten Millions" by Paul Krugman, *The New York Times*

Dec. 6, 2012, ([http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/07/opinion/krugman-the-forgotten-millions.html?\\_r=3&adxnnl=1&partner=rss&emc=rss&adxnnlx=1354885607-Jjys0AIQI5fI3FhblUtB5A&](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/07/opinion/krugman-the-forgotten-millions.html?_r=3&adxnnl=1&partner=rss&emc=rss&adxnnlx=1354885607-Jjys0AIQI5fI3FhblUtB5A&))



Let's get one thing straight: America is not facing a fiscal crisis. It is, however, still very much experiencing a job crisis.

It's easy to get confused about the fiscal thing, since everyone's talking about the "fiscal cliff." Indeed, one recent poll suggests that a large plurality of the public believes that the budget deficit will go up if we go off that cliff.

In fact, of course, it's just the opposite: The danger is that the deficit will come down too much, too fast. And the reasons that might happen are purely political; we may be about to slash spending and raise taxes not because markets demand it, but because Republicans have been using blackmail as a bargaining strategy, and the president seems ready to call their bluff.

Moreover, despite years of warnings from the usual suspects about the dangers of deficits and debt, our government can borrow at incredibly low interest rates — interest rates on inflation-protected U.S. bonds are actually negative, so investors are paying our government to make use of their money. And don't tell me that markets may suddenly turn on us. Remember, the U.S. government can't run out of cash (it prints the stuff), so the worst that could happen would be a fall in the dollar, which wouldn't be a terrible thing and might actually help the economy.

Yet there is a whole industry built around the promotion of deficit panic. Lavishly funded corporate groups keep hyping the danger of government debt and the urgency of deficit reduction now now now — except that these same groups are suddenly warning against too much deficit reduction. No wonder the public is confused.

Meanwhile, there is almost no organized pressure to deal with the terrible thing that is actually happening right now — namely, mass unemployment. Yes, we've made progress over the past year. But long-term unemployment remains at levels not seen since the Great Depression: as of October, 4.9 million Americans had been unemployed for more than six months, and 3.6 million had been out of work for more than a year.

When you see numbers like those, bear in mind that we're looking at millions of human tragedies: at individuals and families whose lives are falling apart because they can't find work, at savings consumed, homes lost and dreams destroyed. And the longer this goes on, the bigger the tragedy.

There are also huge dollars-and-cents costs to our unmet jobs crisis. When willing workers endure forced idleness society as a whole suffers from the waste of their efforts and talents. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that what we are actually producing falls short of what we could and should be producing by around 6 percent of G.D.P., or \$900 billion a year.

Worse yet, there are good reasons to believe that high unemployment is undermining our future growth as well, as the long-term unemployed come to be considered unemployable, as investment falters in the face of inadequate sales.

So what can be done? The panic over the fiscal cliff has been revelatory. It shows that even the deficit scolds are closet Keynesians. That is, they believe that right now spending cuts and tax hikes would destroy jobs; it's impossible to make that claim while denying that temporary spending increases and tax cuts would create jobs. Yes, our still-depressed economy needs more fiscal stimulus.

And, to his credit, President Obama did include a modest amount of stimulus in his initial budget offer; the White House, at least, hasn't completely forgotten about the unemployed. Unfortunately, almost nobody expects those stimulus plans to be included in whatever deal is eventually reached.

So why aren't we helping the unemployed? It's not because we can't afford it. Given those ultralow borrowing costs, plus the damage unemployment is doing to our economy and hence to the tax base, you can make a pretty good case that spending more to create jobs now would actually improve our long-run fiscal position.

Nor, I think, is it really ideology. Even Republicans, when opposing cuts in defense spending, immediately start talking about how such cuts would destroy jobs — and I'm sorry, but weaponized Keynesianism, the assertion that government spending creates jobs, but only if it goes to the military, doesn't make sense.

No, in the end it's hard to avoid concluding that it's about class. Influential people in Washington aren't worried about losing their jobs; by and large they don't even know anyone who's unemployed. The plight of the unemployed simply doesn't loom large in their minds — and, of course, the unemployed don't hire lobbyists or make big campaign contributions.

So the unemployment crisis goes on and on, even though we have both the knowledge and the means to solve it. It's a vast tragedy — and it's also an outrage.

*Seven Deadly Sins (by Mahatma Gandhi)*

*Wealth without work  
Pleasure without conscience  
Science without humanity  
Knowledge without character  
Politics without principle  
Commerce without morality  
Worship without sacrifice.*



Maybe there is a Santa Claus... 'austerity' be damned!

"Money Can't Buy Them Love" by Robert Kuttner, Huffington Post

Dec. 9, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-kuttner/fix-the-debt\\_b\\_2268952.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/robert-kuttner/fix-the-debt_b_2268952.html))

It is literally possible to have more money than you know what to do with. Take the case of the private-equity billionaire Peter G. Peterson, who has bankrolled much of the austerity crusade.

Peterson has now spent over half a billion dollars out of his personal fortune to persuade Americans that austerity is the necessary for the road to recovery. But the debate seems to be getting away from him. Peterson was heavily involved in the corporate-led group, "Fix the Debt." That effort has increasingly backfired. In Peterson's world, CEO spokesmen are a source of great credibility. But out in America, it doesn't look so good when the millionaire CEOs who cut jobs and pay low rates of taxes lecture others to tighten their belts.

Time for a new set of spokesmen. Peterson's latest front group is something called the Coalition for Fiscal and National Security, which ran full-page ads in major newspapers last week. The gimmick, as the ad declared, is that "U.S. National Security in the 21st century rests on both economic and military strength." So if you want to keep al-Qaeda at bay, it logically follows that we need to cut Social Security and Medicare. Well, it does in Peterson's circle.

The ad was signed by doddering former national security officials such as Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, James Baker, Sam Nunn, et al. They should know plenty about national security and the debt, having run up trillions of dollars in excess military spending.

Poor Pete Peterson is running out of categories of concerned citizens to associate with the austerity cause. What will it be next? Poodle breeders to cut the debt? Nascar racers?

At this rate, Peterson will soon join the club of people like Sheldon Adelson, the Koch brothers, and Karl Rove, who spent hundreds of billions of dollars and had just about zero influence for their trouble. Sometimes, money can't buy you love. Sometimes, it only buys poor judgment and makes you look faintly ridiculous.

The idea that recovery depended on austerity was always foolishness. Peterson's ploy was to make it a bipartisan cause, with Democrats agreeing to slit their own throats by agreeing with Republicans to cut Social Security and Medicare for the sake of reassuring the bond markets. But the bond markets are doing just fine, thanks to record low interest rates that turn out to have a lot more to do with Federal Reserve policy than with deficit projections. And President Obama has belatedly realized that the Peterson-Simpson-Bowles austerity axis doesn't exactly serve his political self-interest.

Meanwhile, it is dawning on Peterson's Republican Party allies that they are painted into a corner of their own creation. The Bush tax cuts expire January 1. If the Republicans hold out for tax cuts on the top two percent, they are responsible when taxes go up on everyone else -- and this time President Obama isn't blinking first.

Today, on Fox News, one of the Republican leaders, Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee, went wobbly on taxes because he had a Eureka Moment. If Republicans agree to raise taxes on the richest, he said, that puts away the tax issue, and "all of a sudden, the [debate] goes back to entitlements and maybe it puts us in a place where we actually can do something that really saves the nation."

Uh, no it doesn't. Alas, the Republican version of entitlement reform is built on some really unpopular measures that don't even save much money, such as raising the Medicare eligibility age to 67, while Obama has moved away from the austerity kick.

Which is more popular and more sensible -- raising the Medicare eligibility age, or allowing Medicare to negotiate bulk discounts with drug companies? How does a truly unpopular Republican position translate into good politics? Look how quickly the Republicans dropped the Medicare voucher idea.

Obama's old position, echoing the line of the Peterson crusade, was that we needed to get \$4 trillion in deficit cuts over a decade. Now, however, Obama has sensibly recognized that the budget has already been cut by at least \$1.5 trillion by recent budget deals, most notably the very 2011 budget legislation that gave America the fiscal cliff.

That means far less deficit reduction, Obama is proposing to get most of it from tax increases on the wealthy. If Republicans stick with a larger deficit reduction number, that requires more unpopular cuts in Social Security and Medicare, and more "reform" of tax breaks that the middle class receives, such as the mortgage interest deduction. Uh-oh.

The fiscal cliff has had the opposite effect from the one that its too-clever sponsors intended. It has revealed the backward economic assumptions of the Peterson austerity crusade and the self-serving motives of its sponsors. And it has thrown into sharp relief the political unpopularity of Republican positions on taxes and on social insurance.

As Republicans try to walk back their position of no tax increases on anyone, any time (even billionaires, even if the result is cuts in Social Security and Medicare), watch for Republicans to turn on each other.

It's December. Maybe there is a Santa Claus.

<a href="#">20121207-01</a> 09:27 GaryF Re: Today's Lunch at Apple
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Those photos of the iFood lunches look pretty good. I wonder what the photos of ifood lunches at those Chinese "Apple" factories would look like?

20121207-03 11:13 SteveB Re: Today's Lunch at Apple (reply to GaryF, above)

Maybe like this:



<http://www.flickr.com/photos/huilin/241301114/>

20121207-04 11:22 GaryF Re: Today's Lunch at Apple (reply to SteveB, above)

Probably less protein and more white rice.

20121207-02 11:08 SteveB "Cat Parasite Toxoplasma Uses 'Trojan Horse' to Infect Human Brain & May Cause Suicidal Thoughts & Risk-Taking"

And you thought *The Mind Parasites* was a sci-fi fantasy...

"Cat Parasite Toxoplasma Uses 'Trojan Horse' to Infect Human Brain and May Cause Suicidal Thoughts and Risk-Taking" by Steve Connor, *The Independent*

Dec. 7, 2012, (<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/cat-parasite-toxoplasma-uses-trojan-horse-to-infect-human-brain-and-may-cause-suicidal-thoughts-and-risk-taking-8390165.html>)



(Toxoplasma able to pass from the gut into the central nervous system, says report.)

A food-borne parasite that infects domestic cats can get inside the human brain by commandeering special cells of the immune system which it uses as a Trojan horse to enter the central nervous system, a study has found.

Scientists believe they have finally discovered the mechanism that allows *Toxoplasma gondii* – a single-celled parasite – to pass from the human gut to the brain where it may cause behavioural changes.

Researchers have shown that the parasite can infect the dendritic white blood cells of the immune system causing them to secrete a chemical neurotransmitter that allows the infected cells, and the parasite, to cross the natural barrier protecting the brain.

*Toxoplasma gondii* can live in many different species but it can only complete its life cycle in cats, which secrete the parasite in their faeces. Studies have shown that toxoplasma affects the behaviour of rats and mice, making them more likely to be eaten by cats, thereby completing parasite's complex life-cycle.

Latest figures released in September by the Food Standards Agency show about 1,000 people a day in Britain – 350,000 a year – are being infected with toxoplasma, probably from either direct contact with cats or by eating poorly-cooked meat or vegetables.

Up to 40 per cent of the British population are believed to be infected with toxoplasma and although the vast majority show no apparent symptoms, there is a risk to unborn children if their mothers become infected for the first time during pregnancy.

However, recent studies have also suggested that toxoplasma may be a trigger for psychological disturbances in humans, including schizophrenia, although the research has fallen well short of showing a cause-and-effect.

Antonio Barragan of Sweden's Centre for Infectious Diseases at the Karolinska Institute in Stockholm said that when infected with toxoplasma human dendritic cells, which are not part of the central nervous system, begin to secrete a neurotransmitter called GABA which is normally produced by brain cells.

"For toxoplasma to make cells in the immune defence to secrete GABA was as surprising as it was unexpected...This was unknown before. It means that the parasite had the capacity potentially to manipulate the central nervous system," Dr Barragan said.

The study, published in the on-line journal Plos Pathogens, used human dendritic cells growing in a test tube, but it also showed that infected dendritic cells pass more easily than uninfected cells into the brains of laboratory mice.

"We've shown that it happens in human dendritic cells taken from healthy donors and also proved that the same thing happens in the mouse model. It shows that the parasite is using dendritic cells as a sort of Trojan horse to transport itself from the human gut to the brain," Dr Barragan said.

"We've not looked at behaviour changes in people infected with toxoplasma, as that's been dealt with by previous studies. Instead, we've shown for the first time how the parasite behaves in the body of its host, by which I mean how it enters the brain and manipulates the host by taking over the brain's neurotransmitters," he said.

GABA, or gamma aminobutyric acid, is involved, among other things, in inhibiting the sense of fear and anxiety. Rats and mice infected with toxoplasma show little fear of cats and Dr Barragan suggested that infected dendritic cells may continue to stimulate the production of GABA once the cells have entered the brain.

However, other scientists have shown that toxoplasma is capable of producing another nerve substance called L-dopa which is a chemical precursor to the dopamine neurotransmitter, which may be another route to altering mammalian behaviour.

"Many neuropsychiatric disorders implicate a dysregulation of several neurotransmitters. If one is affected, this may affect the others, or the balance between neurotransmitters. How GABA specifically acts in the equation is a question for the future," Dr Barragan said.

Scientists emphasised that the jury is still out on whether toxoplasma is capable of influencing the behaviour or mental state of infected people given the preliminary nature of the studies showing a tentative link between the parasite and human behaviour.

"We believe that this knowledge may be important for the further understanding of complex interactions in some major public health issues that modern science still hasn't been able to explain fully," Dr Barragan said.

"At the same time, it's important to emphasise that humans have lived with this parasite for many millennia, so today's carriers of toxoplasma need not be particularly worried," he said.

[Still...if I have this crap in my brain, I'm gonna be worried! Don't hang-out with cats! -SteveB]

<a href="#">20121208-01</a> 12:27 SteveB "James Taylor Calls for Election Reform"
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Ah...the impossible "reasonable dialogue"... Sweet Baby James...

"James Taylor Calls for Election Reform" by Bryan Doyle, Politico

Dec. 7, 2012, (<http://www.politico.com/blogs/click/2012/12/james-taylor-calls-for-election-reform-151419.html?hp=r16>)



(Jay Westcott/POLITICO)

James Taylor had election reform on his mind during a speech at the National Press Club on Friday.

"We have a day off for 4th of July. For Independence Day, Patriot's Day. Washington and Lincoln's birthday, Veteran's Day, we have MLK day. Why can't we get a day off to go to the polls?" the singer asked.

Taylor, wearing a cap and turtleneck, also called for polls to be open longer and criticized voter ID laws.

"There are a lot of people in the country...who want fewer people to vote," he said. "These voter ID laws that are in the name of preventing voter fraud, I think, it's a solution without a problem. ...It's just a bad idea in my opinion."

Discussing his political involvement in recent years, Taylor – who stumped for President Barack Obama's re-election – said he was "hugely motivated" by "eight years of Cheney-Bush."

"And I say it in that order on purpose," he said. "It was a tough time for me. I really suffered. It made me deeply ambivalent about my country. That we would choose that – even if we may not have actually chosen it – that that was what represented us in the world."

The Grammy winner added that while he's "a relentless Democrat," he believes that "a reasonable dialogue between Republicans and Democrats is what keeps this country on course and in balance."

"I think that by ourselves liberals would probably steer us to a sort of paralyzed nanny state, European style," he said. "And Republicans left to their own would head toward oligarchy of inherited wealth and power. So I think that we really do need a strong Republican Party and a good dialogue between left and right."

Besides talking politics, Taylor did some singing, too -- crooning classics like "Sweet Baby James" and "Something in the Way She Moves" for the crowd.

"Mmmm...I think I'll wear yellow today, for that tigerish look...quite stylish...but I look so good in black! What's a girl to do?"

"Venus the Two-Faced Cat a Mystery" by Katia Andreassi, *National Geographic*

Aug. 31, 2012, (<http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2012/08/120831-venus-two-faced-cat-genetics-animals-science/>)



Venus's face is split evenly into two colors. (courtesy "Today Show"/NBC)

(Famous feline may have different DNA on each side of her body.)

Venus the two-faced cat is currently the most famous feline on the planet.

The three-year-old tortoiseshell has her own Facebook page and a YouTube video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k38bfE3ubrs>) that's been viewed over a million times, and appeared on the "Today Show" last week.

One look at this cat and you can understand why: One half is solid black with a green eye—the other half has typical orange tabby stripes and a blue eye.

How does a cat end up looking like that? Leslie Lyons, a professor at the University of California, Davis, who studies the genetics of domestic cats said she's never seen a cat exactly like Venus.

"She is extremely, extremely rare," Lyons said. "But you can explain it and you can understand it."

Is Venus a Chimera?

Many reports about Venus refer to the cat as a "chimera." In mythology, a chimera is a mishmash monster made up of parts of different animals. A feline chimera is a cat whose cells contain two types of DNA, caused when two embryos fuse together.

Among cats, "chimeras are really not all that rare," Lyons said. In fact, most male tortoiseshell cats are chimeras. The distinctively mottled orange and black coat is a sign that the cat has an extra X chromosome.

But female cats, said Lyons, already have two X chromosomes so they can sport that coat without the extra X. That means Venus is not necessarily a chimera.

To find out would require genetic testing, said Lyons. With samples of skin from each side of the cat, "we can do a DNA fingerprint—just like on CSI—and the DNA from one side of the body should be different than the other."

### Cat's Blue Eye Another Mystery

If Venus isn't actually a chimera, then what would explain her amazing face?

"Absolute luck," Lyons said. One theory: perhaps the black coloration was randomly activated in all the cells on one side of her face, while the orange coloration was activated on the other, and the two patches met at the midline of her body as she developed.

Cat fanciers who are transfixed by Venus's split face may be missing the real story: her single blue eye. Cat eyes are typically green or yellow, not blue.

A blue-eyed cat is typically a Siamese or else a cat with "a lot of white on them," she explained.

Venus appears to have only a white patch on her chest, which to Lyons is not enough to explain the blue eye.

"She is a bit of a mystery."

[20121208-03](#) 15:25 Marty Re: Mixed Breed? (reply to SteveB, above)

That is very cool. A symmetrical mosaic mutation. Most cats with different colored eyes are deaf. I wonder if this cat can hear?

I got an email from Larry. He still owns and rents some land around Cloverdale (I really don't yet know exactly where), but the young couple who lives there is interested in mushroom hunting. He gave me their phone number and talked to them about it. I'll give them a call.

Any morels in Bolivia?

I forgot to tell you in my last email, there was a blues/rock festival in Greencastle in the fall, and one jazz band played who had HarryM playing guitar. They had a good lead singer who also played trumpet, as well as an old piano player who is in the *Downbeat* Jazz Hall of Fame. Unfortunately, he had clearly seen better days (the piano player).

[20121208-04](#) 19:10 SteveB Re: Mixed Breed? (reply to Marty, above)

So is that what a cat (or any animal, I guess) is if they have different colored eyes? Are they also "symmetrical mosaic mutations"? In which case, I guess it's logical this cat would have different colored eyes.

I wonder why the deafness? Maybe something about nerve connections???

No morels in Bolivia, apparently, but lots of mind-altering plants and mushrooms I'd be very scared of. There are true *brujos* here, who, using such substances, can teach people to fly...at least in their minds... We consider ourselves lucky to now have a regular supply of fresh button mushrooms and portobellos in the supermarkets.

I'll tell Harry on Facebook that you saw him. Happy to hear the good news about my old bandmate.

<a href="#">20121208-05</a>	20:50	SteveG	Fw: SignOn.org Petition: Demand Fair Compensation for Members of Congress!
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from SignOn.org:

Fair Compensation, by Claudia Lewis

To be delivered to: The United States House of Representatives and The United States Senate

#### Petition Statement

"Our senators and representatives no longer represent the average working American. Their compensation needs to be tied to the average workers salary, with no medical benefits, retirement income or more than 2 weeks vacation, so they might better represent us."

#### Petition Background

Our senators and representatives no longer represent the average working American. They have lost touch with the problems faced by working Americans. They recess while they should be working on solving the many budget and health issues that face our country. It's time they faced the problems of middle class Americans. Cut their salary and benefits back to the level of the working class. Maybe then we will have representation.

<http://signon.org/sign/fair-compensation.fb23>

<a href="#">20121209-02</a>	06:05	SteveB	"Ann Coulter Attacks Latinos in Column, As Conservatives Seek to Reach-Out to Hispanic Voters" & "America Nears El Tipping Pointo"
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From the "When Will They Ever Learn" Department:

"Ann Coulter Attacks Latinos in Column, As Conservatives Seek to Reach-Out to Hispanic Voters" by Roque Planas, Huffington Post

Dec. 7, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/ann-coulter-attacks-latinos-conservatives-hispanic-voters\\_n\\_2253721.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=politics&ir=Politics](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/07/ann-coulter-attacks-latinos-conservatives-hispanic-voters_n_2253721.html?utm_hp_ref=politics&ir=Politics))

Republicans looking to reach out to Latinos may want to avoid the advice of Ann Coulter.

The conservative pundit penned a column Wednesday in which she lashed out at the "deluge of unskilled immigrants pouring into the country" and portrayed Latinos as a lazy "underclass" looking for a government handout. Coulter titles the piece "America Nears El Tipping Pointo," presumably to make a virtue of her ignorance of the Spanish language.

In fact, Latinos use less than their fair share of government benefits. According to a study released this year by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities:

Non-Hispanic whites accounted for 64 percent of the population in 2010 and received 69 percent of the entitlement benefits. In contrast, Hispanics made up 16 percent of the population but received 12 percent of

the benefits, less than their proportionate share -- likely because they are a younger population and also because immigrants, including many legal immigrants, are ineligible for various benefits.

Coulter implies in her piece that non-whites are "nitwits who deserve lives of misery and joblessness." She singles out immigrants from Latin America as particularly "nitwitty," saying they have too many babies out of wedlock, without citing a published source for the assertion. Nearly half of undocumented-immigrant households -- 45 percent -- consisted of a spouse or cohabiting couple with one or more children, compared to 34 percent of legal immigrants and 21 percent of the U.S. born, according to a 2010 Pew Hispanic Study.

Apparently unaware that Latinos do not depend disproportionately on government benefits, Coulter writes:

That's a lot of government dependents coming down the pike. No amount of "reaching out" to the Hispanic community, effective "messaging" or Reagan's "optimism" is going to turn Mexico's underclass into Republicans ... Rather than being more hardworking than American, Hispanics actually work about the same as others, or, in the case of Hispanic women, less.

In fact, Latinos -- especially immigrants -- are more entrepreneurial than the general population. As Cristina Costantini points out in a piece for ABC/Univision, Hispanics created twice as many businesses as the general public since 2000, according to census data.

Mitt Romney won just 27 percent of the Latino vote, the lowest number of a presidential candidate since Bob Dole in 1996. Romney's failure to attract Hispanic voters likely owes to the hardline positions on immigration he took to attract the GOP's right wing, many of whom viewed the former Massachusetts governor as too liberal going into the party primary.

"America Nears El Tipping Pointo" by Ann Coulter, various

Dec. 5, 2012, (<http://www.anncoulter.com/columns/2012-12-05.html>)

I apologize to America's young people, whose dashed dreams and dim employment prospects I had laughed at, believing these to be a direct result of their voting for Obama.

On closer examination, it turns out that young voters, aged 18-29, overwhelmingly supported Romney. But only the white ones.

According to Pew Research, 54 percent of white voters under 30 voted for Romney and only 41 percent for Obama. That's the same percentage Reagan got from the entire white population in 1980. Even the Lena Dunham demographic -- white women under 30 -- slightly favored Romney.

Reagan got just 43 percent of young voters in 1980 -- and that was when whites were 88 percent of the electorate. Only 58 percent of today's under-30 vote is white and it's shrinking daily.

What the youth vote shows is not that young people are nitwits who deserve lives of misery and joblessness, as I had previously believed, but that America is hitting the tipping point on our immigration policy.

The youth vote is a snapshot of elections to come if nothing is done to reverse the deluge of unskilled immigrants pouring into the country as a result of Ted Kennedy's 1965 immigration act. Eighty-five percent of legal immigrants since 1968 have come from the Third World. A majority of them are in need of government assistance.

Whites are 76 percent of the electorate over the age of 30 and only 58 percent of the electorate under 30. Obama won the "youth vote" because it is the knife's edge of a demographic shift, not because he offered the kids free tuition and contraception (which they don't need because it's hard to have sex when you're living with your parents at 27).

In 1980, Hispanics were only 2 percent of the population, and they tended to be educated, skilled workers who got married, raised their children in two-parent families and sent their kids to college before they, too, got married and had kids. (In that order.)

That profile has nothing to do with recent Hispanic immigrants, who -- because of phony "family reunification" rules -- are the poorest of the world's poor.

More than half of all babies born to Hispanic women today are illegitimate. As Heather MacDonald has shown, the birthrate of Hispanic women is twice that of the rest of the population, and their unwed birthrate is one and a half times that of blacks.

That's a lot of government dependents coming down the pike. No amount of "reaching out" to the Hispanic community, effective "messaging" or Reagan's "optimism" is going to turn Mexico's underclass into Republicans.

Any election analysis that doesn't deal with the implacable fact of America's changing demographics is bound to be wrong.

Perhaps the reason elections maven Michael Barone was so shockingly off in his election prediction this year was that, in the biggest mistake of his career, Barone has been assuring us for years that most of these Third World immigrants pouring into the country would go the way of Italian immigrants and become Republicans. They're hardworking! They have family values!

Maybe at first, but not after coming here, having illegitimate children and going on welfare.

Charles Murray recently pointed out that -- contrary to stereotype -- Hispanics are less likely to be married, less likely to go to church, more supportive of gay marriage and less likely to call themselves "conservative" than other Americans.

Rather than being more hardworking than Americans, Hispanics actually work about the same as others, or, in the case of Hispanic women, less.

It seems otherwise, Murray says, because the only Hispanics we see are the ones who are working -- in our homes, neighborhoods and businesses. "That's the way that almost all Anglos in the political chattering class come in contact with Latinos," he notes. "Of course they look like model Americans."

(Black males would apparently like to work more. Nearly 20 percent of black males under 30 voted for Romney, more than three times what McCain got.)

An article by Nate Cohn in the current *New Republic* argues, as the title puts it: "The GOP Has Problems with White Voters, Too." As proof, Cohn cites Jefferson County, Colo.; Loudoun County, Va.; Wake County, N.C.; and Somerset County, N.J., all of which went Republican in presidential elections from 1968 through 2004, but which Romney lost in 2012.

Smelling a rat, I checked the demographic shifts in these counties from the 2000 to the 2010 census. In each one, there has been a noticeable influx of Hispanics (and Asians, who also vote Democrat), diminishing "the white vote" that Cohn claims Republicans are losing.

Between the 2000 and 2010 census, for example, the white population of Jefferson County declined from more than 90 percent to less than 80 percent, while the Hispanic population more than doubled, from 6 percent to 14 percent.

In Loudoun County, the Asian population tripled from 5 percent to 15 percent and the Hispanic population doubled from 6 percent to 12 percent. Meanwhile, whites plummeted from 83 percent to 69 percent of the population.

Similarly, Wake County shifted from 74 percent white to 66 percent white in the past decade, while the Hispanic population doubled, from 5 percent to 10 percent, and the black population stayed even at about 20 percent.

In Somerset County, the Hispanic population grew by 63 percent and the Asian population grew by 83 percent since 2000. The number of whites has remained steady, resulting in a population that is now just 62 percent white.

These were the counties chosen by Cohn, not me, to show that Republicans are losing "the white vote." Except they're not so white, anymore. With blacks, Asians and Hispanics voting 93 percent, 73 percent and 71 percent for Obama, Republicans have to do more than just win the white vote. They have to run the table.

Romney got a larger percentage of the white vote than Reagan did in 1980. That's just not enough anymore.

Ironically, Romney was the first Republican presidential candidate in a long time not conspiring with the elites to make America a dumping ground for the world's welfare cases. Conservatives who denounced Romney as a "RINO" were the ones doing the bidding of the real establishment: business, which wants cheap labor and couldn't care less if America ceases to be the land of opportunity that everyone wanted to immigrate to in the first place.

[20121209-03](#) 11:50 Tom Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #1



[20121209-04](#) 18:43 SteveB "How the Mainstream Press Bungled the Single Biggest Story of the 2012 Campaign"

Interesting analysis of the reporting of Republican lies...

"How the Mainstream Press Bungled the Single Biggest Story of the 2012 Campaign" by Dan Froomkin, Huffington Post

Dec. 7, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-froomkin/republican-lies-2012-election\\_b\\_2258586.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=politics&ir=Politics](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dan-froomkin/republican-lies-2012-election_b_2258586.html?utm_hp_ref=politics&ir=Politics))

Post-mortems of contemporary election coverage typically include regrets about horserace journalism, he-said-she-said stenography, and the lack of enlightening stories about the issues.

But according to longtime political observers Thomas Mann and Norman Ornstein, campaign coverage in 2012 was a particularly calamitous failure, almost entirely missing the single biggest story of the race: Namely, the radical right-wing, off-the-rails lurch of the Republican Party, both in terms of its agenda and its relationship to the truth.

Mann and Ornstein are two longtime centrist Washington fixtures who earlier this year dramatically rejected the strictures of false equivalency that bind so much of the capital's media elite and publicly concluded that GOP leaders have become "ideologically extreme; scornful of compromise; unmoved by conventional understanding of facts, evidence and science; and dismissive of the legitimacy of its political opposition."

The 2012 campaign further proved their point, they both said in recent interviews. It also exposed how fabulists and liars can exploit the elite media's fear of being seen as taking sides.

"The mainstream press really has such a difficult time trying to cope with asymmetry between the two parties' agendas and connections to facts and truth," said Mann, who has spent nearly three decades as a congressional scholar at the centrist Brookings Institution.

"I saw some journalists struggling to avoid the trap of balance and I knew they were struggling with it -- and with their editors," said Mann. "But in general, I think overall it was a pretty disappointing performance."

"I can't recall a campaign where I've seen more lying going on -- and it wasn't symmetric," said Ornstein, a scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute who's been tracking Congress with Mann since 1978. Democrats were hardly innocent, he said, "but it seemed pretty clear to me that the Republican campaign was just far more over the top."

Lies from Republicans generally and standardbearer Mitt Romney in particular weren't limited to the occasional TV ads, either; the party's most central campaign principles -- that federal spending doesn't create jobs, that reducing taxes on the rich could create jobs and lower the deficit -- willfully disregarded the truth.

"It's the great unreported big story of American politics," Ornstein said.

"If voters are going to be able to hold accountable political figures, they've got to know what's going on," Ornstein said. "And if the story that you're telling repeatedly is that they're all to blame -- they're all equally to blame -- then you're really doing a disservice to voters, and not doing what journalism is supposed to do."

Ornstein said the media's failure led him to conclude: "If you want to use a strategy of 'I'm just going to lie all the time', when you have the false equivalence meme adopted by a mainstream press and the other side lies a quarter of the time, you get away with it."

### The Apostasy

Ornstein and Mann's big coming out took place in late April, when the *Washington Post's* "Outlook" section published their essay "Admit It. The Republicans Are Worse", adapted from their book *It's Even Worse Than It Looks: How the American Constitutional System Collided With the New Politics of Extremism*, which went on sale a few days later.

Political journalists had no doubt heard similar arguments many times before, mostly from left wing bloggers. But this time the charge was coming from two of the most consistent purveyors of conventional wisdom in town, bipartisan to a fault.

And they were pretty harsh in their critique of the media. "Our advice to the press: Don't seek professional safety through the even-handed, unfiltered presentation of opposing views," they wrote in the Post. "Which politician is telling the truth? Who is taking hostages, at what risks and to what ends?"

Initially, at least, Mann and Ornstein weren't completely ignored. "We had really good reporters call us and say: 'You're absolutely right'," Mann said. "They told us they used this as the basis for conversations in the newsroom."

But those conversations went nowhere, Mann said.

"Their editors and producers, who felt they were looking out for the economic wellbeing of their news organizations, were also concerned about their professional standing and vulnerability to charges of partisan bias," Mann said.

So most reporters just kept on with business as usual.

"They're so timid," Mann said.

Some reporters did better than others, Ornstein said, particularly crediting Jackie Calmes of the *New York Times* and David Rogers of Politico among a few others. "They grew a little bit more straightforward in what they do, and showed you can be a good, diligent unbiased reporter, report the facts, put it in context, and yet show what's really going on," he said.

Most reporters, however -- including many widely admired for their intelligence and aggressive reporting -- simply refused to blame one side more than the other. Mann said he was struck in conversations with journalists by how influenced they were by the heavily funded movement to promote a bipartisan consensus around deficit reduction and austerity. Such a bipartisan consensus doesn't actually exist, Mann pointed out. But if you believe it does, then you can blame both parties for failing to reach it.

"The Peterson world, I think, has given journalists the material to keep doing what they're doing," Mann said of the vast network of think tanks and other influential Washington groups underwritten at least in part by Wall Street billionaire Peter Peterson.

Peterson's vast spending has given rise to an environment of contempt among the Washington elites for anyone who doesn't believe the government is dangerously overextended. And by that reckoning, the Democrats are therefore more out of touch with reality than Republicans, who at least pay the concept ample lip service.

### How Fact-Checking Made Things Worse

Ornstein and Mann's views on journalistic failure have not been widely shared by mainstream media critics, who have instead focused on the fact that the press, in its enthusiasm to see the presidential race decided by a nose, ignored solid polling data to the contrary and called it wrong until the very end.

To the extent that the issue of widespread prevarication has come up at all, many media critics identified the rise of fact-checking as the big new trend of the 2012 cycle.

But Mann and Ornstein said that in practice, the fact-checkers may have made things worse rather than better.

"We had these little flurries of fact-checking -- which I found not worthless, but not a substitute for coherent, serious reporting -- and most of the time it just got stuck in the back of a news organization's output and there was no cost to a candidate of ignoring it," Mann said.

And then there was this terrible irony: "Fact checkers almost seemed obliged to show some balance in their fact checking."

"There was some damn good stuff done, and stuff that really did hold Romney to account," Ornstein said. But no fact-checker intent on "appearing to be utterly straightforward, independent, and without an axe to grind, is going to actually do the job of saying that we're going to cover 20 fact checks on one side, to three on the other."

So, Ornstein concluded: "If you looked at where the scales should have been, and where they were, they were weighted. And they weren't weighted for ideological bias. They were weighted to avoid being charged with ideological bias."

It's hard to exaggerate just how popular Mann and Ornstein were with the press before their apostasy. They were quite possibly the two most quotable men in Washington. They were the media cocktail party circuit's most reliable walking talking points.

And now they are virtual pariahs.

"It's awkward. I can no longer be a source in a news story in the *Wall Street Journal* or the *Times* or the *Post* because people now think I've made the case for the Democrats and therefore I'll have to be balanced with a Republican," Mann said.

Neither Mann nor Ornstein have been guests on any of the main Sunday public affairs shows since their book came out. Nor has anyone else on those shows talked about the concerns they raised.

Ornstein is particularly infuriated that none of the supposed reader advocates at major newspapers have raised the issues they brought up. "What the fuck is an ombudsman doing if he's not writing about this?" he asked.

Their phones are still ringing, they say -- but not from inside the Beltway. "We've gotten a tremendous amount of attention, but much of that is due to the Internet and our original piece going viral," Mann said. They were also featured on NPR.

There have been countless requests for speaking engagements. "We're just selling a shitload of books," said Mann. "There've been page-one stories in countries around the world."

Domestically, however, Mann and Ornstein said they refuse to be "balanced" on TV shows by Republicans -- because they are not anti Republican. The reason they wanted the press to expose what was really happening, they said, was to give voters a chance to respond in an appropriate way.

"The argument we're making is that our politics will never really get better until the Republican Party gets back into the game, instead of playing a new one," Mann said. "We want a strong, conservative Republican Party -- but one with some connection with reality."

Their critique came not out of ideology, they said, but out of their background as devoted process junkies and honest analysts, who finally realized that their vision of collegial governance wasn't possible any more, and it was clear why.

Both see the rise of Tea Party influence on the GOP as a major turning point. For Mann, the moment of reckoning came in the summer of 2011. "What flipped me over was the debt ceiling hostage-taking," Mann said. It was clear then that the Republicans would "do or say anything" to hurt Obama, even if it was overtly bad for the country and false to core Republican values.

"That and getting older. What do I give a shit about access," he said.

"The fact is that one of the parties stopped being a conventional conservative party," Mann said. "My own view is that what needed to happen is somehow the public had to take a two-by-four to the Republicans' heads, knock them back to their senses, and allow conservative pragmatic voices to emerge," he said.

Democrats won soundly in 2012 of course, so the two-by-four was administered. But because the media obfuscated what was going on, the message was not entirely clear -- and certainly not to the Republican leadership.

### Their Message Going Forward

Mann and Ornstein don't get invited to talk to the leaders of news organizations anymore.

But if they were, again, here is what Mann would say: "First of all, I'd sympathize. I'd say I understand that you have the responsibility to use professional norms of accuracy and fairness and not let your own personal feelings get in the way."

But, he would add: "You all have missed an incredibly important story in our politics that's been developing over a period of time. You'll slip it in here and there, you'll bury it, but you really don't confront it."

Ornstein said his message would be this:

I understand your concerns about advertisers. I understand your concerns about being labeled as biased. But what are you there for? What's the whole notion of a free press for if you're not going to report without fear or favor and you're not going to report what your reporters, after doing their due diligence, see as the truth?

And if you don't do that, then you can expect I think a growing drumbeat of criticism that you're failing in your fundamental responsibility.

Your job is to report the truth. And sometimes there are two sides to a story. Sometimes there are ten sides to a story. Sometimes there's only one.

Somebody has got to make an assessment of whether the two sides are being equally careless with their facts, or equally deliberate with their lies.

20121209-05	19:29	MarthaH	"What James Madison Would Tell Grover Norquist"
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"What James Madison Would Tell Grover Norquist" by Stephen Prothero, *USA Today*

Dec. 9, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2012/12/09/grover-norquist-tax-pledge-james-madison/1757029/>)

(Founders didn't want yes men, they want representatives of the people.)

American politics has a pledge problem, and Grover Norquist isn't the only offender. In addition to Norquist's anti-tax increase pledge, there is the liberal Contract for the American Dream of MoveOn.org, plus a host of additional pledges for and against both abortion rights and and gay marriage.

Is all this pledging a good idea? No, said James Madison, and the Founding Fathers agreed.

In England and the British colonies, representatives routinely received "instructions" from citizens that bound them to vote for or against certain measures.

This practice did not go unchallenged. In 1766, Massachusetts Lt. Gov. Thomas Hutchinson argued strenuously against the rights of Massachusetts towns to "instruct" their representatives: "To hold each representative to vote according to the opinion of his town ... contradicts the very idea of a parliament the members whereof are supposed to debate and argue in order to convince and be convinced."

Nonetheless, under the Articles of Confederation, which governed U.S. politics in the aftermath of the Revolution, states reserved the right to recall their "delegates" (as they called them) if they did not vote as they were told.

This political tradition was rejected by the Founding Fathers, who did not include in the U.S. Constitution either a "right to instruct" or a "right to recall" disobedient legislators. When a representative to the First Congress from South Carolina introduced a constitutional amendment affirming a binding "right to instruct," it was soundly defeated in both houses.

A check on powers?

Defenders of instructions saw this tradition as an affirmation of popular sovereignty and a much-needed check on representative power. But Madison, an author of the Federalist Papers and the principal architect of the Constitution, disagreed. Representative power is checked by frequent elections, he argued. Any instructions states might offer to their federal representatives should be seen as merely advisory. "That instructions are binding on the representatives," he concluded "is of a doubtful, if not of a dangerous, nature."

So what does all this have to do with the current mania for pledges and the rapidly approaching "fiscal cliff"?

Colonial and early national instructions are admittedly different from modern-day pledges. A pledge is a straitjacket a candidate puts on himself while an instruction is a straitjacket that citizens put on their representatives. Nonetheless, the lessons learned in our early experiments with republican government still apply.

In our founding debates about instructions, we decided we did not want a government in which "delegates" were sent to the Capitol simply to do the bidding of others. We wanted House and Senate members to represent the interests of the nation, not just those of their states or districts. And we wanted our representatives to deliberate with one another, "to convince and be convinced," and to compromise in order to get things done.

#### Delicate balance upset

All this is to say that our early republic struck a balance between popular sovereignty and what Madison called "a due sense of national character." Pledges disrupt this delicate balance, turning "representatives" into "delegates" who take their marching orders from Grover Norquist or MoveOn.org.

According to Christopher Terranova, author of an exhaustive law review article on the history of legislative "instructions," even the conservative icon Edmund Burke disobeyed instructions sent to him by his constituents when he in his judgment saw fit.

Conservatives today need to follow Burke's example, and the examples of Sen. Saxby Chambliss, R-Ga., Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y., and others who have indicated that they will disregard their anti-tax increase pledges if the good of the country demands it.

Back in 1789, Madison posed this rhetorical question on the House floor: Suppose a representative "is instructed to patronize certain measures, and...he is convinced that they will endanger the public good; is he obliged to sacrifice his own judgment to them?"

His answer was, of course, no.



[http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/South\\_America/Bolivia/North/Beni/JUNGLE/photo513440.htm](http://www.trekearth.com/gallery/South_America/Bolivia/North/Beni/JUNGLE/photo513440.htm)



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #288 — DEC. 11, 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.**

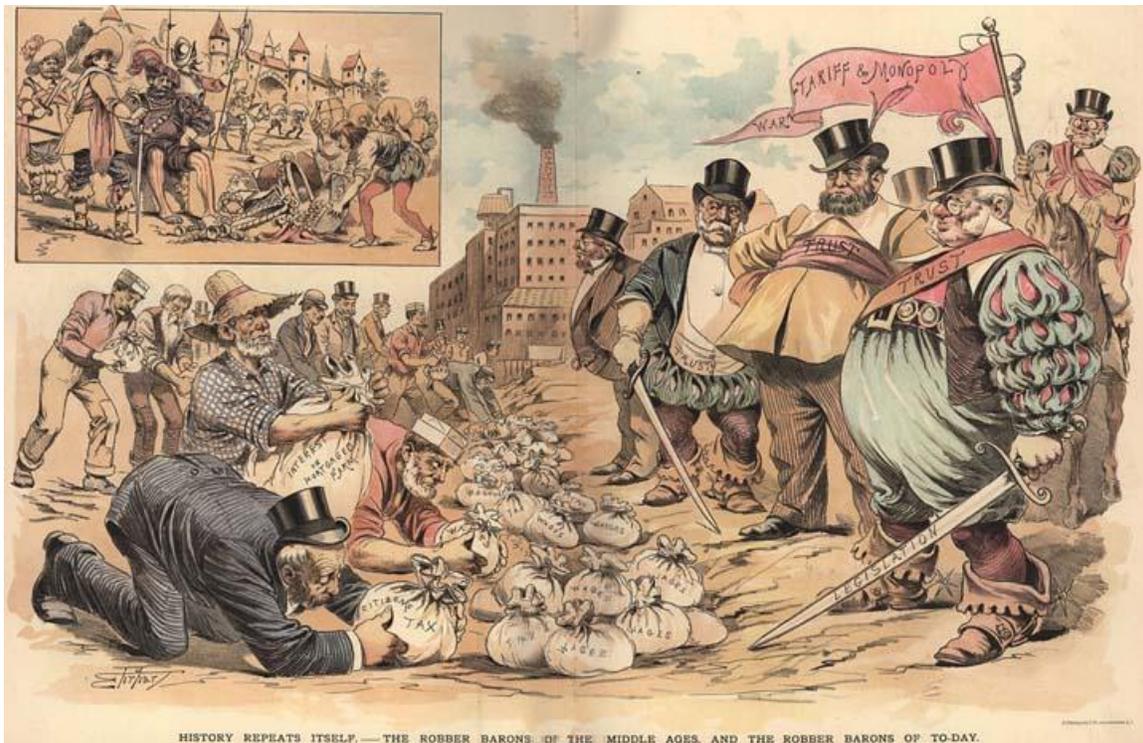
## **The 'Real Villains'**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 11, 2012)

We've been saying (and proving!) for years here at FotM that conservative Republicans have radicalized the party and lurched far to the Right. That's why FotM seems "Left" to so many of those former Teabaggers (though we tend to be moderate or moderately progressive, in my opinion, and we have always given an open forum to all views). But, in America, an even more radical shift has occurred gradually over the last generation—the marginalization, demonization, and destruction of labor and the Middle Class. None of this is without reason or agenda, all orchestrated by the true parasites of society, truly worthy of our most withering contempt...

"5 Biggest Threats to the Middle Class" by Paul Buchheit, Salon/AlterNet

Dec. 10, 2012, ([http://www.salon.com/2012/12/10/5\\_biggest\\_threats\\_to\\_the\\_middle\\_class/](http://www.salon.com/2012/12/10/5_biggest_threats_to_the_middle_class/))



(It's time to stop blaming the federal government and start looking at the parasitism of corporate America.)

One of the pleasures of a weekend away from the city is visiting with people who express points of view that are different from my own. A lot of them hate government. Their comments are sprinkled with colorful references to taxes, waste, and socialism.

Countering with facts and statistics doesn't seem to work. Instead, listening to their rants can be educational for a progressive, because the anti-government sentiment highlights the masterful job done by conservatives and the wealthy over the years, as they have basically convinced much of America to argue against themselves on matters of politics and the economy.

It would make more sense to take on the real villains.

### 1. Medical Providers

They're taking a lot more of our money than Medicare does. According to the Council for Affordable Health Insurance, medical administrative costs as a percentage of claims are about three times higher for private insurance than for Medicare. The U.S. Institute of Medicine reports that the for-profit system wastes \$750 billion a year on waste, fraud, and inefficiency. As a percent of GDP, we spend \$1.2 trillion more than the OECD average.

That's an amount equal to the entire deficit wasted on private medical care companies. One out of every six dollars we earn goes to doctors, hospitals, drug companies, and insurance companies. All good reasons to redirect our hatred.

### 2. Retirement Brokers

Various reports have concluded that administrative costs for 401(k) plans are much higher than those for Social Security — up to twenty times more.

It would be difficult to find, or even imagine, any short-term-profit-based private insurer that is fully funded for the next 25 years. Social Security is. It works for all retirees while private plans work for a limited number of investors.

### 3. Banks

Government is often blamed for local budget shortfalls, but cities and towns around the country have been repeatedly victimized by a "bid-rigging" process that diverts billions of dollars — a few thousand at a time — from numerous unsuspecting communities to the accounts of a few big banks.

Individual homeowners, especially minorities, have also been victimized by the banks. Because of the housing crash and the corresponding decrease in home values, black households lost over half of their median wealth, and Hispanic households almost two-thirds.

There are scandals and scams galore: the privately run Mortgage Electronic Registration System (MERS) headed up the illegal foreclosure business; the banking association LIBOR was guilty of interest rate manipulation; and plenty of financial institutions have engaged in the subtle art of imposing hidden fees. Credit cards are loaded with "gray charges" like surprise subscriptions and auto-renewals that cost the average consumer \$356 a year.

Yet we're forced to keep paying. Shockingly, it has been estimated that 40% of every dollar we spend on goods and services goes to banks as interest.

Public banks, on the other hand, focus on the needs of communities and small businesses rather than on investors. The most well-known example is the Bank of North Dakota (BND), which has successfully worked

with local banks throughout the state, promoting business growth through loans that a larger bank might be reluctant to make, while managing to turn a profit every year for the past 40 years.

#### 4. Higher Education Operators

Outside of the banking industry, there may not be a more egregious example of public abuse than the expropriation of higher education by profit-seekers who have subjected underemployed young people to years of student loan obligations. The collection of outstanding student debt is managed in good part by big banks like JP Morgan and Citigroup.

In most countries tuition remains free or nominal, but in America, as noted by Noam Chomsky, the belief that education strengthens a country is giving way to a philosophy of paying for your own educational benefits. Meanwhile, the "corporatization of universities" has led to a dramatic increase in administrators while relatively expensive programs like nursing, engineering and computer science are being cut.

But the easy loans keep accruing interest long after college ends. With a hint of foreboding, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and Department of Education reported that the student loan debacle has been fueled by the same forces that led to the subprime mortgage collapse.

#### 5. Big Box and Fast Food Companies

Smaller government is promoted by the very companies that make record profits while forcing their employees to accept public assistance.

While McDonald's enjoyed profits of 130 percent over the past four years, and Yum! Brands (Pizza Hut, Taco Bell and KFC) made 45 percent, and while the Walton family made \$20 billion in one year, the median hourly wage for food service workers and Walmart employees is about \$9 an hour. Many workers are stuck at the \$7.25 minimum wage, which according to the National Employment Law Project is worth 30 percent less than in 1968.

Food service and big box store employees, among the fastest-growing job segments in the nation, are making barely enough to stay out of poverty. And it's not just the employees who are subsidizing their bosses. We all are. Low-wage employees are more dependent on the food stamps and Medicaid that are paid for by our tax dollars.

What is the incentive for private companies to deal with tragedies like Hurricane Sandy? The Pacific Standard aptly stated that "the free market doesn't want to be in the flood business."

What is the incentive for private companies to keep the poisons out of our drinking water? Without sufficient government regulations the Clean Water Act was violated a half-million times in one year.

What is the incentive for private companies to plow the county roads? Or to reduce the number of prisoners in profit-seeking prisons? Or to allow you to send a birthday card for just 45 cents? Or to simply treat its customers with respect rather than as a source of profit?

The "invisible hand" of the free market is unable, or unwilling, to satisfy the needs of society in all these areas. For that it is worthy of our contempt.

[20121210-01](#) 10:08 Pam Re: "What James Madison Would Tell Grover Norquist" (reply to MarthaH, FotM Newsletter #287)

This is great. I didn't realize MoveOn.org had pledges too. I hate pledges. They smack of the House on UnAmerican Activities back in the day.

I have just read an incredible book: *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers. It's a novel about his experience in the Iraq war, and it is astonishingly good. This is Powers' first novel, and you can tell he came to fiction from writing poetry. It's graphic and upsetting, but not in a way that overshadows the meaning of what's happening. He gives enough detail to show how bad things were, but the descriptions of violence are not gratuitous. This isn't about all the terrible things that occurred but rather how one young soldier coped with his experience. I highly recommend it.

[20121210-02](#) 12:28 Pam Re: "The Forgotten Millions" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #287)

I like the Krugman piece and have sent it to some of my other friends and family. :-)

[20121210-03](#) 17:23 SteveB "Grapefruit Is Disgusting"

"Grapefruit Is Disgusting" by Katy Waldman, Slate

Dec. 10, 2012,

([http://www.slate.com/articles/life/holidays/2012/12/grapefruit\\_is\\_disgusting\\_no\\_one\\_should\\_eat\\_it\\_let\\_alone\\_give\\_it\\_as\\_a\\_holiday.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/life/holidays/2012/12/grapefruit_is_disgusting_no_one_should_eat_it_let_alone_give_it_as_a_holiday.html))

(Why you shouldn't give it to your loved ones as a holiday gift. Or to anyone, ever.)

Happy holidays, and brace yourself for the season's worst tradition! I speak not of the crass commercialization of Christmas, nor of the unconscionable deceit of hyping children up for Santa's visit. No, I speak of the annual bombardment of grapefruit.

We'll see Harry and David catalogs in the mail, Cushman's ads in the newspaper, and other marketing ploys for the putrid stocking stuffers. That one clueless aunt will mail you a crate. The ritual of shipping your loved ones grapefruit goes back to the Great Depression, when people wanted to send each other "nourishing" gifts they could actually "use." Unlike apples and pears, domestic citrus fruits reached peak ripeness during the colder months. Grapefruit proved durable and thus cheap to transport—packed into crates, they could be loaded onto railroad cars and delivered around the country. Almost a century later, nostalgia (or would that be obstinacy?) keeps the tradition in play.

It needs to stop. This killjoy has already invaded our breakfast routines. Its baleful pink, white, or red flesh shines from thousands of tables. Its pulp gets stuck in our teeth. Its juice stains our clothes. And now, we are asked to inflict the scourge on our relatives, shipping it off in packages of 12 or more in order to demonstrate our *love*?

No. Grapefruit is unwieldy, disgusting, and in some cases dangerous to eat. It is indisputably the worst fruit anyone has ever put on a plate.

A pause, now, for its partisans to bellow, "But it's a *superfood!*" Grapefruit enjoys an exalted reputation, thanks in part to countless magazine stories and nutrition listicles singing its praises. It figures in fad diets, including its eponymous diet, dreamed up by Hollywood sadists. Even its scientific name, *Citrus x paradisi*—so called because, in 1750, naturalist Griffith Hughes dubbed grapefruit the "forbidden fruit" of the Barbados—implies that it belongs somewhere in the Garden of Eden. It does not. It belongs in the trashcan. Consider the evidence:

1. It's impossible to eat.

A halved grapefruit demands that the opposition suit up for battle. Its edible parts radiate out from its center in segments; separating those wedges from the membrane requires you to saw at them like a maniac with the edge of your spoon. (Some people prepare the fruit with a knife first, which makes things easier but is tedious.) Either way, you end up squirting juice all over yourself. If you're wearing a light color, you'll have to change your clothes after the meal. If you're outdoors, you'll immediately become a trough for every insect within a three-mile radius.

Incidentally, there are legends of something called a "grapefruit spoon," with a serrated edge designed to help carve out the fruit's viscera. I have never seen one. Perhaps they only reveal themselves to the worthy, like the Holy Grail. (Or perhaps I simply don't spend enough time in rarefied circles.)

Magic utensil or no, things don't get much easier once you've managed to part pith from flesh. You must dig underneath the pulpy segment, trying to balance it on your spoon so that it doesn't slip off. When it does—and it will—you can choose between retrieving it with your fingers while your classier friends pretend not to notice or just commence sawing a new section. The whole ordeal is not unlike shoveling fish, if you can imagine shoveling fish as an ostensibly healthy, socially approved activity.

## 2. It tastes disgusting.

A difficult eating process doesn't have to be a deal breaker; the choreography of consumption can add to a meal's charm (think lobster). But grapefruit has a more damning problem: It tastes awful. I'm not alone in this judgment.

The polling site Amplicate reports that 26 percent of its 8,066 respondents hate grapefruit. That's more people than hate Chris Brown, bagpipe music, or Brussels sprouts. And the Internet abounds with discussion threads titled things like "Why are grapefruits so nasty? (One answer: "I don't know but they are. They make me feel like I have fur on my tongue.")

Slate's Hanna Rosin told me recently that her Israeli parents served grapefruit for breakfast every morning because its bitter taste evoked the suffering of the Jews. American novelist and playwright Harry Crews also flagged grapefruit as a harbinger of strife. In his memoir *Childhood: The Biography of a Place*, he writes, "The tension and anger coming off" his parents "brought the unmistakable smell of grapefruit into the house." Lest we harbor any doubts about the citrus' infernal powers, Crews reflects thusly on the experience of trying grapefruit for the first time: "I only had to touch my lips to my piece to know something was wrong, bad wrong."

Anecdotal evidence suggests that some people, traumatized by the taste of grapefruit, go into denial about its very existence. This is the most reasonable explanation I can think of for why rapper 50 Cent acted as if he had never heard of it when a waiter brought him the grapefruit soda he ordered and he asked why it wasn't purple (per comedian Aziz Ansari's telling).

In fact, grapefruits got their common name from the way they cluster on the tree like a bunch of grapes. They did not, it is worth noting, get their name because they taste like grapes, which are delicious. In fact, a grapefruit tastes more like a bad-tempered orange soaked in kerosene, like a pack of stale Warheads rehydrated in vinegar, like a sock filled with battery acid. Grocers and grapefruit vendors describe grapefruits as "tangy," "sharp," and—rather poetically—"full of sunshine," but this is laughable. Have you ever seen a grocer actually eat one?

## 3. It's plotting to murder you.

The compounds in grapefruit inhibit an enzyme in the intestine from metabolizing certain substances. These substances include drugs that regulate blood pressure (Nitrendipine), high cholesterol (Lipitor), heart arrhythmia (Cordarone), and depression (Zoloft). If you eat grapefruit or drink grapefruit juice within three days of taking such drugs, your body fails to process the medications as it should, and you can experience side effects resulting from higher levels of the drug in your system. The bottom line? Grapefruit is trying to kill us.

What, then, accounts for our national grapefruit worship? Why do we lie to ourselves about its suitability as a holiday gift? Why do we continue to tolerate the sourness, the mess, the mechanical impossibility of consuming grapefruit without a prissy specialized spoon that belongs, perhaps, in jokes about Mitt Romney's table settings, but not in real life?

Apparently it's crammed with Vitamin C, fiber, calcium, and a possibly cancer-preventing antioxidant called lycopene. Never mind that the list of fruits with more Vitamin C than grapefruit takes care of half the produce aisle: papayas, strawberries, oranges, clementines, tangerines, kiwis, guavas, and cantaloupe, for starters. Or that you can get way more calcium and fiber simply from eating a bowl of cereal with milk. Or that the tests demonstrating the cancer-fighting properties of lycopene were inconclusive.

Experts once thought grapefruit contained a mysterious enzyme that dissolved fat, but that theory was debunked in 2011 by a study from—of all people—the Florida Citrus Department. "There is no evidence that grapefruit has fat-burning enzymes, nor is it a magic bullet for weight loss," Connie Diekman, the past president of the American Dietetic Association, has said.

Meanwhile, diet gurus loved grapefruit because they believed it required more energy to digest than it actually contained. In other words, eating grapefruit burned calories! It was exercise!

Unfortunately, the "negative calorie" label is problematic on its own—and even if it weren't, it's unclear that grapefruit would fit the bill. While grapefruit does boast a low glycemic index, its effect on weight loss is fairly weak, according to one 2004 study from the Scripps Clinic.

More importantly, many unpalatable or impracticable things can help people lose weight, including eating woodchips or wrestling bears. That doesn't mean we eat woodchips or wrestle bears, although I'd honestly consider doing both before fake-smiling my way through another grapefruit half over Sunday brunch.

So please, if you were even remotely thinking about shipping a box of grapefruit to someone you love for the holidays, kindly desist. Offloading a box of grapefruit on someone you hate, however—at least the revenge will be sweet.

20121210-04	17:30	SteveB	"Why the War on Drugs Is a War on Human Nature"
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"Why the War on Drugs Is a War on Human Nature" by Lewis Lapham, TomDispatch/AlterNet

Dec. 9, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/drugs/why-war-drugs-war-human-nature>)

(Drug prohibition is making America ever more security mad and locked down.)

(This essay will appear in "Intoxication," the Winter 2012 issue of *Lapham's Quarterly*.)

The question that tempts mankind to the use of substances controlled and uncontrolled is next of kin to Hamlet's: to be, or not to be, someone or somewhere else. Escape from a grievous circumstance or the shambles of an unwanted self, the hope of finding at a higher altitude a new beginning or a better deal. Fly me to the moon, and let me play among the stars; give me leave to drown my sorrow in a quart of gin; wine, dear boy, and truth.

That the consummations of the wish to shuffle off the mortal coil are as old as the world itself was the message brought by Abraham Lincoln to an Illinois temperance society in 1842. "I have not inquired at what period of time the use of intoxicating liquors commenced," he said, "nor is it important to know." It is sufficient to know that on first opening our eyes "upon the stage of existence," we found "intoxicating liquor recognized by everybody, used by everybody, repudiated by nobody."

The state of intoxication is a house with many mansions. Fourteen centuries before the birth of Christ, the *Rigveda* finds Hindu priests chanting hymns to a "drop of soma," the wise and wisdom-loving plant from which was drawn

juices distilled in sheep's wool that "make us see far; make us richer, better." Philosophers in ancient Greece rejoiced in the literal meaning of the word *symposium*, a "drinking together." The Roman Stoic Seneca recommends the judicious embrace of Bacchus as a liberation of the mind "from its slavery to cares, emancipates it, invigorates it, and emboldens it for all its undertakings."

Omar Khayyam, twelfth-century Persian mathematician and astronomer, drinks wine "because it is my solace," allowing him to "divorce absolutely reason and religion." Martin Luther, early father of the Protestant Reformation, in 1530 exhorts the faithful to "drink, and right freely," because it is the devil who tells them not to. "One must always do what Satan forbids. What other cause do you think that I have for drinking so much strong drink, talking so freely, and making merry so often, except that I wish to mock and harass the devil who is wont to mock and harass me."

Dr. Samuel Johnson, child of the Enlightenment, requires wine only when alone, "to get rid of myself -- to send myself away." The French poet Charles Baudelaire, prodigal son of the Industrial Revolution, is less careful with his time. "One should always be drunk. That's the great thing, the only question. Drunk with what? With wine, with poetry, or with virtue, as you please."

My grandfather, Roger Lapham (1883–1966), was similarly disposed, his house in San Francisco the stage of existence upon which, at the age of seven in 1942, I first opened my eyes to the practice as old as the world itself. At the Christmas family gathering that year, Grandfather deemed any and all children present who were old enough to walk instead of toddle therefore old enough to sing a carol, recite a poem, and drink a cup of kindness made with brandy, cinnamon, and apples. To raise the spirit, welcome the arrival of our newborn Lord and Savior. Joy to the world, peace on earth, goodwill toward men.

#### "If You Meet, You Drink..."

Thus introduced to intoxicating liquors under auspices both secular and sacred, the offering of alms for oblivion I took to be the custom of the country in which I had been born. In the 1940s as it was in the 1840s, as it had been ever since the *Mayflower* arrived at Plymouth laden with emboldening casks of wine and beer. The spirit of liberty is never far from the hope of metamorphosis or transformation, and the Americans from the beginning were drawn to the possibilities in the having of one more for the road. They formed their character in the settling of a fearful wilderness, and the history of the country could be written as a prolonged mocking and harassing of the devil by the drinking, "and right freely," from whatever wise and wisdom-loving grain or grape came conveniently to hand.

The oceangoing Pilgrims in colonial Massachusetts and Rhode Island delighted in both the taste and trade in rum. The founders of the republic in Philadelphia in 1787 were in the habit of consuming prodigious quantities of liquor as an expression of their faith in their fellow men -- pots of ale or cider at midday, two or more bottles of claret at dinner followed by an amiable passing around the table of the Madeira.

Among the tobacco planters in Virginia, the moneychangers in New York, the stalwart yeomen in western Pennsylvania busy at the task of making whiskey, the maintaining of a high blood-alcohol level was the mark of civilized behavior. The lyrics of the "Star-Spangled Banner" were fitted to the melody of an eighteenth-century British tavern song. The excise taxes collected from the sale of liquor paid for the War of 1812, and by 1830 the tolling of the town bell (at 11 a.m., and again at 4 p.m.) announced the daily pauses for spirited refreshment.

Frederick Marryat, an English traveler to America in 1839, noted in his diary that the way the natives drank was "quite a caution... If you meet, you drink; if you part, you drink; if you make acquaintance, you drink; if you close a bargain, you drink; they quarrel in their drink, and they make it up with a drink. They drink, because it is hot; they drink, because it is cold."

During what were known as the Gay Nineties, at the zenith of the country's Gilded Age, Manhattan between the Battery and Forty-second Street glittered in the lights of 10,000 saloons issuing passports to the islands of the blessed and the rivers of forgetfulness. No travel plan or destination that couldn't be accommodated, prices available on request. French champagne at Sherry's Restaurant for the top-hatted Wall Street speculators celebrating the discoveries of El Dorado; shots of five-cent whiskey (said to taste "like a combination of kerosene oil, soft soap, alcohol, and the chemicals used in fire extinguishers") for the unemployed foreign laborer sleeping in

the gutters south of Canal Street. Who could say who was hoping to trade places with whom, the uptown swell intent upon becoming a noble savage, the downtown immigrant imagining himself dressed in fur and diamonds?

What else is America about if not the work of self-invention? Recognize the project as an always risky business, and it is the willingness to chance what dreams may come (west of the Alleghenies or on the further shores of consciousness) that gives to the American the distinguishing traits of character that the historian Daniel J. Boorstin, librarian of Congress from 1975 to 1987, identified as those of the chronic revolutionary and the ever hopeful pilgrim. Boorstin drew the conclusion from his study of the American colonial experience: "No prudent man dared be too certain of exactly who he was or what he was about; everyone had to be prepared to become someone else. To be ready for such perilous transmigrations was to become an American."

#### "There Are More Kicks to Be Had in a Good Case of Paralytic Polio"

So too in the 1960s, the prudent becoming of an American involved perilous transmigrations, psychic, spiritual, and political. By no means certain who I was at the age of 24, I was prepared to make adjustments, but my one experiment with psychedelics in 1959 was a rub that promptly gave me pause.

Employed at the time as a reporter at the *San Francisco Examiner*, I was assigned to go with the poet Allen Ginsberg to the Stanford Research Institute there to take a trip on LSD. Social scientists opening the doors of perception at the behest of Aldous Huxley wished to compare the flight patterns of a Bohemian artist and a bourgeois philistine, and they had asked the paper's literary editor to furnish one of each. We were placed in adjacent soundproofed rooms, both of us under the observation of men in white coats equipped with clipboards, the idea being that we would relay messages from the higher consciousness to the air-traffic controllers on the ground.

Liftoff was a blue pill taken on an empty stomach at 9 a.m., the trajectory a bell curve plotted over a distance of seven hours. By way of traveling companions we had been encouraged to bring music, in those days on vinyl LPs, of whatever kind moved us while on earth to register emotions approaching the sublime.

Together with Johann Sebastian Bach and the Modern Jazz Quartet, I attained what I'd been informed would be cruising altitude at noon. I neglected to bring a willing suspension of disbelief, and because I stubbornly resisted the sales pitch for the drug -- if you, O Wizard, can work wonders, prove to me the where and when and how and why -- I encountered heavy turbulence. Images inchoate and nonsensical, my arms and legs seemingly elongated and embalmed in grease, the sense of utter isolation while being gnawed by rats.

To the men in white I had nothing to report, not one word on either the going up and out or the coming back and down. I never learned what Ginsberg had to say. Whatever it was, I wasn't interested, and I left the building before he had returned from what by then I knew to be a dead-end sleep.

My long-standing acquaintance with alcohol was for the most part cordial. Usually when I drank too much, I could guess why I did so, the objective being to murder a state of consciousness that I didn't have the courage to sustain -- a fear of heights, which sometimes during the carnival of the 1960s accompanied my attempts to transform the bourgeois journalist into an avant-garde novelist. The stepped-up ambition was a commonplace among the would-be William Faulkners of my generation; nearly always it resulted in commercial failure and literary embarrassment.

I didn't grow a beard or move to Vermont, but every now and then I hit upon a run of words that I could mistake for art, and I would find myself intoxicated by what Emily Dickinson knew to be "a liquor never brewed/from Tankards scooped in Pearl." The neuroscientists understand the encounter with the ineffable as an "endorphin high," the outrageously fortunate mixing of the chemicals in the brain when it is being put to imaginative and creative use.

On being surprised by a joy so astonishingly sweet, I assumed that it must be forbidden, and if by the light of day I'd come too close to leaning against the sun with seraphs swinging snowy hats, by nightfall I felt bound to check into the nearest cage, drunkenness being the one most conveniently at hand. Around midnight at Elaine's, a saloon on Second Avenue in Manhattan that in those days catered to a clientele of actors, writers, and other assorted con artists playing characters of their own invention, I could count on the company of fellow travelers outward or

inward bound on the roads of perilous transmigration. No matter what their reason for a timely departure -- whether to obliterate the fear of failure, delete the thought of wife and home, reconfigure a mistaken identity, project into the future the birth of an imaginary self -- all present were engaged in some sort of struggle between the force of life and the will to death. Thanatos and Eros seated across from each other over the backgammon board on table four, the onlookers suspending the judgment of ridicule and extending the courtesy of tolerance.

Alcohol serves at the pleasure of the players on both sides of the game, its virtues those indicated by Seneca and Martin Luther, its vices those that the novelist Marguerite Duras likens, as did Hamlet, to the sleep of death: "Drinking isn't necessarily the same as wanting to die. But you can't drink without thinking you're killing yourself." Alcohol's job is to replace creation with an illusion that is barren. "The words a man speaks in the night of drunkenness fade like the darkness itself at the coming of day."

The observation is in the same despairing minor key as Billie Holiday's riff on heroin: "If you think dope is for kicks and thrills you're out of your mind. There are more kicks to be had in a good case of paralytic polio and living in an iron lung. If you think you need stuff to play music or sing, you're crazy. It can fix you so you can't play nothing or sing nothing." She goes on to say that in Britain the authorities at least have the decency to treat addiction as a public-health problem, but in America, "if you go to the doctor, he's liable to slam the door in your face and call the cops."

Humankind's thirst for intoxicants is unquenchable, but to criminalize it, as Lincoln reminded the Illinois temperance society, reinforces the clinging to the addiction; to think otherwise would be "to expect a reversal of human nature, which is God's decree and never can be reversed." The injuries inflicted by alcohol don't follow "from the use of a bad thing, but from the abuse of a very good thing." The victims are "to be pitied and compassionated," their failings treated "as a misfortune, and not as a crime or even as a disgrace."

### The War on Drugs as a War Against Human Nature

Whether declared by church or state, the war against human nature is by definition lost. The Puritan inspectors of souls in seventeenth-century New England deplored even the tentative embrace of Bacchus as "great licentiousness," the faithful "pouring out themselves in all profaneness," but the record doesn't show a falling off of attendance at Boston's eighteenth-century inns and taverns. The laws prohibiting the sale and manufacture of alcohol in the 1920s discovered in the mark of sin the evidence of crime, but the attempt to sustain the allegation proved to be as ineffectual as it was destructive of the country's life and liberty.

Instead of resurrecting from the pit a body politic of newly risen saints, Prohibition guaranteed the health and welfare of society's avowed enemies. The organized-crime syndicates established on the delivery of bootleg whiskey evolved into multinational trade associations commanding the respect that comes with revenues estimated at \$2 billion per annum. In 1930 alone, Al Capone's ill-gotten gains amounted to \$100 million.

So again with the war that America has been waging for the last 100 years against the use of drugs deemed to be illegal. The war cannot be won, but in the meantime, at a cost of \$20 billion a year, it facilitates the transformation of what was once a freedom-loving republic into a freedom-fearing national security state.

**The policies of zero tolerance equip local and federal law-enforcement with increasingly autocratic powers of coercion and surveillance (the right to invade anybody's privacy, bend the rules of evidence, search barns, stop motorists, inspect bank records, tap phones) and spread the stain of moral pestilence to ever larger numbers of people assumed to be infected with reefer madness -- anarchists and cheap Chinese labor at the turn of the twentieth century, known homosexuals and suspected Communists in the 1920s, hippies and anti-Vietnam War protestors in the 1960s, nowadays young black men sentenced to long-term imprisonment for possession of a few grams of short-term disembodiment.**

If what was at issue was a concern for people trapped in the jail cells of addiction, the keepers of the nation's conscience would be better advised to address the conditions -- poverty, lack of opportunity and education, racial discrimination -- from which drugs provide an illusory means of escape. That they are not so advised stands as proven by their fond endorsement of the more expensive ventures into the realms of virtual reality. Our

pharmaceutical industries produce a cornucopia of prescription drugs -- eye-opening, stupefying, mood-swinging, game-changing, anxiety-alleviating, performance-enhancing -- currently at a global market-value of more than \$300 billion.

Add the time-honored demand for alcohol, the modernist taste for cocaine, and the uses, as both stimulant and narcotic, of tobacco, coffee, sugar, and pornography, and the annual mustering of consummations devoutly to be wished comes to the cost of more than \$1.5 trillion. The taking arms against a sea of troubles is an expenditure that dwarfs the appropriation for the military budget.

Given the American antecedents both metaphysical and commercial -- Thomas Paine drank, "and right freely"; in 1910, the federal government received 71% of its internal revenue from taxes paid on the sale and manufacture of alcohol -- it is little wonder that the sons of liberty now lead the world in the consumption of better living through chemistry. The new and improved forms of self-invention fit the question -- to be, or not to be -- to any and all occasions.

For the aging Wall Street speculator stepping out for an evening to squander his investment in Viagra. For the damsel in distress shopping around for a nose like the one seen advertised in a painting by Botticelli. For the distracted child depending on a therapeutic jolt of Adderall to learn to read the Constitution. For the stationary herds of industrial-strength cows so heavily doped with bovine growth hormone that they require massive infusions of antibiotic to survive the otherwise lethal atmospheres of their breeding pens. Visionary risk-takers, one and all, willing to chance what dreams may come on the way West to an all-night pharmacy.

The war against human nature strengthens the fear of one's fellow man. The red, white, and blue pills sell the hope of heaven made with artificial sweeteners.

20121210-05 20:46 Marci Graphic: "Still Think Atheists Have No Morals?"

**STILL THINK ATHEISTS HAVE NO MORALS?**

Research studies show that:

- \* Compared to religious people, non-believers are in general **LESS** prejudiced, anti-semitic, racist, dogmatic, ethnocentric, close-minded and authoritarian.
- \* And in general non-religious people are **MORE** altruistic and supportive of women's rights, gender equality, and gay rights.
- \* Only 0.2% of prisoners in U.S. jails are atheists.
- \* Murder and violent crime rates are **HIGHER** in highly religious countries than in more secular countries,
- \* And murder and violent crime rates are **HIGHER** in highly religious U.S. states than in less religious U.S. states.

Source: <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/our-humanity-naturally/201103/misinformation-and-facts-about-secularism-and-religion>

quickmeme.com

[Pretending, even believing, we know things does not make those things known. –SteveB]

20121210-06 22:05 Tom Cartoon: KFC Serving Big Bird?

I'm hungry.



20121210-07 22:17 SteveB "Robots and Robber Barons"

"Robots and Robber Barons" by Paul Krugman, *The New York Times*

Dec. 9, 2012, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/10/opinion/krugman-robots-and-robber-barons.html?src=me&ref=general>)

The American economy is still, by most measures, deeply depressed. But corporate profits are at a record high. How is that possible? It's simple: profits have surged as a share of national income, while wages and other labor compensation are down. The pie isn't growing the way it should — but capital is doing fine by grabbing an ever-larger slice, at labor's expense.

Wait — are we really back to talking about capital versus labor? Isn't that an old-fashioned, almost Marxist sort of discussion, out of date in our modern information economy? Well, that's what many people thought; for the past generation discussions of inequality have focused overwhelmingly not on capital versus labor but on distributional issues between workers, either on the gap between more- and less-educated workers or on the soaring incomes of a handful of superstars in finance and other fields. But that may be yesterday's story.

More specifically, while it's true that the finance guys are still making out like bandits — in part because, as we now know, some of them actually are bandits — the wage gap between workers with a college education and those without, which grew a lot in the 1980s and early 1990s, hasn't changed much since then. Indeed, recent college graduates had stagnant incomes even before the financial crisis struck. Increasingly, profits have been rising at the expense of workers in general, including workers with the skills that were supposed to lead to success in today's economy.

Why is this happening? As best as I can tell, there are two plausible explanations, both of which could be true to some extent. One is that technology has taken a turn that places labor at a disadvantage; the other is that we're looking at the effects of a sharp increase in monopoly power. Think of these two stories as emphasizing robots on one side, robber barons on the other.

About the robots: there's no question that in some high-profile industries, technology is displacing workers of all, or almost all, kinds. For example, one of the reasons some high-technology manufacturing has lately been moving back to the United States is that these days the most valuable piece of a computer, the motherboard, is basically made by robots, so cheap Asian labor is no longer a reason to produce them abroad.

In a recent book, *Race Against the Machine*, M.I.T.'s Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee argue that similar stories are playing out in many fields, including services like translation and legal research. What's striking about their examples is that many of the jobs being displaced are high-skill and high-wage; the downside of technology isn't limited to menial workers.

Still, can innovation and progress really hurt large numbers of workers, maybe even workers in general? I often encounter assertions that this can't happen. But the truth is that it can, and serious economists have been aware of this possibility for almost two centuries. The early-19th-century economist David Ricardo is best known for the theory of comparative advantage, which makes the case for free trade; but the same 1817 book in which he presented that theory also included a chapter on how the new, capital-intensive technologies of the Industrial Revolution could actually make workers worse off, at least for a while — which modern scholarship suggests may indeed have happened for several decades.

What about robber barons? We don't talk much about monopoly power these days; antitrust enforcement largely collapsed during the Reagan years and has never really recovered. Yet Barry Lynn and Phillip Longman of the New America Foundation argue, persuasively in my view, that increasing business concentration could be an important factor in stagnating demand for labor, as corporations use their growing monopoly power to raise prices without passing the gains on to their employees.

I don't know how much of the devaluation of labor either technology or monopoly explains, in part because there has been so little discussion of what's going on. I think it's fair to say that the shift of income from labor to capital has not yet made it into our national discourse.

Yet that shift is happening — and it has major implications. For example, there is a big, lavishly financed push to reduce corporate tax rates; is this really what we want to be doing at a time when profits are surging at workers' expense? Or what about the push to reduce or eliminate inheritance taxes; if we're moving back to a world in which financial capital, not skill or education, determines income, do we really want to make it even easier to inherit wealth?

As I said, this is a discussion that has barely begun — but it's time to get started, before the robots and the robber barons turn our society into something unrecognizable.



<http://www.taringa.net/posts/arte/14703503/Arte-en-arena-verde-y-en-hielo.html>



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

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## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #289 — DEC. 12, 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.**

### 'Heal Thyself!'

(posted by Art, Dec. 12, 2012)

Good example of what is wrong with medicine in the United States. Imagine if you are really sick and trying to figure this all out. But don't worry, you can trust your insurance company!

"How Much for an MRI? \$500? \$5,000? A Reporter Struggles to Find Out" by Martha Bebinger, WBUR

Dec. 9, 2012, (<http://www.kaiserhealthnews.org/Stories/2012/December/09/mri-cost-price-comparison-health-insurance.aspx>)



(A health reporter tries to solve the mystery of her migraines with a doctor-recommended imaging test, but trying to find out the real cost of that test induces headaches of its own.)

Massachusetts is launching a sweeping plan to hold down health care costs. A new law is partly designed to get patients to help drive down prices by shopping for medical care.

So when I had a series of migraines over the summer, I decided this was an opportunity to be an engaged, savvy patient.

First decision: whether to even get the doctor-recommended MRI. It's a very expensive test, and I thought maybe the headaches would just disappear.

But I followed my doctor's advice, called Newton-Wellesley Hospital and asked for the price of the test. My doctor didn't know, I got transferred to radiology, I got transferred to billing. Billing said they would call me back. They didn't. I couldn't even get a ballpark estimate.

Now, I have insurance with no deductible, so wherever I went was only going to cost me a \$25 copayment. (Apologies to all of you with high-deductible or tiered plans out there.)

When I couldn't get through to Newton-Wellesley, I tried Mass General, which is what we usually hear is the most expensive and best hospital in the country to go to. They were \$5,315. That's for an uninsured patient. For one MRI.

But they couldn't tell me what my rate was going to be as an insured patient. They said they didn't have that information. So I hit another wall with another hospital.

Then I tried an independent lab, called Shields. It's a chain that specializes in MRIs and other radiology tests. Shields said it would have charged between \$2,000 and \$3,600 for this test (the higher cost is for an MRI with an injectable dye to show contrast). But that's not what they would bill my HMO Blue Cross plan for my MRI: \$600 for the MRI without the contrast dye, and \$1,200 for the MRI with the dye is its negotiated rate with my health plan.

Eventually, I got the test at Newton-Wellesley. I thought the price would be somewhere between Mass General and Shields, and I thought there was some value in following my doctor's recommendation. When I got the bill from Newton-Wellesley I was stunned. It was for \$7,468. Turns out this is the price Newton-Wellesley charges someone who is uninsured. If you include the charge for reading the test, the total is almost \$8,000, even higher than Mass General. I thought that since Newton-Wellesley knows I'm a Blue Cross member, they'd send me the Blue Cross rate — what Blue Cross was going to pay for the test. They didn't.

Newton-Wellesley also didn't tell me that I'd had two MRIs while lying there in the cave wearing headphones that are supposed to ease the earthquake rumble effects of the test. I found this out months later when I got the "Explanation of Benefits" (EOB) from my insurance company. I still don't know why the hospital ran two tests. My doctor says he only ordered one. So the \$7,468 doesn't sound as bad if it's the price of two tests. This is all incredibly confusing and about as far from the transparent process that is supposed to help us "shop" for care as you can get.

### Tips For Price-Conscious Consumers

If you want to try to shop around, here are few things you should know, if you don't already:

1. Insurance companies negotiate different rates with different hospitals. I've had a hard time getting doctors or hospitals to give me the negotiated rate, but Blue Cross will tell me, if I'm willing to wait on hold and have the exact code for the exact procedure I need. Which brings me to...
2. Get the code for the test or procedure you need. In some cases there will be several billing codes. For example, my MRI codes were 70551 without the dye, 70552 with the dye. I used those numbers in so many

different conversations I don't think I'll ever forget them. And in the end, since I had another test I didn't know about, an MRA, I wasn't using all the right codes. This process really could drive you crazy.

3. Sometimes your insurance company will send you the EOB that lists the price they actually pay the hospital, but good luck trying to decipher all this paperwork.

4. The physician's charge is often a separate bill, or rather two bills: what the doc charges and what the insurance company pays. You have to ask a lot of questions.

Why the huge disparity between what a hospital charges for an MRI and what a stand-alone clinic such as Shields charges? Newton-Wellesley said that it costs a lot to keep a hospital open 24 hours a day. Hospitals lose a lot of money on some services and make it up on other services. MRIs or other tests are a place that they often make up for money lost on services such as mental health.

And hospitals say they lose money taking care of patients with Medicare — that's mostly for the elderly — or Medicaid — that's government insurance mostly for the poor. So private insurance payers like me end up paying more for these tests so that the hospitals can have everything balance in the end.

While Shields lab doesn't have the overhead of a hospital, Tom Shields, the company's president, says charging more for an MRI to make up for losing money on other services is just a sign that health care finances are really broken. "You're reimbursing for diagnostic imaging at a very high rate to justify the underpayment for other lines of health care. It's sort of like justifying the \$500 Ace bandage. The logic isn't there."

I wasn't ever able to find out how much of the charge for an MRI is based on "real" costs - like cost of the machine or the salaries of the technician or doctor.

These real costs vary, but in many cases, not much. We know that hospitals with a strong brand name use that brand to boost their charges. Rick Siegrist, who teaches health care management at the Harvard School of Public Health, says hospitals, much like computer giant Apple, can set their charges as they see fit: "A lot of times, people think they're just going to look at what their cost is and put a little markup on that and that's what the charge will be. That's not the way it's done, just like it's not the way it's done in private industry."

We have the health care industry telling us to shop around, to be smart consumers, to make wise choices, and yet it's really difficult to do that, because we don't understand how hospitals set prices, and it can take hours to find a price. The whole pricing system seems very arbitrary. And we're left trying to make choices based on incomplete or wrong information.

There may be some hope, according to Dr. Gene Lindsey who runs Atrius, the state's largest physicians group. He said while it's a long way off, "Atrius Health will, in a very, very focused way, begin the work that's necessary to try to deliver what the bill asks for in terms of cost transparency."

Atrius and a few other physicians groups have started putting some price information in the record that doctors can see when they are speaking to a patient. It'll be a tough task to say, "You're going in for an appendectomy and here's what it's going to cost," because there are so many variables when you go into a hospital for a procedure. But Atrius is shopping for software that will pull all the information, like my health insurance data, together so that they can say, "OK, you're an HMO patient, here's what you'll pay" or, "You have a high deductible, here's what you'll pay."

Two months after I had the tests, I got an Explanation of Benefits from my insurer. Blue Cross paid \$1,650 for both. Actually, Blue Cross paid \$1,360 for the tests and \$290 in physician fees. I never saw a bill for the physician fees, I had to call to get that number. Again, a remarkable lack of transparency.

Then the broader advice is: If you really have to pay attention to price because you have a high-deductible or a tiered coverage plan, then do a lot of deep breathing. Be ready for a long journey that will take some patience.

Oh, and I don't have a brain tumor or anything serious. My doctor sent me a note. My MRI and MRA showed "white matter with a propensity for migraine." White matter is just brain tissue, by the way, not little bits of white junk floating around in my brain. I'm fine; I just need to get more sleep.

(This story is part of a reporting partnership that includes WBUR, NPR and Kaiser Health News.)



20121211-01 16:02 Pam Re: Heal Thyself! (reply to Art, above)

Universal coverage, single payer would eliminate ALL this BULL SHIT. Fewer administrative costs, less redundancy, fewer jobs for paper pushers/ less money for salaries, simple honesty in pricing, transparency (which is obviously the last thing health care providers want), and bills that a normal person can understand. This is beyond preposterous, and I've been screaming that for years. But given what our country has become, I have zero confidence that anything will change as drastically as it needs to. Obamacare is a tepid attempt at progress and is better than nothing, but Americans are still being held hostage by the monied interests. I just learned that my cousin has pancreatic cancer. That's enough to deal with without having to figure out all the bills she's going to have coming in. None of it makes any sense.

20121211-02 16:28 Ben Photo: Today's Poultry Lunch at Apple

from earlier in the day...

Back at work again! Fine fun dining returns!

The Chicken Bahn Mi? The Southern Mussels? (Messy, with a hardcover book...) The Shrimp Fettucini?

Today, as late as I am, it's all going to depend on the lines...

after lunch...

Busy day after a four-day weekend, and so a brief report:

Bahn Mi from the Asian line was very tasty, with an appropriate thin baguette with a lovely flaky crust; the braised chicken thigh was moist and nicely seasoned, and the vegetables were very fresh. The sauce, which I cannot quite identify but seemed to me to be a remoulade, was just the right touch to complement everything including the generously distributed thin slices of chili. I do not know whether these were jalapeno or serano or just what the heck they were, but they really did send me halfway to orbit.

Perhaps it was the circumstance of being on fire after eating the sandwich, or perhaps I will just never be a kimchi kind of guy; my mouth and lips were already on fire, and the kimchi seemed to be glowing. In fact, I cannot say whether the kimchi was as zesty as it looks, or if it was after-burn. but I had a couple bites of it, and... was done. I guess I can't love everything, but I sure enjoyed the sandwich.

The lovely little French spiced cake-ette dipped in chocolate was very tasty, and helped me cool down.

Whew!



Bahn Mi and Kimchi

[Milk is the drink that cools the burn the best, because of a certain enzyme. –SteveB]

20121211-03 19:07 SteveB "Why the Fiscal Cliff Is Causing a Nervous Breakdown on the Right"

"Why the Fiscal Cliff Is Causing a Nervous Breakdown on the Right" by Howard Kurtz, The Daily Beast

Dec. 11, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/12/11/why-the-fiscal-cliff-is-causing-a-nervous-breakdown-on-the-right.html>)

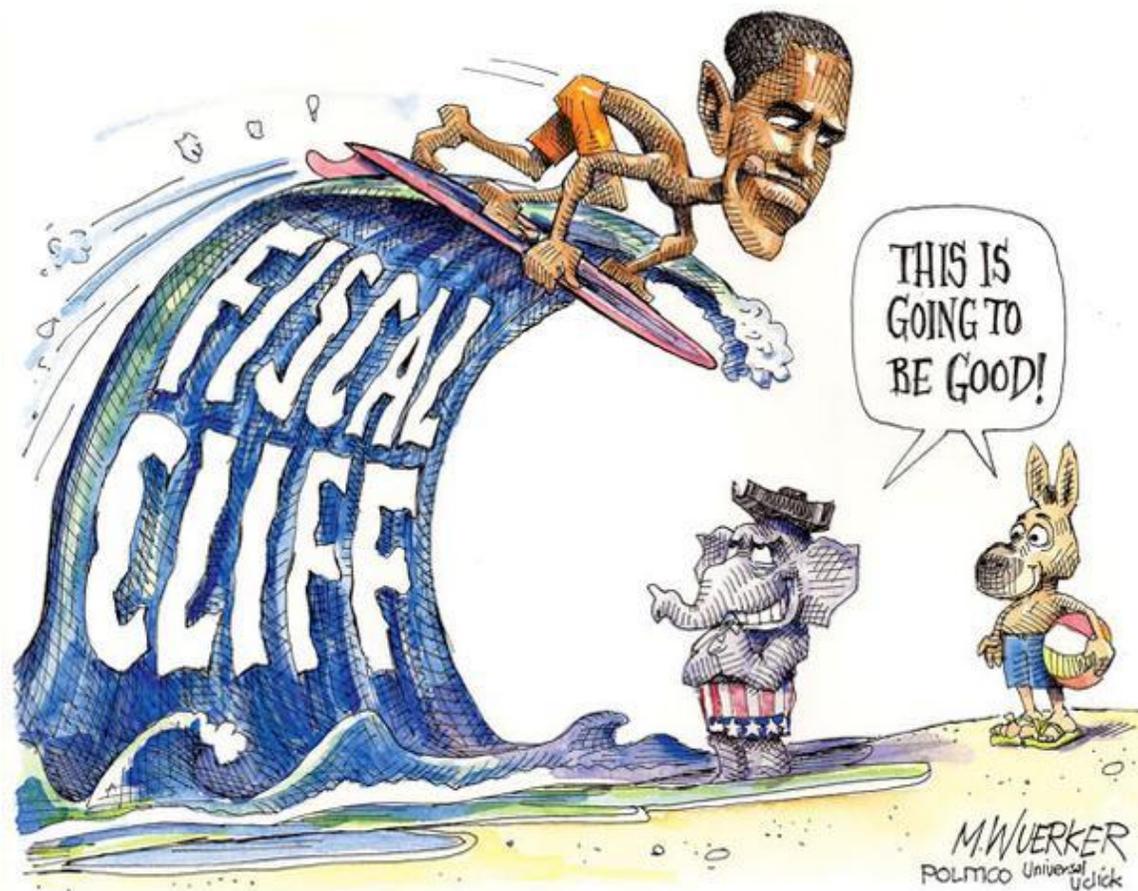
(From Joe Scarborough to Bill Kristol to Rush Limbaugh, the post-election recriminations are getting heated on the slow march to the fiscal cliff. Howard Kurtz on why the GOP is at war with itself.)

It's no surprise, after losing a second time to Barack Obama, that the right is engaged in a furious debate over the future of the Republican Party.

But it's quickly degenerating into a mudfight.

**"Conservatism is a racket for a lot of people to get very, very rich," declares Joe Scarborough on MSNBC. "With no thought of winning elections."**

"It may be that major parts of American conservatism have become such a racket that a kind of refounding of the movement as a cause is necessary," says William Kristol, editor of *The Weekly Standard*.



What's going on here? Is this simply the venting of prominent media folks who are tired of seeing their side taken to the cleaners? Or have they concluded that the talk-show/fundraising culture that powers the GOP has become more interested in feathering its nest than electing Republicans?

Just two years ago, the GOP captured the House, the Tea Party was ascendant, and the rank and file had every reason to believe that Obama would be a one-termer. Now the reelected president, having vanquished Mitt Romney, is all but dictating terms on averting the fiscal cliff. No wonder the right seems to be undergoing a collective nervous breakdown.

Newt Gingrich sounded less than confident on "Meet the Press" when the talk turned to Hillary Clinton running for president in 2016. "The Republican Party today is incapable of competing at that level," said the man who proved incapable of beating Romney.

Scarborough's analysis on "Morning Joe": "You have a lot of people running around, saying harsh things that sell books and push ratings and lose elections."

And those who try to promote a more compassionate brand of conservatism, says the former Florida congressman, are "thrown to the side because they don't sound enough like Glenn Beck or a blogger." He described these adversaries as "cowards" and "bullies" who won't back off unless "you punch them in the face."

Kristol, who has committed the apostasy of saying the GOP should stop protecting a bunch of millionaires from tax hikes, describes the conservative movement as being "in deep disarray."

He's also in a spat with *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page, which took a shot at Kristol (without naming him): "Various Beltway sages want Republicans to say never mind, we were only kidding, tax rates don't matter to the economy. So because Mitt Romney lost, Republicans in Congress are supposed to repudiate their core economic principles."

The *Journal* says that House Republicans still have leverage, and that if we slide off the fiscal cliff and everyone's taxes go up on Jan. 1, the GOP will still have the clout to negotiate a deal with Obama, who may fear that trench warfare will ruin his final term. Kristol responds with an obvious counter-argument: that if House Republicans block legislation to restore tax breaks to 98 percent of Americans in a last-ditch attempt to protect the richest 2 percent, "it will be they, and they alone, insisting on higher taxes." Not a great position to be defending in 2014.

This growing divide extends to the Hill, where more GOP lawmakers—the latest being two senators, Bob Corker and Tom Coburn—are saying they are open to raising rates as part of a deal with the Democrats.

But that erosion among the Grover Norquist pledge-signers is generating significant pushback. Erick Erickson, the founder of RedState, says the Boehner wing of the party is convinced that the conservative movement has become a "paper tiger," and that true believers have to "either start blowing things up or shut up."

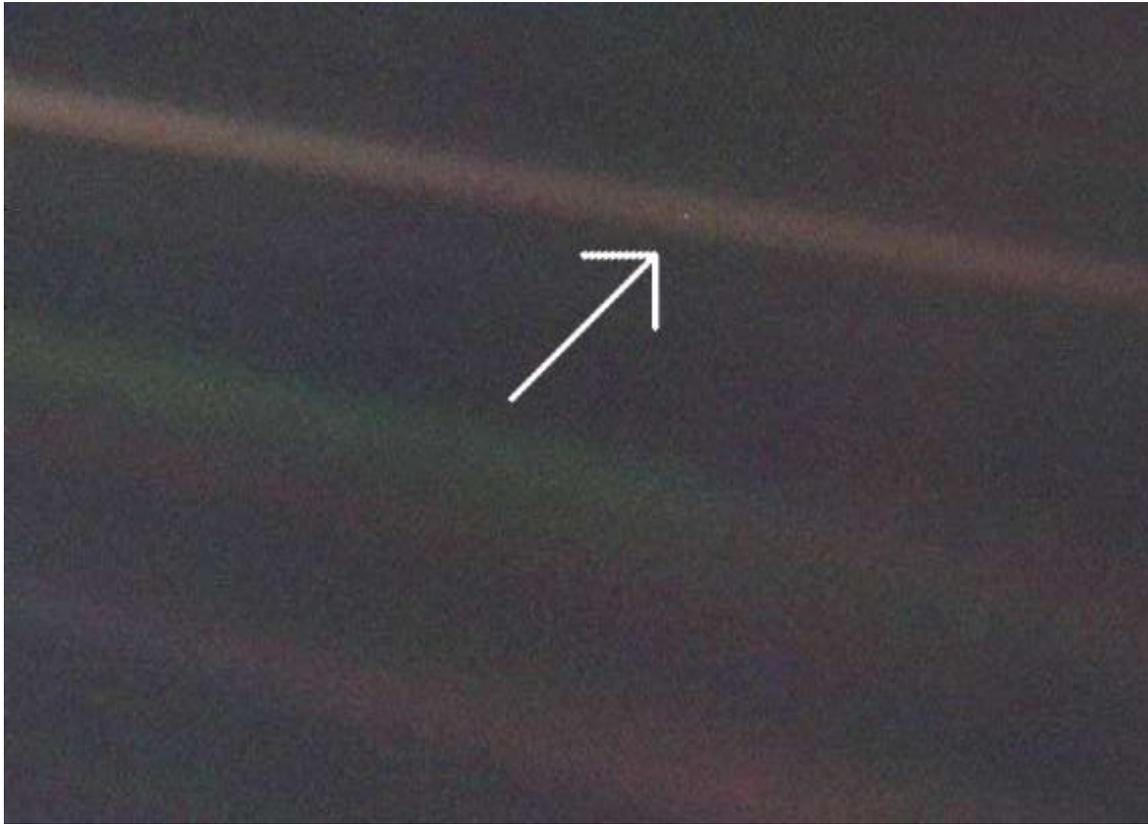
The movement is doing a pretty good job of blowing itself up at the moment. Former allies are sniping at each other, not just over tactics but over fundamental beliefs about what conservatism means and what Republicans should stand for.

Rush Limbaugh, one of the most powerful voices on the right, is also perturbed. In his monologue Monday, posted under the heading "The Comical Floundering of the GOP," El Rushbo describes the theory that "the Republican Party has been doing new Coke, but gradually. We have been caving on the things that identify us." In case anyone missed the point, he adds: "The Republican Party, nobody knows what it is anymore. Whatever it used to be, it's changing the formula."

What should be the new and improved Republican flavor? The dilemma goes beyond taxes and spending to such issues as immigration, where the likes of Sean Hannity and Charles Krauthammer say the party should restore its standing with Hispanics by embracing amnesty or something close to it. Here too, Limbaugh and many others strongly disagree.

And what about gay marriage, now headed for the Supreme Court? The right has been awfully quiet about that, despite the dire predictions when Obama embraced the principle of same-sex marriage last spring. As conservative commentator George Will bluntly noted on "This Week", "Quite literally, the opposition to gay marriage is dying. It's old people."

Romney's retreat from the public stage, except for the occasional sighting at Disneyland or a Las Vegas prizefight, obviously created a GOP vacuum. One day, Paul Ryan or Marco Rubio or Jeb Bush or Chris Christie may lead the party in a different direction. But with Obama not even having been sworn in for a second term, that day is far off. Instead, Republicans are groping for answers as the slow march toward the fiscal cliff leaves them ever more divided.



You are here (almost for sure!). (*Voyager 1*, 1990, NASA/JPL)

From this distant vantage point, the Earth might not seem of any particular interest. But for us, it's different. Consider again that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us. On it everyone you love, everyone you know, everyone you ever heard of, every human being who ever was, lived out their lives. The aggregate of our joy and suffering, thousands of confident religions, ideologies, and economic doctrines, every hunter and forager, every hero and coward, every creator and destroyer of civilization, every king and peasant, every young couple in love, every mother and father, hopeful child, inventor and explorer, every teacher of morals, every corrupt politician, every "superstar," every "supreme leader," every saint and sinner in the history of our species lived there – on a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.

The Earth is a very small stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so that in glory and triumph they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatreds. Our posturings, our imagined self-importance, the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe, are challenged by this point of pale light. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity – in all this vastness – there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. The Earth is the only world known, so far, to harbor life. There is nowhere else, at least in the near future, to which our species could migrate. Visit, yes. Settle, not yet. Like it or not, for the moment, the Earth is where we make our stand. It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. There is perhaps no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. To me, it underscores our responsibility to deal more kindly with one another and to preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we've ever known.

—Carl Sagan, *Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*, 1997 reprint, pp. xv–xvi  
([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale\\_Blue\\_Dot#Reflections\\_by\\_Sagan](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pale_Blue_Dot#Reflections_by_Sagan))

Videos: <http://vimeo.com/51960515> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7cmbTqTLIM>.



[What the hell is that thing?! -SteveB]

<http://janbirdingblog.blogspot.com/2011/01/bird-of-month-green-honeycreeper.html>



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #290 — DEC. 13, 2012

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

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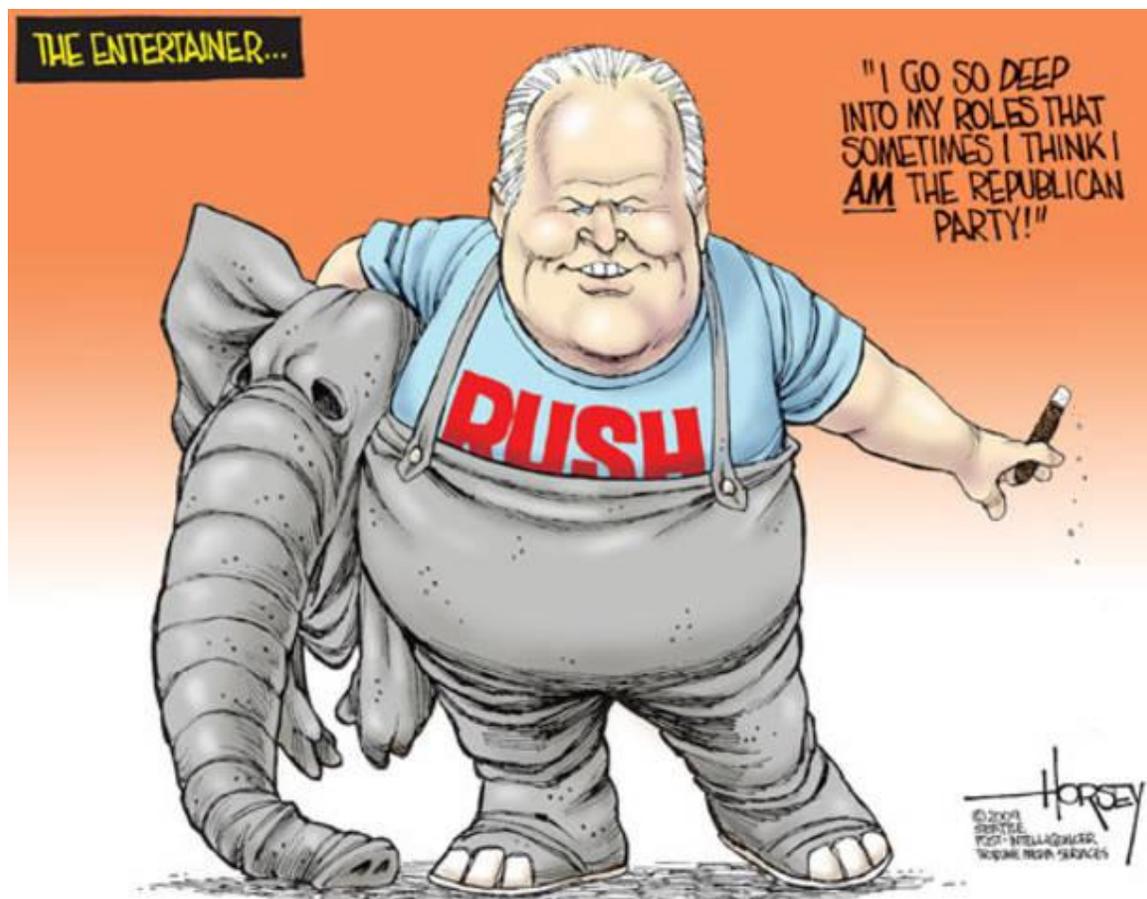
## **The Conservative News 'Racket'**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 13, 2012)

Money and politics don't mix any better in a democracy than drinking and driving, even if you're big and tough. Is that some kind of deep mystery?

"Is Conservative Media One Big 'Racket'?" by Eric Boehlert, *Media Matters/OpEdNews*

Dec. 12, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/Is-Conservative-Media-One-by-Eric-Boehlert-121212-49.html>)



As Republicans continue to try to make sense of their recent election losses, the finger pointing is becoming more intense.

In recent days, prominent conservatives Bill Kristol and Joe Scarborough have leveled a new allegation: Major players have allowed their pursuit of personal wealth (and ego) to take precedence over larger political goals; that elements of the conservative movement resemble a me-first, moneymaking "racket," where lining ones pockets stands out as the key objective.

The nasty "racket" accusation highlights what's happened as Republicans have handed over more and more of their branding and marketing to media personalities whose ultimate barometers of success (ratings and personal income) differ from those who run political parties (getting candidates elected to office).

In the business of media self-promotion, and particularly the carnival barker variety that powers so much of the conservative movement via Fox News and AM talk radio, it's inevitable that the goals of the "conservative entertainment complex," as writer David Frum dubbed it, would collide with the retail politics of the Republican Party. (Frum has charged the complex with having "fleeced" and "exploited" its followers.)

Remember when Glenn Beck charged fans \$125 to sit through the taping of his radio show? Or when he charged \$500 if they wanted to attend a meet-and-greet before the show? And that was *after* Beck banked \$32 million the previous year. More recently, conservative pundits and outlets have rushed to cash in on election spending by renting their emails lists, while Fox News' Karl Rove lightened wealthy donors' bankrolls by \$300 million via his failed political groups.

It's conservatism as an ATM.

The "racket" implication also extends beyond the media world and into the Tea Party, which Fox has faithfully touted as a "grassroot" movement. That feel-good characterization was hard to square with the recent revelation that former GOP House Majority Leader Dick Armey stepped down as chairman of FreedomWorks, an influential Tea Party non-profit group, with a staggering \$8 million golden parachute. (He will reportedly be paid in \$400,000 installments, annually, in "consulting fees.")

Republicans rarely begrudge millionaires for big paydays. (It's the free marketplace!) But if they think cashing in has trumped winning elections, GOP pushback is inevitable.

From Kristol [emphasis added]:

**And the conservative movement** -- a bulwark of American strength for the last several decades -- **is in deep disarray**. Reading about some conservative organizations and Republican campaigns these days, one is reminded of Eric Hoffer's remark, 'Every great cause begins as a movement, becomes a business, and eventually degenerates into a racket.' **It may be that major parts of American conservatism have become such a racket** that a kind of refounding of the movement as a cause is necessary.

And MSNBC's Scarborough:

"You have a lot of people running around, saying harsh things that sell books and push ratings and lose elections," he said on Monday. **"Conservatism is a racket for a lot of people to get very, very rich. With no thought of winning elections.**

Scarborough didn't mention Dick Morris by name, but it's possible the MSNBC host had the Fox News contributor him in mind when he denounced the type of conservative fraud that's "destroying the Republican Party."

As *Media Matters* detailed, Morris and conservative news outlet Newsmax Media operated something of a right-wing boondoggle during the recent election season. Cashing in on his television platform, Morris aggressively fundraised for a super PAC he advised, which then appeared to funnel money back to Morris through rentals of his email list. Morris' Super PAC for America paid Newsmax roughly \$1.7 million for "fundraising" in October and November. It

turns out a significant portion of the super PAC's money likely went to renting Morris' own email list, which is operated by Newsmax Media.

As Rachel Maddow noted last night, while highlighting the *Media Matters* report, "What these financial reports seem to indicate is that donations to Dick Morris' super PAC, substantially, just end up going to Dick Morris."

That feels like a racket to me.

Meanwhile, the incessant right-wing media desire to extract donations from followers for people and organizations that don't really need it can lead to baffling disconnects.

Last week, while cheering the news that Sen. Jim DeMint (R-S.C.) would be leaving the U.S. Senate in order to become president of the influential conservative think tank, The Heritage Foundation, Rush Limbaugh urged his listeners to support the institution and to become paying members. What Limbaugh failed to mention to his AM listeners was that The Heritage Foundation operates on an \$80 million annual budget, lists assets totaling nearly \$200 million, and receives generous support from of 3M, Boeing, and ExxonMobil, just to name a few, key corporate benefactors.

Indeed, the Heritage Foundation, with its gold-plated deep pockets and its big business sponsorship, has long been seen as the most prosperous think tank in all of Washington, D.C., boasting a staff of nearly 300 people. (As its new president, DeMint's annual salary will likely be in excess of \$1 million.) Yet Limbaugh was urging his listeners from around the country, including those from small town America, to write checks to the Heritage Foundation so that its voice can be heard?

And yes, according to this *Washington Post* report, Limbaugh has pocketed millions from the Heritage Foundation over the years, so this also feels like a racket. And there aren't many American political movements that have turned rackets to electoral success.



'You're on in five minutes, Mr. Beck.'

[20121212-01](#) 07:12 MarthaH Photo: Christmas Tree

Whew! It was a lot of work, but I'm done...got the tree up!!

Just love the smell of pine!

Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

[And there the presents are, "under" the tree, just like they're supposed to be! :- ) -SteveB]



[20121212-05](#) 09:22 Pam Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)

Cute. It's even bigger than ours. :-)

[20121212-06](#) 10:08 Art Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)

I don't get it.

[20121212-21](#) 22:22 SandyI Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)

...and a fine job you did, too.



[20121212-02](#) 07:40 SteveB Re: Christmas Tree (reply to MarthaH, above)

Haha! Glad to see they went all out.

A little like us, actually...we have our local art nativity here at home, a string of lights around our famous arched doorway to the oven room at the store, and we're looking for our little cut glass nativity without finding it yet—ah, there it is!.

Three blocks down the street, the central plaza is full of lights and activity, so that's kinda where our "tree" is.

I'd love to do a Santa thing like Art and pass out. Cookie samples at the Plaza this time of year, but it's usually so hot! (Ah, the importance of punctuation!) I really feel sorry for the guys who actually have to wear the suits. I sure wouldn't want any hot kid sitting on my lap. Mmmm...turn-up the A-C, please...



[20121212-03](#) 08:11 MarthaH Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SteveB, above)

I love the different traditions and the joy of traveling and experiencing the new includes 365 days a year. We Americans "assume" the world is like us--or wants to be, God forbid in some areas!

I think the good Christmas memories of childhood make the realities of adulthood go down better--that and creating new ones for the younger generations. We are prepping for soup/salad/dessert meals for separate family units for Christmas month. That means no comparisons of gift sack contents and separate TLC. The herd mentality of Thanksgiving is PLENTY of that! I taught...and know one-on-one! We will probably clear the table and play dominoes, too. On Christmas day it will be the old folks at home with a special dinner for two and a good movie... My ornament collection of trips past conjure up memories of lots of good "presents" in miles covered--Africa, European and American dolls, plus a zillion others...KISS, Keep It Simple, Stupid! That's my motto!

A Happy Hot Holiday to you and yours!

[20121212-22](#) 22:25 SandyI Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SteveB, above)

Love the angels.

[20121212-12](#) 13:27 Tom Photo: Christmas List

Not on Santa's List?



Explanation...

"Chained Explained" by Brooks Jackson, FactCheck.org

Dec. 11, 2012, (<http://factcheck.org/2012/12/chained-explained/>)

(A more accurate inflation adjustment could cut \$300 billion from the deficit.)

The "Chained Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers," or C-CPI-U, attempts to correct a problem that leading economists have been pointing out for half a century: The traditional CPI, they say, goes up faster than the prices ordinary people actually pay.

#### 'Substitution Bias' in the CPI

At issue here is something called "substitution bias." Put simply, the traditional CPI tallies up the current prices of items in a "market basket" of goods and services supposedly bought by the average consumer in any given month. But what goes into the market baskets of real-life consumers today isn't necessarily what went in when the Bureau of Labor Statistics surveyed consumers to find out what they were buying. If the price of beef goes up and shoppers buy more chicken, their cost of living rises by less than the CPI reflects.

BLS used to conduct expenditure surveys only once per decade. Now it updates its market-basket weights once every two years, but still with a considerable time lag. The most recent update was announced in January 2012, when BLS started using weights reflecting what consumers were buying in the 2009-2010 period, updated from weights determined in 2007-2008, which it was using as late as December 2011.

The "substitution bias" was noted more than 50 years ago, in a 1961 report to the Bureau of the Budget, by a panel of economists headed by Nobel Prize-winner-to-be George J. Stigler. Among the problems causing what the Stigler report said was a "systematic upward bias" in the CPI, was this:

Stigler Report, 1961: Since consumers will substitute those goods whose prices rise less or fall more for those whose prices rise more or fall less—and within limits they can do this without reducing their levels of real consumption—the fixed-weight base CPI overestimates rises in the cost of equivalent market baskets.

#### Slow Change

The BLS has made many improvements in the accuracy of the CPI in response to the Stigler report, though not always quickly. It took more than 20 years for the BLS to change the way it calculated the cost of owner-occupied housing along lines suggested by Stigler, for example.

The CPI then based home ownership costs mainly on prices of homes sold, and interest costs for new mortgages taken out in any given month, even though the vast majority of homeowners don't buy a home or take out a new mortgage in that month. Stigler recommended using instead what a homeowner would pay to rent his or her house.

In 1979, when mortgage rates first spiked to over 11 percent, the CPI put overall inflation at 13 percent. But relatively few people actually took out mortgages at the sky-high rates. The CPI thus overstated inflation by 2.5 percentage points compared with what it would have been had BLS used instead the cost of renting equivalent quarters, according to a 1981 report to Congress by the U.S. General Accounting Office.

Finally, in January 1983, the CPI began using the rental equivalent approach Stigler had suggested more than two decades earlier. A BLS paper later concluded that the CPI was higher by 0.6 percentage points each year between 1967 and 1982 than it would have been had the bureau used the rental-equivalence method that it now uses.

## Boskin Report

But flaws remained. In 1996 another panel of distinguished economists (including one who had been a member of the 1961 Stigler commission) estimated that the CPI was still overstating the true rise in the cost of living by between 0.8 percentage points and 1.6 percentage points per year, with a "best estimate" of 1.1 percentage points. The panel was appointed by the Senate Finance Committee, and headed by Michael J. Boskin, former chief economic adviser to President George H.W. Bush.

Among other things, the Boskin panel recommended that BLS take steps to eliminate the substitution bias in the CPI, and to better account for the goods consumers actually buy. And the BLS made some effort in that direction.

Starting in 1999, the BLS started using a "geometric mean" formula in the CPI to remove the effects of substitution bias within product categories (for example, when consumers substitute one brand of ice cream for another because of price changes). That adjustment alone was predicted to reduce the growth of the CPI by about 0.2 percentage points each year.

But the larger problem of substitution bias across different product categories (for example, when consumers switch from apples to oranges when apple prices rise, or orange prices decline) remained.

Further efforts to eliminate that bias were recommended in a 2002 report by a panel of experts assembled by the National Research Council, an arm of the congressionally chartered National Academy of Sciences. An editor of that report was Charles Schultze, who was chief economic adviser to President Jimmy Carter.

Also, starting in July 2002 the BLS began publishing the new "chained" CPI with data going back to 1999. This index, the C-CPI-U, uses a formula designed to account for changes in purchasing patterns that consumers make in response to changes in relative prices across categories. So when pork prices increase or beef prices decline, the C-CPI-U assumes that consumers buy less pork and more beef. These spending weights are changed monthly, "chained" to the spending weights used the previous month.

But by law, annual cost-of-living increases for Social Security and other federal benefits remain linked to a variant of the traditional CPI, the Consumer Price Index for Urban Wage Earners and Clerical Workers (CPI-W). And federal tax brackets are adjusted based on the somewhat broader Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), which is the index most commonly cited in news accounts of government reports on inflation.

## Simpson-Bowles Report

In December 2010, a majority of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, headed by former Sen. Alan Simpson and former White House Chief of Staff Erskine Bowles, recommended switching to the C-CPI-U for all federal spending and tax provisions that use inflation adjustments as part of a massive deficit-reduction effort. The report was endorsed by 11 of the commission's 18 members, including both Democrats and Republicans. But the recommendation was not sent to Congress because the vote fell short of the 14 needed to trigger such action under the executive order establishing the panel.

In March 2011, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimated that switching to the C-CPI-U for adjusting Social Security benefits would automatically cut federal spending by \$112 billion below current 10-year projections, and that using the "chained" index for federal workers' pensions, veterans benefits and military retirees would slow spending growth by another \$24 billion. Using the CPI-U to index all federal spending programs, including a few CBO didn't specify, would cut spending growth by "about \$145 billion" in total.

Also, using the index to adjust income-tax brackets would bring in \$72 billion in additional revenue, CBO said. Taken together, the spending reductions and revenue increases would total \$217 billion over a decade.

Even more deficit reduction was predicted by the Moment of Truth project (also chaired by Simpson and Bowles) in a report issued in May 2011. That report estimated a total of \$299 billion in deficit reduction over 10 years, counting reduced interest payments resulting from lower spending, a factor not addressed by the CBO report.

The effects on benefits would be gradual. CBO said that after years of smaller cost-of-living increases, somebody retiring on Social Security today would be receiving about 3 percent less in benefits at age 75 than they would receive under current law. By age 95, they would face a reduction of about 8 percent.

### Support and Opposition

A *Washington Post* editorial has described the idea as “a relatively easy way to save about \$300 billion.” In current negotiations with the White House, Republican leaders in Congress are pushing use of the “chained” CPI as a relatively painless way to cut some of the deficit. And the idea has even been endorsed conditionally by the liberal Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which said earlier this year that using the C-CPI-U is “a reasonable component of a comprehensive package to put the budget on a sustainable course,” provided that it applies to the tax code as well as to benefit programs, and provided further that certain concessions are made to ease the impact on very old or very low-income beneficiaries.

But the proposed change also faces opposition from predictable quarters. A tax expert at the libertarian Cato Institute says using the C-CPI-U to index the tax code is a “stealth tax increase,” and Grover Norquist’s Americans for Tax Reform opposed it as a “hidden” tax hike.

And on the left, the AARP argues that using it to calculate Social Security cost-of-living increases “targets the oldest, poorest Americans” and is “inappropriate and unwarranted.” A coalition of 85 labor unions and mostly liberal groups expressed “strong opposition” to using the C-CPI-U in a letter to Congress dated Oct. 16.

That letter argues that the cost of living for seniors rises faster than the CPI, which “does not adequately take into account health care costs.” But the fact is, economists generally find no solid evidence that the cost of living for seniors really does rise faster than for others.

### The Trouble with the CPI-E

Those who oppose using the “chained” CPI for adjusting Social Security pensions regularly point to yet another cost index, the CPI-E (for “elderly”), which attempts to measure rising costs for persons age 62 and over.

It is true that seniors spend more of their budgets on their health care than do younger persons. But it’s also true that they spend relatively less of their budgets on other things — including education, transportation, food and clothing. So they are not as affected by the rapidly rising cost of college tuition, for example.

The CPI-E rose an average of 0.2 percent per year more than the CPI-U or the CPI-W between December 1982 and December 2011. But BLS notes, “recent trends show different results.”

Since 2006, the CPI-E has risen at the same rate as the CPI-U, the index most commonly cited in news stories, and used to adjust income-tax brackets. And more important, it has risen more slowly than the CPI-W, the index used to calculate Social Security cost-of-living increases. Over that most recent five-year period, the CPI-E and CPI-U both rose at an annual rate of 2.3 percent, while the CPI-W increased 2.4 percent.

BLS cautions that the CPI-E is an unpublished, “experimental” index, and that “any conclusions drawn from it should be used with caution.” BLS also concedes that the CPI-E has a number of shortcomings because it simply re-weights the price data collected for its regular price surveys, without attempting to collect some important data specific to seniors.

For example, the CPI-E makes no attempt to track what seniors actually buy. “Because the specific items sampled within selected outlets are chosen on the basis of total sales in the outlet—and not sales to the elderly—the items selected for pricing in each outlet may not be representative of the CPI-E population,” BLS states.

Nor does it try to track prices at the places where seniors actually shop. “[T]he outlets may not be representative of the location and types of stores used by the elderly population,” BLS says.

Another shortcoming that BLS readily admits is that the "elderly" index takes no account of "senior discounts" available on such purchases as movie tickets, car rentals, train tickets, public transportation, chain restaurants and so forth.

At a 1995 Senate hearing, BLS Commissioner Janet Norwood was asked whether prices rise more rapidly for the elderly than for others. "The real point is that we do not know," she said. "And we do not know because we do not have prices that are collected for items that are purchased by the elderly."

The 2002 study by the National Research Council (previously mentioned for recommending creation of a "chained" index) also noted deficiencies in the experimental "elderly" index. "[W]e see no rationale for switching to an index along the lines of the CPI-E for purposes of indexation," the report said.

The NRC report said further that a valid index should not be based on "speculation and conjecture":

National Research Council, 2002: Would a price index for the elderly behave differently than the overall CPI if data were collected on items and qualities consumed by the elderly and on the prices paid in outlets where the elderly shop? To have a definitive answer to this question, or even relevant evidence instead of speculation and conjecture, an index for the elderly would have to be constructed to reflect "items that are purchased" and "prices actually paid."

We take no position here as to whether benefits for seniors are too high or too low, whether future cost-of-living adjustments should be higher or lower, or how income-tax brackets should be adjusted in the future. We also note that the cost of living for any individual or family may go up faster or slower than the national average.

But it's just a fact that leading economists have said for many years that the current CPI overstates the true rate of inflation. So using it to index federal programs produces more spending and less revenue than a more accurate measure would justify.

20121212-07

10:09

SteveB

Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell the Senate: No Cuts to Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid Benefits & No Tax Cuts for the Wealthy!

from CREDO Action:

[http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/medicare\\_eligibility/letter.html](http://act.credoaction.com/campaign/medicare_eligibility/letter.html)

The *Washington Post* reported last week that the major Democratic concession in fiscal cliff talks is likely to be raising the Medicare eligibility age from 65 to 67.

As the political blog, Americablog, responded, it's immoral to consider cutting Medicare benefits to pay for George Bush's lies. Democrats should not offer Republicans benefit cuts in exchange for letting the Bush tax cuts expire. Republican lies got us into this deficit mess by waging two failed wars and extending the Bush tax cuts amidst an economic downturn. If we need to cut the budget we should start with Republican priorities — first letting the Bush tax cuts expire and ending the wars, and then moving on to our bloated military budget and tax subsidies for the fossil fuel industry.

Tell President Obama and Congressional Leadership: Don't accept any deal that raises the Medicare eligibility age or cuts benefits.

Raising the Medicare eligibility age from 65-67 will save only \$15 billion per year. Meanwhile, Bush's invasion of Iraq, which was justified by outright lies, has been costing us \$46 billion per year. And in 2013 we'll be spending \$88 billion in Afghanistan, nearly six times as much as it will cost to keep the Medicare eligibility age at 65.

We should be lowering the Medicare eligibility age, not raising it. The real solution to our health care crisis is to expand Medicare to all. Medicare covers 40 million Americans over the age of 65, providing quality care at prices that are much lower than the private market. We should expand it so that it covers everybody.

Where was the concern over the deficit when Bush lied to push through tax cuts and two wars we couldn't afford. Inside the beltway in Washington DC, politicians who enjoy lifetime pensions and fantastic health care coverage are busy bargaining away a cornerstone of our social safety net. And for what? To appease the corporations and wealthy Americans who many of our representatives see as their most important constituency.

These politicians need a wake up call. They need to hear from people all across the U.S. that we will not let them take away Medicare benefits.

Health care in the U.S. is already expensive. Saving money by cutting Medicare benefits does nothing more than shift the cost of necessary medical care onto the backs of people who might not be able to pay for it. Raising the Medicare eligibility age is one of the most wrongheaded things Congress and the White House could do. No deal is better than a bad deal. And we must reject any deal that contains cuts to Social Security, Medicaid or Medicare benefits.

It could be that this is just another trial balloon from DC insiders. But it could also be the shape of the deal that is soon to come. In either case, we need to shoot down this terrible idea, and do it decisively.

Paul Krugman, reacting to the news, wrote on his blog: "If anyone in the White House is seriously thinking along these lines, please stop it right now."

We couldn't agree more.

Click below to automatically sign the petition:

[http://www.credoaction.com/campaign/senate\\_deal\\_2012/?rc=homepage](http://www.credoaction.com/campaign/senate_deal_2012/?rc=homepage).

Thank you for helping us hold the line on Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare benefits.

Becky Bond, Political Director

20121212-20	19:24	SteveG	Fw: Democrat Senators.org Petition: Support Middle-Class Tax Cuts!
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It should be easy...

from Sen. Patty Murray (D. WA):

Last week I took to the Senate floor to encourage Speaker Boehner and House Republicans to extend the middle-class tax cuts.

It should be easy. The American people have clearly said that the wealthy need to pay their fair share, and that we should not balance the budget on the backs of middle-class families.

Republicans agree that we should extend the middle-class tax cuts. So why isn't this easy? The problem is that House Republicans are holding the middle class hostage to protect the wealthiest Americans.

But thanks to you -- and thousands of other supporters -- I wasn't alone when I told Speaker Boehner to end this hostage crisis, and give middle-class families the tax extension that they deserve.

Will you share your support for our petition to extend the middle-class tax cuts on Facebook or Twitter to help spread the word?

Our efforts to put pressure on House Republicans are starting to work.

In just the last few days, more Republican elected officials, columnists, and pundits have come forward and said that we should not protect the wealthy at the expense of the middle class.

But it's not enough to talk about it; we actually need Republicans to act.

Help us build momentum by sharing your support for our petition to extend the middle-class tax cuts:

Facebook: <http://www.democratsenators.org/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=h2VY5PtoKgvPjRHrrWI5ysevfrhSeP2D>.

Twitter: <http://www.democratsenators.org/dia/track.jsp?v=2&c=BMfvwywx%2FHbTTIRQF%2FJ1wsevfrhSeP2D>.

If we all speak out together, we can make our voices heard and give middle-class families the certainty that they need before the holidays. It won't be as easy as it should be, but we can do it.

Thank you for your support, Patty Murray, U.S. Senator

**20121212-08** 11:33 Ben Graphic: When I Grow Up I Want to Be an Exotic Dancer Like Mommy

Gotta love this one....make you chuckle. First Grade Drawing - PRICELESS!

A first grade girl handed in the drawing below for her homework assignment:



The teacher graded it and the child took it home. She returned to school the next day with the following note:

Dear Ms. Davis,

I want to be perfectly clear on my child's homework illustration. It is NOT of me on a dance pole on a stage in a strip joint surrounded by male customers with money.

I work at Home Depot and had commented to my daughter how much money we made in the recent snowstorm.

This drawing is of me selling a shovel.

Sincerely, Mrs. Harrington

20121212-09 12:45 SteveB "PolitiFact Names Romney Ad 'Lie of the Year'"

"PolitiFact Names Romney Ad 'Lie of the Year'" by Josh Voorhees, Slate

Dec. 12, 2012,

([http://www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_slatest/2012/12/12/romney\\_wins\\_lie\\_of\\_the\\_year\\_gop\\_jeep\\_ad\\_named\\_biggest\\_lie\\_by\\_politifact.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2012/12/12/romney_wins_lie_of_the_year_gop_jeep_ad_named_biggest_lie_by_politifact.html))

Here' PolitiFact with the falsehood's origin:

It originated with a conservative blogger, who twisted an accurate news story into a falsehood. Then it picked up steam when the Drudge Report ran with it. Even though Jeep's parent company gave a quick and clear denial, Mitt Romney repeated it and his campaign turned it into a TV ad. And they stood by the claim, even as the media and the public expressed collective outrage against something so obviously false.

Romney would go on to lose the all-important Buckeye State by 3 points.\*

Here's the ad video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=VQ8P04q6jqE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=VQ8P04q6jqE).

While PolitiFact's staff deemed the campaign spot worthy of the no. 1 slot, the outlet's readers viewed it as only the third-biggest lie of a list of ten they had to choose from. Here were the top seven results from the reader survey:

*"Obamacare is . . . the largest tax increase <u>in the history of the world.</u> " -- Radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh	26.6%
President Barack Obama was saying success "is the result of government," not "hard-working people," when he said, "If you've got a business, <u>you didn't build that.</u> Somebody else made that happen." -- a campaign video from the Mitt Romney campaign	20%
Barack Obama "sold Chrysler to Italians who <u>are going to build Jeeps in China</u> " at the cost of American jobs. -- a TV ad from the Mitt Romney campaign	18.7%
"Under Obama's plan (for welfare), you wouldn't have to work and wouldn't have to train for a job. <u>They just send you your welfare check.</u> " -- a TV ad from the Mitt Romney campaign	13.1%
Barack Obama began his presidency "with <u>an apology tour.</u> " -- Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney	10.4%
"Over the last four years, the deficit has gone up, but <u>90 percent of that</u> is as a consequence" of President George W. Bush's policies and the recession. -- President Barack Obama	5.6%
Mitt Romney and Bain Capital are to blame in <u>a woman's premature death</u> when they closed the plant where her husband worked. -- Priorities USA Action, a super PAC that supported Barack Obama	3.1%

[20121212-10](#) 12:51 SteveB Video: Cute Dog

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=PN-MjUC4f9k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=PN-MjUC4f9k)

[20121212-11](#) 13:26 SteveB Video: Why Marijuana Should Maybe Not Be Legal

Here's a video of some young people working hard to improve people's lives in their community:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aGXHTq4fUo>.

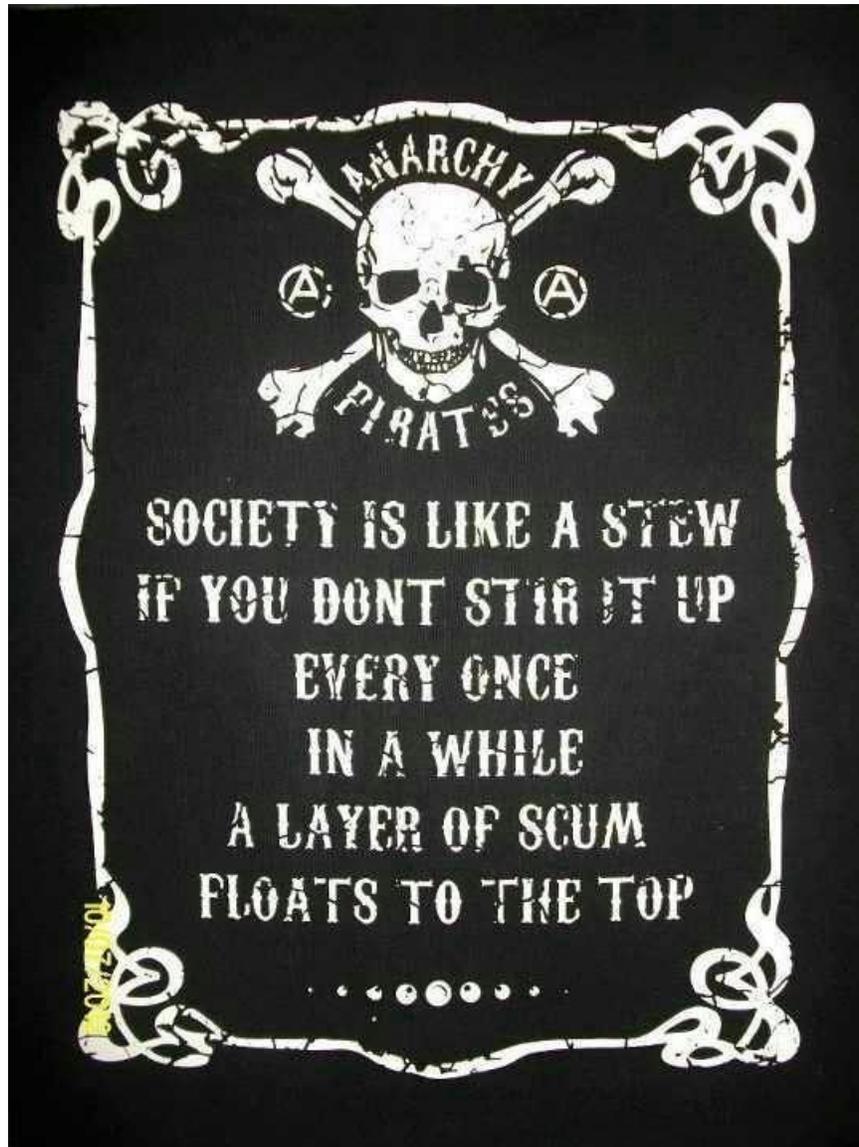
[20121212-14](#) 13:35 SteveB Video: Drive-Bys

These *jovents* would love *Carnaval* here in Santa Cruz:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qrJQ6BIQizc>.

[20121212-19](#) 19:03 SteveB Videos (GIF): People Who Are Having a Worse Day Than You Are

<http://www.buzzfeed.com/daves4/people-who-are-having-a-worse-day-than-you>



Can the GOP Be Saved?

"The Right's Sham Religion of Rugged Individualism" by Robert S. Becker, [NationofChange](http://www.nationofchange.org)

Dec. 12, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/right-s-sham-religion-rugged-individualism-1355328952>)

Behold the damning paradox that bedevils the dazed rightwing. While strictly-scrutinized party factions toe strict ideological lines, every freedom-loving GOP gang glorifies the absurd, frontier badge of rugged individualism. "The great and abiding lesson of American history, particularly the cold war," declares Rand Paul, "is that the engine of capitalism, the individual, is mightier than any collective."

Right, one great champion drives every mighty, corporate colossus, doubtlessly a willful, Ayn Rand superman. Columnist Marilyn von Savant only adds fuel to the folly, "The freedom to be an individual is the essence of America." That so? The apex of radical individualism isn't found in America, no longer the world's leader in socio-

economic mobility but more likely resides within some all-powerful warlord whose tyranny lasts as long as his lifespan.

The right talks individualism and freedom yet practices the politics of punitive submission, extorted by Tea Party primaries, boorish FOX newscasters, loutish televangelists, Rovian political operatives, and unelected Grover Norquist enforcers. "Don't tread on me" sounds a great war cry but doesn't advance a country of 300 million. No wonder, with widening agendas, at least five GOP cliques squabble like hungry chickens:

1. The predatory corporate crowd, from Wall Street banksters to reactionary billionaires rigging the system.
2. Close-minded, Tea Party haters of all government programs that share goodies outside their tribe.
3. Faith-alone fundamentalists, keyed to Biblical literalism, End of Days, or defiance of abortion rights.
4. Belligerent, neo-con marauders, boasting pre-emptive invasions to affirm our imperial destiny.
5. The residual strays, fairly inconsequential, spanning distraught moderates to plumb-crazy conspiracy nuts, secessionists, armed militias and back-to-the-boonies cultism.

Yet, all Republican differences dissipate when the right invokes its transcendent, irrational leap of faith: that American prowess wholly reflects our worship of go-it-alone, "I-built-it-my-way" manias, revering the lone gunman blasting all foes. Why, just study history. Did not "collectivist" Puritans season their theocracy with individual freedom for all? Was not our revolution gained by one great hero, not the one-third of insurgent colonists working together? Did not lonely frontiersmen carve out homes from the wilderness, oh, except for families, neighbors, and cheap (slave, Native American, Irish, Italian, Asian) labor? Lincoln alone freed the slaves and won the Civil War, just like great individuals must have won both world wars, built our infrastructure, and now defend global commerce.

In short, thanks to willful ignorance that demeans the essential co-operation that defines America, babble that the individual is "mightier than any collective" goes on. Name one, Mr. Paul? This country is at heart communitarian, not authoritarian, not libertarian.

### GOP Triumph of the Will

Yet, if every conservative has the god-given right to liberty and conscience, why are there so few party rebels (or true "rogues") that defy lockstep obedience to a rigid party line? And why is disagreement, even challenge to one group's holy crusade, vilified by great thinkers like Norquist or birdbrain Rush Limbaugh? What bizarre notion of freedom induces extremists to primary into oblivion minor divergence from their fixations? Had not Tea Partiers "expressed their individualism" by defeating five electable candidates since 2010, they'd control the Senate. Of course, they'd then have to forego this William Godwin rant, "Above all we should not forget that government is an evil, a usurpation upon the private judgment and individual conscience of mankind."

In fact, do not warped notions of individualism, implying total mastery over one's life, represent the motherload for every hot button social wedge issue since 2000? On gun control, what heroic individualist can protect his home and family against bad guys without commanding his own arsenal? Since "evil government" eyes the truest, most independent thinkers, freedom-loving, paranoid militias would betray their essence by not preparing for the enemy. Let's not forget those gun-loving, manly hunters, decimating all those blood-curdling wild animals, like rabbits, game birds and deer. For stalkers of the innocent, it's munitions, not clothes, that make the man. Or gay marriage: what self-respecting, individualist he-man "chooses" the "homosexual life style," let alone publicizes it to the world by marrying one's buddy?

### The Certitude of the Rigid

Certainly, every rugged individualist scrutinizes birth control methods and reigns in appetites so he or she never needs abortion doctors. What model of self-reliance would ignobly drug a date or assault a relative or child? That deserves getting skinned alive. Does not similar, hard line thinking justify capital punishment as just accountability, fitting ultimate punishment to the individual's willful crime, like in good Old Testament days. Bring on the fire and brimstone, hell's a'waitin' for miscreants who choose wickedness.

Just last week, a throng of freedom-loving senators trumped a U.N. treaty for daring to apply American standards to overseas discrimination against the disabled. Pretty rugged stuff. What a brave bunch, shuddering in terror

against the mighty wrath of primary challenges by know-nothings! Observe the fierce irony: any conservatives who think on their own, who deviate a smidgeon, face political blackmail, from all the usual suspects:

- Libertarians outraged against those who insufficiently despise government.
- Fundamentalists outraged at the failure to despise abortion, secularism, or gay rights.
- Greedy capitalists outraged at those who don't despise taxes or regulation.
- Belligerent, neo-con conquistadores outraged at those who don't despise perpetual war.

Except for militarists, reliant on government-sponsored war machines ("peace after all depends on constant war"), all endorse Godwin's take on government as evil and the individual as the highest, if not only good. All these zealots are so vehement they continue to shoot themselves in the head by equating "freedom" with obstructive filibustering of whatever the majority supports. If God is really on that side, the world withers without a new theology.

### All for One, One for All

Finally, for lovers of high irony, here's a zinger. The Democrats are in fact a far more diverse, undisciplined, and independent-minded community, yet they share a much higher consensus about community values, the value of government and where the country should go. With the Obama re-election, liberals regained strength simply by asserting this radical idea, "the greatest good for the greatest number," while reinforcing both Elizabeth Warren's campaign and Republican, ex-justice Sandra Day O'Connor, "We don't accomplish anything in this world alone...and whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads form one to another that creates something" (of worth).

To end, here's compelling etymology: the word "liberal" comes from the root *liber*, as in free, thus informing "liberty" and "liberation" (even "libertine"). For over a century, "liberal" buttressed the inalienable rights of all men, plus FDR's Four Freedoms. A "liberal" benefactor was a hero with positive connotations of compassion, humanity, tolerance and openness to change.

Let us restore "liberal" to its root origins, with brave defenses of liberty **alongside** tolerance, individualism **alongside** "collective" teamwork. What's wrong with pulling together, "all for one and one for all," the recipe for job creation, health delivery, and critical ecological balances? For that simple, communitarian creed separates us from both know-nothing yokels and scheming fat cats who mouth individualism while funding inquisitions to insure lockstep obedience.

<a href="#">20121212-16</a>	18:04	Ben	Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple
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Today, the seafood choice came from the Asia line, and was presented as Red Snapper Tikka. This was a fresh red snapper filet with a delicious and zesty (but not massively hot) yellow curry sauce served over my choice of brown or white pistachio biryani rice; I took the long grain white, presumably Basmati or something like it. My filet was (no surprise) both very fresh and perfectly cooked; we're not looking for sushi in a dish like this, and the filet was at that perfect stage of moist flakiness with just a hint of pink in the thickest parts. It separated neatly with a fork along any muscle-bundle lines I cared to choose. Both a lovely yellow curry sauce and a tasty sweet tamarind sauce adorned the plate, and both were so delicious that I mopped up every blob by mopping with a forked fish morsel. The lovely garnish of crispy cucumber salad was a cool breath with the spicy curry. This dish was one of those that was so nicely balanced that everything tasted great mixed with everything else, although I admit that I scarfed down the green beans first, the better to enjoy them warm. (Beans have a very high surface area to volume ration, and cool really fast, if not submerged in something else.)

Yum! I'd do it again in a second!



Red Snapper Curry with Butter-Braised Green Beans and Rice

20121212-17 18:48 Art "Walmart CEO Mike Duke: 'We Do Pay Competitive Wages'"

Another reason not to shop Walmart...

"Walmart CEO Mike Duke: 'We Do Pay Competitive Wages'" by Harry Bradford, Huffington Post

Dec. 12, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/walmart-ceo-mike-duke\\_n\\_2286440.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=business](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/12/walmart-ceo-mike-duke_n_2286440.html?utm_hp_ref=business))

Apparently, all those protests by Walmart workers over pay and benefits aren't getting through to CEO Mike Duke.

At a recent event, Bloomberg LP President Dan Doctoroff pointed out to the Walmart chief executive that even though his company paints itself as "serving an emerging middle class," many of its employees aren't paid enough to lead a normal life and some even resort to food stamps to make ends meet, as previously reported by The Huffington Post. This is what Duke had to say in response:

"Retailing is the most competitive industry out there, and we do pay competitive wages," Duke told Doctoroff, according to *Business Insider*, noting that around 175,000 Walmart employees are promoted from entry-level positions each year. "Our associates are a great source of pride and personal inspiration for me," he added.

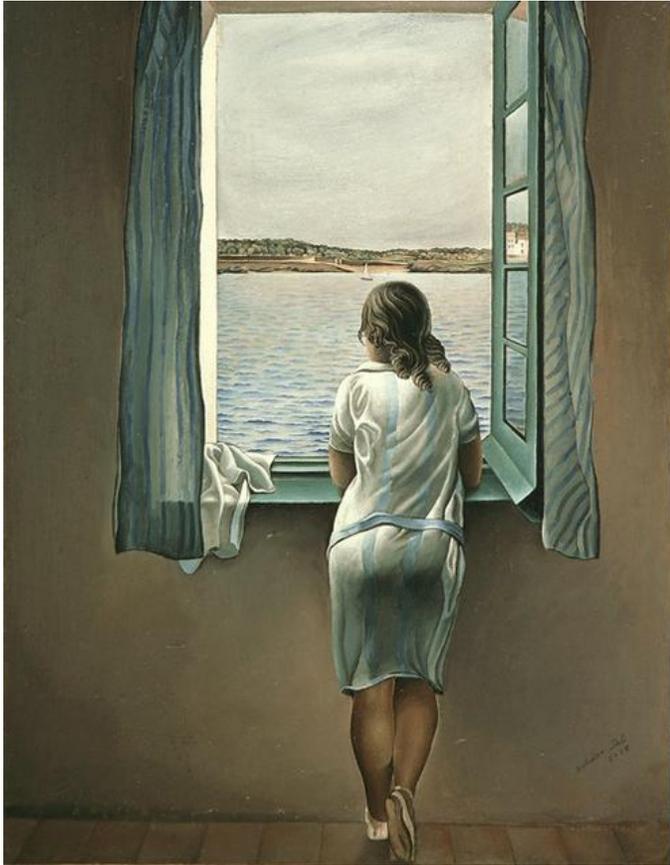
But maybe that's simply because he's getting away with paying them so little. According to market research firm Ibis World, the average wage for a Walmart employee is \$8.81 per hour, barely over the minimum wage in some states. **Walmart executives say average rates are higher, with estimates including \$11.75 per hour and \$12.40 per hour. In contrast, Duke made \$18.7 million in 2010. With a CEO-to-employee pay ratio of 717-to-1, that ranks Duke second among a list of 50 CEOs who are paid significantly more than their employees.**

[20121212-18](#)

18:50

SteveB

Photo: Cats Imitating Art #1 (Salvador Dali, *Woman at the Window*, 1925)





<http://www.aracari.com/wordpress/2010/12/kentitambo-chachapoyas-accommodation/>



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

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Welcome to all our new members who may be here for the first time. We want to hear from YOU! To submit your comment, you can use the form on our website or blog, or reply to this email with your two cents worth. Be sure to sign with your desired user name.

Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>  
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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #291 — DEC. 14, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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**INDEX: Click here.**

## **'The Future Is Upon Us'**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 14, 2012)

Obamacare is still a big mystery to most of us, but is about to start unfolding into the public consciousness. Let the revelations begin.

"Obamacare Begins" by Bill Boyarsky, TruthDig

Dec. 13, 2012, ([http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/obamacare\\_begins\\_20121213/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/obamacare_begins_20121213/))



Dealing with the complex problems of the poor is one of the most difficult challenges facing Obamacare as the historic health reform law slowly but steadily enters American life.

Throughout the country, health professionals, politicians and health care activists are meeting about how to implement the Affordable Care Act now that it has been upheld by the Supreme Court and President Barack Obama's re-election.

I attended one of these sessions recently and saw the potential for Obamacare in the nation's impoverished communities. Among the topics was autism, a disability in which—as is true of much of American medical care—treatment is rationed on the basis of wealth.

Areva D. Martin, an attorney who advocates for children with special needs such as autism, called care for the disorder "a microcosm" of inadequate treatment of the poor, with insufficient diagnoses, limited and scattered facilities, and caregivers—parents, other relatives and friends—so burdened with two or three jobs and low incomes that they can't fight for help in a bureaucratic system.

Martin spoke at a conference at St. John's Well Child & Family Center, which has 140,000 visits a year from residents of South Los Angeles, home to many thousands of working-class Latinos and African-Americans. St. John's provides primary, dental and mental health care; a team approach to complex ailments; and diagnosis and treatment of HIV/AIDS. It is one of more than 8,000 community health clinics across the nation serving more than 20 million poor people, according to the National Association of Community Health Centers.

The clinics are a key part of the Obamacare effort to improve treatment of the poor. The Affordable Care Act provides \$7.5 billion to expand services over five years and an additional \$1.5 billion for construction of facilities. Jim Mangia, president and CEO of St. John's, told me that Obamacare is providing funds for new buildings and remodeling at the center's main South L.A. facility and satellite clinics in the broad area of poverty that stretches for miles south of the office towers, expensive restaurants and high-priced homes of affluent Los Angeles.

Obamacare funding of Medicaid for the poor will put 12,000 St. John's patients, presently without health insurance, on the government care program. By paying for these patients, Medicaid will provide funds to St. John's, which now has to finance its care from donations and other scarce sources.

Autism requires a range of services administered by doctors, schools, health clinics, speech and behavior therapists, psychologists and others. To put all these components together requires parental sophistication and an ability to fight the system. For those in South L.A., it also means finding help at facilities that are often a long bus ride away.

Attorney Martin learned how poverty makes this difficult when she attended a parental meeting to find ways of helping her autistic son learn to read. She knew how to fight the system, unlike some of the poor mothers and fathers she met. Help, she found, is hard to obtain "if you are not educated, if you are not used to dealing with bureaucrats, if you don't have a job that allows you time to go to two zillion meetings, if you are working three jobs."

In a series published a year ago, *Los Angeles Times* journalist Alan Zarembo reported that state spending for treatment of autism is tilted toward whites in more affluent areas. For autistic children between the ages of 3 and 6, the critical period for treating the disorder, the *Times* found that California spent \$11,723 per child for whites, \$11,063 for Asians, \$7,634 for Latinos and \$6,593 for African-Americans.

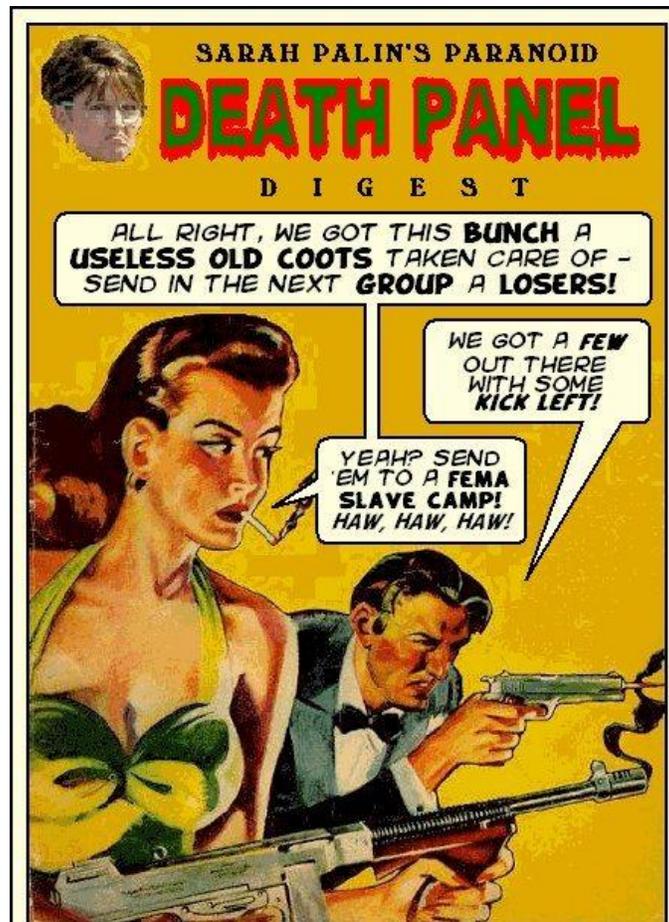
St. John's CEO Mangia said that his organization, helped by Obamacare funds, is planning a large center for special needs children, including those with autism, on a new medical campus being built in South L.A. to replace the old Martin Luther King Jr. Hospital.

"There will be early identification, intervention, mental health care, counseling, speech, psychological and occupational therapy, all the things these kids need here," Mangia said, services now reserved for "upper-middle-class kids whose families can afford it."

Autism is just an example. By putting money into community health clinics, expanding Medicaid, and financing improved primary and comprehensive treatment, Obamacare will improve life throughout the country for the poor suffering from diabetes, heart disease, HIV/AIDS and other complex ailments.

Such care should have been available a long time ago. Medicare for all would have been better. But at St. John's and community health centers throughout America, dedicated health care professionals are making Obamacare work. So are others engaged in setting up the exchanges that will make a variety of insurance policies, with subsidies for the low income, available to those now uninsured.

Their work is the beginning of a journey that will end only when Obamacare—if it is successful—makes decent health care a right rather than something reserved for those who can afford it.



[20121213-01](#) 06:04 MarthaH Weekly Contact

It's that time again...Keeping the contact going to Boehner, McConnell, Lugar, our congressman, Coats...

Did you see what Murdock blamed for his defeat???? The Liberal media!

Dear Senator:

I once was a registered Republican and Richard Lugar was my college hero as a political science major. Along came Zippergate, and I saw hipocracy in Congress from those who cast stones--and then the party I had worked for as a YR and intern at the state party went BONKERS even further. I disavowed my allegiance and came to know that honesty, honor, and duty are by far more important than a label or party loyalty. Serving select wealthy supporters in the name of party loyalty by blocking things that will strengthen our country for our grandchildren's futures is dishonest, dishonorable, and lazy. Will you serve the future or serve the donors? Your caucus is out of touch with the voters and reality when they ignore the majority of We the People. Step up.

[20121213-03](#) 09:54 Pam Re: Weekly Contact (reply to MarthaH, above)

Good for you, Martha!

[20121213-02](#) 09:53 Pam Re: Christmas Tree (reply to SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)

This is why we don't have one. :-)



[20121213-05](#) 10:44 Art Re: Christmas Tree (reply to Pam, above & SandyI, FotM Newsletter #290)

Ditto.

[20121213-04](#) 10:35 Art "In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty"

Well, the rich have been soaking the rest of us for a very long time.

Does all this not remind you of feudalism just a bit? The nobility arose in Europe primarily in the late Dark Ages in response to the Viking raids. Once they became entrenched they made sure it stayed that way. Better diets made

them stronger and better able to handle weapons. Their money bought them armor and weapons training that assured they stayed on top. No central government meant that everything passed from father to son (interesting to read about primogeniture). Pretty soon it became a fixed class with no one else allowed in. For a lengthy period they actually largely controlled most kings (Warwick the King Maker etc) and it wasn't until late in the middle ages that they were finally overcome - stronger kings and especially gunpowder which took out castle walls.

The rich are sort of like that today. No inheritance taxes, daddy buys them the best schools, they start out with millions to begin with, and we are slowly grinding down the middle class.

And there are Republicans who say we need to kick these people in the ass to get jobs. From the below article this young lady has already been "kicked in the ass" more than a few times and maybe in the face too.

Good article if you have not read:

["In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty" by Anne Hull, \*The Washington Post\*](#)

Dec. 8, 2012, ([http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-08/national/35701739\\_1\\_anne-hathaway-art-club-bible-club](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-12-08/national/35701739_1_anne-hathaway-art-club-bible-club))

Week after week, the mailman climbed the steep hill of Shenango Street to the house with the busted porch steps. "Dear Miss Rouzzo," the letters began, or "Dear Tabitha Rouzzo." The college catalogues barely fit in the mailbox. They stuck out like gift-wrapped presents against white aluminum siding gone dingy from decades of wear. On the porch were three new Linen Breeze decorative candles — a nice try, thought the actual Tabitha Rouzzo, who came walking up the hill every afternoon with her mind on the mailbox.

The 11th-grader seldom brought anyone home, and when she did she would sort of draw in a breath and say, "Well, here it is."

Her Victoria's Secret bag was crammed with track clothes and school papers. At 17, with dark hair and dark eyes, she was a version of the actress Anne Hathaway if Anne Hathaway had stars tattooed on her hip, chipped blue nail polish and lived two blocks from the projects.

Tabi shared the rental house with her mother and sometimes her mother's boyfriend. Her four older siblings were grown. None of them had graduated from high school. They wore headsets and hairnets to jobs that were so futureless that getting pregnant at 20 seemed an enriching diversion. Born too late to witness the blue-collar stability that had once been possible, they occupied the bottom of the U.S. economy.

"I'm running from everything they are," she said.

The question was whether Tabi could outrun the odds against her.

She knew that colleges sent out millions of letters to 11th-graders who took the Princeton Review prep course. The whole Dear Tabitha campaign was about as personal as fliers from Tire Express. But nearing the end of her junior year of high school, without a single item of value to secure her future — not even a \$50 U.S. savings bond from a departed relative — the mail was all she had.

So she sweated it out the old-fashioned way, joining Spanish Club, Chess Club, Bible Club, Art Club and the track team, where she may have been the worst pole-vaulter in the Pennsylvania-Ohio border region. On Wednesday nights, she was at church waving her praise hands in the air, and on Friday night, it was a school production of "No, No, Nanette."

With no working vehicle at home, she had to walk most places. You could see her hoofing across the industrial landscape, her pink bag slung over her shoulder.

Tabi kept the college mail upstairs in her bedroom. She wrote back to 22 schools that offered biochemistry programs. Her goal was to be a forensic scientist in North Carolina. "It seems nice," Tabi said, though she had never been. She had never flown on an airplane. Her laptop was a secondhand PC she bought from a guy for \$60. Her bedroom window overlooked a field strewn with Filet-O-Fish wrappers and Keystone Ice empties and, lower in the valley, the stacks at Ellwood Quality Steels chugging smoke.

Long before the recession, New Castle was a place of vanishing opportunity. It was 50 miles from Pittsburgh but felt farther, and while Steelers banners hung from awnings, the hard hat was a remnant of the past. Retail and food service jobs now outnumbered manufacturing jobs in the county. The top three employers were the hospital, state government and Liberty Mutual insurance company. Number seven was Wal-Mart, where Tabi's older brother worked in dairy until he was fired for stealing an energy drink.

Tabi heard stories about the olden days. She came from welders and ceramic production workers. But, to Tabi, the sprawling Shenango China factory where her grandfather and great-grandfather worked was just a boarded-up place on the way to Wal-Mart.

Her New Castle was the one that existed now: white, working class, with poverty that had deepened into the second and third generations. Nearly three-fourths of the students in Tabi's school qualified for free or reduced-price lunches, and one-third of New Castle families with children younger than 18 had incomes beneath the poverty level.

During the 2012 election, the campaigns of President Obama and Mitt Romney visited Pennsylvania a combined 38 times. With Ohio next door, the candidates and their wives barnstormed the region like few other places, focused almost entirely on the economy and strengthening the middle class. After the election, New Castle was still a hard town to be young and poor in.

They had \$50 prepaid phones and \$5 Day-Glo earbuds with the Chinese innards spilling out. They went to Township Tan for the 15-minute prom special. But the backwash of America's affluence was a dim substitute for the promise of the middle class, which had moved farther from their reach. The decline in economic mobility has made the bottom more difficult to climb up from.

Unlike her counterparts in higher ranges, prepped for ascension, Tabi Rouzzo had only herself.

At 13, she started working in a deer slaughterhouse. Her friend Gloria told her about it, and Gloria's mom drove them out there. They were greeted by a cold room with kerosene heaters. For \$10 an hour, Tabi was to stand at a table cutting butterfly filets.

With a bloody knife in her hand and a circular saw whining behind her, labor laws being violated by the minute, Tabi decided on the spot that work offered freedom. She went back the next two winters, through 10th grade. Off-season, she cleaned rental properties, clerked in a mini-mart and baled hay at a farm.

In 11th grade, Tabi needed a job she could walk to and found Splitstone Entertainment, a storefront that sold used electronics, along with a selection of stun guns, nunchucks, ninja throwing stars and factory-boxed Star Wars collectibles. People brought in their Xboxes and PlayStations to unload, and Tabi cleaned them for resale.

"The controllers are real greasy," she said one Saturday afternoon, pulling back her hair for the task. She was not complaining. Even describing the slaughterhouse, she sounded like a butcher and not a squee girl. "I'm a grown man," she joked. It was somehow true. She had not a line on her porcelain face but a weariness was already in her.

After work that night, she met Gloria at Sheetz for dinner. Gloria was working midnights at the Subway inside the Pilot gas station for \$8.60 an hour and was no longer in school.

"This town is dragging everyone down," Tabi said a few days later.

The mailbox at home remained a repository of hope. Tabi's mother brought the mail in every day. "She's got colleges all the way from Texas wanting her," said Patricia Edmonds, bragging about her daughter.

Tabi didn't spend much energy correcting the record. School, and her future, had always been hers to figure out.

Her mother had five kids and no husband at age 23. Tabi, the last born, was a welfare and WIC baby who grew up with evictions and lights getting cut off. Her 39-year-old mother remembers it differently.

"I tried to give them everything," Patricia said. "You wouldn't find one of my kids without a matching bed set."

Monthly income for Tabi and her mother at the house on Shenango Street was an \$824 check from Social Security, food stamps and survivor's benefits for Tabi from the death of her father, a welder who died of an overdose. Patricia spent a lot of time on Facebook, posting shout-outs to her four grown children, "I'm cookin' sauce, you comin' home or what?" She listed herself as a "Stay at home mom" with a qualifier — "QueenBitch."

Tabi thought her mother should get a job. "I don't ever want to sit on my butt, waiting on hand and foot for someone to help me," Tabi said.

It was her greatest motivation. The college mail reminded her how badly she wanted to escape her mother's destiny. And yet the glossy pictures of emerald campuses revealed how far away that green world was.

Tabi's alarm for school went off at 5:45 a.m. It sounded like a firehouse bell, as if to stress the urgency of the moment. Tabi used to share the room with her older sister. One morning, Tabi's sister decided not to get up, and that was that for high school. Tabi pulled herself from bed.

The crowded halls of New Castle Junior/Senior High School enveloped her. "Yo, Tabs," a teammate from track called. Tabi wore khakis and ballet flats. The hard protective shell Tabi wore at home was gone.

Despite her aspirations, Tabi was not pushing herself at school. She rarely brought work home. Some of her teachers used class time to let students complete their assignments. If Tabi had extra homework, she blew through it at lunch. Even so, she maintained a 3.0 GPA while taking honors courses.

Four and five decades ago, when New Castle High was full of factory workers' kids, the school taught Chinese, Latin, German, Spanish, French and Italian. Now it was Spanish, French and Italian. As students became poorer, standards dropped lower. Tabi's junior year, the average SAT score was almost 200 points below the national average. To boost scores, the school has made the Princeton Review college prep course free for all sophomores during class hours. Private tutors are luxuries of a different solar system.

Tabi planned to take the SAT before the school year ended. She kept reminding herself to sign up.

She worked other angles. The annual science competition was coming up. In the ninth and 10th grade, Tabi made it to the final round, and she was hoping for a repeat performance and trip Penn State.

"The main campus," Tabi said, as if speaking confidentially. "Maybe someone will see my project and help me get a scholarship."

What would have been nice was to be her friend Matt. He had an iPhone and two parents. They recently took Matt to visit Robert Morris University, a small liberal arts school outside Pittsburgh, and invited Tabi to come along.

A week later, in her school cafeteria, she was still talking about the trip. The campus tour was beautiful, and afterward, they met with an admissions counselor who estimated the cost of one year was \$34,000. Tabi jumped in to warn Matt.

"I said, 'Matt, you're going to be paying off the loan for the rest of your life!'" she recounted at lunch. "His dad said, 'I think I got it covered.'"

There was more. On the way back to New Castle, they stopped for dinner at Olive Garden. Tabi couldn't help noticing the bill. "It was like \$70!" Tabi said. "And it was no sweat off their back."

In the cafeteria, she went back to her free lunch and packed up for pre-calculus.

She needed to stop by the guidance office. At New Castle High, the office was the make-or-break room. It's where college-bound seniors stopped for applications — for loans, waivers, scholarships and grants. Mrs. Gibson, the senior guidance counselor, helped them fill out the paperwork. She also arranged etiquette dinners that taught proper grooming, eating and the do's and don'ts of dressing professionally.

But decorating the ceiling of the guidance counseling office was her most inspired idea.

It was a patchwork of college T-shirts. They were stapled across the entire ceiling. Each was autographed by a New Castle High grad who had gone on to glory: Slippery Rock University, Youngstown State University, Robert Morris University, Butler Community College, St. Vincent's College, Clarion University, Penn State and Pitt. The parachute hovered like a subliminal cloud: You can do it.

The deadline to sign up for the SAT came and went. Distracted, Tabi forgot.

Every Wednesday night, Tabi got a break from the hand-over-hand climbing that consumed her life.

She usually sat in the same spot: the front row, closest to the preacher. When Pastor Shawn told Tabi she would look back in 20 years and be blown away by all the things God had done for her, she hoped he was right.

But on one night, the chairs were cleared out. An inspirational thrash metal band was performing live at First Assembly of God. Half the teenagers in New Castle seemed to be going, Jesus-loving or not.

For years, Tabi rode the church bus that swept through New Castle's threadbare neighborhoods picking up poor kids. On the night of the concert, Tabi got an upgrade. Her friend Miranda gave her a ride. Traveling by private coach was the way to go.

Not a single space was left in the parking lot as the arrivals poured in — Tabi by car and the poor kids by bus. They tumbled down the stairs in a cloud of Sexiest Fantasies Body Spray. One girl was holding her MP3 player in the air like a transistor, the tiny rattling of Mindless Behavior's "Valentine's Girl" piping out through the 1-by-1-inch speaker.

Inside the church, God's abundance overflowed. Pastor Shawn had ordered enough pizzas and nachos to feed the Rust Belt. Shawn Galla, the 26-year-old youth pastor, had convinced church elders that a night of metal music and free prizes was more likely to bring in New Castle's teenagers than praise music and juice boxes.

Having grown up in working-class Pittsburgh with a single mother, Pastor Shawn thought he knew his audience when he took the job in New Castle in 2008, until he launched a fundraising drive for his kids and found their parents selling the Auntie Anne's pretzels for cash for themselves.

Tabi had inched her way to the front of the crowd when the lights went down and the screaming started. Pastor Shawn was on stage ready to start flinging CDs and McDonald's gift cards into the crowd.

"We're giving away free stuff!" he yelled. "EVEN JESUS!"

The band Icon For Hire was pierced and mohawked. "WHAT'S UP, NEW CASTLE!" the lead singer shouted, and the head banging commenced. The evening's motivational speaker, Seth Franco, a former Harlem Globetrotter, told his story of injury and comeback and invited anyone to raise their hands and come forward if they wanted to accept Jesus Christ.

"There's more to life than nothing," Seth said, as the electric keyboard softly lulled and the lights dimmed. "There's more to life than this town."

Words to Tabi's ears. She was not exceptionally pious and she had made her share of transgressions, but she always felt better at this moment when she closed her eyes and let go. The kids from the bus had their heads bowed, too. Some were wiping away tears, a few were sobbing, their shoulders heaving in the darkness of the church.

Then the lights blasted back on and Pastor Shawn was onstage, holding something small in his hand.

"WHO WANTS AN IPOD?"

The silver sporty coupe arriving at Tabi's one Saturday night was so polished and punctual that it made the sagging house sag a little more. The Dodge Stratus idled at the curb. Tabi came down the busted porch steps in a skirt.

In Deric Lewis she had a boyfriend with the right mix of qualities. "He has goals," Tabi said. "He's kinda smart. He works. He's always there five minutes early."

But he was also a source of tension in the house and had stopped going inside. Tabi's mother said Deric was a snob and was turning Tabi against her family. Tabi said that Deric was the best thing that ever happened to her. Opening the car door, she left her mother and "Storage Wars" behind.

Deric was 19 and smelled of soap. He worked full time at Castle Cheese, where he wore a hairnet in 100-degree heat reaching into milky buckets of mozzarella for \$9.65 an hour. His dad was a scrap-metal worker. Determined to have an office job someday, Deric was a full-time student at the community college.

He and Tabi were headed for the outlet mall in Grove City, 30 miles away, to see if Deric could use a \$20-off coupon he had at Aeropostale. Tabi leaned in close as he drove, until he yawned, and she punched him in the arm.

"Hey!" he said, laughing. He reminded her of his 6 a.m. shift that day. Tabi pointed out that she had also worked eight hours that day.

They were the oldest teenagers in America.

All around them in the rural dark, energy companies were buying up land for natural gas exploration. Deric heard in class that Shell Oil was building a \$3 billion refinery site in Beaver County. There were millwright jobs across the border in Youngstown. Deric wondered if he was doing the right thing pursuing a business degree, which would take three more years of killing himself at the cheese plant.

Tabi thought school was the answer, and they should stick to the plan.

"We're lucky; we both work," she said, as they arrived at the outlet mall. "We have the advantage that others don't."

They held hands as they walked to Aeropostale. Deric didn't find anything. He folded the coupon and put it back in his wallet. Tabi took an armful of clothes into a dressing room. It was nice to try on new things.

"How'd those work out for you?" a saleswoman asked. Aeropostale would not be getting a dime of Tabi's money. The \$124 in her purse — she was a fanatic about counting her cash — was going toward a trip to Chicago with the Spanish Club. She returned every item.

Back in New Castle, they drove around, killing time. High on a hill, the lights of the city blinked below, and in the pockets of darkness were the abandoned mausoleums of industry.

"They say money doesn't buy happiness, but I would love to be crying in my Porsche," Deric said.

Tabi's phone flashed with a text. Keys in the mailbox.

"Well, mom's going out," Tabi said, sounding both annoyed and apprehensive.

Later that night, Deric brought Tabi home to her dark patch of Shenango Street. She was almost to her front door when she heard her name being called. The woman was vaguely familiar, a neighbor, someone her mother maybe knew. She asked to borrow Tabi's phone. Then the woman asked for a glass of water. Tabi put her stuff down and went to the kitchen.

When she came back with the water, the woman was gone and so was Tabi's purse.

With crystal force, the stolen purse exposed the tension between Tabi and her mother, proven out in the weeks that followed.

Tabi partly blamed herself for responding to someone on the street at 1 in the morning. But she also blamed her mother for living in a neighborhood where people needed money at 1 in the morning.

For years, Tabi hid her cash in small stacks around her bedroom. Tabi was more flush than her mother. If her mom asked for a loan, Tabi charged 20 percent interest. Once, when her mom ran out of food stamps, Tabi, as if to impart a lesson, went out to eat.

Patricia Edmonds felt her daughter's judgment. Tabi was different from her other four. Patricia marveled at her as a spectator would, watching something rare and unexpected.

"She wants so much for herself," Patricia said.

Patricia hung Tabi's awards on the living room wall. The sprawling constellation gave Patricia a tangible sense of accomplishment.

In her face and spirit were traces of the cheerleader who got pregnant in the eighth grade. Patricia's father was a welder and her mother a nurse's aide. The love of her life was a dark-haired welder named Frankie Rouzzo, Tabi's father. They had two daughters and Tabi on the way when they split. He died when Tabi was 10, and since then Patricia had maintained a fragile livelihood on the survivor's benefits for her three daughters.

She tried pleasing her vegetarian daughter, buying Tabi her favorite chocolate soy milk and making special trips to Wal-Mart for the bags of lettuce Tabi liked. "I made her Taco Bell Grande with tofu meat," Patricia said.

But Tabi had withdrawn. She came home from track practice, poured some lettuce on a plate, doused it in ranch and took her dinner upstairs.

The explosion happened on a Saturday night. Patricia was bigger, badder and louder than Tabi. But Tabi had resentment that went back years.

She said Deric hadn't brainwashed her against her family; the feelings were entirely her own. There was a difference between bad luck and bad choices, Tabi said, and she had grown up captive of her mother's choices.

"You think you're better than me, don't you?" Patricia yelled. "I had five kids!"

"Mom," Tabi yelled back, "you quit school. Does it dawn on you after your first [child] not to have a second one?"

It was a lethal blow, as only a teenage girl could deliver. Patricia got pregnant in the eighth grade, the same age Tabi was when she started at the slaughterhouse.

Patricia grounded Tabi for a month. She confiscated her phone — which Deric had paid for — and banned all activities except school and work.

One day after school, Tabi went to see her Uncle Bill about moving in with him. He worked at the jail and was a steady presence. When Tabi was 10, she went to stay with him when her mom was in a period of chaos. He took her to violin lessons.

Standing on the sidewalk at Uncle Bill's, the sun beat down. Tabi and her uncle and his wife were quiet.

"What are you gonna do?" Bill said, still in his jail uniform.

"It's up to you, Tab," Sybil said.

Tabi left their house on foot. She took the broken sidewalk that led her downtown. The beige mannequins and the Coney Island, the old motor lodge and legal disability clinic, Tabi hardly looked up.

"If I move out, my mom would lose the check, lose everything," Tabi said, weighed down by the decision.

When she reached home, it was different. Pine scent wafted. Folded stacks of laundry sat on the couch. The cleaning spree went on all week. Patricia went room to room, carrying out bags to the curb and posting her progress on Facebook. She was serious about taking a course in emergency medical technician training.

Patricia declared she was turning it around. Tabi had heard it before. But this time, her mother made a promise and extracted one from Tabi — she had to break up with Deric.

Wanting to believe, Tabi agreed.

On a Saturday morning in June, Tabi walked to school to take the SAT. She had remembered to sign up for this one. Five interminable hours later, it was over, and Tabi went to work.

Summer without Deric was empty. There were grimy Xboxes to clean at Splitstone and swimming at the rock quarry. On Friday nights, Tabi and a friend hung out at a convenience store where a handwritten sign on the beverage station said, in friendly curlicue, "Smoothies, Slushies and Fountain pops cannot be bought with food stamps!"

Tabi got her first plane ride — a church mission to Guatemala.

When school started in the fall, senior year felt different. An hourglass had been turned and the sand was falling. The college buzz greeted Tabi in the hallways, and it gave her the feeling that she was somehow already behind.

"Everybody's asking, 'Where are you going?'" Tabi said. "That worries me I don't have it figured out."

Applications to fill out, deadlines to meet — it all hovered. Her SAT results were not what she hoped. They were above the average score at New Castle but well shy of the national median.

But Tabi, a master of contingency, already had a Plan B. On top of school, she started night classes to get certified as an EMT. True to her promise, her mother enrolled, too, and they sat side by side, sharing Tabi's textbook.

Patricia, who had not been in a classroom since eighth grade, spent afternoons at the public library. She and Tabi left Shenango Street for a new rental house, funded with help from Patricia's boyfriend.

Buried in school, work and EMT training, Tabi began to recalibrate.

The Navy recruiter was in the cafeteria at school when a 17-year-old girl approached. She was ready to sign her name — Tabitha Rouzzo. She didn't want to hear a pitch. Tabi had learned enough online about a reservist's pay

and travel. College could wait. When it did start, tuition would be on the Navy and Tabi would be gone from New Castle.

[20121213-06](#) 12:43 Pam Re: "In Rust Belt, a Teenager's Climb from Poverty" (reply to Art, above)

This is the 47% Mr. Romney and the tea baggers want to push off the cliff. You're right, Art, it is exactly like feudalism. Not much has changed but the technology.

[20121213-07](#) 17:09 Ben Photos: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple

I love meals like this: one of an infinity of variations of fish and vegetables.

Chef Patricia presented a plate as beautiful as it was tasty: a perfect moist trout filet with not even a hint of desiccation in the thin areas; creamy faintly but richly cheesed polenta, crisp roasted cauliflower and succulent bits of roasted sweet potato, garnished with fresh arugula and a light, lovely lemony garlic cream sauce. Marvelous!

(I added a Good Faith Ginger Snap on the way out the door. Not pictured here, but quite perfect, reminiscent of subscriber Larry N's perfect cookies)

Here's lunch:



Seared Trout over Mascarpone Polenta



Someone else had the catfish (crop).

20121213-08 19:03 MarthaH Cartoon: Caught!



20121213-10 19:55 SteveB Re: Cartoon: Caught! (reply to MarthaH, above)

Now, that's really, really bad. Just a reality check... :-)

Bonus that comes w/ our new Appliance!



[And I was thinking it came with free sex... Oh, well. At least she seems like a nice, clean girl. -SteveB]

20121213-11

23:57

Tom

Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #5



20121213-12

23:58

SteveB

Photo: Cats Imitating Art #2 (Alfred Stevens, *The Bath*, 1867)



<http://jennybennett.net/category/travel/>



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #292 — DEC. 17, 2012

*Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.*  
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**[INDEX: Click here.](#)**

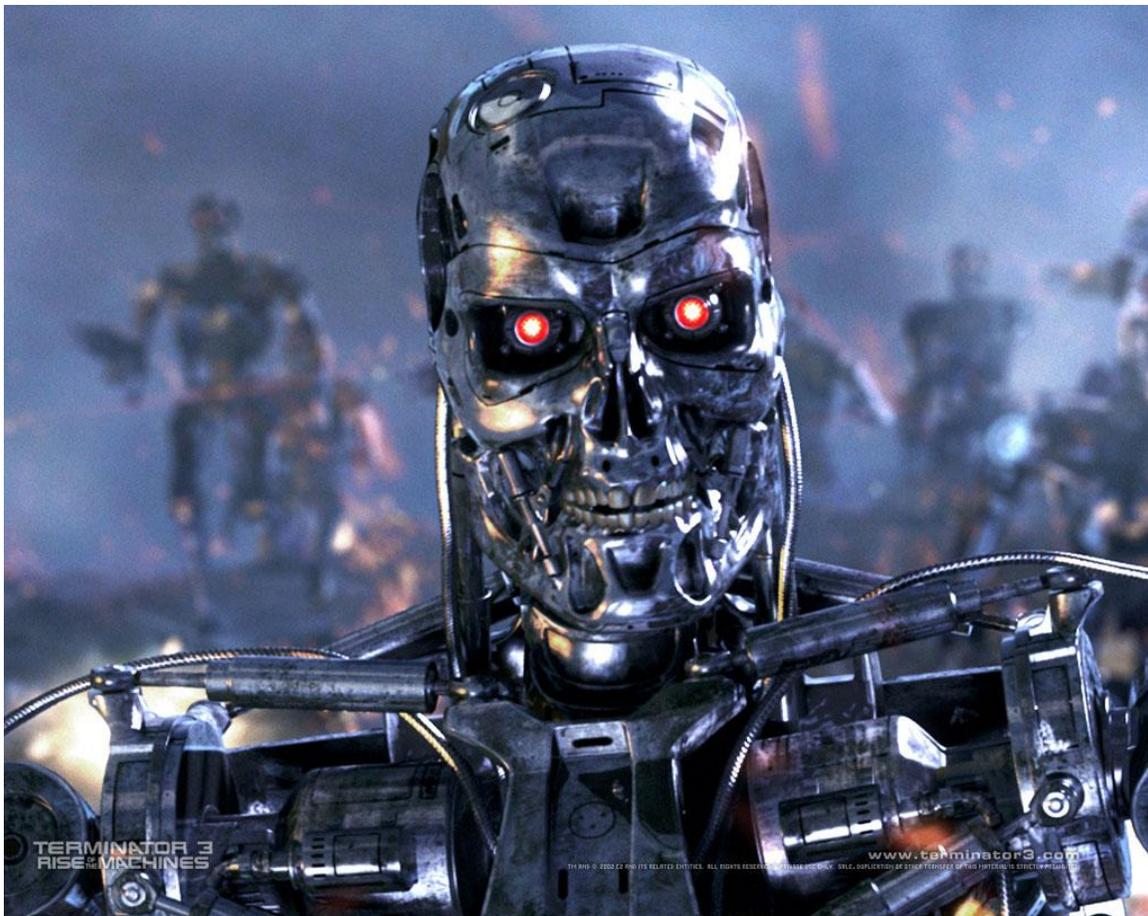
## **Our Boon or Doom?**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 17, 2012)

Ready or not, here they come...eventually...I hope against hope for the best...

"Why Making Robots Is So Darn Hard" by Gary Marcus, *The New Yorker*

Dec. 13, 2012, ([http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2012/12/why-making-robots-is-so-darn-hard.html?mbid=gnep&google\\_editors\\_picks=true](http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/newsdesk/2012/12/why-making-robots-is-so-darn-hard.html?mbid=gnep&google_editors_picks=true))



Robots, all of a sudden, are all over the news. Mitsubishi has just announced that it's built a robot specially designed to help clean up the Fukushima nuclear power plant; NASA is working on a robotic handyman suitable for use in outer space. The past two weeks have also seen the release of a new iPad guide to robots (featuring a hundred and twenty-six robots from nineteen countries), and a fresh investment in a Web site called robotappstore.com, in which you can download apps for your Roomba. Romo, one of the latest hits on Kickstarter, and slated to ship in March, 2013, is a tiny tank-like robot that uses an iPhone for an electronic brain.

This is hardly the first time someone tried to go after the consumer-robotics market. Perhaps most famously, Nolan Bushnell, the founder of the video-game-pioneer Atari, tried, in the early in the nineteen-eighties, with a company called Androbot. He invested, and, ultimately, lost, twenty-three million dollars of his own money. Thirty years later, computers have gotten a lot faster, but robots still seem kind of primitive. If you walk into a Brookstone or Best Buy, the only robots you are likely to find are children's toys and glorified self-propelled vacuum cleaners, not all-purpose helpers that are versatile enough to change diapers, hold conversations, and cook dinner.

The two biggest challenges to making general-purposes robots are, as they always have been, hardware and software. Neither challenge is insuperable, but both are harder than one might think. On the hardware side, there are now lots of robots that can do incredibly cool things. One robot runs faster than the fastest human, another dances Gangnam style. Still another, PR2, folds towels and fetches beer. The catch is that, at the moment, each new robot is like a proof of concept. The ones that are fast and physically powerful, like AlphaDog, a quadruped robot, and the headless but amazing PETMAN, are, for now, still dependent on hydraulic actuators powered by industrial-strength pumps and gasoline engines; they work fine in a laboratory-test environment, but you wouldn't want one roaming around your home. Others, like Baxter and PR2, are capable of fairly sophisticated movements, but at speeds that are still too slow to be practical around the home. It might take five minutes just for PR2 to grab you a beer.

Computer processors keep getting faster and faster—roughly doubling every eighteen months, the rate predicted by the so-called Moore's Law—and memory gets cheaper and cheaper. But the motors and actuators that move robots aren't improving nearly as fast. (Battery technology, too, is key, moving quickly, but not quite keeping pace with Moore). In the words of Erico Guizzo, the robotics editor at the *IEEE Spectrum*, "Lots of people have been working on humanoid robots for decades, but the electric motors needed to drive a robot's legs and arms are too big, heavy, and slow. Today's most advanced humanoid robots are still big hulking pieces of metal that are unsafe to operate around people."

As Rodney Brooks, founder of Rethink Robotics, explained to me, the key difference is between information and physics. "If you want to use a blue pile of sand to represent a zero, and red pile of sand to represent a one, you can split each pile of sand in half, and still have the same information. You can keep doing that until you have a single grain of sand [in each pile]. And that's basically what's happened with computers, and why we can keep making them smaller. But the laws of mass and motion aren't the same as the laws of information. If you move an arm with half the force, you only get half the result, which means, for example, that you can't miniaturize a robot arm and expect it to lift the same heavy objects."

Meanwhile, whether a robot looks like a human or hockey puck, it is only as clever as the software within. And artificial intelligence is still very much a work-in-progress, with no machine approaching the full flexibility of the human mind. There is no shortage of strategies—ranging from simulations of biological brains to deep learning and to older techniques drawn from classical artificial intelligence—but there is still no machine remotely flexible enough to deal with the real world. The best robot-vision systems, for example, work far better with isolated objects than with complex scenes involving many objects; a robot can easily learn to tell the difference between a person and a basketball, but it's far harder to learn why the people are passing the ball a certain way. Visual recognition of complex flexible objects, like strands of cooked spaghetti and opening and closing humans hands, present tremendous challenges, too. Even further away is a robust way of embodying computers with common sense.

In virtually every robot that's ever been built, the key challenge is generalization, and moving things from the laboratory to the real world. It's one thing to get a robot to fold a colorful towel in an empty room; it's another to get it to succeed in a busy apartment with visual distractions that the machine can't quite parse. Likewise, the demo of a robot running at cheetah speed is amazing, but it's conducted on the flat, level ground of a treadmill, not in the

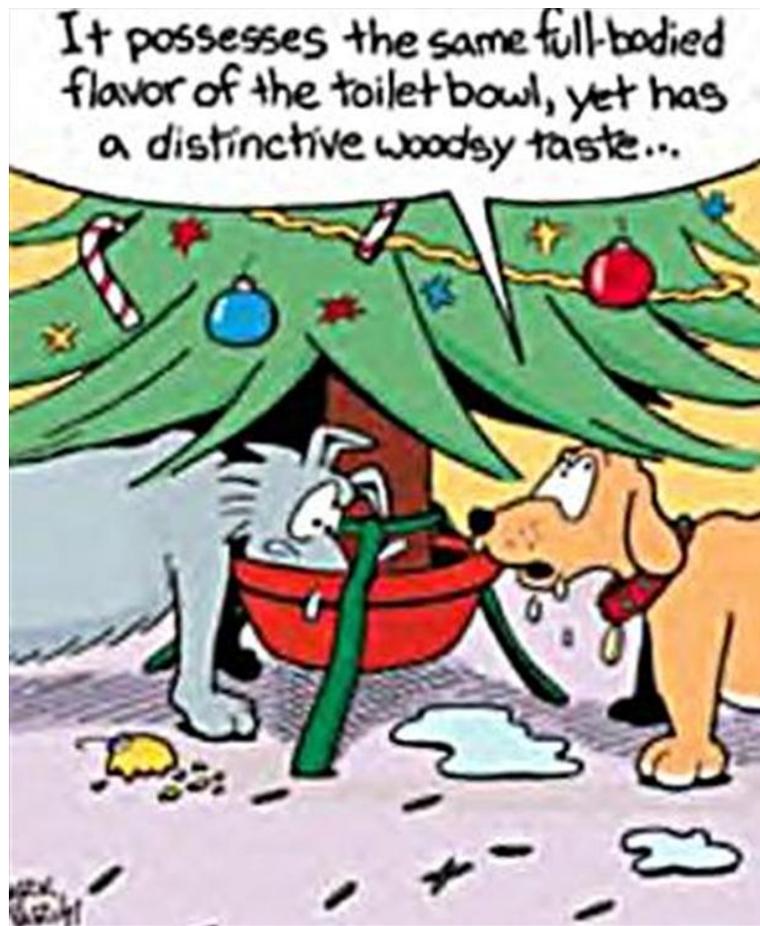
uneven territory of the real world. "Film and fiction have raised everyone's expectations about what robots may be able to do," Tandy Trower of Hoaloha Robotics and formerly of Microsoft Robotics, said. "I don't believe we are anywhere near affordable, safe, manipulation on a mobile robot that can generalize such features into consumer operations for at least ten to twenty years." The iRobot founder Rodney Brooks's predictions were remarkably similar.

There are important incremental advances in robots virtually every day, and occasionally major breakthroughs, like the Microsoft Kinect 3-D sensor that makes affordable indoor 3-D vision for video games a realistic target. And one of the biggest new companies in robotics, Willow Garage, has recently open-sourced much of its software, which means that scores of young hackers around the globe won't have to reinvent the wheel every time they build a new robot. But robot helpers as versatile as The Jetsons' Rosie are still a long way away, with major hurdles in speed, safety, autonomy, and intelligence still to be solved.

(Gary Marcus, a professor of psychology at N.Y.U. and the author of *Guitar Zero: The Science of Becoming Musical at Any Age*, has written for the *New Yorker* about the facts and fictions of neuroscience; moral machines; and Ray Kurzweil's new book, *How to Create a Mind: The Secret of Human Thought Revealed*.)



*Robots Will Destroy Us All (Thank god) (by ~mothbot)*



When I retired early from teaching, my premiums were my responsibility, as a part of the corporation plan according to our master contract. I kept track of the rising premiums and--no surprise here--wrote the politicians EVERY time they went up. I got identical form letters from Lugar, nothing from W or the rest of them...Theirs came from we-know-whom...so it wasn't that relevant. Greed is just too much of it. We aren't rich, but we don't suffer. We have plenty compared to so many! Until all are served equally, how can we do anything but fight so we can look ourselves in the mirror?

"Health Insurance: U.S. Paying More for Less, Report Finds" by Maggie Fox, NBC News

Dec. 11, 2012, (<http://vitals.nbcnews.com/news/2012/12/11/15848640-health-insurance-us-paying-more-for-less-report-finds?lite>)

Health insurance premiums have shot up more than 60 percent in the last eight years, and if they keep up at this pace the average family of four will be paying \$25,000 a year just for health insurance, according to a report released Wednesday.

At the same time, deductibles are also going up for employer-sponsored plans, so workers are paying more and more for less and less, the non-profit Commonwealth Fund said.

"Workers are paying more for less financial protection when they get sick," said Commonwealth Fund senior vice president Cathy Schoen, who led the team writing the report.

Currently, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation, an average worker with employer-sponsored health insurance pays between about \$15,000 to \$16,000 a year for that coverage. Workers at bigger firms pay more. Coverage is about \$5,600 a year for a single person.

The Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation that conducts health policy reform research, did a state-by state look at health insurance premiums and deductibles and used Census Bureau data on earnings for the report, which covers 2003 to 2011.

"Premiums for family coverage increased 62 percent across states -- rising far faster than income for middle- and low-income families," the report says. "At the same time, deductibles more than doubled in large and small firms. Workers are thus paying more but getting less-protective benefits. If trends continue at their historical rate, the average premium for family coverage will reach nearly \$25,000 by 2020."

One big reason for the rising premiums? Rising expenses. "Broad evidence of poorly coordinated care, duplicative services, and administrative waste, as well as rising prices charged to those privately insured, signal that greater efforts are needed to slow cost growth in both private and public insurance markets," the report finds.

This isn't controversial. Earlier this year the independent Institute of Medicine made a formal pronouncement on what think-tanks and academic institutions had been saying for years. It said the U.S. health care system wasted \$750 billion in 2009, about 30 percent of all health spending, on unnecessary services, excessive administrative costs, fraud, and other problems.

"The U.S. health insurance system remains highly fragmented, marked by elevated spending on administration and an inability or unwillingness to combat high health care costs in private insurance markets. Our system includes Medicare coverage for those 65 and older and some disabled individuals, state-operated Medicaid programs, and an array of competing private insurance plans," the report adds.

The Commonwealth Fund has been a big fan of the Affordable Care Act, the 2010 health reform law known widely by supporters and opponents alike as Obamacare. And the report says the legislation will do a lot to lower costs, but not enough.

"Health insurance is expensive and has become less affordable, no matter where one lives. Insurance premiums rose sharply in all states during these eight years and, because wages failed to keep pace, increased as a share of median household income," the report says.

"The net result is that it is more difficult for many insured workers and their families to save for education or retirement -- or simply to meet day-to-day living expenses."

And, the group says, the economy has made things worse. "With the recent recession, millions of workers lost their jobs or were otherwise unable to afford coverage and, as a result, joined the ranks of the uninsured. From 2008 to 2010, the per-centage of people with employment-based insurance fell from 58.9 percent to 55.3 percent," the report says.

"An estimated 9 million adults ages 19 to 64 lost a job with health benefits and became uninsured during this period."

Michael Ramlet, a health economist at the right-leaning American Action Forum, says one reason health insurance costs actually slowed during the recession is that people stopped getting anything but the most essential health services.

"That is starting to change as you have this slow recovery," Ramlet said in a telephone interview.

He thinks expenses will go up even more as the Affordable Care Act's requirements kick in. These include the so-called essential health benefits -- the minimum requirements for the health insurance plans that people will buy on the open market starting in 2014. These aren't the same plans as those offered by employers, but Ramlet thinks the federal requirements will make these new retail plans pricey.

"They are very rich," he said. "Economists would warn you there there is no free lunch and more things cost more money."

Ramlet believes this could affect employer-sponsored insurance. Already some federal requirements such as provision of free health screenings are making employers think twice about offering insurance, he said. "Honestly I don't think employers are going to stay in the insurance game for very long," Ramlet said.

Just this week, the International Foundation of Employee Benefit Plans said more than 85 percent of employers surveyed say they plan to keep offering health insurance to workers. But Ramlet believes those numbers will fall as health insurance becomes more and more expensive.

He also predicts more people will gamble and not buy health insurance at all -- although the health reform law is designed to encourage people to buy it. That could be a risky option when an unanticipated medical emergency can quickly rack up hundreds or even of thousands of dollars in bills.

<a href="#">20121214-03</a>	10:51	Pam	Re: "Health Insurance: U.S. Paying More for Less, Report Finds" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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Just once I'd like to see a company, a university, a hospital, anything, announce that they are reducing their slice of the financial pie. I support labor unions, but there's no way we'll survive unless everyone feels a pinch, but it should be top down. If I saw the CEOs and university administrators cutting back on their salaries and perks, I imagine the whole country would feel a lot more cooperative.

<a href="#">20121214-04</a>	11:17	SteveG	"U.S. Judge Says Victims' Bodies Can Prevent Rape"
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Here we go again with stupid!!!!

"U.S. Judge Says Victims' Bodies Can Prevent Rape" by AP

Dec. 14, 2012, (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation/2012/12/13/judge-women-rape-victims/1768673/>)

(SANTA ANA, CA) A Southern California judge is being publicly admonished for saying a rape victim "didn't put up a fight" during her assault and that if someone doesn't want sexual intercourse, the body "will not permit that to happen."

The California Commission on Judicial Performance voted 10-0 to impose a public admonishment Thursday, saying Superior Court Judge Derek Johnson's comments were inappropriate and a breach of judicial ethics.

"In the commission's view, the judge's remarks reflected outdated, biased and insensitive views about sexual assault victims who do not 'put up a fight.' Such comments cannot help but diminish public confidence and trust in the impartiality of the judiciary," wrote Lawrence J. Simi, the commission's chairman.

Johnson made the comments in the case of a man who threatened to mutilate the face and genitals of his ex-girlfriend with a heated screwdriver, beat her with a metal baton and made other violent threats before committing rape, forced oral copulation, and other crimes.

Though the woman reported the criminal threats the next day, the woman did not report the rape until 17 days later.

Johnson, a former prosecutor in the Orange County district attorney's sex crimes unit, said during the man's 2008 sentencing that he had seen violent cases on that unit in which women's vaginas were "shredded" by rape.

"I'm not a gynecologist, but I can tell you something: If someone doesn't want to have sexual intercourse, the body shuts down. The body will not permit that to happen unless a lot of damage is inflicted, and we heard nothing about that in this case," Johnson said.

The commission found that Johnson's view that a victim must resist to be a real victim of sexual assault was his opinion, not the law. Since 1980, California law doesn't require rape victims to prove they resisted or were prevented from resisting because of threats.

In an apology to the commission, Johnson said his comments were inappropriate. He said his comments were the result of his frustration during an argument with a prosecutor over the defendant's sentence.

Johnson said he believed the prosecutor's request of a 16-year sentence was not authorized by law. Johnson sentenced the rapist to six years instead, saying that's what the case was "worth."

<a href="#">20121214-05</a>	18:16	SteveB	Connecticut School Deaths vs. Chinese Injuries ("22 Children, 1 Adult Injured in Knife Attack at China School")
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This is the way the evil goes down if there are fewer guns in the hands of madmen—only injuries (so far). Those poor parents and kids in CT (and China)! R.I.P.

Or, as the Republican argued at the time of the recent NFL murder/suicide, maybe those 6 and 7-year-old kids would still be alive if they'd been packing! The solution is simply more guns! How *fácil!*

"22 Children, 1 Adult Injured in Knife Attack at China School" by AP

Dec. 14, 2012, (<http://www.todayonline.com/World/EDC121214-0000124/22-children,-1-adult-injured-in-knife-attack-at-china-school>)

(BEIJING) A knife-wielding man injured 22 children and one adult outside a primary school in central China as students were arriving for classes Friday, police said, the latest in a series of periodic rampage attacks at Chinese schools and kindergartens.

The attack in the Henan province village of Chengping happened shortly before 8 am, said a police officer from Guangshan county, where the village is located.

The attacker, 36-year-old villager Min Yingjun, is now in police custody, said the officer, who declined to give her name, as is customary among Chinese civil servants.

A Guangshan county hospital administrator said the man first attacked an elderly woman, then students, before being subdued by security guards who have been posted across China following a spate of school attacks in recent years. He said there were no deaths among the nine students admitted, although two badly injured children had been transferred to better-equipped hospitals outside the county.

A doctor at Guangshan's hospital of traditional Chinese medicine said that seven students had been admitted, but that none were seriously injured.

Neither the hospital administrator nor the doctor would give his name.

It was not clear how old the injured children were, but Chinese primary school pupils are generally 6-11 years old.

A notice posted on the Guangshan county government's website confirmed the number of injured and said an emergency response team had been set up to investigate the attacks.

No motive was given for the stabbings, which echo a string of similar assaults against schoolchildren in 2010 that killed nearly 20 and wounded more than 50. The most recent such attack took place in August, when a knife-wielding man broke into a middle school in the southern city of Nanchang and stabbed two students before fleeing.

Most of the attackers have been mentally disturbed men involved in personal disputes or unable to adjust to the rapid pace of social change in China, underscoring grave weaknesses in the antiquated Chinese medical system's ability to diagnose and treat psychiatric illness.

In one of the worst incidents, a man described as an unemployed, middle-aged doctor killed eight children with a knife in March 2010 to vent his anger over a thwarted romantic relationship.

[20121214-06](#) 19:26 Art Re: Connecticut School Deaths vs. Chinese Injuries (reply to SteveB, above)

Yes, noted that also. Wonder how many NRA types will note the comparison? Zero!!!

My stock reply on Facebook has been, "If those first graders had just been packin'. Just sayin'" Of course most of those bozos probably are saying, "Yeah, this guy is onto something!"

[20121215-01](#) 10:49 Tom Graphic: More Guns Needed



["I wish to god she [the CT school principal] had had an m-4 in her office, locked up so when she heard gunfire, she pulls it out ... and takes him out and takes his head off before he can kill those precious kids." —Louie Gohmert, Republican Representative from Texas. Gee, he makes it sound so easy... —SteveB]

## Deer Hunting after the Obama Gun Ban....



**PEOPLE ARE ALREADY OFFERING UP  
SOLUTIONS TO THIS TRAGEDY.  
THERE ISN'T ONE.**

**EVIL PEOPLE EXIST. THEY ALWAYS WILL.  
SOME PEOPLE ARE SIMPLY BORN BROKEN.  
THEY WANT TO RAPE, KILL, HURT, WHATEVER.**

**YOU CAN PREPARE FOR THEM, LOOK OUT FOR  
THEM, AND DO YOUR BEST TO BE VIGILANT,  
BUT YOU CAN'T LEGISLATE THEM OR COUNSEL  
THEM TO NOT BE BROKEN.**



[But we can keep guns away from them. And there is no reason to turn this reasonable proposition into something unreasonable like "Oh, no, he wants to take our guns away from us!" I guess you could say I'm pro-gun, yet a lot of them need to be taken away and it needs to be a lot harder to get one in the first place. How many people have to die before the gun lobby has made enough money to be happy? All of us, I guess. Greed! –SteveB]

20121216-02 13:35 SteveB "America's Teachers: Heroes or Greedy Moochers at the Public Trough?"

"America's Teachers: Heroes or Greedy Moochers at the Public Trough?" by Dave Lindorff, NationofChange

Dec. 16, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/america-s-teachers-heroes-or-greedy-moochers-public-trough-1355674260>)

I'll be brief here. Let's just note that the heroic teachers who died while courageously trying to protect their kids at the Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, and the others who survived but stayed to protect the kids, were all part of a school system where the employees are members of the American Federation of Teachers.

Let's just let that sink in for a moment. Those teachers, who are routinely being accused by our politicians of being drones and selfish, incompetent money grubbers worried more about their pensions than about teaching our children (though most, even after 10 years, earn less than \$55,000 a year for doing a very difficult job that involves at least 12-14 hours a day of work and prep time counting meetings with parents), stood their ground when confronted with a psychotic assailant armed with semi-automatic pistols and an automatic rifle, and protected their kids. The principal too, a veteran teacher herself, stood her ground, reportedly suicidally charging at the assailant along with the school's psychologist in a doomed effort to tackle him and stop the carnage.

How many of us would have had to the courage to stand in front of a closet door to keep an armed madman from finding the kids hidden behind it, as one slain teacher died doing? How many of us would charge at an armed shooter, to almost certain death, in an effort to stop him from further killing? How many would bravely hide in a bathroom with a class of kids when we could have run away and saved ourselves?

And this: How many of the politicians in Washington and in state capitals and how many conservative think-tank "researchers" who attack teachers as leeches and drones would have shown such heroism under fire?

My guess is damned few -- if any. Yet it appears from the news reports that not one teacher in that unionized school fled the scene and abandoned the children to their fate. They all stuck with their kids. So did the custodian -- no doubt a unionized worker earning poverty wages -- who ran through the building warning everyone of the attacker's presence.

Just a couple of weeks ago, the Newtown school board, like school boards all over this country, was considering cutting the school's elementary music program and library program. It should be noted that both the school librarian and the school music teacher, whose jobs were on the line at the school board, stayed with the kids they were teaching when the attack began.

Yet in an attitude all too typical of many Americans' thinking, one man, in a discussion section of the local paper, discussing the local School Board's \$1-million budget cutting plans last spring, wrote to a teacher last spring:

You, as a public sector employee, don't generate ANY revenue. Every penny of the budget of your public sector enterprise is TAKEN from producers. It's other people's money versus money your organization EARNED. Your salary is not market based. Your salary, nor your benefits, nor your job, is in jeopardy during contracting economic times. If I want a raise I have to prove I have contributed more to the bottom line, and then it doesn't matter unless the entire firm has grown the bottom line sufficiently to give me that raise. You are insulated from that reality. Your private (sic) sector salary only goes up. How is that fair? Especially in light of the fact that you don't even generate the revenue that pays for your constantly rising salary?

Some of those "non-revenue-generating" unionized teachers, and the school's non-revenue-generating principal, just died defending those kids.

I wonder if their tax-obsessed critics would have done the same?

20121215-04

18:37

SteveB

"Dean Baker: The Biggest Myth in Obama-GOP Spending Showdown Is the 'Fiscal Cliff' Itself" (w/ video)

"Dean Baker: The Biggest Myth in Obama-GOP Spending Showdown Is the 'Fiscal Cliff' Itself" (w/ video) from "Democracy Now!" with Amy Goodman & Juan González

Dec. 14, 2012, ([http://www.democracynow.org/2012/12/14/dean\\_baker\\_the\\_biggest\\_myth\\_in](http://www.democracynow.org/2012/12/14/dean_baker_the_biggest_myth_in))

As negotiations continue between the White House and House Speaker John Boehner, leading economist Dean Baker joins us to discuss the myths about the so-called fiscal cliff. With little more than two weeks before the deadline, President Obama insists on an immediate increase in the top two income-tax rates as a condition for further negotiations on changes to spending and entitlement programs. But Boehner said Washington's "spending problem" is the biggest roadblock to reaching a deal and has urged the White House to identify more spending cuts. "This idea that, somehow, if we don't get a deal by the end of the year we're going to see the economy collapse, go into a recession, really that's just totally dishonest," says Baker, the co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research. "The basis for this is that we don't have a deal all year. And the fact that you don't have a deal December 31st does not mean you don't get a deal by December 31st, 2013."

Guest: Dean Baker, economist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Transcript:

**AMY GOODMAN:** Juan, before we go on, congratulations on this day. December 14th, 1987, you went to the *New York Daily News*, celebrating 25 years today as a columnist with the paper.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Yeah, it's hard to believe. I figured after the first few years I'd be gone. I was actually fired in 1990 as part of the—when the Tribune Company owned the paper and fired all the unionized employees at the time and hired replacement workers. But we—

**AMY GOODMAN:** And you led the strike.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** We persevered in a strike there that lasted six months. And, of course, the—not only was the publisher who fired us gone, but later so was the owner, the Tribune Company, which is now a bankrupt news organization. And luckily, the *Daily News* is still around, and somehow, I'm still around there working at the paper and producing columns, yes.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Well, I look forward to reading a spread on you in Sunday's paper of the *New York Daily News*. And we'll link to it at [democracynow.org](http://democracynow.org).

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Yeah, well, let's get on to more important stuff here.

President Obama met for a third time with House Speaker John Boehner on Thursday in an attempt to discuss ways to avert the so-called fiscal cliff. The White House and congressional Republicans are hoping to strike a spending deal before a round of tax hikes and spending cuts take effect in January. The White House and Republicans continue to express public criticism of each other amidst the ongoing behind-the-scenes talks. This is White House spokesperson Jay Carney.

**JAY CARNEY:** The process continues. There are clear obstacles here, the principal one being the rather amazing insistence, given the road we've traveled these past several years, given the degree to which this was debated, the degree—the degree to which independent economists back up the president's position, we still have this insistence that we're not going to do anything that doesn't include tax cuts for the wealthy from the Republicans. And that's just—that's just not acceptable to the president.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** With little more than two weeks before the deadline, President Obama insists on an immediate increase in the top two income-tax rates as a condition for further negotiations on changes to spending and entitlement programs. But House Speaker Boehner said Washington's, quote, "spending problem" was the biggest roadblock to reaching a deal, and he has urged the White House to identify more spending cuts.

**HOUSE SPEAKER JOHN BOEHNER:** Washington has a spending problem that can't be fixed with tax increases alone. The right answer is to start cutting spending, addressing our debt, and paving the way for a long-term economic growth. Unfortunately, the White House is so unserious about cutting spending that it appears willing to slow walk any agreement and walk our economy right up to the fiscal cliff.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Well, to talk more about the debates around the so-called fiscal cliff, we go to Washington, D.C., to speak with Dean Baker, economist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

Dean, welcome to "Democracy Now!" Talk about the myths around the fiscal cliff.

**DEAN BAKER:** Well, there's an endless number of myths, but the first and foremost is that we face any sort of cliff. You know, you've had this effort, certainly in Washington, to hype this December 31st deadline. Basically, if we miss that deadline, nothing happens. You know, you come to January 1st, we'll be subject to higher tax withholding rates. Not a lot of us are going to get paid January 1st. If there's a deal worked out somewhere in the first, second week of January, we'll probably never see anything extra deducted from our paycheck, and even if we do, we'll get it back in the second paycheck. I mean, no one wants to see money deducted out of their paycheck, but, you know, if you're going to get it back in the second check—I mean, I know that will be a hardship for some people, but the impact on the economy will be pretty much minimal.

And on the spending side, President Obama controls—has enormous control over the pace of spending. And if there's a deal outlined that—you know, outline of a deal that he sees with Congress, he'll just keep spending in accordance with that deal. So this idea that, somehow, if we don't get a deal by the end of the year, you know, we're going to see the economy collapse, go into a recession, really that's just totally dishonest. And I've seen that said I don't know how many times. And it's based—the basis for this is that we don't have a deal all year. And the fact that you don't have a deal December 31st does not mean you don't get a deal by December 31st, 2013. And I think everyone knows that.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Well, Dean, on Thursday, Republican Senator Jim DeMint of South Carolina, who just announced his retirement, predicted President Obama would win the debate on the budget cut crisis.

**SEN. JIM DEMINT:** The president campaigned on raising taxes and getting rid of the Bush-era tax cuts, and he's going to get his wish, I believe. We're going to be raising taxes not just on the top, top earners; everyone's going to pay more taxes next year in this country. And I think that's what the president wants. But we've doubled the size of this government and doubled spending over the last 10 years. This year, tax revenues at current tax rates will probably be at historic highs. And if you look at the facts, we don't need more revenue; we just need to stop the spending.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** That was Senator DeMint speaking to CBS. And DeMint, of course, is a vocal leader of the tea party movement who recently announced his retirement for the Senate four years before the end of his term, and he'll become the head of the Heritage Foundation.

**DEAN BAKER:** Well, a couple points on that. First off, I mean, you know, President Obama has been very clear. Obviously he does not want to raise taxes on everyone. I mean, you know, if Congress were to propose tomorrow that—exactly what President Obama had asked for, that they extend lower tax rates, the Bush-era tax rates, on the bottom 98 percent, he'll sign that in a second. He said that a thousand times. If they don't believe it, why don't they pass that and challenge him?

The second point that everyone should understand, the only reason we have large deficits today is because the economy collapsed. So you have people like Senator DeMint running around, "It's a spending problem, blah blah." They just have to look at the numbers. We did not have a spending problem. We haven't gone on some huge

spending spree. The Congressional Budget Office projected that the deficits through 2009, '10, '11, '12, they are projected to be about 1.5 percent of GDP. We know how long you can run deficits of 1.5 percent GDP; we could say it exactly: forever. The debt-to-GDP ratio is falling. The reason why the deficit ballooned was very simple: The housing bubble burst; that crashed the economy. Right now the deficits are supporting the economy. People are yelling about the big deficits. Maybe they know this, maybe they don't. What they want is slower economic growth and higher unemployment, because you could love the private sector to death, but you aren't going to see more demand come out of the private sector just because you love it. So, the reality is, the deficit is supporting the economy right now because the private sector has collapsed.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Earlier this month—

**DEAN BAKER:** People may not like that, but that's the reality.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Tim—Dean, earlier this month, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner said the Obama administration is prepared to see the U.S. go over the looming so-called fiscal cliff rather than cave to Republican demands for a continued tax break for the wealthiest Americans. Geithner made the statement in an interview with CNBC's Steve Liesman.

**STEVE LIESMAN:** I want to understand the administration's position when it comes to raising taxes on the wealthy, those making more than \$250,000. If Republicans do not agree to that, is the administration prepared to go over the fiscal cliff?

**TREASURY SECRETARY TIMOTHY GEITHNER:** Oh, absolutely. Again, we see there's no prospect to an agreement that doesn't involve those rates going up on the top 2 percent of the wealthiest Americans. Remember, it's only 2 percent.

**AMY GOODMAN:** That was Timothy Geithner. Dean Baker, how important it is—is it to raise taxes on people who make over \$250,000 a year? And how far is the Obama administration willing to go in taking on Medicare and Social Security, in cutting it?

**DEAN BAKER:** Well, the first part of the question, I think, is an easy one. Somewhere—we don't need it this year, we don't need it next year, but we are going to need more revenue. And if you don't get it from the top 2 percent, you're looking to get it from everyone else. And, you know, that just seems kind of commonsense. These have been the big winners in the economy over the last three decades, in fact the only winners pretty much in the economy over the last three decades. So it's, to my mind, just commonsense. And this was what the election was over, you know, so there shouldn't be much debate about it at this point.

In terms of Social Security and Medicare, you know, President Obama has indicated in the past he was willing to make cuts to these programs. To my mind, you know, you look at the data, you look at the situation of our seniors, most of them are just scraping by. Median income for someone over age 65 is about \$19,800. It's pretty hard to say that these people are living high. And the reality, you keep hearing this talk about, you know, the cost of these programs exploding. Social Security actually rises very little over the next two, three, four decades, or really the rest of the century. The whole story is Medicare, Medicaid, and that's a healthcare story. We already pay more than twice as much per person for our healthcare as people in other wealthy countries—Germany, Canada, whoever you want to throw in that mix. We have to fix our healthcare system. If we fixed our healthcare system—and we have the data to show this—we don't have a budget problem. So, if people want to talk about healthcare, absolutely, we have to fix the healthcare system, we have to constrain our costs. But that's not a Medicare, Medicaid problem; that's our private healthcare system.

**AMY GOODMAN:** How do you fix it?

**DEAN BAKER:** If that's constrained, we're fine.

**AMY GOODMAN:** How do you fix it?

**DEAN BAKER:** Well, you know, we had an opportunity with the Affordable Care Act. There are some cost controls. I'm hoping that those will be helpful. We've actually seen a sharp slowdown in healthcare cost growth the last few years. That may or may not be maintained. I mean, I would love to have seen us move towards a universal Medicare system. I mean, we have the model up in Canada, other countries as well, where they have costs that are about half ours and, by many outcome measures, they actually do better. Very hard to do politically, obviously, but, you know, the question is: How do we move from here to there? I mean, one of the things I've thrown out—originally as a joke, but I actually think it's a good proposal—suppose we let our seniors, our Medicare beneficiaries, buy into the healthcare system of other countries and split the savings. You know, they could put thousands of dollars a year in their pocket, government would save thousands of dollars a year, and looks like everyone comes out ahead in that story.

**JUAN GONZÁLEZ:** Dean, I'd like to ask you about some of the negotiations that are going on which are rarely talked about in terms of specifics. But President Obama did say over the last few days in one interview that he is willing to consider the possibility of raising the age of eligibility for Medicare from 65 to 67. I'd like to ask you whether you think that that's already him making a major step back in terms of defending these social programs. But I'd also like to ask you about the payroll tax. For the last two years, most Americans have only been paying 4 percent into their Social Security payroll tax, and that's due to expire January 1. So, is there any discussion about what's going to happen with that? Because that would mean an automatic increase of—or at least a reduction in the pay of most Americans when they go back to the 6 percent that they've been normally paying.

**DEAN BAKER:** Well, starting with the Medicare issue, yeah, I mean, I think going to 67 would be a major step in the wrong direction. We know that would substantially raise the costs for these people, people who are 65, 66. They have very expensive health insurance on average. Not all of them are sickly, but, you know, many of them do have bad health conditions. And the private sector does not work well for older Americans. That's why we created Medicare in the first place. So, I think it's a very, very backward step, and I have heard reports that they've moved away from that position, because obviously they are getting a lot of pressure. It's just a really bad policy and, you know, frankly, very bad politics. That's what all the polls show.

In terms of the issue about raising—you know, ending the payroll tax holiday, I regretted that that was ever tied to Social Security. We could have given the exact same tax cut—if we wanted to give a 2 percent—2 percent of wages up to the first \$110,000, we could have done that and had no link to Social Security. I just wish we had done that. We do need the stimulus. The economy is very weak. And again—this is the point I was making earlier—the private sector is not generating the demand. You know, I can go into that in detail, but the point is very simple: It's not generating demand. And as much as, you know, the Republicans like to yell about the job creators, this and that and that, no businessperson in their right mind goes out and creates jobs because they see the government is laying off workers. That doesn't make any sense. So, at the moment, we do need additional stimulus. I'd hate to see that payroll tax cut expire without something else to offset that, because there's no doubt, it would be a drag on the economy.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Dean Baker, why don't Republicans consider the huge military expenditures for the military, big government? Salon — according to Salon, the Pentagon runs a staggering 234 golf courses around the world at a cost that's undisclosed. The *Washington Post* says the Pentagon also spends half-a-billion dollars annually on marching bands. What about the Pentagon?

**DEAN BAKER:** Well, you know, I think this whole debate over big government has always been silly, because it's not about big government. It's about who your friends are. And in this case, you know, the friends of the Republicans are defense military contractors, so they don't want to see them cut. I mean, you know, **this whole notion of big government, small government—one side's for one, one side's for the other—it's literally nonsense.**

I'll just give you, you know, one very simple example. We spend somewhere close to \$300 billion a year on prescription drugs, because the government gives drug companies patent monopolies. I'd get arrested, you know, if I tried to produce, you know, Pfizer's drugs. They have a patent monopoly. They get to charge whatever they want. If you didn't have those monopolies, we'd spend about a 10th as much, somewhere around \$30 billion. So that difference is close to \$250 billion a year. That's not entered on the budget, but the government is requiring us to spend extra money for drugs. That's really big government, but the Republicans never, ever talk about that,

because the pharmaceutical industry are big contributors. So we aren't arguing about big government or small government; we're arguing about who gets the money.

**AMY GOODMAN:** Dean Baker, we want to thank you very much for being with us, economist and co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research.

This is Democracy Now! When we come back, we're going to be joined by former FCC Commissioner Michael Copps on new policies being pushed through by the Federal Communications Commission. Then we'll be joined by peacemakers who have just returned from Afghanistan. Stay with us.

<a href="#">20121215-05</a> 18:49 SteveB "Why We Cannot Lead Humankind to a Sustainable World"
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This should probably be an afterward to the excellent article below, because Mr. Wolff provides a good foundation, but stops before he gets to the real issue of why we cannot create anything like a "sustainable world" (at least, without apocalyptic destruction and the loss of literally billions of human lives). He seems to become distracted by every liberal cause out there. He takes care of the straw dogs, but the main beast is left unchallenged, so no real answer is ever given to the question referred to in the piece's title. I will attempt to slay this last dragon...

I've been working on a long poem I have named "Climate Control" (the personal kind, not the global warming kind, though there are metaphorical connections between the two). The long poems often take me years to finish and such is the case with "Climate Control". Because of this poem, I've been thinking for some time about why we can't even seem to start to solve our biggest problems.

What the author, below, doesn't want to come right out and say is this: we need sustained negative growth for generations to come and, even with heroic sacrifices, it may ultimately be too late anyway.

Mankind has created wealth all over the world by doing things that produce these global warming gasses as by-products. Wealth was produced making that mess. One of the things that wealth inadvertently "bought" was global warming. In order to undo the mess, wealth would have to be pumped into halting the pollution and, probably, remediating past damage. Where will this wealth come from?

Wealth's flow toward remediating the problem of global warming would essentially means endless recession, negative growth, the thing that makes everyone scream and causes citizens to riot and governments to fall.

And, yes, as the article below states, money is the root of all evil, but what else is new? It is the short-sightedness of the masses, their demand for instant and continual gratification that ultimately dooms our efforts and, indeed, our species, this time around, at least. Even governments and villains eventually quake at the power of the masses. How would you like to live in Syria right now?

I believe the rich and governments would actually permit negative growth if the citizens would stand for it. A government truly looking out for its people would see the dire need for such actions to prevent even worse consequences. This seems to fly in the face of Republican arguments that there is no such thing as climate change, but there are very good reasons why both governments and big money are focused on the short run rather the long run which is their wont. Given human nature, no such farsighted government could long survive.

We doomed ourselves. We spread the ideas of freedom from want, liberty, and consumption, even conspicuous consumption, around the world. We even missed the boat as far as fighting communism went. Communism was our greatest friend. It tends to freeze history in its tracks, eliminating growth. We should have tried hard to maintain the Cold War, kept it going forever, kept the world from consuming so much. That's probably the best thing we could have done to fight global warming, and we did the opposite. We helped bankrupt and dismantle the USSR, then aided the Chinese to build their factories with our capital (at first). As for India, well, blame that on the UK. The only country we did the right thing with, under this theory, is Cuba, which is still stuck in the 1950's, gracefully not choking its roads with traffic or our air with its smoke.

What family, what citizens, what nation in today's world is going to volunteer to engage in negative growth into the foreseeable future? Greece has had to go back in time. It isn't pretty. There were riots. People died. Governments fell. For how long will people endure such bleakness before there are more serious problems?

We are not heroic enough. Collectively, as a species, we are selfish, self-interested, shortsighted, and greedy. We are doomed, my friends, unless human nature itself can be altered.

"Why We Cannot Lead Humankind to a Sustainable World" by Robert Wolff, OpEdNews

Dec. 14, 2012, (<http://www.opednews.com/articles/Why-we-cannot-lead-humanki-by-robert-wolff-121214-715.html>)



*Guernica*, by Pablo Picasso (1937)

After super-hurricane Sandy, a lot more people have come to accept that climate change is here. We have known of global warming, which manifests now as climate change, for 40 years or more. We have known what causes global warming. Very simple: we, humans, burn oil and coal and now natural gas to generate electricity. We burn oil in our cars, in airplanes, in many factories. Burning anything makes smoke and other gases that go into that thin layer of air we call the atmosphere. We burn an awful lot of oil and coal and so produce tons of gases that go into the atmosphere. We have known for a long time that all these gases accumulate high up in the atmosphere and it so happens that many of our waste gases have come to act as a sort of shield around the planet. Our sun sends light and heat to our earth. Before we so generously fed our waste into the atmosphere (and the waters of the earth, and its soil) much of the heat was reflected back into space. Now that shield of gases lets the heat in but prevents much of it from being mirrored back into space. The glaring white of ice and snow at the poles reflects sunlight and heat. When ice and snow melt there is water. Water is dark, it absorbs heat.

For many thousands of years the temperature of the earth fluctuated, but within a narrow range of temperatures. During that time of relatively stable temperatures we, humans, developed our ways of living.

For many centuries we slowly multiplied, settled all over the world. We formed a civilization, many civilizations. We invented things that made life easier, certainly different from our beginnings. A few hundred years ago we invented the steam engine, and then other engines all run by heat: we burned first wood, then coal, then oil. All these inventions changed the way we live. Now we are so accustomed to have the use of electricity that we cannot imagine living without.

But now because fewer of the sun's rays are mirrored back into space our atmosphere is getting warmer. Air, of course, moves around the world and so it is getting warmer everywhere. The warmer air melts more of the polar

ice and the ice of glaciers each summer. The more ice is melted the more water is at the poles. White snow reflects, black water absorbs heat. That is called a positive feedback loop. Small causes can bring big consequences.

Weather scientists long ago calculated that a warmer planet would have more droughts, which means less food can be grown on a parched earth. Warm air can hold more water and so we expect floods and very wet storms. The reason for the enormous floods in Pakistan and Australia a little while ago. And all this change also brings unusual and stronger storms than we are used to. Super-hurricane Sandy was such an unusual and extremely destructive storm.

Almost everyone everywhere has observed changes. Plants and birds are migrating north (in the northern hemisphere) toward cooler places where they never were before. And yet, maybe half of all Americans deny that anything is strange and new. Unfortunately that blocks any effort to do something about climate change which will affect and is already affecting many of the poorest people here as well as the poorest countries of the world.

We know, and have known for a long time, what we could and should do to perhaps slow down global warming. Easily said not easily done: stop burning oil and coal (and now natural gas); stop producing super polluting gases from factories, from planes, from ships, from cars.

Some countries have done that. [I don't know of any! Counting baby steps as completion? –SteveB] It is possible to do. We, the US, are one of the two most polluting nations on earth. We are and have been responsible for one fourth, 25%, of all the poisons added to the atmosphere by the entire world; and we are only 4% of the seven billion humans on the planet.. **For years I have wracked my brain trying to understand why we did not become a leader in introducing, using, sustainable ways of producing electricity. We know how; why don't we?**

A few days ago I had a series of insights. Now I understand why America cannot change its ways. Oh, I am certain that the leadership, the rich, the big corporations, even the oil and coal companies, know perfectly well what they are doing and what the consequences are of what they are doing. But they cannot change. Now, finally, I know why. I'll try to explain but, to explain, I must tell a story. I'll make it as short as I can, cutting out all the details that make it true.

I am old; I lived through World War Two in the Netherlands. I was 18 when the Germans invaded and occupied Holland. Twenty-three when the war officially ended. For Americans, WWII lasted three years; for us, the occupation by Germany lasted almost exactly five years—from early May, 1940 to early May, 1945. The occupation was brutal. I resisted long before there was an organized Resistance. Eventually, of course, I was absorbed into the Resistance.

The United States landed an army on a beach in France in 1944, liberated Paris and managed to push the Germans back north almost to the Netherlands but not quite. Most of Holland was still under German control. The Germans plundered Holland that last year. They moved what they could to Germany. Everything that was still in stores was taken. The entire harvest of all farmers in the western and northern provinces of Holland was taken. The copper wires of trains and street cars, the rails, even the trains were moved to Germany. That winter is now known as the Hunger Winter. We had no electricity, phones very occasionally, no gasoline, no candles, no clothes, no food. I survived on a diet of sugar beets and tulip bulbs; I weighed 90 pounds at the end of the war; we were all skeletons.

When I became part of the Resistance I had been taught to shoot, take apart, and put together rifles and automatic weapons. I knew one man above me, and four below me. Everything had to be done in the greatest secrecy. I never slept in the same house more than two nights. Before going to sleep I memorized where my shoes were, my wallet, my coat, the escape--so that I could get out of there in less than a minute, leaving no sign that anyone had been there. The man above me regularly gave me assignments. They were all dangerous of course. I will mention only one.

I had to protect some "important people who are having a meeting" in a small house in a row of similar houses. There was a front door and a small back door, I had to stay awake; move back and forth all night. In the small kitchen there were I think five men talking very softly, by the light of a wick floating on oil in a cup. I did not want to listen to what they were talking about but could not help hearing a word now and then. Around midnight they

askd me to make some coffee. I wondered where they had gotten real coffee; we had not had any for years. I sat down with them for a few minutes. They told me two of the men had come from England a few days before, dropped with a black parachute by a quiet low flying plane.

When I put together the words I could not help overhearing I realized they were talking about "day one." The first day after the end of the war. The day when we would have our own government again.

At the time I was indignant. I was giving my life to protect people who were planning a future I could not see. Why don't they plan how to win this war? Why don't they make plans to get rid of these (blank) Germans?

I survived until May. I'll spare you the details. There were what seemed endless weeks of confusion. The Allies had arranged with the Germans that they would stay in their barracks (keeping their weapons otherwise the people would have killed them) and we, the Resistance, wearing arm bands, were "in charge." Essentially we were again, as at the beginning of the war, without any government. I already knew that the absence of a government does not mean chaos. People know how to live together, and in emergencies we know what to do. I am sure of that; I have experienced it many more times.

And then, one day our government was back in charge. "Day one." In my memory it all happened in one day, but it must have been longer. Everybody got the new money, boatloads of food and other necessities arrived. Soon we had telephone again, electricity came back. Clinics and hospitals were outfitted again, actually functioning. It was a total miracle.

Yes, it took years to restore a plundered country, but then I fully understood that those five men who also gave their lives had planned this to the last detail. The midnight cup of real coffee came back into my memory and I realized they too had risked their lives because they knew our suffering. I realized that those men had been passionately, intelligently planning because the core idea they worked from was that the function of government is taking care of the people in their charge.

I must repeat that thought: **Government is based on the core idea that its function is to see to it that the people are taken care of: protected, fed, reasonably content, as healthy as possible.**

That is why in the Netherlands and many other nations there was never a debate about universal health care (including teeth and eyes). Unemployment can be taken care of by reducing the work week to 36, 34 hours so that more people can get work. A woman giving birth gets a few months paid leave. Child care is free. All education is free, adapted to the needs and gifts of individuals. Everybody has four weeks paid vacation (in France it's six weeks). Of course everyone pays taxes but they get their money's worth. Peace with neighbor nations comes from talking with neighbors. No need for big armies.

In America, we call all that "socialism," a word that means abhorrent. To me, it is no "ism" it is what humans do. We have always known that we have to take care of each other. We would not have survived for a hundred and more thousand years if we hadn't taken care of each other.

In America, we do not believe (any more?) that the core idea of governing is to take care of people. Americans, at least the loudest American voices, say that each of us should take care of her/himself. If I get sick and cannot afford surgery: too bad. I should have planned my own life better. And if I cannot afford to go to a hospital, I die--I remember the loud applause when Ron Paul said that in one of the debates. The American core idea is that governing means taking care of business. Money. People have to look out for themselves.

That is why we cannot change our way of life. **We cannot make a green economy because that costs money and goes against the interest of oil companies, coal companies, the rich, and the very rich.** And that is why we cannot even slow down global warming. This year is already the hottest in U.S. history. Future generations -- if there are any -- will blame us, the big U.S. The world is already blaming us now, today.

Speaking just for myself, I hate to think that because I and my country did not do what we easily could have done to prevent or slow down global warming all the world must suffer the worldwide apocalyptic disaster that may make this beautiful planet unfit for us to survive on/in. And we did it to ourselves.

We are now fighting "terrorism" all over the globe. To prevent another 9/11 we say. Fighting individuals with all the force of an armed nation, at a cost of billions, trillions, does not work. We should have learned that by now. By fighting terrorism we have become the Terror.

The world expected this country to lead. We ourselves think we must lead. But we lead in the wrong direction; we fight the wrong war. Instead of doing everything we can to stop burning oil and coal we fight people. Oh yes, we know how to become sustainable. It can be done in less than ten years if we wanted. But we think it more important to find and kill people suspected of having bad intentions. Every innocent child we kill, so-called collateral damage, has brothers and sisters who want revenge. By fighting terrorism with missiles shot from drones we make more terrorists and have no time, no thought, for taking care of people. Global warming is a much greater threat than terrorism. Rome is burning; the world is burning and we are fiddling, making money from wars.

Sometimes I think of the one vote from the Supreme Court that gave us a president and I fantasize what president Gore would have been able to do. That one vote changed history; it may have changed the fate of Life on this Earth. A very eerie thought.

<a href="#">20121216-01</a> 06:22 SteveB "Whoa: Physicists Testing to See if Universe Is a Computer Simulation" & "Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?"
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I think these guys have it philosophically wrong. They're wasting their time. There is no conceivable way of proving or disproving that the universe and, therefore, our paltry, mundane lives are "real" or a computer simulation, software instead of hardware.

Would we have consciousness as simulacrums?

What do you think? Therefore, you are?

"Whoa: Physicists Testing to See if Universe Is a Computer Simulation" by Eric Pfeiffer, Yahoo News

Dec. 13, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/blogs/sideshow/whoa-physicists-testing-see-universe-computer-simulation-224525825.html>)

Will you take the red pill or the blue pill?

Some physicists and university researchers say it's possible to test the theory that our entire universe exists inside a computer simulation, like in the 1999 film *The Matrix*.

In 2003, University of Oxford philosophy professor Nick Bostrom published a paper, "The Simulation Argument" (see below), which argued that, "we are almost certainly living in a computer simulation." Now, a team at Cornell University says it has come up with a viable method for testing whether we're all just a series of numbers in some ancient civilization's computer game (<http://arxiv.org/abs/1210.1847>).

Researchers at the University of Washington agree with the testing method, saying it can be done (<http://www.washington.edu/news/2012/12/10/do-we-live-in-a-computer-simulation-uw-researchers-say-idea-can-be-tested/>). A similar proposal was put forth by German physicists in November ([http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/11/physicists-may-have-evidence\\_n\\_1957777.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2012/10/11/physicists-may-have-evidence_n_1957777.html))



Could this be a computer simulation? (Space.com)

So how, precisely, can we test whether we exist? Put simply, researchers are building their own simulated models, using a technique called lattice quantum chromodynamics. And while those models are currently able to produce models only slightly larger than the nucleus of an atom, University of Washington physics professor Martin Savage says the same principles used in creating those simulations can be applied on a larger scale.

"This is the first testable signature of such an idea," Savage said. "If you make the simulations big enough, something like our universe should emerge."

The testing method is far more complex. Consider the Cornell University explanation: "Using the historical development of lattice gauge theory technology as a guide, we assume that our universe is an early numerical simulation with unimproved Wilson fermion discretization and investigate potentially-observable consequences."

To translate, if energy signatures in our simulations match those in the universe at large, there's a good chance we, too, exist within a simulation.

Interestingly, one of Savage's students takes the hypothesis further: If we stumble upon the nature of our existence, would we then look for ways to communicate with the civilization who created us?

University of Washington student Zohreh Davoudi says whoever made our simulated universe might have made others, and maybe we should "simply" attempt to communicate with those. "The question is, 'Can you communicate with those other universes if they are running on the same platform?'" she asked.

"Are You Living in a Computer Simulation?" by Nick Bostrom, Faculty of Philosophy, Oxford University

Published in *Philosophical Quarterly* (2003) Vol. 53, No. 211, pp. 243-255, (<http://www.simulation-argument.com/simulation.html> and <http://www.simulation-argument.com/simulation.pdf>)



*World of Wires*, a play inspired by the simulation argument, New York (2012)

## ABSTRACT

This paper argues that at least one of the following propositions is true: (1) the human species is very likely to go extinct before reaching a "posthuman" stage; (2) any posthuman civilization is extremely unlikely to run a significant number of simulations of their evolutionary history (or variations thereof); (3) we are almost certainly living in a computer simulation. It follows that the belief that there is a significant chance that we will one day become posthumans who run ancestor-simulations is false, unless we are currently living in a simulation. A number of other consequences of this result are also discussed.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Many works of science fiction as well as some forecasts by serious technologists and futurologists predict that enormous amounts of computing power will be available in the future. Let us suppose for a moment that these predictions are correct. One thing that later generations might do with their super-powerful computers is run detailed simulations of their forebears or of people like their forebears. Because their computers would be so powerful, they could run a great many such simulations. Suppose that these simulated people are conscious (as they would be if the simulations were sufficiently fine-grained and if a certain quite widely accepted position in the philosophy of mind is correct). Then it could be the case that the vast majority of minds like ours do not belong to the original race but rather to people simulated by the advanced descendants of an original race. It is then possible to argue that, if this were the case, we would be rational to think that we are likely among the simulated minds rather than among the original biological ones. Therefore, if we don't think that we are currently living in a computer simulation, we are not entitled to believe that we will have descendants who will run lots of such simulations of their forebears. That is the basic idea. The rest of this paper will spell it out more carefully.

Apart from the interest this thesis may hold for those who are engaged in futuristic speculation, there are also more purely theoretical rewards. The argument provides a stimulus for formulating some methodological and

metaphysical questions, and it suggests naturalistic analogies to certain traditional religious conceptions, which some may find amusing or thought-provoking.

The structure of the paper is as follows. First, we formulate an assumption that we need to import from the philosophy of mind in order to get the argument started. Second, we consider some empirical reasons for thinking that running vastly many simulations of human minds would be within the capability of a future civilization that has developed many of those technologies that can already be shown to be compatible with known physical laws and engineering constraints. This part is not philosophically necessary but it provides an incentive for paying attention to the rest. Then follows the core of the argument, which makes use of some simple probability theory, and a section providing support for a weak indifference principle that the argument employs. Lastly, we discuss some interpretations of the disjunction, mentioned in the abstract, that forms the conclusion of the simulation argument.

## II. THE ASSUMPTION OF SUBSTRATE-INDEPENDENCE

A common assumption in the philosophy of mind is that of substrate-independence. The idea is that mental states can supervene on any of a broad class of physical substrates. Provided a system implements the right sort of computational structures and processes, it can be associated with conscious experiences. It is not an essential property of consciousness that it is implemented on carbon-based biological neural networks inside a cranium: silicon-based processors inside a computer could in principle do the trick as well.

Arguments for this thesis have been given in the literature, and although it is not entirely uncontroversial, we shall here take it as a given.

The argument we shall present does not, however, depend on any very strong version of functionalism or computationalism. For example, we need not assume that the thesis of substrate-independence is necessarily true (either analytically or metaphysically) – just that, in fact, a computer running a suitable program would be conscious. Moreover, we need not assume that in order to create a mind on a computer it would be sufficient to program it in such a way that it behaves like a human in all situations, including passing the Turing test etc. We need only the weaker assumption that it would suffice for the generation of subjective experiences that the computational processes of a human brain are structurally replicated in suitably fine-grained detail, such as on the level of individual synapses. This attenuated version of substrate-independence is quite widely accepted.

Neurotransmitters, nerve growth factors, and other chemicals that are smaller than a synapse clearly play a role in human cognition and learning. The substrate-independence thesis is not that the effects of these chemicals are small or irrelevant, but rather that they affect subjective experience only via their direct or indirect influence on computational activities. For example, if there can be no difference in subjective experience without there also being a difference in synaptic discharges, then the requisite detail of simulation is at the synaptic level (or higher).

## III. THE TECHNOLOGICAL LIMITS OF COMPUTATION

At our current stage of technological development, we have neither sufficiently powerful hardware nor the requisite software to create conscious minds in computers. But persuasive arguments have been given to the effect that if technological progress continues unabated then these shortcomings will eventually be overcome. Some authors argue that this stage may be only a few decades away.<sup>1</sup> Yet present purposes require no assumptions about the time-scale. The simulation argument works equally well for those who think that it will take hundreds of thousands of years to reach a “posthuman” stage of civilization, where humankind has acquired most of the technological capabilities that one can currently show to be consistent with physical laws and with material and energy constraints.

Such a mature stage of technological development will make it possible to convert planets and other astronomical resources into enormously powerful computers. It is currently hard to be confident in any upper bound on the computing power that may be available to posthuman civilizations. As we are still lacking a “theory of everything”, we cannot rule out the possibility that novel physical phenomena, not allowed for in current physical theories, may be utilized to transcend those constraints<sup>2</sup> that in our current understanding impose theoretical limits on the information processing attainable in a given lump of matter. We can with much greater confidence establish lower bounds on posthuman computation, by assuming only mechanisms that are already understood. For example, Eric

Drexler has outlined a design for a system the size of a sugar cube (excluding cooling and power supply) that would perform  $10^{21}$  instructions per second.<sup>3</sup> Another author gives a rough estimate of  $10^{42}$  operations per second for a computer with a mass on order of a large planet.<sup>4</sup> (If we could create quantum computers, or learn to build computers out of nuclear matter or plasma, we could push closer to the theoretical limits. Seth Lloyd calculates an upper bound for a 1 kg computer of  $5 \cdot 10^{50}$  logical operations per second carried out on  $\sim 10^{31}$  bits.<sup>5</sup> However, it suffices for our purposes to use the more conservative estimate that presupposes only currently known design-principles.)

The amount of computing power needed to emulate a human mind can likewise be roughly estimated. One estimate, based on how computationally expensive it is to replicate the functionality of a piece of nervous tissue that we have already understood and whose functionality has been replicated in silicon, contrast enhancement in the retina, yields a figure of  $\sim 10^{14}$  operations per second for the entire human brain.<sup>6</sup> An alternative estimate, based the number of synapses in the brain and their firing frequency, gives a figure of  $\sim 10^{16}$ - $10^{17}$  operations per second.<sup>7</sup> Conceivably, even more could be required if we want to simulate in detail the internal workings of synapses and dendritic trees. However, it is likely that the human central nervous system has a high degree of redundancy on the microscale to compensate for the unreliability and noisiness of its neuronal components. One would therefore expect a substantial efficiency gain when using more reliable and versatile non-biological processors.

Memory seems to be a no more stringent constraint than processing power.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, since the maximum human sensory bandwidth is  $\sim 10^8$  bits per second, simulating all sensory events incurs a negligible cost compared to simulating the cortical activity. We can therefore use the processing power required to simulate the central nervous system as an estimate of the total computational cost of simulating a human mind.

If the environment is included in the simulation, this will require additional computing power – how much depends on the scope and granularity of the simulation. Simulating the entire universe down to the quantum level is obviously infeasible, unless radically new physics is discovered. But in order to get a realistic simulation of human experience, much less is needed – only whatever is required to ensure that the simulated humans, interacting in normal human ways with their simulated environment, don't notice any irregularities. The microscopic structure of the inside of the Earth can be safely omitted. Distant astronomical objects can have highly compressed representations: verisimilitude need extend to the narrow band of properties that we can observe from our planet or solar system spacecraft. On the surface of Earth, macroscopic objects in inhabited areas may need to be continuously simulated, but microscopic phenomena could likely be filled in *ad hoc*. What you see through an electron microscope needs to look unsuspecting, but you usually have no way of confirming its coherence with unobserved parts of the microscopic world. Exceptions arise when we deliberately design systems to harness unobserved microscopic phenomena that operate in accordance with known principles to get results that we are able to independently verify. The paradigmatic case of this is a computer. The simulation may therefore need to include a continuous representation of computers down to the level of individual logic elements. This presents no problem, since our current computing power is negligible by posthuman standards.

Moreover, a posthuman simulator would have enough computing power to keep track of the detailed belief-states in all human brains at all times. Therefore, when it saw that a human was about to make an observation of the microscopic world, it could fill in sufficient detail in the simulation in the appropriate domain on an as-needed basis. Should any error occur, the director could easily edit the states of any brains that have become aware of an anomaly before it spoils the simulation. Alternatively, the director could skip back a few seconds and rerun the simulation in a way that avoids the problem.

It thus seems plausible that the main computational cost in creating simulations that are indistinguishable from physical reality for human minds in the simulation resides in simulating organic brains down to the neuronal or sub-neuronal level.<sup>9</sup> While it is not possible to get a very exact estimate of the cost of a realistic simulation of human history, we can use  $\sim 10^{33}$  -  $10^{36}$  operations as a rough estimate.<sup>10</sup> As we gain more experience with virtual reality, we will get a better grasp of the computational requirements for making such worlds appear realistic to their visitors. But in any case, even if our estimate is off by several orders of magnitude, this does not matter much for our argument. We noted that a rough approximation of the computational power of a planetary-mass computer is  $10^{42}$  operations per second, and that assumes only already known nanotechnological designs, which are probably far from optimal. A single such a computer could simulate the entire mental history of humankind (call this an

ancestor-simulation) by using less than one millionth of its processing power for one second. A posthuman civilization may eventually build an astronomical number of such computers. We can conclude that the computing power available to a posthuman civilization is sufficient to run a huge number of ancestor-simulations even it allocates only a minute fraction of its resources to that purpose. We can draw this conclusion even while leaving a substantial margin of error in all our estimates.

**Posthuman civilizations would have enough computing power to run hugely many ancestor-simulations even while using only a tiny fraction of their resources for that purpose.**

#### IV. THE CORE OF THE SIMULATION ARGUMENT

The basic idea of this paper can be expressed roughly as follows: If there were a substantial chance that our civilization will ever get to the posthuman stage and run many ancestor-simulations, then how come you are not living in such a simulation?

We shall develop this idea into a rigorous argument. Let us introduce the following notation:

$f_p$  : Fraction of all human-level technological civilizations that survive to reach a posthuman stage

$N$  : Average number of ancestor-simulations run by a posthuman civilization

$H$  : Average number of individuals that have lived in a civilization before it reaches a posthuman stage

The actual fraction of all observers with human-type experiences that live in simulations is then:

$$f_{sim} = (f_p N H) / ((f_p N H) + H)$$

Writing  $f_I$  for the fraction of posthuman civilizations that are interested in running ancestor-simulations (or that contain at least some individuals who are interested in that and have sufficient resources to run a significant number of such simulations), and  $N_I$  for the average number of ancestor-simulations run by such interested civilizations, we have:

$$N = f_I N_I$$

and thus:

$$(*) : f_{sim} = f_p f_I N_I / ((f_p f_I N_I) + 1)$$

Because of the immense computing power of posthuman civilizations,  $N$  is extremely large, as we saw in the previous section. By inspecting (\*) we can then see that at least one of the following three propositions must be true:

$$(1) : f_p \sim 0$$

$$(2) : f_I \sim 0$$

$$(3) : f_{sim} \sim 1$$

#### V. A BLAND INDIFFERENCE PRINCIPLE

We can take a further step and conclude that conditional on the truth of (3), one's credence in the hypothesis that one is in a simulation should be close to unity. More generally, if we knew that a fraction  $x$  of all observers with human-type experiences live in simulations, and we don't have any information that indicate that our own particular experiences are any more or less likely than other human-type experiences to have been implemented *in vivo* rather than *in machina*, then our credence that we are in a simulation should equal  $x$ :

$$(\#) : C (SIM | f_{sim} = x) = x$$

This step is sanctioned by a very weak indifference principle. Let us distinguish two cases. The first case, which is the easiest, is where all the minds in question are like your own in the sense that they are exactly qualitatively identical to yours: they have exactly the same information and the same experiences that you have. The second case is where the minds are "like" each other only in the loose sense of being the sort of minds that are typical of human creatures, but they are qualitatively distinct from one another and each has a distinct set of experiences. I maintain that even in the latter case, where the minds are qualitatively different, the simulation argument still works, provided that you have no information that bears on the question of which of the various minds are simulated and which are implemented biologically.

A detailed defense of a stronger principle, which implies the above stance for both cases as trivial special instances, has been given in the literature.<sup>11</sup> Space does not permit a recapitulation of that defense here, but we can bring out one of the underlying intuitions by bringing to our attention to an analogous situation of a more familiar kind. Suppose that  $x\%$  of the population has a certain genetic sequence  $S$  within the part of their DNA commonly designated as "junk DNA". Suppose, further, that there are no manifestations of  $S$  (short of what would turn up in a gene assay) and that there are no known correlations between having  $S$  and any observable characteristic. Then, quite clearly, unless you have had your DNA sequenced, it is rational to assign a credence of  $x\%$  to the hypothesis that you have  $S$ . And this is so quite irrespective of the fact that the people who have  $S$  have qualitatively different minds and experiences from the people who don't have  $S$ . (They are different simply because all humans have different experiences from one another, not because of any known link between  $S$  and what kind of experiences one has.)

The same reasoning holds if  $S$  is not the property of having a certain genetic sequence but instead the property of being in a simulation, assuming only that we have no information that enables us to predict any differences between the experiences of simulated minds and those of the original biological minds.

It should be stressed that the bland indifference principle expressed by (#) prescribes indifference only between hypotheses about which observer you are, when you have no information about which of these observers you are. It does not in general prescribe indifference between hypotheses when you lack specific information about which of the hypotheses is true. In contrast to Laplacean and other more ambitious principles of indifference, it is therefore immune to Bertrand's paradox and similar predicaments that tend to plague indifference principles of unrestricted scope.

Readers familiar with the Doomsday argument<sup>12</sup> may worry that the bland principle of indifference invoked here is the same assumption that is responsible for getting the Doomsday argument off the ground, and that the counterintuitiveness of some of the implications of the latter incriminates or casts doubt on the validity of the former. This is not so. The Doomsday argument rests on a much stronger and more controversial premiss, namely that one should reason as if one were a random sample from the set of all people who will ever have lived (past, present, and future) *even though we know that we are living in the early twenty-first century* rather than at some point in the distant past or the future. The bland indifference principle, by contrast, applies only to cases where we have no information about which group of people we belong to.

If betting odds provide some guidance to rational belief, it may also be worth to ponder that if everybody were to place a bet on whether they are in a simulation or not, then if people use the bland principle of indifference, and consequently place their money on being in a simulation if they know that that's where almost all people are, then almost everyone will win their bets. If they bet on not being in a simulation, then almost everyone will lose. It seems better that the bland indifference principle be heeded.

Further, one can consider a sequence of possible situations in which an increasing fraction of all people live in simulations: 98%, 99%, 99.9%, 99.9999%, and so on. As one approaches the limiting case in which everybody is in a simulation (from which one can deductively infer that one is in a simulation oneself), it is plausible to require that the credence one assigns to being in a simulation gradually approach the limiting case of complete certainty in a matching manner.

## VI. INTERPRETATION

The possibility represented by proposition (1) is fairly straightforward. If (1) is true, then humankind will almost certainly fail to reach a posthuman level; for virtually no species at our level of development become posthuman, and it is hard to see any justification for thinking that our own species will be especially privileged or protected from future disasters. Conditional on (1), therefore, we must give a high credence to DOOM, the hypothesis that humankind will go extinct before reaching a posthuman level:

$$Cr(DOOM | f_P \sim 0) \sim 1$$

One can imagine hypothetical situations where we have such evidence as would trump knowledge of  $f_P$ . For example, if we discovered that we were about to be hit by a giant meteor, this might suggest that we had been exceptionally unlucky. We could then assign a credence to DOOM larger than our expectation of the fraction of human-level civilizations that fail to reach posthumanity. In the actual case, however, we seem to lack evidence for thinking that we are special in this regard, for better or worse.

Proposition (1) doesn't by itself imply that we are likely to go extinct soon, only that we are unlikely to reach a posthuman stage. This possibility is compatible with us remaining at, or somewhat above, our current level of technological development for a long time before going extinct. Another way for (1) to be true is if it is likely that technological civilization will collapse. Primitive human societies might then remain on Earth indefinitely.

There are many ways in which humanity could become extinct before reaching posthumanity. Perhaps the most natural interpretation of (1) is that we are likely to go extinct as a result of the development of some powerful but dangerous technology.<sup>13</sup> One candidate is molecular nanotechnology, which in its mature stage would enable the construction of self-replicating nanobots capable of feeding on dirt and organic matter – a kind of mechanical bacteria. Such nanobots, designed for malicious ends, could cause the extinction of all life on our planet.<sup>14</sup>

The second alternative in the simulation argument's conclusion is that the fraction of posthuman civilizations that are interested in running ancestor-simulation is negligibly small. In order for (2) to be true, there must be a strong *convergence* among the courses of advanced civilizations. If the number of ancestor-simulations created by the interested civilizations is extremely large, the rarity of such civilizations must be correspondingly extreme. Virtually no posthuman civilizations decide to use their resources to run large numbers of ancestor-simulations. Furthermore, virtually all posthuman civilizations lack individuals who have sufficient resources and interest to run ancestor-simulations; or else they have reliably enforced laws that prevent such individuals from acting on their desires.

What force could bring about such convergence? One can speculate that advanced civilizations all develop along a trajectory that leads to the recognition of an ethical prohibition against running ancestor-simulations because of the suffering that is inflicted on the inhabitants of the simulation. However, from our present point of view, it is not clear that creating a human race is immoral. On the contrary, we tend to view the existence of our race as constituting a great ethical value. Moreover, convergence on an ethical view of the immorality of running ancestor-simulations is not enough: it must be combined with convergence on a civilization-wide social structure that enables activities considered immoral to be effectively banned.

Another possible convergence point is that almost all individual posthumans in virtually all posthuman civilizations develop in a direction where they lose their desires to run ancestor-simulations. This would require significant changes to the motivations driving their human predecessors, for there are certainly many humans who would like to run ancestor-simulations if they could afford to do so. But perhaps many of our human desires will be regarded as silly by anyone who becomes a posthuman. Maybe the scientific value of ancestor-simulations to a posthuman civilization is negligible (which is not too implausible given its unfathomable intellectual superiority), and maybe posthumans regard recreational activities as merely a very inefficient way of getting pleasure – which can be obtained much more cheaply by direct stimulation of the brain's reward centers. One conclusion that follows from (2) is that posthuman societies will be very different from human societies: they will not contain relatively wealthy independent agents who have the full gamut of human-like desires and are free to act on them.

The possibility expressed by alternative (3) is the conceptually most intriguing one. If we are living in a simulation, then the cosmos that we are observing is just a tiny piece of the totality of physical existence. The physics in the universe where the computer is situated that is running the simulation may or may not resemble the physics of the

world that we observe. While the world we see is in some sense "real", it is not located at the fundamental level of reality.

It may be possible for simulated civilizations to become posthuman. They may then run their own ancestor-simulations on powerful computers they build in their simulated universe. Such computers would be "virtual machines", a familiar concept in computer science. (Java script web-applets, for instance, run on a virtual machine – a simulated computer – inside your desktop.) Virtual machines can be stacked: it's possible to simulate a machine simulating another machine, and so on, in arbitrarily many steps of iteration. If we do go on to create our own ancestor-simulations, this would be strong evidence against (1) and (2), and we would therefore have to conclude that we live in a simulation. Moreover, we would have to suspect that the posthumans running our simulation are themselves simulated beings; and their creators, in turn, may also be simulated beings.

Reality may thus contain many levels. Even if it is necessary for the hierarchy to bottom out at some stage – the metaphysical status of this claim is somewhat obscure – there may be room for a large number of levels of reality, and the number could be increasing over time. (One consideration that counts against the multi-level hypothesis is that the computational cost for the basement-level simulators would be very great. Simulating even a single posthuman civilization might be prohibitively expensive. If so, then we should expect our simulation to be terminated when we are about to become posthuman.)

Although all the elements of such a system can be naturalistic, even physical, it is possible to draw some loose analogies with religious conceptions of the world. In some ways, the posthumans running a simulation are like gods in relation to the people inhabiting the simulation: the posthumans created the world we see; they are of superior intelligence; they are "omnipotent" in the sense that they can interfere in the workings of our world even in ways that violate its physical laws; and they are "omniscient" in the sense that they can monitor everything that happens. However, all the demigods except those at the fundamental level of reality are subject to sanctions by the more powerful gods living at lower levels.

Further rumination on these themes could climax in a naturalistic theogony that would study the structure of this hierarchy, and the constraints imposed on its inhabitants by the possibility that their actions on their own level may affect the treatment they receive from dwellers of deeper levels. For example, if nobody can be sure that they are at the basement-level, then everybody would have to consider the possibility that their actions will be rewarded or punished, based perhaps on moral criteria, by their simulators. An afterlife would be a real possibility. Because of this fundamental uncertainty, even the basement civilization may have a reason to behave ethically. The fact that it has such a reason for moral behavior would of course add to everybody else's reason for behaving morally, and so on, in truly virtuous circle. One might get a kind of universal ethical imperative, which it would be in everybody's self-interest to obey, as it were "from nowhere".

In addition to ancestor-simulations, one may also consider the possibility of more selective simulations that include only a small group of humans or a single individual. The rest of humanity would then be zombies or "shadow-people" – humans simulated only at a level sufficient for the fully simulated people not to notice anything suspicious. It is not clear how much cheaper shadow-people would be to simulate than real people. It is not even obvious that it is possible for an entity to behave indistinguishably from a real human and yet lack conscious experience. Even if there are such selective simulations, you should not think that you are in one of them unless you think they are much more numerous than complete simulations. There would have to be about 100 billion times as many "me-simulations" (simulations of the life of only a single mind) as there are ancestor-simulations in order for most simulated persons to be in me-simulations.

There is also the possibility of simulators abridging certain parts of the mental lives of simulated beings and giving them false memories of the sort of experiences that they would typically have had during the omitted interval. If so, one can consider the following (farfetched) solution to the problem of evil: that there is no suffering in the world and all memories of suffering are illusions. Of course, this hypothesis can be seriously entertained only at those times when you are not currently suffering.

Supposing we live in a simulation, what are the implications for us humans? The foregoing remarks notwithstanding, the implications are not all that radical. Our best guide to how our posthuman creators have chosen to set up our world is the standard empirical study of the universe we see. The revisions to most parts of

our belief networks would be rather slight and subtle – in proportion to our lack of confidence in our ability to understand the ways of posthumans. Properly understood, therefore, the truth of (3) should have no tendency to make us “go crazy” or to prevent us from going about our business and making plans and predictions for tomorrow. The chief empirical importance of (3) at the current time seems to lie in its role in the tripartite conclusion established above.<sup>15</sup> We may hope that (3) is true since that would decrease the probability of (1), although if computational constraints make it likely that simulators would terminate a simulation before it reaches a posthuman level, then our best hope would be that (2) is true.

If we learn more about posthuman motivations and resource constraints, maybe as a result of developing towards becoming posthumans ourselves, then the hypothesis that we are simulated will come to have a much richer set of empirical implications.

## VII. CONCLUSION

A technologically mature “posthuman” civilization would have enormous computing power. Based on this empirical fact, the simulation argument shows that *at least one* of the following propositions is true: (1) The fraction of human-level civilizations that reach a posthuman stage is very close to zero; (2) The fraction of posthuman civilizations that are interested in running ancestor-simulations is very close to zero; (3) The fraction of all people with our kind of experiences that are living in a simulation is very close to one.

If (1) is true, then we will almost certainly go extinct before reaching posthumanity. If (2) is true, then there must be a strong convergence among the courses of advanced civilizations so that virtually none contains any relatively wealthy individuals who desire to run ancestor-simulations and are free to do so. If (3) is true, then we almost certainly live in a simulation. In the dark forest of our current ignorance, it seems sensible to apportion one’s credence roughly evenly between (1), (2), and (3).

Unless we are now living in a simulation, our descendants will almost certainly never run an ancestor-simulation.

(Nick Bostrom's academic homepage: <http://www.nickbostrom.com>.)

(More on the simulation argument: <http://www.simulation-argument.com>.)

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<sup>1</sup>See e.g. K. E. Drexler, *Engines of Creation: The Coming Era of Nanotechnology*, London, Fourth Estate, 1985; N. Bostrom, “How Long Before Superintelligence?” *International Journal of Futures Studies*, vol. 2, (1998); R. Kurzweil, *The Age of Spiritual Machines: When Computers Exceed Human Intelligence*, New York, Viking Press, 1999; H. Moravec, *Robot: Mere Machine to Transcendent Mind*, Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>2</sup>Such as the Bremermann-Bekenstein bound and the black hole limit (H. J. Bremermann, “Minimum energy requirements of information transfer and computing.” *International Journal of Theoretical Physics* 21: 203-217 (1982); J. D. Bekenstein, “Entropy content and information flow in systems with limited energy.” *Physical Review D* 30: 1669-1679 (1984); A. Sandberg, “The Physics of Information Processing Superobjects: The Daily Life among the Jupiter Brains.” *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, vol. 5 (1999)).

<sup>3</sup>K. E. Drexler, *Nanosystems: Molecular Machinery, Manufacturing, and Computation*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992.

<sup>4</sup>R. J. Bradbury, “Matrioshka Brains.” Working manuscript (2002), <http://www.aeiveos.com/~bradbury/MatrioshkaBrains/MatrioshkaBrains.html>.

<sup>5</sup>S. Lloyd, “Ultimate physical limits to computation.” *Nature* 406 (31 August): 1047-1054 (2000).

<sup>6</sup>H. Moravec, *Mind Children*, Harvard University Press (1989).

<sup>7</sup>Bostrom (1998), op. cit.

<sup>8</sup>See references in foregoing footnotes.

<sup>9</sup>As we build more and faster computers, the cost of simulating our machines might eventually come to dominate the cost of simulating nervous systems.

<sup>10</sup>100 billion humans 50 years/human 30 million secs/year [ $10^{14}$ ,  $10^{17}$ ] operations in each human brain per second [ $10^{33}$ ,  $10^{36}$ ] operations.

<sup>11</sup>In e.g. N. Bostrom, "The Doomsday Argument, Adam & Eve, UN++, and Quantum Joe." *Synthese* 127(3): 359-387 (2001); and most fully in my book *Anthropic Bias: Observation Selection Effects in Science and Philosophy*, Routledge, New York, 2002.

<sup>12</sup>See e.g. J. Leslie, "Is the End of the World Nigh?" *Philosophical Quarterly* 40, 158: 65-72 (1990).

<sup>13</sup>See my paper "Existential Risks: Analyzing Human Extinction Scenarios and Related Hazards." *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, vol. 9 (2001) for a survey and analysis of the present and anticipated future threats to human survival.

<sup>14</sup>See e.g. Drexler (1985) op cit., and R. A. Freitas Jr., "Some Limits to Global Ecophagy by Biovorous Nanoreplicators, with Public Policy Recommendations." Zyvex preprint April (2000), <http://www.foresight.org/NanoRev/Ecophagy.html>.

<sup>15</sup>For some reflections by another author on the consequences of (3), which were sparked by a privately circulated earlier version of this paper, see R. Hanson, "How to Live in a Simulation." *Journal of Evolution and Technology*, vol. 7 (2001).



<http://carimareventos.wordpress.com/2012/08/22/latidos-de-cubania/>



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## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #293 — DEC. 18, 2012

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### **When a President Must Try to Heal a Nation...**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 18, 2012)

Presidential biographer David Maraniss called this speech Obama's "Gettysburg Address." I think he is not far wrong. Now, if Congressmen only had backbones!

"Obama Newtown Speech: President Addresses Vigil for Sandy Hook Shooting Victims" (w/ video and full text), by Huffington Post

Dec. 16, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/16/obama-newtown-speech\\_n\\_2313295.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/16/obama-newtown-speech_n_2313295.html))



President Obama spoke at a prayer vigil in Newton, Connecticut on Sunday in honor of the victims of the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

Below, read Obama's full remarks as provided by the White House:

**THE PRESIDENT:** Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you, Governor. To all the families, first responders, to the community of Newtown, clergy, guests -- Scripture tells us: "...do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away...inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."

We gather here in memory of twenty beautiful children and six remarkable adults. They lost their lives in a school that could have been any school; in a quiet town full of good and decent people that could be any town in America.

Here in Newtown, I come to offer the love and prayers of a nation. I am very mindful that mere words cannot match the depths of your sorrow, nor can they heal your wounded hearts. I can only hope it helps for you to know that you're not alone in your grief; that our world too has been torn apart; that all across this land of ours, we have wept with you, we've pulled our children tight. And you must know that whatever measure of comfort we can provide, we will provide; whatever portion of sadness that we can share with you to ease this heavy load, we will gladly bear it. Newtown -- you are not alone.

As these difficult days have unfolded, you've also inspired us with stories of strength and resolve and sacrifice. We know that when danger arrived in the halls of Sandy Hook Elementary, the school's staff did not flinch, they did not hesitate. Dawn Hochsprung and Mary Sherlach, Vicki Soto, Lauren Rousseau, Rachel Davino and Anne Marie Murphy -- they responded as we all hope we might respond in such terrifying circumstances -- with courage and with love, giving their lives to protect the children in their care.

We know that there were other teachers who barricaded themselves inside classrooms, and kept steady through it all, and reassured their students by saying "wait for the good guys, they're coming"; "show me your smile."

And we know that good guys came. The first responders who raced to the scene, helping to guide those in harm's way to safety, and comfort those in need, holding at bay their own shock and trauma because they had a job to do, and others needed them more.

And then there were the scenes of the schoolchildren, helping one another, holding each other, dutifully following instructions in the way that young children sometimes do; one child even trying to encourage a grown-up by saying, "I know karate. So it's okay. I'll lead the way out." (Laughter.)

As a community, you've inspired us, Newtown. In the face of indescribable violence, in the face of unconscionable evil, you've looked out for each other, and you've cared for one another, and you've loved one another. This is how Newtown will be remembered. And with time, and God's grace, that love will see you through.

But we, as a nation, we are left with some hard questions. Someone once described the joy and anxiety of parenthood as the equivalent of having your heart outside of your body all the time, walking around. With their very first cry, this most precious, vital part of ourselves -- our child -- is suddenly exposed to the world, to possible mishap or malice. And every parent knows there is nothing we will not do to shield our children from harm. And yet, we also know that with that child's very first step, and each step after that, they are separating from us; that we won't -- that we can't always be there for them. They'll suffer sickness and setbacks and broken hearts and disappointments. And we learn that our most important job is to give them what they need to become self-reliant and capable and resilient, ready to face the world without fear.

And we know we can't do this by ourselves. It comes as a shock at a certain point where you realize, no matter how much you love these kids, you can't do it by yourself. That this job of keeping our children safe, and teaching them well, is something we can only do together, with the help of friends and neighbors, the help of a community, and the help of a nation. And in that way, we come to realize that we bear a responsibility for every child because we're counting on everybody else to help look after ours; that we're all parents; that they're all our children.

This is our first task -- caring for our children. It's our first job. If we don't get that right, we don't get anything right. That's how, as a society, we will be judged.

And by that measure, can we truly say, as a nation, that we are meeting our obligations? Can we honestly say that we're doing enough to keep our children -- all of them -- safe from harm? Can we claim, as a nation, that we're all together there, letting them know that they are loved, and teaching them to love in return? Can we say that we're truly doing enough to give all the children of this country the chance they deserve to live out their lives in happiness and with purpose?

I've been reflecting on this the last few days, and if we're honest with ourselves, the answer is no. We're not doing enough. And we will have to change.

Since I've been President, this is the fourth time we have come together to comfort a grieving community torn apart by a mass shooting. The fourth time we've hugged survivors. The fourth time we've consoled the families of victims. And in between, there have been an endless series of deadly shootings across the country, almost daily reports of victims, many of them children, in small towns and big cities all across America -- victims whose -- much of the time, their only fault was being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

We can't tolerate this anymore. These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change. We will be told that the causes of such violence are complex, and that is true. No single law -- no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world, or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society.

But that can't be an excuse for inaction. Surely, we can do better than this. If there is even one step we can take to save another child, or another parent, or another town, from the grief that has visited Tucson, and Aurora, and Oak Creek, and Newtown, and communities from Columbine to Blacksburg before that -- then surely we have an obligation to try.

In the coming weeks, I will use whatever power this office holds to engage my fellow citizens -- from law enforcement to mental health professionals to parents and educators -- in an effort aimed at preventing more tragedies like this. Because what choice do we have? We can't accept events like this as routine. Are we really prepared to say that we're powerless in the face of such carnage, that the politics are too hard? Are we prepared to say that such violence visited on our children year after year after year is somehow the price of our freedom?

All the world's religions -- so many of them represented here today -- start with a simple question: Why are we here? What gives our life meaning? What gives our acts purpose? We know our time on this Earth is fleeting. We know that we will each have our share of pleasure and pain; that even after we chase after some earthly goal, whether it's wealth or power or fame, or just simple comfort, we will, in some fashion, fall short of what we had hoped. We know that no matter how good our intentions, we will all stumble sometimes, in some way. We will make mistakes, we will experience hardships. And even when we're trying to do the right thing, we know that much of our time will be spent groping through the darkness, so often unable to discern God's heavenly plans.

There's only one thing we can be sure of, and that is the love that we have -- for our children, for our families, for each other. The warmth of a small child's embrace -- that is true. The memories we have of them, the joy that they bring, the wonder we see through their eyes, that fierce and boundless love we feel for them, a love that takes us out of ourselves, and binds us to something larger -- we know that's what matters. We know we're always doing right when we're taking care of them, when we're teaching them well, when we're showing acts of kindness. We don't go wrong when we do that.

That's what we can be sure of. And that's what you, the people of Newtown, have reminded us. That's how you've inspired us. You remind us what matters. And that's what should drive us forward in everything we do, for as long as God sees fit to keep us on this Earth.

"Let the little children come to me," Jesus said, "and do not hinder them -- for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."

Charlotte. Daniel. Olivia. Josephine. Ana. Dylan. Madeleine. Catherine. Chase. Jesse. James. Grace. Emilie. Jack. Noah. Caroline. Jessica. Benjamin. Avielle. Allison.

God has called them all home. For those of us who remain, let us find the strength to carry on, and make our country worthy of their memory.

May God bless and keep those we've lost in His heavenly place. May He grace those we still have with His holy comfort. And may He bless and watch over this community, and the United States of America. (Applause.)



20121217-01 8:50 MarthaH Guns and Schools

The shock is over, and the yellow school buses roll again this morning, dragging a bit perhaps in unified sadness and loss of more innocence. Certainly every teacher and retired teacher's focus today is on classrooms everywhere. We are all saying "I knew that kid"--withdrawn, hugging walls, friendless...and our society will treat broken bones but not damaged minds as too costly? What could I do to protect the students in my room if I heard shooting down the hall? Where and how would we survive, perhaps? What about the irrational and/or irate parents who shout and stop in the office? Did they dislike a grade a child earned from his work ethic and attitude? Blame a classmate for a shun of "her child"? What prices we pay...then we can throw in the gun debate, too. Along with a lot of trite phrases, I DETEST. "Guns don't kill people...." Why is our society so focused on them? The 2d Amendment's intent had to do with when there were immediate needs and no electronics to summon help, nor policemen handy on the frontier. Vs. now???? I grew up with hunting guns in our household, shot from an early age, and never thought of them as weapons when "things" went wrong as they always do. What household needs an AK-??? as a right? Our culture has turned so macho that they are all right with tattoos, tough guys, etc...but this was also a child, 20, and he had issues that could have gotten some help, perhaps... There were signs. We can't turn schools into armed camps to protect anyone. They are called PUBLIC schools! Children deserve to grow up with protecting adults, not selfish ones! The right-wing Supreme Court justices tout the intent of the Founding Fathers but don't read history? Hmm...I believe that unless the NRA sanctions it, there won't be any gun law changes...Money rules...at what cost? I am a believer that whenever and wherever it is my time, I will die, but protecting the innocent children is

the job of the adults...Where is the public will? OFF my soapbox...except to note: Write your members of Congress with your stand!

[20121217-02](#) 10:37 Jim Re: Our Boon or Doom? (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #292)

A follow-up on your robot story...

Video: "The Wrong Automation" (<http://www.youtube.com/embed/xWMkOwg2qIU?rel=0>)

[20121217-03](#) 16:29 SteveB Plan B? (to Republicans) & Dominos Pizza

I'm forwarding the Domino's deals (below, <http://www.dominos.com>) because I will no longer patronize them or Papa John's, so you are welcome to them. Universal health care is too important for grandstanding games. (Chick-fil-A I'm thinking about, but, so far, their chicken salad sandwich outweighs their religious fanaticism and anti-gayness.)

The Republican Plan A (R for Romney? E for Election?) failed. I told you it would. People are just not that stupid.

Now, what's Plan B? Anarchy?

Notes from a conversation with Dominos:

**SteveB:** I'm sorry to say I won't be eating any more Domino's pizzas. I read that your founder is suing the federal government (and Obamacare) over the contraception issue. To my mind, he can take his right-wing politics and shove them up his pepperoni. Your workers and customers (even former customers like me) deserve better!

**Dominos:** Domino's founder Tom Monaghan sold the company in 1998 and today has no active affiliation with our company. The media often neglect to note this fact. His views are not our views. Domino's Pizza has made no public statements about health care, as we are still waiting to see how the final rules will affect our network of small business owners. Domino's is not a political company; it is not a religious company -- we are a pizza company.

**SteveB:** I'm extremely happy to read this! Thank you for the quick, apolitical reply! You have my business, still.

This is the story AP is putting out, and I think it's very misleading! These people are sure hurting your business and good name! And, besides, I thought we were all for contraception, anyway, especially for the other guy. Mr. Monaghan should stick to pizza.

"Tom Monaghan, Domino's Pizza Founder: Obamacare Lawsuit Filed Over Mandatory Contraception Coverage" by AP

Dec. 17, 2012, (<http://www.wptv.com/dpp/news/national/tom-monaghan-dominos-pizza-founder-obamacare-lawsuit-filed-over-mandatory-contraception-coverage>)

(DETROIT) The founder of Domino's Pizza is suing the federal government over mandatory contraception coverage in the health care law.

Tom Monaghan, a devout Roman Catholic, says contraception isn't health care but a "gravely immoral" practice.

He filed a lawsuit Friday in federal court. It also lists as a plaintiff Domino's Farms, a Michigan office park complex that Monaghan owns.

Monaghan offers health insurance that excludes contraception and abortion for employees. The new federal law requires employers to offer insurance including contraception coverage or risk fines.

Monaghan says the law violates his rights, and is asking a judge to strike down the mandate. There are similar lawsuits pending nationwide.

A message left Saturday for Monaghan's attorney, Richard Thompson, was not immediately returned.

The government says the contraception mandate benefits women.

<a href="#">20121217-04</a>	17:53	Ben	Photo: Today's Healthy Lunch at Apple (Major Meat Weekend Precipitates Monday Salad Day)
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Some tasty looking stuff on the menu today, but after debauchery at Cooper's BBQ in Llano, TX (as well as leftovers therefrom) it seemed meet and right (get it?) to invoke a Salad Day:



Some Kind of Salad

20121217-05

23:56

Tom

Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #7



20121217-06

23:57

SteveB

Photo: Cats Imitating Art #4 (Joseph Ducreux, *Self Portrait Yawning*, 1780)





<http://wanderinggaia.com/2010/08/13/flight-of-the-condors/>



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

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<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>  
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## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #294 — DEC. 19, 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.**

### **Capitulator-in-Chief?**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 19, 2012)

Weak. Weak Weak. Why? Why? Why? Stand-up! Stand-up! Stand-up! Why give-in to a bunch of lying losers?

"Capitulation Is Never Popular. Or Effective." by Markos Moulitsas, Daily Kos

Dec. 18, 2012, (<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2012/12/18/1171777/-Capitulation-is-never-popular-Or-effective>)



# CAPITULATION

Because "Change Is Hard"

You won. Act like it. [Note: Dennis, it's "capitulation" not "copulation"! –SteveB]

If President Barack Obama has a flaw, it's his obviously overwhelming desire to appear reasonable and conciliatory and "work together" to find "compromise" and "get things done". Bipartisanly. With a sane, reasonable, conciliatory opposition, that approach would make sense. But after four years of getting slammed by Republicans eager to destroy his presidency, Obama still hasn't learned the lesson. He still thinks he's going to get rewarded for being the "adult in the room". Yeah, everything I've put inside scare quotes is a joke. A bad, painful joke.

So there's nothing better than headlines like this one, in the Washington Post, to deliver the lesson to the White House to, well, just quit being the Capitulator In Chief:

### A rough 24 hours for the White House

You see, Obama had drawn a line in the sand, and then -- to no one's surprise -- ended up capitulating on everything he said he'd never capitulate on.

A few weeks ago, the Obama administration was firm that they wouldn't budge on tax rates for income above \$250,000 and that they wouldn't budge on the debt ceiling. They've since budged on both.

And while Republicans are stupid, even they aren't that stupid.

Republicans increasingly think the White House will concede more now, and that if they don't concede more now they'll definitely give Republicans a better deal if threatened with debt default.

Capitulation is never a strength. A deal will obviously require concessions by the president, but you make those to FINISH the deal, not in the middle of negotiations, and not until after you've branded the opposition with the concessions they're demanding. If a final deal required concessions on chained CPI, then make sure it's the Republicans making those demands, and then make sure everyone *knows* it's the Republicans making those demands. Don't be the one making that offer, for chrissakes!

[White House allies] are disappointed to see an old dynamic reasserting itself: The president makes concessions, thinking he's close to a deal, and then the Republicans pocket those concessions, offering nothing but renewed threats to blow up the talks in return.

Yup, this is insanity. Not only is it brain dead stupid with regards to Republicans, but also betrays his own vice president and congressional caucus -- which had promised several times that Social Security (among other things) was off the table.

Worse, the pushback from congressional Democrats over chained CPI is stronger than the administration expected — note the outspoken opposition from Sen. Dick Durbin, an Obama ally who's often considered a barometer for pragmatic liberals.

At least some Democrats have learned the lessons of the 2012 elections -- that Republicans cannot win as long as Democrats turn out at the polls. And there's no better way to go back to the glory days of 2010, than to reprise the same pattern of appeasement and capitulation that led to unwarranted, unnecessary, and unpopular Republican legislative victories.

Obama wasn't elected to play nice with Republicans. He was elected to lead our nation and improve the lives of its citizens. The political reality is that he needs Republicans to pass legislation. But that doesn't mean he cedes the bully pulpit, solidly backed by the American people, in order to hand Republicans victories they didn't earn -- either in the court of public opinion or at the ballot box.

Tell President Obama to take Social Security cuts off the table, in current and in future negotiations:

[http://campaigns.dailykos.com/p/dia/action/public/?action\\_KEY=280&tag=1218Capitulation](http://campaigns.dailykos.com/p/dia/action/public/?action_KEY=280&tag=1218Capitulation).

"Invincible Ignorance" by Thomas Sowell, GOPUSA

Dec. 18, 2012, (<http://www.gopusa.com/commentary/2012/12/18/sowell-invincible-ignorance/?subscriber=1>)



Must every tragic mass shooting bring out the shrill ignorance of "gun control" advocates?

The key fallacy of so-called gun control laws is that such laws do not in fact control guns. They simply disarm law-abiding citizens, while people bent on violence find firearms readily available.

If gun control zealots had any respect for facts, they would have discovered this long ago, because there have been too many factual studies over the years to leave any serious doubt about gun control laws being not merely futile but counterproductive.

Places and times with the strongest gun control laws have often been places and times with high murder rates. Washington, D.C., is a classic example, but just one among many.

When it comes to the rate of gun ownership, that is higher in rural areas than in urban areas, but the murder rate is higher in urban areas. The rate of gun ownership is higher among whites than among blacks, but the murder rate is higher among blacks. For the country as a whole, hand gun ownership doubled in the late 20th century, while the murder rate went down.

The few counter-examples offered by gun control zealots do not stand up under scrutiny. Perhaps their strongest talking point is that Britain has stronger gun control laws than the United States and lower murder rates.

But, if you look back through history, you will find that Britain has had a lower murder rate than the United States for more than two centuries-- and, for most of that time, the British had no more stringent gun control laws than the United States. Indeed, neither country had stringent gun control for most of that time.

In the middle of the 20th century, you could buy a shotgun in London with no questions asked. New York, which at that time had had the stringent Sullivan Law restricting gun ownership since 1911, still had several times the gun murder rate of London, as well as several times the London murder rate with other weapons.

Neither guns nor gun control was not the reason for the difference in murder rates. People were the difference.

Yet many of the most zealous advocates of gun control laws, on both sides of the Atlantic, have also been advocates of leniency toward criminals.

In Britain, such people have been so successful that legal gun ownership has been reduced almost to the vanishing point, while even most convicted felons in Britain are not put behind bars. The crime rate, including the rate of crimes committed with guns, is far higher in Britain now than it was back in the days when there were few restrictions on Britons buying firearms.

In 1954, there were only a dozen armed robberies in London but, by the 1990s-- after decades of ever tightening gun ownership restrictions-- there were more than a hundred times as many armed robberies.

Gun control zealots' choice of Britain for comparison with the United States has been wholly tendentious, not only because it ignored the history of the two countries, but also because it ignored other countries with stronger gun control laws than the United States, such as Russia, Brazil and Mexico. All of these countries have higher murder rates than the United States.

You could compare other sets of countries and get similar results. Gun ownership has been three times as high in Switzerland as in Germany, but the Swiss have had lower murder rates. Other countries with high rates of gun ownership and low murder rates include Israel, New Zealand, and Finland.

Guns are not the problem. People are the problem-- including people who are determined to push gun control laws, either in ignorance of the facts or in defiance of the facts.

There is innocent ignorance and there is invincible, dogmatic and self-righteous ignorance. Every tragic mass shooting seems to bring out examples of both among gun control advocates.

Some years back, there was a professor whose advocacy of gun control led him to produce a "study" that became so discredited that he resigned from his university. This column predicted at the time that this discredited study would continue to be cited by gun control advocates. But I had no idea that this would happen the very next week in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

(Thomas Sowell is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University, Stanford, CA 94305. His Web site is <http://www.tsowell.com>.)

"Mr. Rogers Photo, Words of Advice Go Viral in Wake of Shootings" by Courtney Hazlett, Today

Dec. 17, 2012, (<http://todayentertainment.today.com/news/2012/12/17/15969444-mr-rogers-photo-words-of-advice-go-viral-in-wake-of-shootings>)



Fred Rogers meets children at a school in Pittsburgh in a photograph taken by Jim Judkis. [What a wonderful photo! This is what life should be like! Full of wonder and joy! –SteveB]

During a time when so many are wondering how to talk to their children about the school massacre in Newtown, Conn., some familiar voices of reassurance have surfaced online. Among them is Fred Rogers, even though the children's television icon passed away in 2003.

"Mister Rogers Neighborhood" went off the air in 2001, but the TV host's calm approach and knack for relating to kids is being called upon now. In a message that's gone viral on Facebook, and originated on PBS' "Helping Children Deal with Tragic Events" web page, Rogers talks about what his mother taught him when it came to scary situations.

"When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, '**Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping,**'" Rogers said. "To this day, especially in times of 'disaster,' I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers -- so many caring people in this world."

On the Facebook page 170 Million Americans for Public Broadcasting, the words were attached to a photo showing Rogers interacting with a young child. More than 48,000 people "liked" the image and 88,000 had shared it by Monday afternoon.

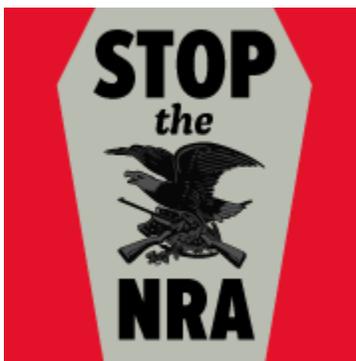
On the Washington Post website, Maura Judkis wrote about the photograph, which was taken by her father Jim Judkis during a shoot for People magazine. The photographer is sure that if Rogers were alive today, he'd be doing anything he could to help the children of Newtown.

LeVar Burton, who hosted "Reading Rainbow" on PBS from 1983-2005, shared his own thoughts on the Reading Rainbow blog. "I offer prayers for the families and the community devastated by this violence against the innocent. This year has seen several tragic shootings which are terrifying for all of us. When this happens in an elementary school, a place of safety, of learning, of play, our suffering is amplified. It would be best of course if children never have to hear about events like these, however that is not the world we seem to live in!"

"Sesame Street," another childhood mainstay, is not going to air a special episode aimed at addressing the events in Connecticut, but has posted resources online to help parents talk about what their kids might be seeing or hearing.

20121218-03	12:35	SteveB	Fw: CREDO Action Petition: Tell the NRA to Stand Down!
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from CREDO Action:



"Teachers stand up to gunmen, but Congress won't stand up to the NRA." That's what one of the signs read when hundreds of people joined CREDO's Emergency March on the NRA in Washington, DC.

After the shooter Adam Lanza, no one is more to blame for the massacre of 20 first graders and six adults at the Sandy Hook Elementary School than the National Rifle Association. In order to stop the senseless killing we must first stop the NRA.

The National Rifle Association is a powerful lobby that pretends to represent gun owners. But in reality, it represents the deadly interests of arms dealers and gun manufacturers. And it has been astonishingly successful at blocking regulations that would keep our children safe from gun violence.

In the wake of the Sandy Hook massacre, CREDO organized hundreds of people to march on the National Rifle Association's lobbying office. An action described by The New York Times as a "protest in Washington on Monday against the National Rifle Association, which has virtually unmatched ferocity in advancing its political and legislative interests." We chanted "Shame on the NRA!" and delivered one simple demand: Stand down and let us pass gun control.

Most NRA members are unaware of the organization's extreme stances that have blocked the passage of any major piece of gun legislation in nearly two decades.

Through lobbying, campaign spending, and inciting a paranoia about government among a radical fringe in their membership, the NRA has helped defeat common sense gun measures that polls show an overwhelming majority of gun owners support.

The NRA has successfully blocked efforts to limit the ability to purchase military-style semi-automatic assault rifles and high capacity ammunition clips.

The NRA has successfully blocked efforts to restrict weapons sales to individuals on the U.S. terrorism watch list.

The NRA successfully defeated the U.N. Arms Trade Treaty which would have required countries exporting conventional weapons to certify that they weren't being shipped to a terrorist group or a nation under a U.N. arms embargo like North Korea or Iran.

It's time to end the tyranny of guns. Tell the NRA to stand down, and allow Congress and the President to pass gun control legislation.

In the wake of the Sandy Hook Elementary School massacre there is momentum in Washington, DC to pass commonsense federal reforms including ensuring that a background check is conducted whenever a gun is sold, banning the sales of military-style assault weapons and high capacity ammunition magazines, and making arms trafficking a federal crime.

As Senator Manchin's former Chief of Staff explained in the Huffington Post, "Unlike some interest groups, where it is money that creates influence, here it is more the threat of response... The idea is that if you come out for any type of gun control, any type of common-sense reform, they are going to come after you, especially if you are a red-state Democrat. And they will paint you with a broad brush as being anti-gun."

After the massacre not a single one of the 31 senators who received an A grade from the NRA would agree to appear on the influential Sunday morning talk show, Meet the Press. But then Sen. Joe Manchin, a stalwart NRA supporter, said that "the massacre of so many innocent children has changed — has changed America" and that gun control should be up for debate.

This is a rare moment where change is possible. We need to prove ourselves worthy of this moment. In his address to the nation, President Obama vowed "to take meaningful action."<sup>10</sup> We will hold him accountable for sending legislation to Capitol Hill to address the crisis of gun violence in this country. But Congress, which for decades has bowed to self-interest when called to courage on the issue of guns, is not likely to pass any bill proposed by the White House if we don't stand up and force the NRA to stand down.

Tell the NRA to stand down, and allow Congress and the President to pass gun control legislation. Click the link below and sign the petition:

[http://www.credoaction.com/campaign/nra\\_stand\\_down/?rc=homepage](http://www.credoaction.com/campaign/nra_stand_down/?rc=homepage).

Together, we can make this happen. —Becky Bond, Campaign Manager

20121218-05	15:10	SandyI	Just Thinking about the Newtown Tragedy
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Have already written President, and Congress to urge gun control. Having been exposed to "legal weapons" rather recently, this is hitting close to home.

Have you read seen the FB by Morgan Freeman who asks not to remember the name of the shooter(s) but of their victims? And the article of the mother who says she could have been the mother of the shooter because her 13 year old, brilliant son is out of control and un-controllable? The time is now to at least make those guns that are assault weapons illegal at least and to make it more difficult for felons and those with mental issues unable to purchase legal guns. Make a start and make it now.

I see Westboro is promising a visit to the funerals in CT.



We all could use a little lift from a friend.

[20121218-06](#) 15:35 Pam Re: Just Thinking about the Newtown Tragedy (reply to SandyI, above)

I was listening to NPR this afternoon, and there was a discussion of what to do about guns and the mentally ill in this country. We don't want to over-react and stigmatize everyone who has mental problems, but we most certainly need to pay more attention to the needs of individuals and families that are dealing with these intractable issues. Martha, your comment about how teachers are all too familiar with those lone students, who lurk around, talk to no one, and seem--well--creepy, is right on target. (Bad choice of words.) That's not to say they're all crazy enough to shoot someone, but it's like a snake. When you see one, you recognize the danger and react immediately (at least I DO).

I have never understood why guns can't be licensed and registered like cars are. Why is that a big deal? It's only common sense, and it doesn't violate the Constitution. Americans are allowed to maintain a "well-regulated militia," but some folks have forgotten the words "well-regulated." We're living in crazy times, and we're turning into a crazy, dysfunctional society. I wish I knew what I could do to make a difference--I know, write my Congressmen.

We cannot leave it to families to solve this. I raised a son who was out-of-control and uncontrollable, and believe me I needed all the help I could get. I think he's doing OK now, but his last arrest was as a felon in possession of a firearm. Something is very wrong when convicted criminals can get hold of guns. And NO ONE needs an assault weapon for any reason! Maybe after this horrific tragedy, the country will wake up and shake off the NRA and all the nut jobs who are unleashing such chaos in the name of "freedom."

[20121218-07](#) 16:09 Art Re: Just Thinking about the Newtown Tragedy (reply to Pam, above)

All good points. Heard last evening that 1 in 17 Americans has some sort of mental illness and only 1/3 are getting treatment. By my math that is about 19 million with mental illness and 12 some million are not even being seen. Add to that the fact that we have guns laying around everywhere (about 300M I think) and guess what? Surprise, surprise!

There are solutions. Pam you are absolutely correct. The first step is simple. Stop all sales of assault rifles, 20 and 30 rounds magazines for pistols, small pocket sized hand guns and all other paramilitary type equipment. I think the next step would be to require all those type weapons currently in the hands of people to be registered and documented. Treat them much as you would an automobile ( a parallel the gun morons love to throw up). Require licensing, periodic renewals, insurance etc.

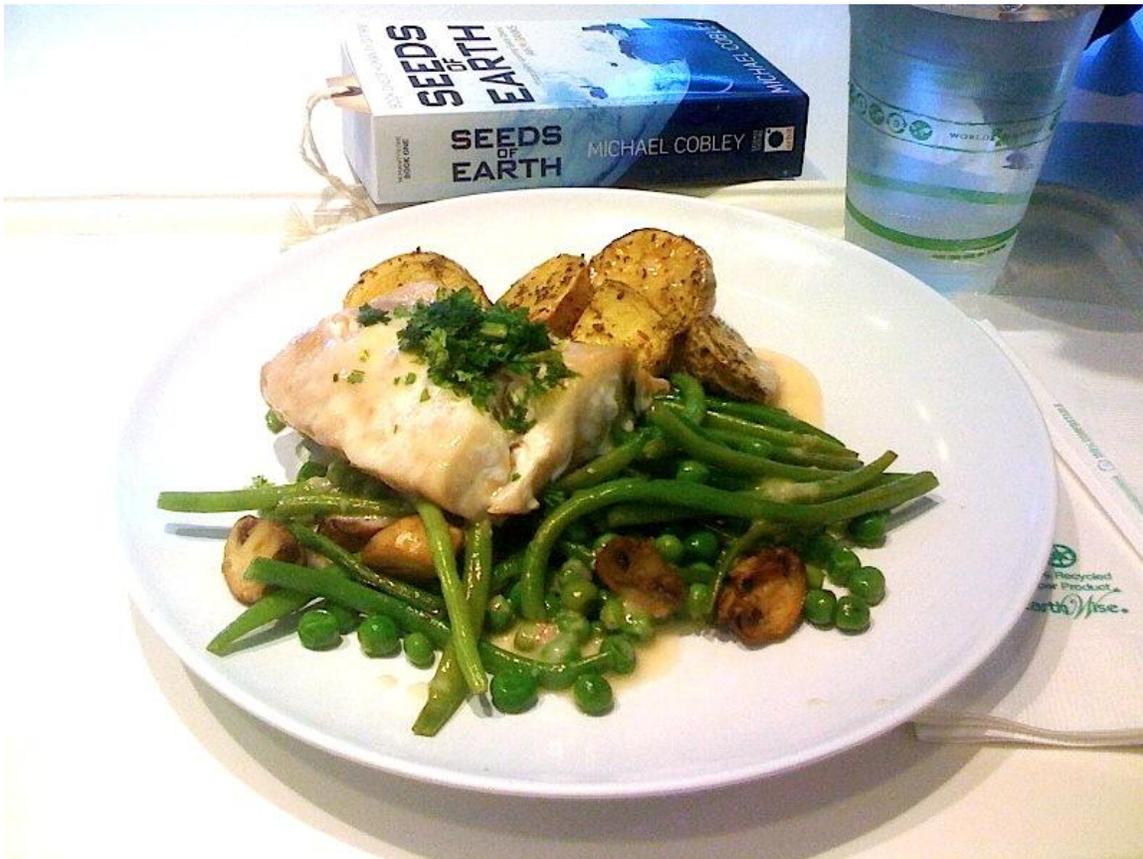
This alone would cut deaths but a huge margin I am sure. Make people libel for the use of their guns by others. This would make many think twice about having extensive arsenals in their homes, if they have relatives, children etc who may not be mentally well balanced. Pam, I don't know your situation but I suspect that thought crossed your mind a time or two.

Next require a two week waiting period to buy a gun. Require mandatory gun safety training, paid for by the purchaser. Regulate all gun shows and gun show purchases just like sales from gun stores.

These few and really fairly simple steps would put this country on the right path to getting this under control. It will not really impact the 2nd Amendment at all, but of course the gun manufactures and their NRA lackys will scream bloody murder.

20121218-04 15:05 Ben Photo: Today's Seafood Lunch at Apple

I have grown to love tilefish since the cafeteria first introduced me to it. I had seen it - the whole fish - in markets before, but never had it. It's a beautiful dense, rich, large-flaked flesh with a sweet mild flavor, and Chef Kelli laid out a lovely big filet of it over a generous heap of *haricots verts* with sweet green English peas and baby portabellae and roasted potatoes, topped with fresh parsley flakes and a delicious, tangy lemon vinaigrette. A most delicious lunch, of just the sort (fish and veggies) I'd love to eat every day:



Texas Tilefish, Roasted Potatoes, Peas, HVerts, and Tiny Portabella

20121218-08

23:56

Tom

Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #8



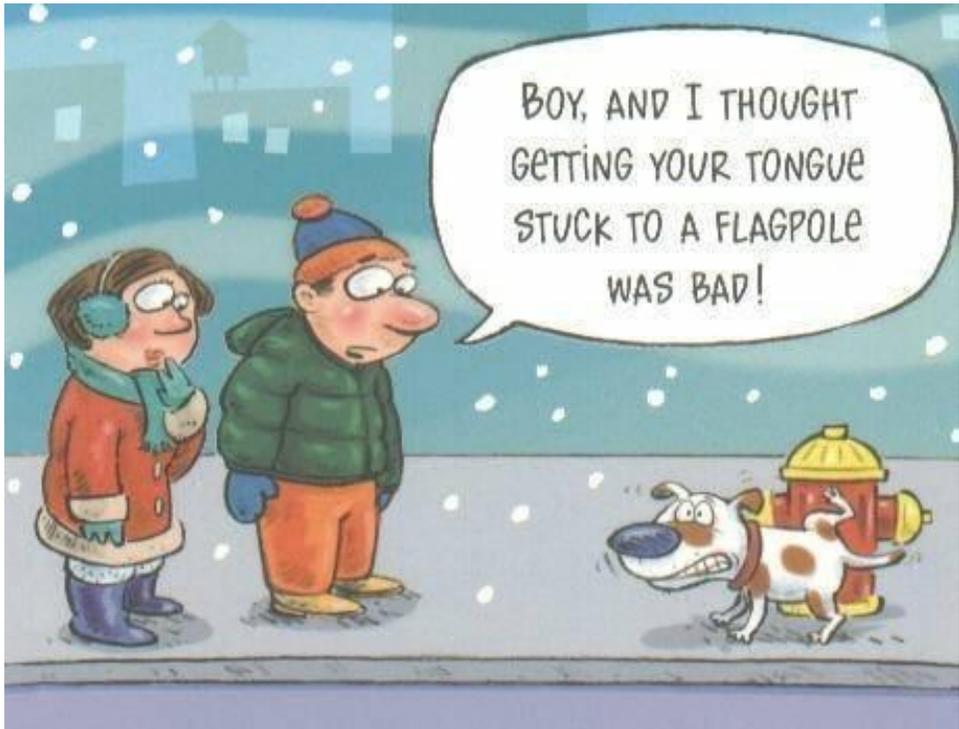
20121218-09

23:57

SteveB

Photo: Cats Imitating Art #5 (Mary Cassat, *Breakfast in Bed*, 1897)





[http://twosideddivinity.blogspot.com/2011\\_02\\_01\\_archive.html](http://twosideddivinity.blogspot.com/2011_02_01_archive.html)



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #295 — DEC. 20, 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.**

## **Lock and Load**

(posted by SandyI and MarthaH, Dec. 20, 2012)

So refreshing to hear a voice of reason in all the madness but then I agree with him and simply can not understand people who want more guns to make us safer. Perhaps, because I so recently heard someone load many guns to "not let them take me" I am biased against guns but then maybe, just maybe, that experience convinced me that the Second Amendment is incorrectly interpreted accidentally on purpose. —SandyI

"On Guns, Take Action Now" by Eugene Robinson, *The Washington Post*

Dec. 17, 2012, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-on-guns-take-action-now/2012/12/17/5f300f98-4888-11e2-ad54-580638ede391\\_story.html?hpid=z2](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/eugene-robinson-on-guns-take-action-now/2012/12/17/5f300f98-4888-11e2-ad54-580638ede391_story.html?hpid=z2))



We are not helpless to stop the massacre of innocent children. We must begin — today, right now, this minute — taking guns out of the hands of madmen, and the first step should be a ban on military-style assault weapons such as the rifle used to turn a Connecticut school into a slaughterhouse.

That won't be enough to end all the carnage, but it will save some lives. It is admirable that President Obama, members of Congress and other elected officials are deeply horrified and saddened by what happened Friday in Newtown. But the moment calls for action, not words, and politicians who are too craven or stupid or ideologically rigid to finally move forward on gun control will have the blood of future victims on their hands.

We must begin with the guns.

Yes, there are other factors that play their roles in these mass shootings. We need to talk about mental-health issues. We need to explore why the assassin is always a troubled young man whose alienation was noticed by others but not adequately addressed. We need to examine the impact of hyper-violent video games on impressionable minds. We need to remember that horrors such as Columbine, Blacksburg, Aurora, Tucson and Newtown are statistically insignificant compared to the everyday bloodshed on our streets and in our homes.

But we have to start somewhere. If we wait for a perfect, comprehensive, foolproof solution, we'll do nothing. Tough, aggressively enforced, nationwide gun control is the most effective single initiative we could undertake, and shame on us if we wait another month, another week, another day.

The National Rifle Association and other apologists for murder will object, of course. They will say that Connecticut's gun control laws are already among the nation's toughest, and yet they failed to prevent Adam Lanza from annihilating 20 children and six adults at Sandy Hook Elementary School, his mother and himself. Therefore, these sophists will argue, gun control doesn't work.

What a crock. The truth is that gun control is ineffective because laws considered "tough" are, in reality, tragically weak.

There is no reason an everyday citizen needs to possess a Bushmaster AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle — the gun used not only in Newtown but in the Aurora, Colo., movie theater shootings and as recently as last week in a deadly shooting at a shopping mall near Portland, Ore. At the very least, these high-powered weapons developed for use by soldiers, not hunters, should be outlawed — and surrendered to authorities for destruction.

Lanza's mother had the Bushmaster and several other guns in her arsenal, and because of the Second Amendment, it is hard to imagine legislation that could have eliminated all of them. But she knew her 20-year-old son had profound psychological problems. She should at least have been required to keep her weapons under lock and key, securely out of his reach.

If you buy a gun for "protection," it probably will never be fired in anger. There is almost no chance you will ever use it to defend yourself against an intruder. Much more likely than the home-invasion scenario is that you will use the weapon on yourself or someone you know — or that someone else in the household will use it, perhaps on himself or herself, perhaps on you.

That some right-wing lawmakers and commentators have responded to Newtown by calling for teachers, principals and campus security guards to be armed is beyond obscene — and beneath contempt. More guns, with amateurs firing every which way, surely would have meant more dead children and more grieving families.

"We can't tolerate this anymore," Obama said Sunday at the Newtown memorial service, the fourth such sad ceremony he has attended during his four years in office.

"These tragedies must end. And to end them, we must change," Obama said. "We will be told that the causes of such violence are complex, and that is true. No single law, no set of laws can eliminate evil from the world or prevent every senseless act of violence in our society, but that can't be an excuse for inaction. Surely we can do better than this."

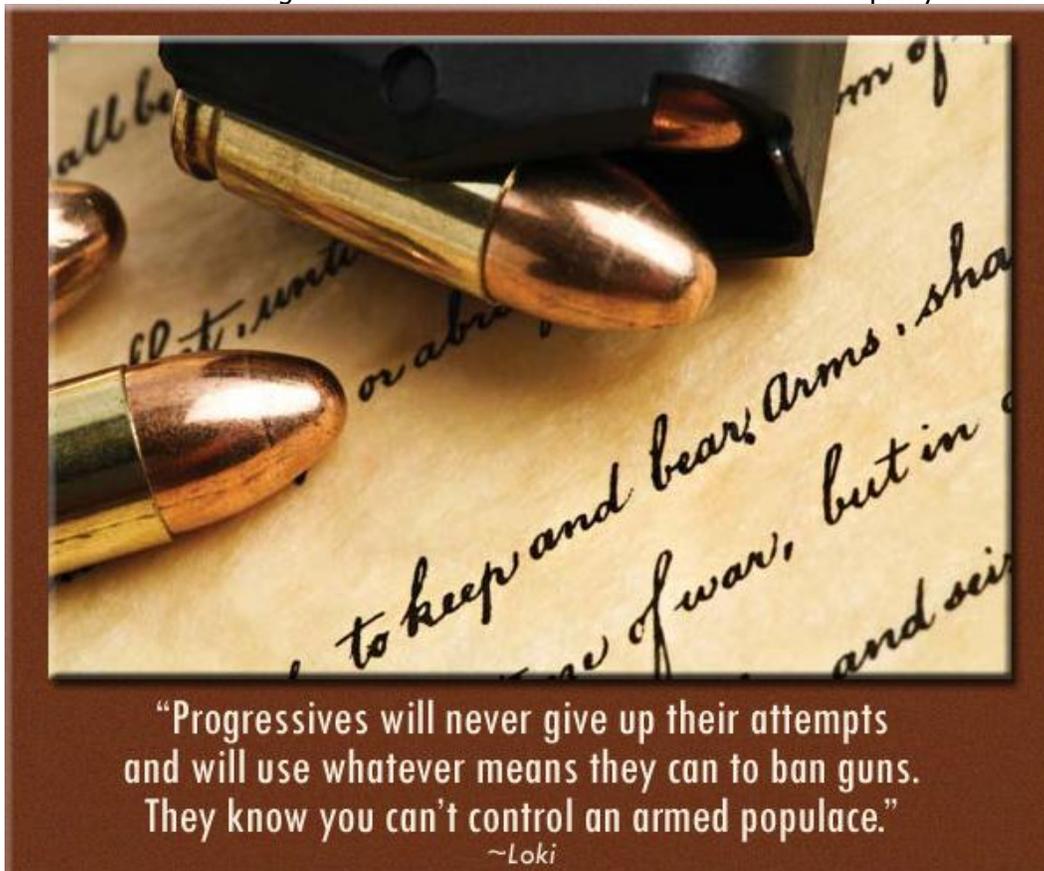
We can, and we must. We should begin with a strict assault weapons ban. Here are 20 reasons why:

Charlotte Bacon, 6. Daniel Barden, 7. Olivia Engel, 6. Josephine Gay, 7. Dylan Hockley, 6. Madeleine Hsu, 6. Catherine Hubbard, 6. Chase Kowalski, 7. Jesse Lewis, 6. Ana Marquez-Greene, 6. James Mattioli, 6. Grace McDonnell, 7. Emilie Parker, 6. Jack Pinto, 6. Noah Pozner, 6. Caroline Previdi, 6. Jessica Rekos, 6. Avielle Richman, 6. Benjamin Wheeler, 6. Allison Wyatt, 6.

Dogs Sent to Newtown to Comfort Grieving Children



Damn betcha! Is this what the Right wants—to be out of control? Wonderful! Stupidity and evil unleashed!



20121219-01 14:48 Pam Re: Lock and Load (reply to SandyI & MarthaH, above)

I can hardly bear to watch the news, so I'm not entirely up to speed on what Obama is doing about the Newtown shootings. I agree with everyone who is calling for him to stand up to the gun lobby. I am so sick and tired of the argument "guns don't kill people; people kill people." Well, arsenic doesn't kill people, poisoners do. That doesn't mean the sale of arsenic isn't regulated. Our murder rate by guns is off the charts compared to other developed countries, not that I consider us very developed in this regard. Enough is enough. I don't want to hear that there's nothing we can do. I don't want anyone to be able to buy a gun online or without an extensive background check, proper training, registration of the gun, and a license to possess firearms. This is common sense, not a conspiracy to enslave us. This is not a choice between security and liberty; it's about taking the necessary precautions to ensure the safety of all of us, especially innocent little children. We need options for the mentally ill and their families that don't require prison or homelessness, which is what we've got today. I don't want to chain crazy people to a wall, but I don't want them walking down my street either. There must be a balance somewhere if politicians would cut the crap and do what's right.

20121219-03 15:20 Dennis Re: Lock and Load (reply to Pam, above)

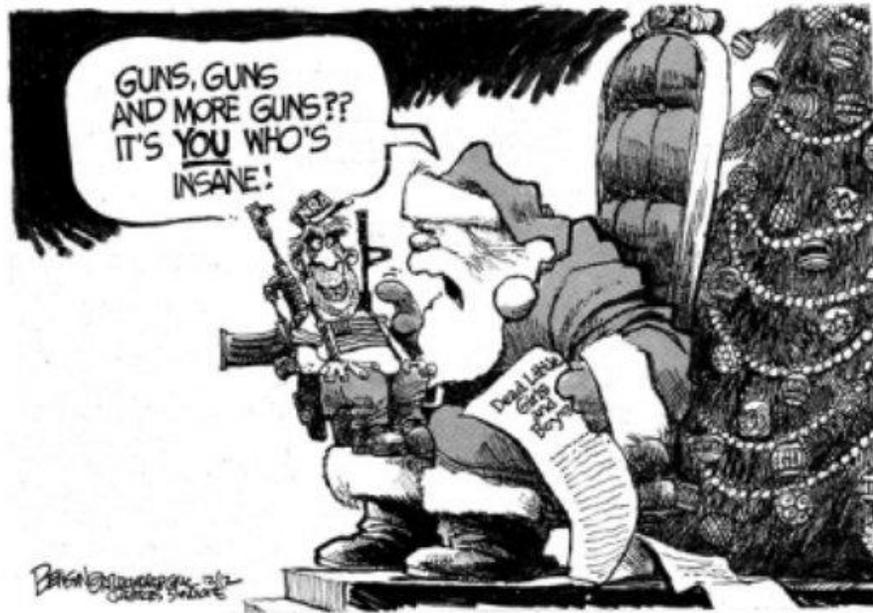
Assuming that the Second Amendment guarantees the right to own guns -- which it has only been interpreted as such since being hijacked by the radical right-wing in the 1970s -- I maintain that insuring the Constitutional right to "domestic Tranquility" supersedes it. 30,000 deaths per year by guns is hardly the mark of a tranquil society. There are all sorts of attempts at scapegoating going around, including blaming mental illness, video games, abortions (thanks for that brilliant insight Hucklebee), et al. Apparently having 87% of the guns in all the 23 wealthiest countries doesn't register as the problem with the macho exponents of weapons of mass murder who fund the domestic terrorist organization that the NRA has become.

20121219-05 17:05 Pam Re: Lock and Load (reply to Dennis, above)

Well said. I'm in total agreement. We still need better options for the mentally ill though.

20121219-07 19:15 Dennis Re: Lock and Load (reply to Pam, above)

I did casework with mental patients at one time and I can attest that they were not nearly as crazy as some right-wing ideologues. Dealing with America's obsession with gun violence should start with confronting domestic terrorists like the leaders of the NRA: <https://www.facebook.com/OccupyTheNRA>.



It was a yummy as it is lovely. Pale white delicate flounder, with a creamy tart yougurt dill sauce, over fragrant lemony cous cous. Delicious crunchy slices of roasted baby root vegetables: parsnips, turnips, pale beets, garnished with a generous dollop of tangy, vividly green-and-purple beet greens. This was a plate of balanced balanced textures and flavors that .... I want to take a nap, now... I am so spoiled...



Baked Flounder with Dill Sauce and Root Vegetables

20121219-06

18:24

SteveB

"Rearranging the Deck Chairs on the Republican *Titanic*" & "Why the Formerly Grand Old Party Needs to Change & Won't"

"Rearranging the Deck Chairs on the Republican *Titanic*" by Tom Engelhardt, TomDispatch

Dec. 13, 2012, (<http://www.tomdispatch.com/blog/175628/>)

It's barely a month since Election 2012 put Barack Obama back in the White House and Mitt Romney in the Republican doghouse (or even perhaps on the roof of the GOP's family car). Still, TomDispatch is already behind the eight ball in its election coverage. After all, we're still thinking about the past election while the rest of the media didn't take a breath before launching campaign 2016. And here's the real question that, it turns out, should rivet us all: Will Hillary run? Reporters and pundits were already asking even before Election Day. Immediately after the votes were counted, the first Iowa poll came in. (She was way ahead of Vice President Biden and New York Governor Cuomo.) Now you can hardly avoid the subject of how invincible she would be -- unless you care to jump off that "fiscal cliff."

Last week, "will she or won't she?" hit the front page of the *New York Times* in a piece that highlighted all the truly crucial and confounding political conundrums of our moment. Can Hillary, for instance, make piles of money working for law firms handling clients from the wrong -- i.e., rich -- side of the tracks or can she forge a new monumentally moneymaking life "advising foreign countries on geopolitical risk, or at an investment bank or a private equity firm"? Yes, without a doubt is the answer in all cases, but not, it seems, if she wants to run for president. The poor woman might have to rely on peddling (for multi-millions) a tell-nothing tome on her years traveling the world as secretary of state doing... well, whatever. (Again, if she wants to run for president, it's common wisdom in Washington and in the media that you can't write a book with genuine content -- it might be used against you!)

Yes, folks, get ready for 2016 early and often. In the supersized, never-ending American election season it's going to be a meaty four years of media speculation.

At the moment, it seems that the only question outrunning Hillary & Co. is: Can we avoid that dreaded fiscal cliff (and all the mixed metaphors that go with it)? You hear it intoned relentlessly on the nightly news, with accompanying countdowns ("only 20 days to...") and everything but Jaws-style ominous music. Of course, the tectonic political plates that raised that cliff we may "go over" and the river of money that gouged out the abyss into which we may "fall" were Washington-made and the cliff itself, like any fabulous stage set, is potentially moveable. Still, let's keep our eye on the ball. And while we're revving up for the ultimate Washington clash about cliffing it -- to jump, or not to jump: that is the question -- and preparing for the Democratic presidential race to 2016, let's not forget those Republican'ts. What's the story there?

We considered conducting a TomDispatch séance to get in touch with them, since these days they reportedly live in another world that may be located somewhere in the vicinity of planet Earth. Instead, we decided to turn to Jeremiah Goulka, our resident "former Republican," to fill us in on just what to make of the cliff -- fiscal, physical, or demographic -- that the Republican'ts are threatening to throw themselves off in the wake of Mitt Romney's defeat.

"Why the Formerly Grand Old Party Needs to Change and Won't" by Jeremiah Goulka, TomDispatch (see above)

Mitt Romney had hardly conceded before Republicans started fighting over where to head next. Some Republicans -- and many Democrats -- now claim that the writing is on the wall: demography is destiny, which means the GOP is going the way of the Whigs and the Dodo. Across the country, they see an aging white majority shrinking as the U.S. heads for the future as a majority-minority country and the Grand Old Party becomes the Gray Old Party. Others say: not so fast.

In the month since 51% of the electorate chose to keep Barack Obama in the White House, I've spent my time listening to GOP pundits, operators, and voters. While the Party busily analyzes the results, its leaders and factions are already out front, pushing their own long-held opinions and calling for calm in the face of onrushing problems.

Do any of their proposals exhibit a willingness to make the kind of changes the GOP will need to attract members of the growing groups that the GOP has spent years antagonizing like Hispanics, Asian Americans, unmarried women, secular whites, and others? In a word: no.

Instead, from my informal survey, it looks to this observer (and former Republican) as if the party is betting all its money on cosmetic change. Think of it as the Botox Solution. It wants to tweak its talking points slightly and put more minority and female Republicans on stage as spokespeople. Many in the GOP seem to believe that this will do the trick in 2014 and beyond. Are they deluded?

You've heard the expression "putting lipstick on a pig," haven't you?

### The Blame Game and the Short-Term Outlook

Although most Republicans see hints of future demographic challenges in the exit polls, many prefer to focus on other factors to explain Romney's loss out of a desire not to "blow up the party if there are less radical solutions." (Hence, the delusional quality of so many of their post-mortems and the lack of interest in meaningful change.)

1. They cite the Romney factor: a weak candidate, too moderate -- or too conservative -- who failed to fight the Obama campaign's early efforts to paint him as an out-of-touch plutocrat. In other words, his history (Bain Capital and Romneycare) depth-charged him before demographics could even kick in. He was, unfortunately, the perfect quarter-billionaire candidate for a Democratic narrative that the GOP is only out for the rich and doesn't "care about people like me." (He predictably lost that exit poll question by a margin of 81% to 18%). Running a "vulture capitalist" (and a Mormon) drove a number of Republican voters to stay home or even -- gasp! -- vote for Obama. It's a mistake that won't be repeated in 2016.

2. They point to the Obama factor. In both 2008 and 2012, he attracted unprecedented levels of minority and young voters, a phenomenon that might not be repeated in 2016. Some Republican operatives are also convinced that his campaign simply had a much better "ground game" and grasp of how to employ technology to turn out voters. (Half of self-identifying Republican voters think, as they did in 2008, that Obama simply stole the election through registration fraud involving African Americans.)

3. They emphasize the powers of incumbency. Romney only became the presumptive front-runner because the GOP's A-list -- mostly too young in any case -- feared the huge advantage an incumbent president enjoys and stayed home. 2016, they swear, will be different. Nor do they seem to fear a reprise of the 2008 and 2012 primary circuses because the A-listers in 2016, they insist, will all have well-established conservative bona fides and won't have to bend over backwards to cultivate the conservative base.

Trying to appeal to the Right while facing various nutcase candidates, Romney shot himself in both feet, labeling himself a "severe conservative" and staking an extreme anti-immigration position. George W. Bush, on the other hand, could run as a "compassionate conservative" in 2000 because his street cred on the Right was unchallengeable. Indeed, Paul Ryan is already talking up "compassion," while Ted Cruz, the new (extreme) senator from Texas, is hawking "opportunity conservatism."

4. There is the perceived success of Republicans other than Romney, particularly in what white Republicans call the "Heartland." GOP operatives are still angry at Todd Akin and Richard Mourdock for losing two gimme Senate seats to the Dems by "saying stupid things" (in the words of Bobby Jindal, Louisiana governor and frequent visitor to Iowa), and they wonder how they lost in Montana and North Dakota.

Still, they kept their majority in the House of Representatives, losing only a handful of seats. (That the GOP lost the majority of total votes cast gets less attention.) The Party also added a 30th governor to its roster, and held onto its control of the majority of top offices and legislative chambers in the states. Come 2014, GOP operatives expect the Party to do quite nicely, as the opposition party often does in midterm elections, especially if turnout demographics look like 2006 and 2010. Another lesson many movement conservatives have learned is that the more they pound away on their issues, the more they shift American politics rightward even when they lose.

All of this suggests to anxious Republicans that they are not crazy for seeing no immediate need to make big changes to appeal to demographic groups outside the Party's aging white base. But the short term is likely to be short indeed. Think of them, then, as the POD or the Party of Denial.

#### Meanwhile, on the Bridge of the *Titanic*

Avoid it as they may, the long-term picture couldn't look grimmer for the Party. Demographics may well be destiny. Even a cursory look at the numbers exposes the looming threat to the Party's future prospects.

- **Whites:** About three-quarters of the electorate (and 88% of Romney's voters) this year were white, but their numbers are steadily sinking -- by 2% since 2008. Yes, many whites may have stayed home this year, turned off by Mr. Car Elevator, but whites are projected to become a demographic minority by 2050 -- or possibly even before 2040 -- and minority births are now outpacing white births.

- **White Christians:** The bulk of Romney's supporters (79%) were white Christians (40% of whom were evangelicals), but this is an aging and shrinking group. Three-quarters of senior voters but only a quarter of millennial voters are white Christians, and the generations in between are much less likely to consider themselves "strong" members of their religion than seniors. (Non-white Christians, Jews, observers of other faiths, and the growing number of the religiously-unaffiliated all overwhelmingly vote for Democrats.)

- **Hispanics:** According to the *Washington Post* exit polls, Obama received 71% of the Hispanic vote in 2012 (67% in 2008). Already 10% of this year's voters (9% in 2008), the Hispanic population is exploding, accounting for half of U.S. population growth.

- **Asian Americans:** The nation's fastest growing demographic group -- now 3% of this year's voters (2% in 2008) -- gave Obama 73% of its vote in 2012 (62% in 2008).

- **Unmarried Women:** The percentage of unmarried women has been growing slowly since the 1970s, about 48% of women as of last year. Even among subgroups favoring Obama, there was a marriage gap in which unmarried women (23% of this year's voters) favored Obama by huge margins. Despite winning 53% of (mostly white) married women, 31% of this year's voters (down from 33% in 2008), Romney lost women overall by 11 points.

- **The Young:** The millennial generation (born between 1978 and 2000) has been voting overwhelmingly for Democrats (66% for Obama in 2008, 60% this year). They are projected to be 40% of the eligible voting pool by 2020. Because they are relatively diverse and secular, the GOP cannot assume that enough will emulate previous generations and swing to the right as they age.

Such polling figures should frighten GOP leaders. There's no reason to believe that what we saw on November 6th was anything but the tip of the iceberg.

The factions in the party that are not socially conservative see these looming threats as an opportunity to get the GOP to drop the social stuff. But movement conservatives aren't going to cede ideological ground, not when they (correctly) think it's a necessity if they are to attract their base voters. "This country doesn't need two liberal or Democratic parties," is the way Bobby Jindal puts it, typically enough.

Like right-wing pundit Fred Barnes, many movement conservatives and Tea Party leaders will continue to insist that whites are going to remain "the nation's dominant voting bloc... for many elections to come." Hedging their bets, they have decided to become more "inclusive" or at least just inclusive enough in these days of micro-targeting and razor-thin election margins. After all, Romney would have won New Mexico, Florida, Nevada, and Colorado if he had captured even slightly higher shares of the Hispanic vote and he could have won in the Electoral College if fewer than 200,000 voters in key states had switched their votes.

To get more inclusive, however, these leaders offer an entirely cosmetic approach: emphasize the Party's middle-class message, increase outreach or "partnership" with Hispanics and Asian Americans, back off the anti-immigration message a tad, say fewer stupid things à la Akin and Mourdock, cross your fingers, and hope for the best.

### A Nonsense Strategy

When it comes to why this won't work down the line, it's hard to know where to start. Take that middle-class message. Many Republicans think that it should offer "crossover appeal" on its own, so long as it's said loudly enough.

But what exactly is it? After all, it's never about jobs going abroad, retirement worries (except insofar as the GOP wants to increase insecurity by privatizing Social Security), underwater mortgages, missing childcare for working families, exploding higher education costs, or what global warming is doing to the Midwestern breadbasket and coastal agriculture (much less the long-term capability of the planet to sustain life as we know it). Instead, it remains about "choice," lowering taxes (again), "entitlement reform," and getting the government out of the way of economic growth.

As if what the middle class really wants or needs is "choice" in education (Jindal's plan to divert tax funds to private and parochial schools through vouchers was just ruled unconstitutional); "choice," not affordability, in health care (the #1 cause of personal bankruptcy in America); and ever more environmental pollution, as well as further challenges to getting workman's comp if you get injured on the job.

Studies have repeatedly shown that most Americans are "operationally" liberal on the substance of most policy issues. In other words, Republicans will support "small government," until you ask about cutting spending on anything other than anti-poverty programs. In fact, less than a third of self-identifying Republicans surveyed by Reuters/Ipsos this year "somewhat" or "strongly" disagreed with the proposition that the wealthiest Americans should pay higher tax rates.

As a counter to the charge that the GOP is the party of the rich, Jindal offered this on Fox News: "We... need to make it very clear... that we're not the party of Big: big businesses, big banks, big Wall Street, big bailouts."

Um... who other than Republican true believers will buy that?

### The Jerk Factor

As for those demographic groups the GOP needs to start winning over in the medium- and long-term, putative 2016 A-lister Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker wants to see a middle class "message of prosperity and freedom for all" communicated loudly to immigrants and the young. But as one astute Republican insider said to me, "Hispanics won't hear our message so long as they think our immigration platform says, 'We hate Mexicans.'"

Bobby Jindal was right to say, "If we want people to like us, we have to like them first." But the Party hasn't truly begun to grasp what might be called the liking gap between the GOP and the groups it needs to cultivate. It's time for Republicans to take a long, hard look in the mirror. It's not just recent anti-immigration fervor that repels Hispanics and others from the party. The GOP needs to internalize the fact that the dead bird hanging from its neck is its entire modern history.

It's true that the Democrats were once the segregationists and Abraham Lincoln and the conservationist, trust-busting Teddy Roosevelt were Republicans, as Republicans are fond of pointing out. But that's ancient history.

The Party's modern history began when business leaders got politicized in response to the New Deal and then the GOP began courting the Dixiecrats after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act in 1965 (despite knowing that he had "just delivered the South to the Republican Party"). The white South started voting for GOP presidential candidates in the Nixon years and would soon become solidly Republican. At 70% of the electorate (nearly 90% in Mississippi), it remains so today.

White-flight suburbs around the country followed suit. Add in the fervent cultivation of evangelical Protestant Christians -- anti-gay, anti-choice, anti-evolution, anti-science -- and the various modern incarnations of nativist Know Nothings. Don't forget the ejection of moderates from the Party, and you have the essential history of the modern GOP in two paragraphs.

So the GOP can say that it wants to and plans to like Hispanics, Asian Americans, unmarried women, and secular youth, but to be believable, merely easing off on its anti-immigration message or going quiet on abortion won't do the trick. And if it wants to *prove* that it cares, it will have to put some real money where its mouth is.

### What the Party Should Do -- and Won't

Here's an idea: how about some "extraordinary financial gifts" like the ones Mitt Romney denounced just days after his loss!

To really go after the groups it needs, the GOP would have to do the inconceivable: drop the "entitlement reform" racket, open the wallet, and reach below a restrictive definition of the middle class. It might, for instance, mean adding more money to Food Stamps, rather than poking fun at the "food stamp president," because a full quarter of Hispanics and 35% of Hispanic children are poor.

According to the Census, the median income for Hispanics in 2009 was \$38,039 versus \$51,861 for whites. The difference is far starker when you compare median net worth: Thanks to the economic crisis, Hispanic households lost 66% of their median net worth, falling to \$6,325 in 2009, compared to \$113,149 for white households (a 16% loss).

It would undoubtedly mean supporting equal pay for equal work, which the GOP has consistently opposed. It would mean working to make healthcare more affordable for everyone. That's how you prove you care in politics -- and it would also be good for the nation.

Similarly, if the Republicans want to be taken seriously as “defenders” of the middle class, they would need to do something to defend it from its predators. No, not the lower class but the *upper* class, the predatory lenders and speculators, the fraudsters, the manipulators of the financial system, the folks who got bailed out while everyone else shouldered the risk.

It hardly needs to be said that this isn’t likely to happen in any of our lifetimes.

So far the only Republican suggestion I’ve heard that seems more than (barely) cosmetic is for the Party to drop its aversion to gay marriage. That would, at least, be a beneficial, if cynically motivated, move to look less hateful.

### Hesitation in the Face of Change

It is, of course, theoretically possible that Senator Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) could attract enough Hispanic and other voters in 2016 to win the presidency. Provided that the primaries don’t turn into another bizarre battle. Provided that the tone set by Rick Santorum, Michele Bachmann, or fringe candidates of their ilk doesn’t sink the A-listers. Provided that not too many “stupid” things are said -- on abortion, immigration, evolution, or global warming. (Rubio has already gotten to work on that one by punting on a question about the Earth’s age to keep the creationists happy.)

But come 2020, 2024, or 2028, whatever’s left of the GOP is going to be kicking itself for not having built a foundation of anything other than words that no one outside its rank-and-file actually believed. Texas, after all, could go purple by 2020 or 2024.

Of all the signals emanating from the GOP since Election Day, perhaps the most significant came last week when the socially and fiscally conservative Tea Party kingmaker Jim DeMint voted with his feet. The man who would rather have “30 Republicans in the Senate who believe in principles of freedom than 60 who don’t believe in anything” is leaving that body for the Heritage Foundation -- a hint about the future of what is arguably the most important GOP organization in the country.

It looks like the GOP is at the wheel of the *Titanic*, sailing toward that iceberg, while the band plays “Nearer My God to Thee” for all it’s worth.

20121219-09

23:56

Tom

Photo: Go Out & Enjoy Nature #9



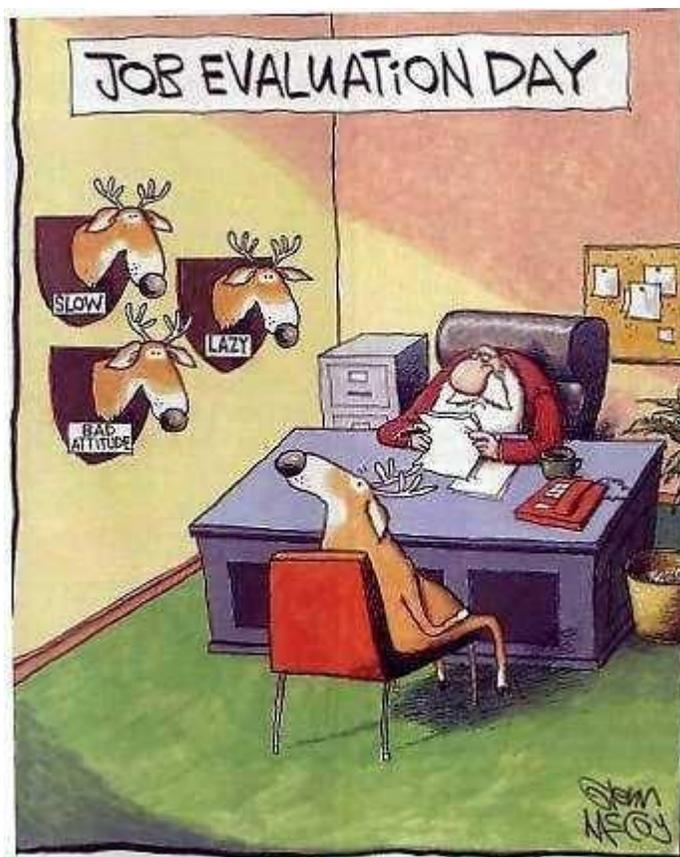
20121219-10

23:57

SteveB

Photo: Cats Imitating Art #6 (Carlo Dolci, *St. Catherine Reading A Book*, Late 17th Century)





<http://flywithmeproductions.com/blog/?tag=fly-with-me-productions&paged=3>



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

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## FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #296 — DEC. 21, 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.**

### **Cliff Update**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 21, 2012)

It's like Shakespeare, only real. What a palpable power struggle! Yet why does Mr. Obama never utilize his real power—the people? Where's the "bully pulpit"? Where's the election, barely a month in the past? Leadership!

The next issue of the *FotM Newsletter* will be Dec. 26. MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

"And Now for the Republican Freakout..." by Steve Nornacki, Salon

Dec. 19, 2012, ([http://www.salon.com/2012/12/19/and\\_now\\_for\\_the\\_republican\\_freakout/](http://www.salon.com/2012/12/19/and_now_for_the_republican_freakout/))



(Credit: AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite)

(Do House Republicans really believe they can turn back the clock to the summer of 2011?)

Yesterday began with President Obama's base grappling with how to interpret the new concessions he'd offered House Speaker John Boehner in their fiscal cliff negotiations.

There was – and is – serious question over the left's willingness to abide the framework Obama proposed. After demanding that tax rates be restored to their Clinton-era levels on income over \$250,000, the president is now willing to accept a \$400,000 threshold. He's also willing to let the payroll tax holiday expire – at a cost of \$1,000 a year to the average family – and to agree to a modified form of chained-CPI, a less generous method for calculating Social Security benefit payouts. Measured against what would happen if there's no deal at all before January 1, there's good reason for liberals to wonder if Obama is giving away too much in pursuit of a bipartisan accord. There are conflicting signals from leading Democrats about whether the party would go along with this plan.

But all of that may be moot because of what's now playing out on the other side of the aisle. While it appeared that Obama had ceded considerable ground to the GOP, especially relative to the leverage he enjoys, the reaction from Republicans on Monday was jarringly negative.

First came Boehner's declaration that Obama's terms were unacceptable and that he would begin pursuing "Plan B" – a House vote simply on extending the Bush rates for all income under \$1 million. This wouldn't help resolve the standoff, since Senate Democrats say they'd never act on Boehner's plan. There are also doubts about how much support Plan B has among House Republicans, more than two dozen of whom apparently spoke out against it at a GOP conference sessions yesterday.

Not that Republicans are any warmer to Plan A. The Heritage Foundation, which a Tea Party icon recently left the Senate to head up, on Monday ripped into the most recent blueprint Boehner presented to Obama – the one that Obama was working off of when he made his offer to Boehner Sunday night. The framework that was emerging from that back-and-forth is also apparently opposed by influential conservatives on Capitol Hill, most notably Paul Ryan.

There are two ways of looking at what Boehner is now doing with Plan B. It's possible that it's all posturing; that he recognizes how hard it is to sell any compromise to the House GOP and that he really needs to convince conservatives he's exhausted every last means of avoiding giving ground to the president. He could, in other words, just be putting on a show, with the hope that more conservatives will speak up to encourage a deal with Obama as January 1 approaches.

But, as Ezra Klein wrote on Monday, it's also possible that Boehner has simply concluded that he doesn't – and won't – have the latitude he needs to sell the kind of deal he and Obama seemed to be inching toward earlier this week. This wouldn't exactly be unprecedented; it's what blew up the "grand bargain" talks between the speaker and the president last year. The current showdown was supposed to be different, because of Obama's supposedly superior bargaining position, but as Klein points out, conservatives have lately been fixating on the debt ceiling, which we're due to hit in a few months, believing they can use it to counter Obama's leverage.

This complicates Boehner's position. If his members are convinced they can use the debt ceiling to extract major concessions from Obama, then why would they sign off on any deal now that isn't light on tax hikes and heavy on spending cuts, especially to the safety net? And if this is where things stand, it presents the White House with a dilemma: give more ground in pursuit of a deal, or stand firm and go over the cliff if need be? As Paul Krugman notes, if January 1 comes and goes with no deal, Obama could probably then get a tax package more to his (and Democrats') liking than what's on the table now – with no cuts to Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. The flip side is that he probably wouldn't be able to get an extension of unemployment insurance or any additional funding for infrastructure.

So for now, it no longer appears that a deal is imminent. Any accord will ultimately need to pass with real support from both parties, since there were also be large numbers of defections on both sides. This is a particularly tricky issue on the Republican side, given the built-in distrust many conservatives have for Boehner. Obama has a lot more wiggle room with his party than Boehner has with his.

"Republicans Push 'Plan B' as White House Says Fiscal Cliff Talks Have Ceased" by Ewen MacAskill, *The Guardian*

Dec. 20, 2012, (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/dec/20/fiscal-cliff-plan-b-talks-cease>)

(Symbolic passage of 'plan B' comes as White House spokesman says Boehner and Obama have not spoken since Monday.)

House Republicans were preparing to push through a "plan B" bill on the fiscal cliff crisis on Thursday, in a largely symbolic gesture that only served to highlight the extent of the deadlock in Washington.

After days of hopeful talks between Barack Obama and Republican House speaker John Boehner earlier this week, negotiations appear to have reached an impasse. Hopes of a deal before Christmas have almost evaporated.

The White House press spokesman Jay Carney said communications between Obama and Boehner had ceased. The two have not spoken since Monday.

"Time's running short. I'm going to do everything I can to protect as many Americans from an increase in taxes as I can," Boehner said as he vowed to push ahead with a planned vote on his bill on Thursday night.

Carney dismissed the bill, which the Democratic-led Senate said it will not consider and which the White House vowed to veto, as a "multi-day exercise in futility".

Only hours before the vote, Boehner was facing a revolt among some conservatives who were refusing to back a tax-raising bill. About a dozen said emphatically they will not vote for it, while others refused to say or said they still had to make up their minds.

Obama, who had been due to fly to Honolulu this weekend to begin a Christmas and New Year break with his family, is postponing his trip. The Senate announced it is planning to leave Washington on Friday and return to Washington next Thursday, much earlier than planned, in hopes of still reaching a deal before the 1 January deadline.

The Republicans, who hold a solid majority in the House, were preparing to vote on a bill Thursday night that would restrict tax increases due to kick in on 1 January to those earning \$1m a year or more.

**The bill is designed primarily to offer the Republicans some cover if every taxpayer sees a rise on that day. While polls suggest the Republicans are likely to be blamed, they will be able to point to the bill, saying that if it had been enacted, it would have prevented rises for more than 99% of the population.**

If Obama and Boehner were to suddenly reach an agreement, both the House and Senate would still be in session on Friday and both could return next Thursday in order to get legislation through before 1 January.

Boehner, at a press conference on Capitol Hill, said: "Under current law, tax rates will go up on all taxpayers beginning 1 January unless the Congress acts and the president will sign the bill. Today, we'll vote to protect as many American families and small businesses as possible from the tax hikes that are already scheduled to occur.

"The president has called on the House – again and again – to pass a bill to protect 98% of the American people from a tax hike. Well, today we're going to do better than that. Our bill would protect 99.81% of the American people from an increase in taxes."

But the Democratic leader in the Senate, Harry Reid, at an earlier press conference, said the bill was an empty gesture. "We are not taking up any of the things that they're working on over there now. It's very, very, very unfortunate the Republicans have wasted an entire week on a number of pointless political stunts."

He added: "The bill has no future, if they don't know it now, tell them what I said," he added.

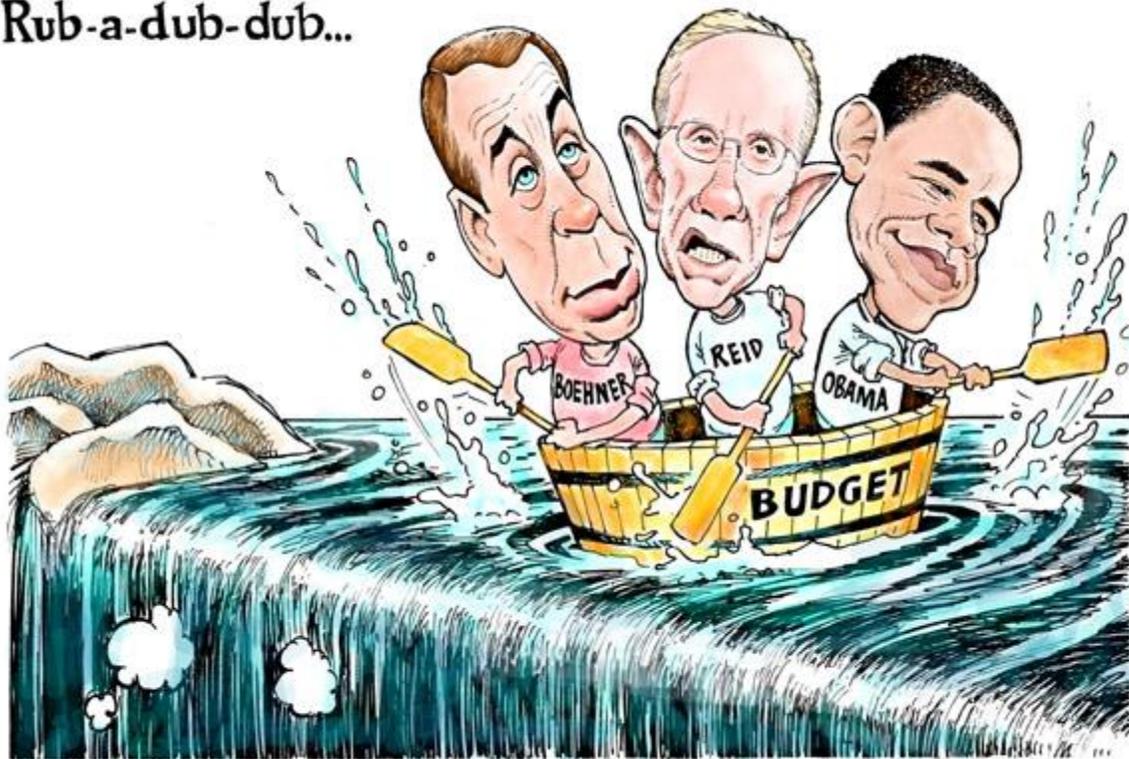
The impasse comes at a time when the differences between Obama and Boehner appear to be minimal, with agreement reached on principle and divided only over the final figures.

Obama wants the tax increases to kick in at \$250,000 rather than \$1 million. He is proposing \$800bn in spending cuts whereas Boehner is looking for \$1.2tn.

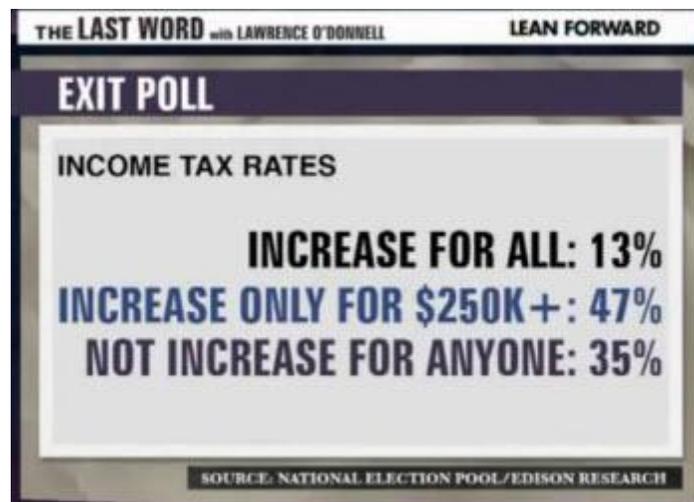
Claiming it was not about the figures, Democrats identified the problem as Boehner being unable to deliver Republicans behind a tax-raising measure, a charge he denied. The Republicans countered that the problem was Obama being unable to sell spending cuts, particularly in entitlement programmes, to his own party.

Boehner said: "I've become convinced," he added, "the president is unwilling to stand up to his own party on the big issues that face our country."

Rub-a-dub-dub...



DAVE GRANLUND © www.davegranlund.com



"Even Before Newtown Tragedy, NRA Was Losing Democratic Support" by Peter Wallsten and Tom Hamburger, *The Washington Post*

Dec. 19, 2012, ([http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/even-before-newtown-tragedy-nra-was-losing-democratic-support/2012/12/19/9b32738a-4952-11e2-ad54-580638ede391\\_story\\_2.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/even-before-newtown-tragedy-nra-was-losing-democratic-support/2012/12/19/9b32738a-4952-11e2-ad54-580638ede391_story_2.html))

Months before the massacre in Newtown, Conn., put the National Rifle Association on the defensive, the powerful gun rights group faced an unexpected problem. One of its most loyal Democratic friends in Congress was leading a rebellion against an NRA effort to hold Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. in contempt of Congress, a cause viewed by Democrats as a political sideshow that had nothing to do with gun rights.

"This, my friends, is not a position I relish," Rep. John D. Dingell (Mich.) wrote in an anguished letter urging fellow gun lovers to reject the NRA's position.

Dingell's rare show of defiance was seen by his colleagues as part of a growing estrangement between the NRA and its Democratic allies, who have provided vital support in the past and could be important again next year in what appears to be a coming showdown over gun rights. With public pressure building on Congress to act, the NRA will need Democratic votes to block or weaken legislation, particularly in the Senate.

While the NRA devoted most of its national campaign efforts this year to supporting Republicans and opposing President Obama, the group has historically gained its clout in Washington by nurturing close ties to lawmakers in both parties, particularly those from rural areas who have counted on the NRA's blessing to get elected.

But several recent factors have altered that calculus. And, with the horror of the Newtown school shootings forcing gun control back onto the national agenda, a decline in the NRA's traditional bipartisan strength provides gun-control advocates with what they see as their best prospects in nearly two decades.

For one, many rural Democrats lost their seats in the past two congressional elections. Political battlegrounds have also shifted away from those rural areas to the suburbs, where the NRA holds less sway and there is more appetite for restrictions on guns. And Democrats are looking increasingly at the NRA as an arm of the Republican Party, pointing specifically to the Holder contempt vote this year and the group's 2009 opposition to Supreme Court nominee Sonia Sotomayor as key turning points.

"I worry the NRA has become a captive of the Republican Party at a time that it needs Democratic votes," said Rep. Gene Green (D-Tex.), who has had a top rating from the NRA but joined Dingell in opposing the censure of Holder. "In the long run it will be weakened."

Aside from the group's problem with Democrats, it faces a threat to its immense money advantage from billionaire New York City Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg (I), who has started to back candidates who are taking on NRA allies.

Nevertheless, the NRA remains one of Washington's most feared lobbies, with an annual budget of more than \$200 million and the ability to reach millions of people through mail, magazines, broadcasts and a Web-based alert system. Its extensive political scorecards are closely watched by state and federal candidates, who frequently boast in their campaigns if they earn an "A" rating with the group. Democrats, in a strategy designed by then-Rep. Rahm Emanuel (Ill.), retook the House in 2006 in part by recruiting pro-gun centrists to run in conservative districts.

The Fairfax County-based organization, founded in the 19th century to promote marksmanship, expanded after the assassinations of the 1960s and now claims 4 million members. It is the face of the gun rights movement, pushing its agenda in courts, city council chambers and state capitals in addition to Congress.

It has an iconic image, tapping movie star Charlton Heston as its leader in the late 1990s, and has had an eclectic roster on its board, including actor Tom Selleck, basketball star Karl Malone and anti-tax activist Grover Norquist. The most prominent NRA spokesman now is its executive vice president, Wayne La-Pierre, who warned a conservative audience this year that if Obama won reelection, "America as we know it will be on its way to being

lost forever." He also described the president's lack of action on gun control in his first term as a "massive Obama conspiracy to deceive voters and hide his true intentions to destroy the Second Amendment during his second term."

The NRA's continued clout could be seen Wednesday, when one of its Democratic friends, Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia, toned down comments he made earlier in the week expressing openness to a new assault-weapons ban. Citing a statement Tuesday by the NRA on the Newtown shootings in which the group said it was "prepared to offer meaningful contributions" to the debate, Manchin told a West Virginia radio host that he was "so proud of the NRA and so pleased that they have agreed to be a part of this." He said: "I'm not supporting a ban on anything. I'm supporting a conversation on everything."

NRA officials declined to comment for this article and have remained out of public view since Friday. The Tuesday statement said the group was "shocked, saddened and heartbroken by the news of the horrific and senseless murders in Newtown." NRA officials have a news conference planned for Friday.

The growing partisan divide was evident this week when House Democrats announced a strategy to reach beyond the NRA's Washington leadership to appeal to its members, who polls suggest support some restrictions.

"There will be a growing wedge between the extreme positions and tactics of the Washington-based lobbyists for the NRA and its grass-roots membership," Rep. Chris Van Hollen (Md.) said in an interview after a meeting with his fellow Democrats.

Obama hinted at a news conference Wednesday that he would follow a similar playbook, describing the NRA as "an organization that has members who are mothers and fathers," who would welcome some restrictions.

House Democrats, wary of being portrayed as urban elites who want to strip Americans of their gun rights, looked to one of their few remaining members with some bona fides to lead the effort, tapping Rep. Mike Thompson (Calif.), a hunter and wounded Vietnam War veteran.

Thompson said he has requested a meeting with NRA leaders and has been hearing from avid hunters and some Republicans back home, telling him, "We do not need these assault weapons. What can I do to help you?"

The California Democrat is emblematic of the growing divide between his party and the NRA. His district is becoming more suburban and less rural, and it happens to be in Napa Valley, the heart of California's wine country — hardly representative of Middle America.

As recently as 2010, the NRA and Democrats teamed up to score a major victory. The group and its Blue Dog allies pressured House leaders to carve out a special exemption for the gun group in the Disclose Act, which would have required every corporation and nonprofit group to reveal top donors to broadcast political ad campaigns. As amended, the legislation exempted 501(c)4 organizations with more than 500,000 members. Legislative staffers said the narrow language, requested by the NRA, would apply to only the gun organization and a tiny handful of others.

Democratic leaders initially balked at the exemption but relented after meetings in which the NRA's chief lobbyist, Chris Cox — joined by Dingell and Rep. Heath Shuler (D-N.C.) — warned that without it, the legislation would lose 50 Democratic votes, according to a person familiar with the meetings who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the discussions.

By the time the session was over, Van Hollen, the bill's author, "looked as though he was going to vomit," according to the person familiar with the meetings. The measure passed on a mostly party-line vote in the House but died in the Senate.

This July, as House Republicans moved to censure Holder for his role in withholding information on a botched gunrunning investigation known as "Operation Fast and Furious", some Democratic allies were angered at being told that their NRA election grade would be based in part on the Holder vote.

"I find myself in an unusual position today," Dingell wrote in his June 28 letter to colleagues. "It seems I am at odds with the National Rifle Association, a group with which I have been proud to be associated with throughout my tenure in Congress."

Dingell's actions helped persuade numerous pro-gun-rights Democrats to join him in opposing the Holder resolution. Of the 31 Democrats who signed on to a June letter to Obama expressing "serious concern" about the administration's response to the congressional inquiry into "Fast and Furious", 11 opposed the Holder resolution and four did not vote.

Demographic changes in some districts have given Democratic lawmakers more latitude to buck the NRA.

Rep. Jim Cooper (D-Tenn.), for instance, has for years been viewed as an NRA friend. But that is largely a vestige of his time in the 1980s and 1990s representing a rural district. His district is now based in and around Nashville. Cooper opposed the Holder censure and said this week that he was "willing to consider any proposal that will keep our children safe, regardless of politics."

A similar shift can be seen in Sen. Mark R. Warner (D-Va.), a supporter of gun rights who has criticized the NRA in recent years, perhaps feeling freer as the political power of Virginia has shifted to the more centrist suburbs and exurbs. He blasted the NRA in 2009 for its opposition to Sotomayor and made headlines this week when he told reporters that he had received "A" ratings from the NRA in the past, but "enough is enough."

Money is also a factor. The NRA has historically outspent gun-control advocates in elections, but Bloomberg poured more than \$9 million late in this year's campaign to defeat opponents of gun restrictions.

During the 2012 cycle, the NRA spent about \$20 million on federal races, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, mostly in support of Republican lawmakers.

Rep. Joe Baca (D-Calif.), a longtime gun rights proponent, lost this year after being targeted by Bloomberg. He blames the NRA for failing to bolster his campaign, citing his refusal to support the Holder resolution.

The NRA "left me high and dry, despite my years of strong support for Second Amendment rights," Baca said in an interview.

(Sari Horwitz contributed to this report.)

[20121220-02](#) 10:55 Pam Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Tom, FotM Newsletter #295)

The graphic with all the "forbidden" signs is ridiculous. I get the implication, and it's simply foolish. The "slippery slope" is a logical fallacy, as any rhetorician or classicist knows. Banning assault weapons is in NO way comparable to banning cigarettes in restaurants or requiring helmets for motorcyclists. Some people are too stupid to look after themselves--or too young. I include the gun apologists in the former. The duty of government is to protect as well as defend.

[20121220-04](#) 11:03 SteveB Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Pam, above)

I love these duty of government discussions. I think they get us right to the hearts of the problems.

It's funny, you know, America is not a very free country (as we've discussed in relation to Canada, especially)...but, as you know, the worst of the ways it isn't free are a little different than gun freedom and freedom for the people who make \$millions on them, and some of the other stuff in Tom's graphic. For instance...

WE DON'T HAVE:

1. Freedom from hunger.

2. Freedom from a lack of education.
3. Freedom not to be consumed by unnecessary worry because you're alone in the world and not making it at the moment...
4. Freedom from being shot down in cold blood.
5. Freedom, if you are a woman, to deal with pregnancy as she sees fit, with honor cast upon her womanhood and motherhood, regardless of her decision.
6. Freedom from the blatant lies of republican politicians, over and over and over again.
7. Freedom from joblessness.
8. Freedom from homelessness, even for Veterans.
9. Freedom from lack of taxes and regulation on the rich and powerful.
10. Freedom of clean, fair, consistent, verifiable, reasonably long (short), reasonably financed primaries and elections.
11. I never thought I'd be saying it, but the freedom of gays to marry or whatever. What the hay?
12. Freedom from the grand "War on Drugs".
13. Freedom from the Bush-era Patriot Act and policies of totalitarianism initiated then and continued now.
14. Freedom from the "yelling 'FIRE' in a theater" money-making lies of right-wing media.
15. Freedom from the relentless depression of old age. (Just kidding, but not kidding that the old must be cared for in an honorable way. For now, that would have to mean, at the very least, no cuts to Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid whatsoever, just the vast cost savings of a much better approach to the public's health, which is a journey I think we have finally begun, at least and at last.)

I could go on...

THESE ARE THE FREEDOMS I WANT (pretty much).

[20121220-09](#) 12:41 SteveB Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Pam, above)

And:

16. Freedom from pollution and global warming.
17. Freedom from creationism.
18. Freedom from car alarms and golden retrievers barking all night.

[20121220-05](#) 11:17 Pam Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to SteveB, above)

What is it with this "freedom" fetish anyway? You want to know what it's like to REALLY live without freedom? Spend a little time as a woman in Afghanistan. Or read about life behind the Iron Curtain, when totalitarianism had a strangle hold on millions and controlled not just their actions but their thoughts as well. I lived in Afghanistan as a teenager, and when I returned with my parents to the States, the customs agent greeted me with the words, "Welcome home," and I burst into tears. I learned never to take American freedom for granted, which is why warrantless wire-tapping and indefinite detention are disturbing to me. Not being able to own a militarized weapon whose only purpose is to kill people is not an abrogation of anyone's freedom. You want to know what a country looks like where guns are everywhere? Visit Somalia. Or even Mexico. American weapons are pouring over the Mexican border, while their drugs pour over ours. We simply have to say NO to those who profit from carnage. I understand hunters wanting guns, or target shooters, but I have NEVER heard a single good reason why anyone needs an assault rifle. It's madness.

[20121220-06](#) 11:36 SteveB Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to Pam, above)

If an assault rifle is legal, why not a tank or bazooka, hand grenades, RPG's, mortars, or a small destroyer? Of course the constitution gives the government, state or federal, the right to set a limit.

Instead of being framed as a "give me liberty or give me death" issue, it's really just...

Where do we draw the line that surely we all agree must be drawn somewhere. (I FOR ONE, DO NOT WANT TO SEE THE KOCH BROS. WITH A DESTROYER!) Majority rules. No name calling. That's democracy. End of assault rifles (at least) from now on.

[20121220-08](#) 12:36 Pam Re: Graphic: Don't (reply to SteveB, above)

Amen!!

[20121220-03](#) 10:26 Art FotM Newsletter #295

I'm really going to miss this. It's my daily touch with sanit., with always a few contributors added to remind me of all the morons out there.

[20121220-07](#) 12:12 SteveB Re: FotM Newsletter #295 (reply to Art, above)

Gee, not sure I've ever been called sane before... :-)

But maybe you meant "sanit." as "sanitizing"? No, I'm going to take it as "sane".

Thanks for your words and all you do!

Delicious Texas Gulf by-catch, over gorgeous carrot purée with potato gratin and arugula salad...



I Love Dogs & Golden Retrievers! ;-(

I'll catch more heat for this one:



See what the "Great Disarmer-in-Chief", is causing!

from J&G Sales (<http://www.jgsales.com>), Prescott, AZ:

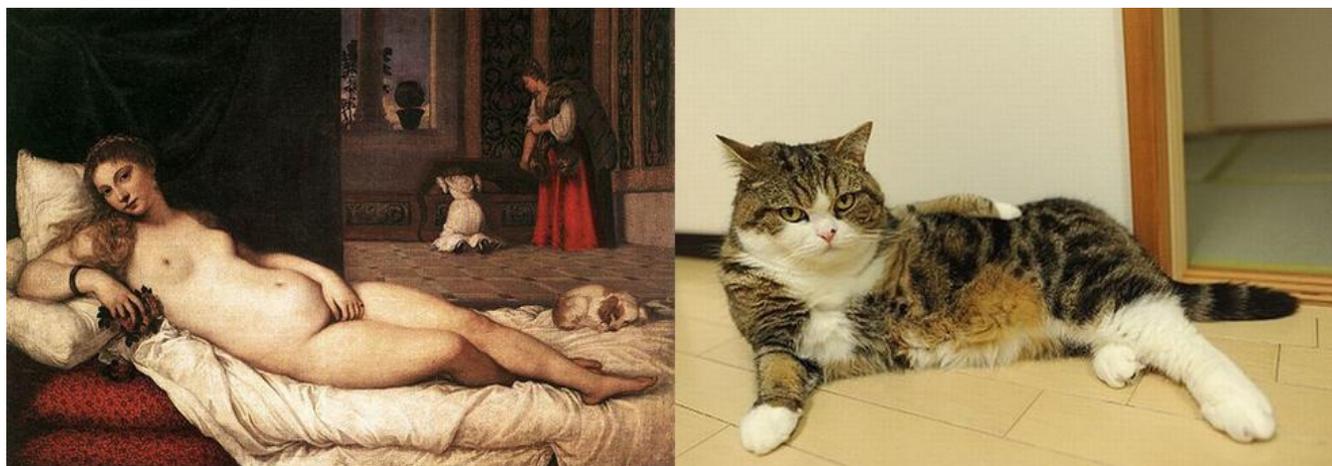
We at J&G Sales want to wish all of you a Merry Christmas. We hope you have a wonderful time with friends and family and are richly blessed this season.

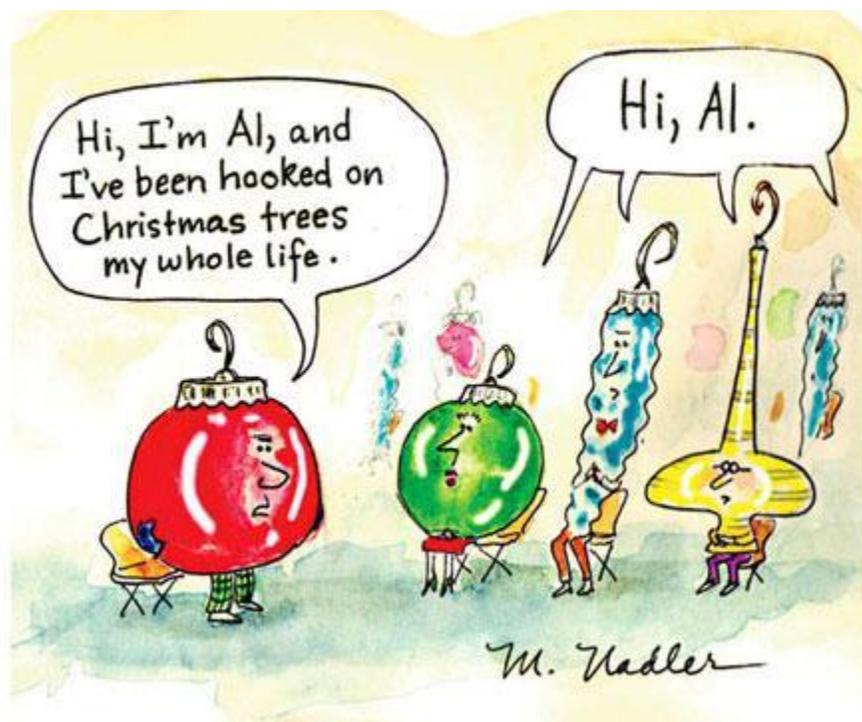
Due to very high order volume we have sold out of many items. Additionally answers to your emails are several days behind, and you will have trouble getting through on the phone. If you placed an order please wait, shipping delays are currently a week or two. If there is a problem we will contact you. We are working through the orders and email questions as fast as we can. We will try to fill all orders that have been received, but certain items are oversold and many orders will be cancelled.

You will notice items being removed from our website as they sell out. They will be added again to the website when more become available. Please keep checking back to see availability of previously sold out items. We are unsure of how many of these items we will be able to restock, and prices to replenish from manufacturers and suppliers are starting to rise as demand increases prices. Thank you for your patience and understanding.

Again we wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Sincerely, The J&G Team





<http://imagescollectionvince.blogspot.com/2010/12/preikestolen-pulpit-rock.html>





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

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Welcome to all our new members who may be here for the first time. We want to hear from YOU! To submit your comment, you can use the form on our website or blog, or reply to this email with your two cents worth. Be sure to sign with your desired user name.

Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #297 — DEC. 26, 2012

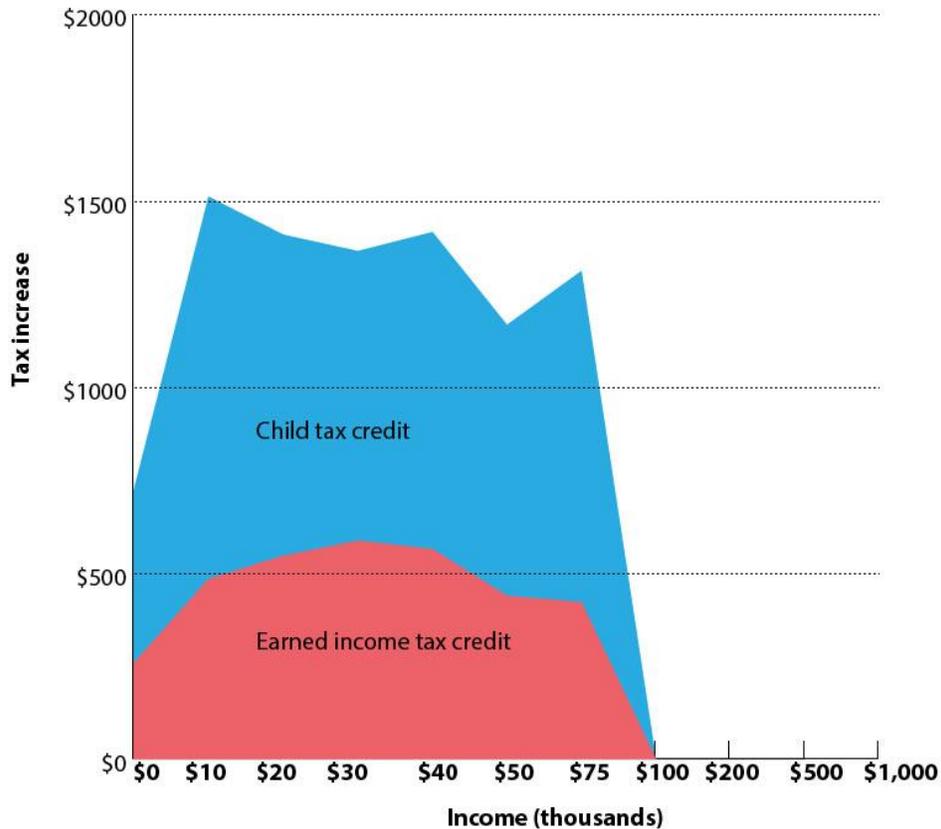
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**INDEX: Click here.**

## **My Fellow Citizens...**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 26, 2012)

### **How John Boehner's "Plan B" raises taxes on the poor**



So...I hope you all had a great extended Christmas weekend! I had a little extra time on my hands, so I thought I would reach-out one more time to all the Republican members of FotM (and Art). I haven't had much luck with this project in the past, but I thought I needed to give it one more go, given the dire state of the nation. I present my results below.

See how dark are the forces behind the Republican Party's allegiance, not to the nation, but to the 1% (or so)...

First, I just sent-out this article without comment:

"The Fall of Plan B: Self-Destruction in the Cause of the 0.3 Per Cent" by John Cassidy, *The New Yorker*

Dec. 20, 2012, (<http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/johncassidy/2012/12/gops-plan-b-self-destruction.html>)

[Update: On Thursday evening, John Boehner unexpectedly called off the vote on Plan B because he didn't have enough votes to pass the measure. Some ultra-conservative House Republicans balked at supporting an increase in tax rates even for those earning a million dollars a year or more. Others disliked the bill because it didn't include any spending cuts. Virtually no GOP members opposed Plan B on the grounds that it was too regressive. Where this humiliating setback for Boehner leaves the negotiations with the White House unclear. "Now it is up to the president to work with Senator Reid on legislation to avert the fiscal cliff," a statement from Boehner's office said.]

Back in November, a week after President Obama's reelection, Bobby Jindal, the ambitious young Republican governor of Louisiana, sat down with Politico and talked about the lessons of Mitt Romney's defeat. "We've got to make sure that we are not the party of big business, big banks, big Wall Street bailouts, big corporate loopholes, big anything," Jindal said. "We cannot be, we must not be, the party that simply protects the rich so they get to keep their toys."

Jindal wasn't the only senior G.O.P. figure who was talking about the need for his party to shed its obsession with protecting the privileges of the wealthy and reach out to middle-class Americans. Marco Rubio, the Florida senator who could well face off against Jindal in the 2016 primaries, said much the same thing, and so did Paul Ryan, Romney's running mate. "We must speak to the aspirations and anxieties of every American," Ryan told a Republican dinner. And David Brooks, the Times op-ed columnist, wrote of a "Republican glasnost."

Flash forward a few weeks, and such statements seem comical. Let's set aside, for the moment, the dogged rejection by prominent congressional Republicans of calls for stricter gun laws in the wake of the Newtown massacre. In the House of Representatives today, Speaker John Boehner is set to push through a vote on a G.O.P. tax and spending proposal that is a spit in the eye to low- and middle-income Americans and a shameful giveaway to the party's richest supporters.

The central element of Boehner's so-called "Plan B" is a proposal to raise the income threshold at which a higher rate of tax would kick in from four hundred thousand dollars—the figure in President Obama's latest proposal—to a million dollars. Obviously, that would be a boon to people earning half a million dollars a year, or three quarters of a million dollars a year—people who are very well off by any definition. But that is only part of the story. Let's talk about those lucky Americans who earn more than a million dollars a year: they number about four hundred thousand, which is roughly 0.3 per cent of the total population of tax filers. Under Plan B, these folks would face a higher tax rate on part of their income—39.5 per cent, compared to the current rate of 35 per cent. Boehner's proposal would appear to hurt them quite a bit, but that simply isn't the case. Although they would end up paying a bit more in tax than they do now, they wouldn't pay nearly as much as they would under Obama's compromise proposal.

As ever, the devil is in the details. While the tax rates of the 0.3 per cent would go up, they would also be allowed to claim many more deductions than they would under the Obama plan. In addition, they would also get to pay substantially lower rates on capital gains, dividends, and inheritances. Since many of them derive much of their income from these sources, this is a big deal. In short, "the Boehner plan maintains several generous tax cuts for incomes over \$1 million." The quote comes from an invaluable post by Bob Greenstein, the president of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, which takes a clinical look at Plan B and cites freshly produced figures from the non-partisan Tax Policy Center. The upshot of these calculations: relative to the President's latest offer, which limits the deductions that very high earners can take and increases the tax rates they would pay on investment income, the average member of the 0.3 per cent would gain upwards of fifty thousand dollars a year.

You might think that would be enough of a gift to the ultra-rich, and enough of a slap in the face for one day to Jindal, Rubio, Brooks, and other would-be G.O.P. reformers. But you would be mistaken. To help pay for their largesse, Boehner and his colleagues in the House are proposing a big cut in the incomes of some of America's

poorest families. Under Plan B, the federal government would reduce the payments that low-income working families currently receive under two programs designed to help them: the Earned Income Tax Credit and the Child Tax Credit.

In 2009, at the start of the Obama Administration, these programs were enhanced, and, in 2011, according to Census data that Greenstein cites, the changes helped lift 1.6 million Americans, including six hundred thousand children, out of poverty. Under Plan B, these enhancements would come to an end, resulting in substantial income reductions for the affected families. Greenstein gives the example of a mother with two children who works full time earning the minimum wage of \$7.25 an hour. At the moment, she makes \$14,500 a year and receives an additional get Child Tax Credit of \$1,725. Under Plan B, this credit would be slashed to just \$165, meaning her income would be cut by \$1,560—or about ten per cent.

So, there you have it. Less than two months after being defeated at least partly because it was viewed as a tool of the rich, the G.O.P. is about to vote through a measure that, even by the standards of trickle-down economics, is shameful sop to those who need help least. Plan B's only conceivable merit is for use as a bargaining chip in the final days of the negotiations over the fiscal cliff. Almost certainly, that is what Boehner has in mind. But in turning down the White House's latest offer and opting for this sordid gambit, he hasn't only derailed efforts to reach an early settlement. He's made a mockery of the G.O.P.'s nascent efforts to reposition itself as a party for all Americans. Whether it realizes it or not, the party still seems intent on self-destruction.

**REPUBLICANS:** NO RESPONSE.

OK. So I sent this email:

Dear Republicans,

Read the news today, all of it if you have time.

This is essentially what the start of the self-destruction of a political party looks like.

I think you can guess which party.

**REPUBLICANS:** NO RESPONSE.

So I sent the following:

Dear Republicans,

Don't you think the people who hurt the Republican Party hurt the country?

I do.

It's time the GOP too back control of itself from the big money and did something about the jerks! You know who I mean.

Do you agree?

Seriously, wasn't losing the election in such embarrassing fashion, and to a socialist black man, enough destruction? Get with it Republicans! The writing's on the wall! Read it!

DIALOGUE AND COMPROMISE WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO YOUR SURVIVAL SHOULD YOU CHOOSE TO ENGAGE, I say especially to Republican Congressmen.

Below...a very, very reasonable article that might be of help...

MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL!

"Two Debacles in 12 Hours" by John Dickerson, Slate

Dec. 21, 2012,

([http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/politics/2012/12/john\\_boehner\\_s\\_failure\\_and\\_wayne\\_lapierre\\_s\\_defiance\\_are\\_two\\_signs\\_of\\_just.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2012/12/john_boehner_s_failure_and_wayne_lapierre_s_defiance_are_two_signs_of_just.html))

(Why today was a very bad day to be Republican.)

(WASHINGTON) The National Rifle Association's president David Keene ended Friday's news conference—the gun lobby's first public comments since the massacre in Newtown, Conn. with these words: "This is the beginning of a serious conversation. We won't be taking questions today." That was the essential thrust of the organization's combative political response: Shoot first; ask questions later. The NRA's top lobbyist, Wayne LaPierre, who delivered the bulk of the remarks, was characteristically defiant, calling for security officers to be stationed at every school. He spoke with an edge, his voice straining as if he were being shouted down by hippies. (Presumably, that's what they expected would happen if they let the reporters in the audience ask questions; in the end, Code Pink provided the shouting.)

It was the second defiant act by conservatives in 12 hours. The night before, a committed band of Republicans defeated House Speaker John Boehner. The Republican leader had offered legislation designed to give his party political cover in the fiscal cliff negotiations and increase his leverage in talks with the president. The gambit failed because enough Republicans refused to bend on their anti-tax principles. Boehner wound up looking foolish, and the House Republicans looked unable to perform the most basic functions.

The Republican Party is in a rebuilding mode after its 2012 election loss. These two events—a defiant NRA and an incompetent leadership—cannot be the face of confrontation the GOP wants to show the public on high-profile issues. Tea Party activists and gun owners are a key part of the party base. But these public acts are out of sync with the moment and completely at odds with party's need to widen its membership.

The NRA and Tea Party conservatives would simply say that they are sticking to their principles. That presents two questions: whether their principles are wrong at this time in history and whether the way in which they stick to their principles damages the party.

Let's focus on the second question. The message of both of these acts is more than "we're sticking to our principles." The message is: We don't care about the wider audience. That cannot be the message that the Republican Party wants. It particularly can't be the message after Mitt Romney's losing presidential campaign, which was defined by his secretly taped conversation with donors in which he said he didn't care about 47 percent of the population. We know it's not the message that its putative leaders want to send. Chris Christie, Bobby Jindal, Marco Rubio, and Paul Ryan are all trying to send various messages of inclusion.

In the case of House Republicans, they are clearly defying broad public sentiment, which is that Congress should work out a deal with the president. A recent Washington Post/ABC News poll shows the public in favor of compromise and supporting the president's view. (Seventy-six percent say the Republicans have not been willing to compromise enough.) The members who blocked Boehner have a different political calculus, however. Their voters reward them for their opposition to policies that don't cut spending enough. Plus, ideological groups like Americans for Prosperity, the Club for Growth, and FreedomWorks can penalize them if they vote the wrong way because their districts hold read-to-run conservatives who will stay pure—just add money.

But consider how this hurts the party. Let's say you're a principled conservative who disagrees with John Boehner. You'd like more people in the country to sign on to your way of thinking. To do this, you must persuade those people. You want to persuade them so they'll vote for more Republicans who will give you a majority to enact

conservative policies. But these persuadable people are sensitive. You can't persuade them when they think you're incompetent. The House Republicans' performance on Thursday night qualifies for that description.

The NRA response is a different matter. The NRA has been far more successful at working the system than House Republicans. So, as Dave Weigel points out, Wayne LaPierre was backing a position on Friday that at least has the popularity of the assault weapons ban the president is pushing. This Gallup poll asked Americans how to prevent the next massacre. Sixty-four percent wanted "at least one person" at every school to be armed, and 87 percent were open to more "police presence" at schools.

But the question at hand is whether the defiant tone of the NRA event will be as popular as those policies. For most people, the post-Newtown public conversation has had some element of self-reflection. The president, NRA-supporting politicians, and Hollywood have all taken a step back and examined their views. Most have recognizing that they need to at least modify their positions in some ways. Even if no one changes their tune ultimately, the participants have at least nodded to the possibility that a decent respect for the opinions of others requires sensitivity to opposing positions.

The NRA did not go this route. It was calling for a conversation but it was starting an argument. LaPierre blamed culture—movies, video games, and music—for a mass shooting but wasn't willing to even brush up against considering what role guns might play.

That is where the interests of the NRA and the GOP separate. A full-throated argument with President Obama helps the NRA by riling up its members who write big checks. This, in turn, provides money to keep lawmakers in line.

For a national party so closely aligned with the NRA, this poses a challenge. Right now its leaders are trying to send the message of inclusiveness in all forms. The Republican Party has lost the popular vote in five of the last six elections. Something has to change. The precise road back to the majority is not clear. But as a matter of basic math, it's pretty clear that the party must show that it is open: open to ideas, new people (i.e., minorities who are growing as a larger share of the voting population), and the new challenges of our daily lives.

Holding more firmly to your views despite new circumstances can offer stability, but it also opens you up to looking remote, unconcerned, and out of touch. To those who might think you hail from another planet, it helps to speak to them in their language. That language requires a conversation, not an argument.

It is a virtue to stay true to your principles. But the great patron saint of conservatism, Ronald Reagan, knew that you had to do it in a way that didn't offend people. Reagan had plenty of critics, to be sure. Clark Clifford famously called him an amiable dunce, but even that cheap shot allowed for the fact that he was amiable. There is nothing amiable in these recent public stands by conservatives. It can't be true that a party returns to national greatness on an anti-amiable platform.

**REPUBLICANS: NO RESPONSE.**

Not one to give up easily and not entirely happy with the Right's response, I sent this:

The Real Truth -- Brought to You (Inadvertently) by Fox News! Who? Yes, FOX!

The article below so well portrays the typical cowardly, lying, jerk attitude of Fox News et al....

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJtjfs1yz8E>.

"Fox News Calls Early End to Interview That Turned Critical" by Josh Voorhees, Slate

Nov. 26, 2012,

([http://www.slate.com/blogs/the\\_slatest/2012/11/26/thomas\\_ricks\\_fox\\_news\\_anchor\\_jon\\_scott\\_ends\\_benghazi\\_interview\\_early\\_after.html?wpisrc=obnetwork](http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2012/11/26/thomas_ricks_fox_news_anchor_jon_scott_ends_benghazi_interview_early_after.html?wpisrc=obnetwork))

Pulitzer Prize-winning defense reporter Thomas E. Ricks made an appearance on Fox News this morning to talk about the Obama administration's response to the attack on the American consulate in Benghazi. As you'll see in the clip, the segment didn't go exactly how Fox News anchor Jon Scott was likely expecting.

(We'll go ahead and hazard a guess that metaphorical red lights started going off in the control room right around the time when Ricks suggested that Fox News spent much of the campaign season "operating as a wing of the Republican Party.")

Like most things Fox News-related, the clip has generated a good deal of Internet chatter in the hours that followed, including articles by both Politico (as would be expected given their output/coverage area) and the New York Times (somewhat more surprising). Ricks told both publications that the cable news network had suggested to him that his segment was likely to last about three minutes. In reality, it ran about half that time.

"Alright, Tom Ricks, thank you very much for joining us today," Scott said bringing what was clearly an early end to the interview. "You're welcome," Ricks replied.

It's one thing to cut off a man-on-the-street type interview that goes off course. It's quite another to do it to someone who you've brought on specifically to speak in the role of expert, especially when said reporter is responding directly to the questions being asked of him.

## **REPUBLICANS: NO RESPONSE.**

So...

Does this go too far, Republicans?

["What Americans Should Learn from the 'Republican Apocalypse'" by Joe Conason, TruthDig](#)

Dec. 21, 2012,

[http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/what\\_americans\\_should\\_learn\\_from\\_the\\_republican\\_apocalypse\\_20121221/](http://www.truthdig.com/report/item/what_americans_should_learn_from_the_republican_apocalypse_20121221/)

What may finally consume the House Republicans is their boundless contempt for the American public—a contempt bluntly demonstrated in their refusal to consider any reasonable compromise with President Obama to avoid the so-called "fiscal cliff" Dec. 31. They know from the election results (and every poll) that the public believes taxes should be raised on the wealthy. They know that the public wants bipartisan compromise. And they know that the approval rating of the House Republicans, in contrast to the president's upwardly trending numbers, are veering toward historic lows.

Moreover, they claim to believe that the major tax hikes and spending cuts that will occur on Jan. 1, if negotiations fail, will be ruinous for the American and perhaps the world economy. (And never mind that this concern validates Keynesian economics, flatly contradicting their professed ideology.) Failure to achieve a deal may result in a renewed recession or worse.

Yet the majority of Republican members adhere so blindly to their far-right ideology that on Thursday evening, they humiliated their own leadership by refusing to support Speaker John Boehner's "Plan B"—and effectively scuttled negotiations between the House leadership and the White House. Boehner thought a bill to increase taxes only on households earning more than \$1 million annually would pass the House, as Majority Leader Eric Cantor confidently announced. "We're going to have the votes," he said on Thursday afternoon. Several hours later the House leaders cancelled the roll call on the tax bill, admitting that they didn't have the votes.

This embarrassing episode—the "Mayan Apocalypse" of the Republican Party—demonstrates again why it is unfit for the responsibilities of national office.

The Republicans proved their unfitness the first time in the summer of 2011, when they held the national debt ceiling hostage, supposedly to reduce spending, and succeeded only in damaging both the nation's credit rating and the economic recovery. Now they have declared their unwillingness to negotiate with a newly re-elected president, who won easily on the taxation issue. Although they held the majority, they actually lost seats and received fewer total votes than the House Democrats. But still they see no reason to deal with the president or acknowledge the national consensus.

Naturally, public anger at the Republicans is growing. But how furious would people feel if they fully understood this latest absurd episode on Capitol Hill? Boehner's proposal was exceptionally generous to the wealthiest taxpayers—and mean to the poor and working families.

His Plan B would have extended the Bush tax cuts for their first million dollars of income; repealed a limit on tax deductions by the highest-income households; established a dividend tax rate of only 20 percent; and maintained an estate tax break for those same highest-income families worth an average \$1.1 million. At the same time, according to the authoritative Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Boehner's bill would have ended various tax credits for low-income and middle-income families, costing them roughly \$25 billion a year and driving millions of American children into poverty.

**But awful as that proposal was, it was deemed too liberal by the dominant faction in the Republican caucus. They found it so offensively decent, so treasonously moderate, that they made fools of their own leaders and themselves rather than let negotiations continue.** (Their spending bill was even worse.)

The president is fortunate in his opposition, whose obstinacy and extremism may yet prevent him from making a terrible deal to damage Social Security or Medicare when neither is necessary. He wanted to make a deal—very badly—but there is nobody with the competence or sanity with whom to make a deal, not even a raw deal.

Now Obama must explain clearly what has happened. Perhaps then voters will begin to draw the obvious conclusion—that this country's problems cannot be addressed, let alone solved, until they remove these Republicans from power.

**REPUBLICANS: NO RESPONSE.**

I thought it was time to mention the Crisis of Extremism in America:

["The GOP Brings Politics to a Crisis Point" by Michael Tomasky, The Daily Beast](#)

Dec. 23, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/12/23/michael-tomasky-the-gop-brings-politics-to-a-crisis-point.html>)

(With their refusal to vote for Boehner's Plan B, Republicans have definitively shown that they'd rather sabotage democracy than govern. How can they be stopped?)

Really, what is to be done about this Republican Party? What force can change it—can stop Republicans from being ideological saboteurs and convert at least a workable minority of them into people interested in governing rather than sabotage? With the failed Plan B vote, we have reached the undeniable crisis point. Actually we've been at a crisis point for years, but this is really the all-upper-case Undeniable Crisis Point. They are a direct threat to the economy, which could slip back into recession next year if the government doesn't, well, govern. They are an ongoing, at this point almost mundane, threat to democracy, subverting and preventing progress the American people clearly desire across a number of fronts. They have to be stopped, and the only people who can really stop them are corporate titans and Wall Streeters, who surely now are finally beginning to see that America's problem is not Barack Obama and his alleged "socialism," but a political party that has become psychologically incapable of operating within the American political system.

We all know that the GOP has become much more extreme in the last few years, and, taking the longer historical view, the last 20 or 25 years. But when that gets said, it usually elides an important point—the important point. It's usually meant to refer to the party's policy positions. And the move to the hard right is obviously true along those lines.

But politics, and certainly political parties, aren't only about policy positions. There's also the question of what I'll call process, which means simply how a party practices politics on a day-to-day, month-to-month, and year-to-year basis. This isn't a question of the positions per se, but how the party attempts to advance and defend them.

And it's on process far, far more than on policy that the Republican Party has gone nuts. You know this story, too, so I needn't rehearse the details, except to describe the current end point, which is that to the GOP today, the Democrats must be denied any victory by any means necessary. The Republicans unwilling to vote for Plan B weren't in the main loathe to give Boehner a win. The problem was that that particular Boehner win might have led to an Obama win. That was the issue that drove them.

In that sense, all these people saying they learned no lesson from the election are completely wrong. They learned a lesson, all right, but the lesson they took away is just the opposite of the kind of lesson normal small-d democrats would learn. Normal small-d democrats would learn that you've lost twice now, and while you should still stick to your principles of course, it was also time to play a little ball. But these Republicans learned that they have to be even more obstructionist. Their ideas are unpopular, their America is dying. But by God, they're standing until the last man! They're Paulus's soldiers at Stalingrad, surrounded by an enemy that embodies evil—and is fated to outlast them. This is how they've been trained to think.

So they'll give no ground. People are now saying that the only way to avoid going off the cliff is for Boehner to let the Senate bill come to the floor and let it be passed mostly by Democrats. But what reason is there to believe that even 20 or 25 Republicans would vote for a bill? And please, don't tell me "because a large majority of Americans would support it." That doesn't matter to them.

And next year, in January or February, when Joe Biden's task force completes its work and we have new gun legislation? We have now rafts of new polling showing that clear majorities will support the kinds of proposals that are likely to be in any such legislation. But that won't matter. They have the votes to block, and they will. And then perhaps Obama will attempt immigration reform, again with a solid majority of Americans behind him. They showed a few post-election signs of yielding here, so we'll see. But as the issue heats up, the usual sources will start warning even the softer-hearted GOP legislators that a vote for immigration is a vote for Obama, you quisling, and if you waver on this you can certainly expect a primary challenge.

**They didn't come to Washington to govern. They came to sabotage. So our working assumption must be whatever the issue, sabotage is what they're going to do.**

**And they can do it all they want. Our founders didn't assume that a cadre of people of such immense bad faith and cynicism would ever come to control key levers of government; they built a system that would work, albeit slowly, in the hands of people of reasonably good will. It's a system that people of bad will can subvert and stop from functioning.**

Someone has to tell them enough. The only people I can think of with the power to do so are the high-profile figures of Wall Street and the corporate world. They're the only people these Republicans might conceivably listen to. They should have done it—and some did—last year during the debt-limit hostage-taking. But then, most of corporate America was still wagering that the Republicans could beat Obama in 2012. Now that that hasn't happened, now that we're four years away from another election and Obama will be retiring anyway, and now that the Republicans have demonstrated that they are interested in no compromise at all in any way shape or form, maybe the business elite will finally show some responsibility.

Once upon a time, the statists—Roosevelt and his brains trusters—helped save capitalism from the Bolsheviks of the left. Today, the capitalists have to help save the state. This time the enemy is the Bolsheviks of the right, our current GOP. They're taking us over the fiscal cliff, and they'll do far worse without an intervention.

**REPUBLICANS:** NO RESPONSE.

That's the extent of our dialogue? Things are the same in real life as they are in the House of Representatives. What's wrong with our democracy? What's wrong with America? What's wrong with Republican citizens and lawmakers that they must be called out as recalcitrant children? And I think discussion is impossible only if one side knows it is wrong or lying about its true agenda. That's a real debate killer and isn't that what's going on? Appalling!

Hey, Republicans, at least try to pick-up a damned gauntlet every once in a while! Man! If my side were blasted like that, I'd have at least a little something to say, fer cryin' out loud!

I think you have to make the decision, at some point in time, if you believe the lives and futures of our children and grandchildren are more important than billionaires keeping every penny they "earn" or gun manufacturers and oil companies taking control of our nation.

Money and greed are the great corruptors, not poverty and joblessness. We all know this.

What's important to you?

**REPUBLICANS:** NO RESPONSE.

So...we return to where we began—the middle:

"Realigning American Politics: Towards a Mass Party of the Center" by Van Gosse, Huffington Post

Dec. 23, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/van-gosse/political-realignment\\_b\\_2326238.html?utm\\_hp\\_ref=politics](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/van-gosse/political-realignment_b_2326238.html?utm_hp_ref=politics))

Like a fog slowly clearing, we can perceive the slow-motion realignment of American politics towards a mass party of the center. This emerging formation, the Clinton-Obama remaking of the Democratic Party, will almost certainly dominate politics and policy at the federal level and in most major states for the long-term. If this is the new reality, the left had better adjust its sights. Above all, let's stop the furious agonizing about an ultra-right, Christian Right, Tea Party, Koch-Brothers-and-Karl-Rove take-over: it ain't happening, get over it, move on.

The mass party of the center, birthed 20 years ago by Bill Clinton triangulating his way into a "socially-liberal" version of neoliberalism (or what used to be "liberal Republicanism" in the days of Nelson Rockefeller and George Romney) has been brought to fruition by Barack Obama's savvy Chicago apparatchiks. Consider what they have achieved:

The Democratic Party has won the popular vote in five of the past six presidential elections;

It has reduced the Republican Party to a pathetic replica of the pre-New Deal Democrats, relying on white votes in the Solid South and the rest of rural America where Dixie flags and country music dominate, along with poverty and nativism (with the obvious difference that the Obama machine is making that America a lot less solid);

At the presidential level, Democrats now have a lock on nine of the top 15 states defined by GDP (California, New York, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, Washington, Maryland), and of the remaining six, Florida, Ohio, and Virginia are turning blue, while Texas and Georgia alone remain deep red (North Carolina seems to be the purple wild card right now).

Forget states, whole regions are gone for the Right. Except when they get lucky or run RINOs, the entire Northeast is Democratic, as is the West Coast. Since Reagan, their white hope has been the Midwestern heartland, but Obama again shut them out of every Midwestern state other than the traditionally borderish Indiana and Missouri.

Anyone can read these numbers. Indeed, the Democratic tilt of major states, regions, the cities, and most of suburbia has been growing ever more obvious for some time, but no one has had the nerve to call it a realignment. Why not? What is realignment, anyway, and why should you care?

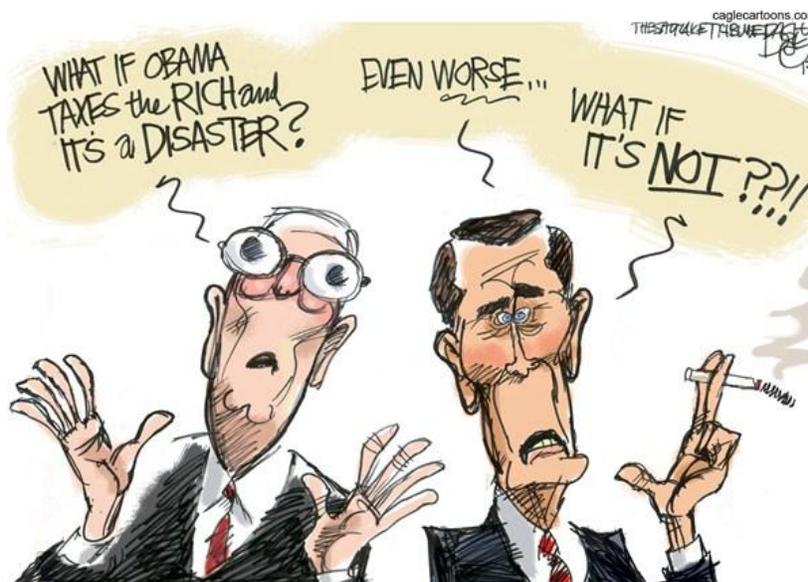
The term derives from the eminent political scientist Walter Dean Burnham, who argued long ago that the American political system since the 1790s has pivoted on a handful of "realigning" elections, when huge swathes of the electorate moved in one direction, undergirding long-term majorities for one party -- Republicans after 1896; Democrats after 1936, and so on.

For decades, the not-so-New Right has pursued its own realignment, and rightward-trending and just trendy pundits have bought into their propaganda that the big shift was about to happen. In fact, it was always just about to happen, whether in the defection of the vaunted Reagan Democrats to the Gipper, or Rove's grand plan to sew up Latinos and so-called "soccer moms." But at no point has the U.S. ever come close to a lasting realignment to the Right. Each of their big victories -- in 1984, 1994 and 2004 -- was followed immediately by sharp defeats (losing the Senate in 1986; Clinton's crushing Dole in 1996; the Democratic sweep of 2006). Now, in the aftermath of Obama's sequential system-wide victories, encompassing every region and popular vote majorities, we see the real realignment towards a socially progressive, center-right, post-Fordist party, with one foot in neoliberal orthodoxy (think Summers and Geithner), and the other in what's left of the "functionally social-democratic" base (think Ohio and Michigan, where nationalizing the auto industry in 2009 secured national victory in 2012).

So where does that leave those of us who define as left, whether in, out, or in-denial regarding the Democratic Party? Begin with a basic premise: the tectonics of generational and demographic change have decisively moved U.S. politics to a new kind of center, commanded by those who now lead the Democratic party. Carefully marshaling an array of constituencies, from Ph.D.'s to janitors, these new men and women of power have decisively trumped the ultra-right's hopes of rolling back the twentieth-century's progressive gains. And with powerful financial machines of their own and nationwide networks of personal loyalty, the Obamaites have also largely displaced the older party and union structures that got out the Democratic vote. Remember the "Friends of Bill" back in the 90s? They were merely the precursors of the thousands of dedicated organizers recruited into Obama's permanent campaign since 2006.

Is there any room for the left as we have known it, other than as dutiful acolytes, tiptoeing around the table of power, or impotent critics, standing on the sidelines? Certainly Occupy points the way to how savvy, spectacular protest can galvanize the national discourse, but surely we can do better than that. What would an American Left look like? That's the real question. Stay tuned.

**REPUBLICANS:** NO RESPONSE.



[20121221-01](#) 08:40 Tom Film: *Jack Reacher*, from the book *One Shot*

Entertaining Film, with a good storyline. Good Winter Action Flick! Cruise does a fine job. Pike is treat for the eyes in this interestingly-written action movie. We love the muscle car chase scenes, shootouts are okay, and nice humor thrown into the script. Subject matter and violence squeaked away with a PG 13 rating, it's very close to an R! Only frontal nudity would be that of Tom Cruise. ;-)

[http://m.cbsnews.com/blogsstorysynopsis.rbml?feed\\_id=71&catid=20081184&videofeed=null](http://m.cbsnews.com/blogsstorysynopsis.rbml?feed_id=71&catid=20081184&videofeed=null)

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mobileweb/2012/07/03/jack-reacher-trailer-tom-cruise\\_n\\_1645851.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/mobileweb/2012/07/03/jack-reacher-trailer-tom-cruise_n_1645851.html)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_Shot\\_\(novel\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Shot_(novel))

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack\\_Reacher](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_Reacher)

[20121221-02](#) 10:51 Pam FotM Newsletter #296 & Merry Christmas!

Merry Christmas, everyone. I wouldn't say I think of this group as family, but I certainly do count you as friends--whether you agree with me or not. Steve B., once again, I thank you for all you've done with FotM. Even though it will be on hiatus for a while (there will always be a next election), I hope we can all stay in though whenever we have a thought we just have to share. I sincerely hope next year brings bad things to an end and a new beginning for joy to the world.

[20121221-03](#) 10:56 SteveB "Tiny House, Big Freedom"

"Tiny House, Big Freedom" by Beth Greenfield, Shine/Yahoo News

Ella Jenkins has been living in a space about the size of a shipping container since October—and loving every minute of it. She built her own 130-square-foot house with the help of framing plans and her stepfather, and is now part of a growing trend of people who reside in "tiny houses," miniature abodes that are modestly priced, eco-friendly and minimalistic. [Just a sampling of pictures, below –SteveB]

Dec. 21, 2012, (<http://shine.yahoo.com/photos/tiny-house-big-style-slideshow/>)





I love the tub!



[20121223-04](#) 14:17 SteveG Re: "Tiny House, Big Freedom" (reply to SteveB, above)

Seeing more and more young people acting responsibly – really nice. Maybe our future won't be too bad once they get control.

[20121223-05](#) 17:18 SteveB Re: "Tiny House, Big Freedom" (reply to SteveG, above)

I thought that was what they said about us? :-)

[20121223-06](#) 20:32 SteveG Re: "Tiny House, Big Freedom" (reply to SteveB, above)

Lol - ur r8t!











[20121222-01](#) 06:27 SteveB

"NRA Leader Wayne LaPierre's Much-Criticized Sandy Hook Speech Was Actually Quite Effective"

"NRA Leader Wayne LaPierre's Much-Criticized Sandy Hook Speech Was Actually Quite Effective" by Jason Linkins, [Huffington Post](#)

Dec. 21, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/21/nra-wayne-lapierre\\_n\\_2348277.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/21/nra-wayne-lapierre_n_2348277.html))

Spend enough time dipping into the post-game reaction of NRA leader Wayne LaPierre's press conference today -- staged and performed as the organization's first public statement since the tragic school shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. -- and you'll likely run up on any number of people who'll tell you the LaPierre's presentation (which included calls for more guns in schools and greater restrictions on video games) was tone-deaf or ineffective or out-of-touch or a failure.

Those critics are wrong. LaPierre's presentation was terrifically effective.

Granted, if you believe that what LaPierre was trying to do today was to sincerely join in a national conversation over school shootings, or offer a coherent set of preventative policy options, or even just demonstrate some baseline sensitivity for the lives that were lost, it is easy to see why you'd deem LaPierre's press conference to be an ineffective, tone-deaf failure. But what you should remember that the National Rifle Association does not exist to offer sensible public policy or participate in conversations or pretend to be sensitive about tragedies. The National Rifle Association exists to assist the manufacturers of guns and gun-related accoutrements in selling guns and gun-related accoutrements to people. That is their job, summed up, in its entirety.

The NRA are lobbyists who represent a bunch of gun retailers, and this is what lobbyists do -- they help their clients sell their products. And every action that LaPierre took today can and should be viewed through that prism.

There are people who claim to be legitimately gobsmacked today that LaPierre did not come to Washington, D.C., and say, "You know, I honestly think we can give ground on the assault weapons thing." Those people need to ask themselves: Why would a guy who is paid to help assault weapon manufacturers sell assault weapons to people who want assault weapons say, "Hey, let's restrict the sales of assault weapons?" If you thought that the NRA was going to sign on to any sort of weapons ban, then you have not been paying attention to what the NRA is all about.

Lots of people who have read BuzzFeed's listicle of "10 Things The NRA Blamed For The Sandy Hook Massacre" have noted that one of the things that the NRA went awfully easy on was the actual Sandy Hook Massacre-er, Adam Lanza. Here's what LaPierre had to say about Lanza:

The truth is that our society is populated by an unknown number of genuine monsters — people so deranged, so evil, so possessed by voices and driven by demons that no sane person can possibly ever comprehend them. They walk among us every day. And does anybody really believe that the next Adam Lanza isn't planning his attack on a school he's already identified at this very moment?

See, LaPierre knows that people like Lanza exist, and he's capable of manifesting righteous anger against the things that he believes exclusively shape people like Lanza. And those things are the other things on that BuzzFeed list: video games and celebrities and the media and movies and President Obama.

But at the same time, he probably knows that the next Adam Lanza might have a mother with a stable source of income -- if not a stable source of income himself. And he's not going to get in the way of some of that money going to a gun manufacturer.

Yes -- the entire idea that we should create a small army of minimum-wage mercenaries to guard schools, which LaPierre promoted today, is certifiably stupid. As Salon's Alex Seitz-Wald reported, ABC News undertook an experiment back in 2009 where they demonstrated that you could arm people, train them to use their weapon, put them in a school, *warn them that there would be an attack on their school*, and they would still massively fail to stop the armed assailant that they knew was going to arrive.

Beyond the practicalities, however, the idea is pretty much a political non-starter, as the party that likes guns does not like spending tax dollars (least of all on public schools), and the party that likes public schools does not like handing out guns willy-nilly to glorified rent-a-cops.

In case you were wondering, the cost involved with putting an armed guard in every single school in America would be around \$18 billion and no, the phrase "private-sector solution" was never uttered by LaPierre during his press conference.

But LaPierre is happy to put the notion out there. Who knows? It's not likely that the federal government will pass a law that will create this Paul Blart Army of school defenders, but on the off-chance they do, all it means is that someone is going to have to purchase some guns. And maybe there are some states or counties or municipalities that can be suckered into passing a similar law, increasing the opportunities for gun retailers. (One thing's for sure, it probably won't be a county or municipality that has learned the hard way that placing an armed guard as a school won't prevent gun-related mayhem ... like, say, Jefferson County, Colo.)

So, people wonder how LaPierre could have been so dumb as to sit on his hands for one week and then deliver the presentation he delivered today. And people wonder if, as a result of today's presentation, David Gregory is going to tear LaPierre a new one on "Meet The Press" this weekend. The people who wonder that have obviously not been watching David Gregory or "Meet The Press" lately, but that's beside the point.

Wayne LaPierre is only too happy to lose an argument to David Gregory. Wayne LaPierre is only too happy to have people criticize the NRA for its response. Wayne LaPierre hears the scorn that you have for his "guns in schools" idea, and he welcomes it. That's because today, Wayne LaPierre did not go out in front of reporters in a sincere attempt to mount a policy argument or craft a solution or engender warm feelings from his critics. Today was about *synergy*. Wayne LaPierre went out in front of reporters because he knew it was time to leverage the Sandy Hook shooting into a unique, sales-boosting opportunity for the industry he represents.

And what's going on in Connecticut today?

Scott Carney@sgcarney:

I'm at a gun shop thirty minutes away from Newtown CT. This place is packed. Ppl worried guns will be illegal so they are stocking up

So, you maybe didn't notice, but today was a good day for Wayne LaPierre.

20121222-04

14:29

Dennis

"The Real Rationale for the 2nd Amendment, That Right-Wingers Are Totally Ignorant About"

Has history ever been more distorted for political means?

"The Real Rationale for the 2nd Amendment, That Right-Wingers Are Totally Ignorant About" by Robert Parry, AlterNet

Dec. 21, 2012, (<http://www.alternet.org/news-amp-politics/real-rationale-2nd-amendment-right-wingers-are-totally-ignorant-about>)

(A big obstacle to commonsense gun control is the Right's false historical narrative that the Founders wanted an armed American public that could fight its own government.)

Right-wing resistance to meaningful gun control is driven, in part, by a false notion that America's Founders adopted the Second Amendment because they wanted an armed population that could battle the U.S. government. The opposite is the truth, but many Americans seem to have embraced this absurd, anti-historical narrative.

The reality was that the Framers wrote the Constitution and added the Second Amendment with the goal of creating a strong central government with a citizen-based military force capable of putting down insurrections, not to enable or encourage uprisings. The key Framers, after all, were mostly men of means with a huge stake in an orderly society, the likes of George Washington and James Madison. President George Washington, as Commander-in-Chief, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey Rebellion in 1794.

The men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1787 weren't precursors to France's Robespierre or Russia's Leon Trotsky, believers in perpetual revolutions. In fact, their work on the Constitution was influenced by the experience of Shays'

Rebellion in western Massachusetts in 1786, a populist uprising that the weak federal government, under the Articles of Confederation, lacked an army to defeat.

Daniel Shays, the leader of the revolt, was a former Continental Army captain who joined with other veterans and farmers to take up arms against the government for failing to address their economic grievances.

The rebellion alarmed retired Gen. George Washington who received reports on the developments from old Revolutionary War associates in Massachusetts, such as Gen. Henry Knox and Gen. Benjamin Lincoln. Washington was particularly concerned that the disorder might serve the interests of the British, who had only recently accepted the existence of the United States.

On Oct. 22, 1786, in a letter seeking more information from a friend in Connecticut, Washington wrote: "I am mortified beyond expression that in the moment of our acknowledged independence we should by our conduct verify the predictions of our transatlantic foe, and render ourselves ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of all Europe."

In another letter on Nov. 7, 1786, Washington questioned Gen. Lincoln about the spreading unrest. "What is the cause of all these commotions? When and how will they end?" Lincoln responded: "Many of them appear to be absolutely so [mad] if an attempt to annihilate our present constitution and dissolve the present government can be considered as evidence of insanity."

However, the U.S. government lacked the means to restore order, so wealthy Bostonians financed their own force under Gen. Lincoln to crush the uprising in February 1787. Afterwards, Washington expressed satisfaction at the outcome but remained concerned the rebellion might be a sign that European predictions about American chaos were coming true.

"If three years ago [at the end of the American Revolution] any person had told me that at this day, I should see such a formidable rebellion against the laws & constitutions of our own making as now appears I should have thought him a bedlamite – a fit subject for a mad house," Washington wrote to Knox on Feb. 3, 1787, adding that if the government "shrinks, or is unable to enforce its laws ... anarchy & confusion must prevail."

Washington's alarm about Shays' Rebellion was a key factor in his decision to take part in – and preside over – the Constitutional Convention, which was supposed to offer revisions to the Articles of Confederation but instead threw out the old structure entirely and replaced it with the U.S. Constitution, which shifted national sovereignty from the 13 states to "We the People" and dramatically enhanced the power of the central government.

The drastic changes prompted strong opposition from some Revolutionary War figures, such as Virginia's Patrick Henry, who denounced the federal power grab and rallied a movement known as the Anti-Federalists. Prospects for the Constitution's ratification were in such doubt that its principal architect James Madison joined in a sales campaign known as the Federalist Papers in which he tried to play down how radical his changes actually were.

To win over other skeptics, Madison agreed to support a Bill of Rights, which would be proposed as the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Madison's political maneuvering succeeded as the Constitution narrowly won approval in key states, such as Virginia, New York and Massachusetts. The First Congress then approved the Bill of Rights which were ratified in 1791. (For details, see Robert Parry's *America's Stolen Narrative*.)

### Behind the Second Amendment

The Second Amendment dealt with concerns about "security" and the need for trained militias to ensure what the Constitution called "domestic Tranquility." There was also hesitancy among many Framers about the costs and risks from a large standing army, thus making militias composed of citizens an attractive alternative.

So, the Second Amendment read: "A well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." Contrary to some current right-wing fantasies about the Framers wanting to encourage popular uprisings over grievances, the language of the amendment is clearly aimed at maintaining order within the country.

That point was driven home by the actions of the Second Congress amid another uprising which erupted in 1791 in western Pennsylvania. This anti-tax revolt, known as the Whiskey Rebellion, prompted Congress in 1792 to expand on the idea of "a well-regulated militia" by passing the Militia Acts which required all military-age white males to obtain their own muskets and equipment for service in militias.

In 1794, President Washington, who was determined to demonstrate the young government's resolve, led a combined force of state militias against the Whiskey rebels. Their revolt soon collapsed and order was restored, demonstrating how the Second Amendment helped serve the government in maintaining "security," as the Amendment says.

Beyond this clear historical record – that the Framers' intent was to create security for the new Republic, not promote armed rebellions – there is also the simple logic that the Framers represented the young nation's aristocracy. Many, like Washington, owned vast tracts of land. They recognized that a strong central government and domestic tranquility were in their economic interests.

So, it would be counterintuitive – as well as anti-historical – to believe that Madison and Washington wanted to arm the population so the discontented could resist the constitutionally elected government. In reality, the Framers wanted to arm the people – at least the white males – so uprisings, whether economic clashes like Shays' Rebellion, anti-tax protests like the Whiskey Rebellion, attacks by Native Americans or slave revolts, could be repulsed.

However, the Right has invested heavily during the last several decades in fabricating a different national narrative, one that ignores both logic and the historical record. In this right-wing fantasy, the Framers wanted everyone to have a gun so they could violently resist their own government.

This bogus "history" has then been amplified through the Right's powerful propaganda apparatus – Fox News, talk radio, the Internet and ideological publications – to persuade millions of Americans that their possession of semi-automatic assault rifles and other powerful firearms is what the Framers intended, that today's gun-owners are fulfilling some centuries-old American duty.

The mythology about the Framers and the Second Amendment is, of course, only part of the fake history that the Right has created to persuade ill-informed Tea Partiers that they should dress up in Revolutionary War costumes and channel the spirits of men like Washington and Madison.

But this gun fable is particularly insidious because it obstructs efforts by today's government to enact commonsense gun-control laws and thus the false narrative makes possible the kinds of slaughters that erupt periodically across the United States, most recently in Newtown, Connecticut, where 20 schoolchildren and six teachers were murdered in minutes by an unstable young man with a civilian version of the M-16 combat rifle.

While it's absurd to think that the Founders could have even contemplated such an act – in their 18th Century world of single-fire muskets that required time-consuming reloading – right-wing gun advocates have evaded that obvious reality by postulating that Washington, Madison and other Founders would have wanted a highly armed population to resist the U.S. government.

Today's American Right is drunk on some very bad history, which is as dangerous as it is false.

20121223-01	07:45	MarthaH	NRA Spin
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In a statement on the NRA's Institute for Legislative Affairs website Friday, the group told its four million members that "if you think the latest gun control debate will be limited solely to legislation to ban semi-autos and 'large capacity' magazines, think again. Calls have already been renewed to subject all private sales of firearms to background checks, even among family members and friends, and to end mail-order sales of ammunition."

The statement added, "We knew that this fight was coming. But it's now crystal clear that this latest round is on an expedited track and the corresponding rhetoric has been amped up exponentially." The group urged its members

and “the tens of millions of other law-abiding American gun owners” to contact members of Congress “and let them know that gun bans and other restrictions on our Second Amendment rights are not the solution.”...

A PIECE of work...

<a href="#">20121223-02</a>	13:37	SteveB	Quotes: Second Amendment
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There are a lot of bogus gun quotes going around these days. Here’s just one **TOTALLY FALSE** example:

“Firearms stand next in importance to the Constitution itself. They are the American people's liberty teeth and keystone under independence. The church, the plow, the prairie wagon, and citizen's firearms are indelibly related. From the hour the Pilgrims landed, to the present day, events, occurrences, and tendencies prove that to insure peace, security and happiness, the rifle and the pistol are equally indispensable. Every corner of this land knows firearms, and more than 99 99/100 percent of them by their silence indicate they are in safe and sane hands. The very atmosphere of firearms anywhere and everywhere restrains evil interference; they deserve a place with all that's good. When firearms, go all goes; we need them every hour.”

—Falsely attributed to George Washington, address to the second session of the first U.S. Congress.

Not sure which ones are real: [http://www.godseesyou.com/2nd\\_amendment\\_quotes.html](http://www.godseesyou.com/2nd_amendment_quotes.html).

<a href="#">20121222-02</a>	10:04	SteveB	“The Four Most Important Political Lessons of 2012”
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The last three are right-on. The first...well, I am hopeful but skeptical...

“The Four Most Important Political Lessons of 2012” by Eliot Spitzer, Slate

Dec. 21, 2012,

([http://www.slate.com/blogs/spitzer/2012/12/21/2012\\_in\\_review\\_the\\_four\\_most\\_important\\_lessons\\_of\\_the\\_year.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/spitzer/2012/12/21/2012_in_review_the_four_most_important_lessons_of_the_year.html))

What are the most important political lessons of 2012?

**First, we saw the end of the electoral power—at the national level—of the Republican Party's theologically rigid agenda.** Mitt Romney's primary season embrace of the social and economic agenda of the more rabid elements of his party doomed him, especially the shrill immigration rhetoric and the harshly insensitive theory that no additional sacrifice or contribution should be sought from those at the top. When he tried to move away from the sharpest edges of this during the general election, the public didn't trust him.

Romney's defeat was not simply the arithmetic of voting blocs; it was the larger statement that "We all did build this." The sense of community in our politics and society re-asserted itself against the hard individualism of the right. Hence the near certainty that Congress will enact immigration reform and tax rates that require the wealthiest to pay more. The two theologians of the Republican Party—Grover Norquist on taxes and Wayne LaPierre on guns—are now struggling. This is good for our politics.

**Second, the president did best and crafted his majority when he spoke to true progressive values.**

During much of his first term he was quite tepid in his embrace of those values. And his poll numbers were flat, the public disengaged from his efforts. But when he finally spoke up on the agenda that the public cares about—from same-sex marriage to immigration reform to a fair distribution of the tax burden—the public responded. The lesson is clear: The timorous politics of so many Democrats who feel compelled to rush to the middle, to be meek, to shy away from the agenda of change that is needed, is not only wrong substantively, it is wrong politically.

**Third, revolutions are messy things.** The initial euphoria of the Arab spring—the most important foreign policy event of the past several years—has now been replaced by the grind of upheaval that has no clear direction. Yet the move toward secular society does seem to have traction, the desire for freedom as we understand it seems to be real. There are countervailing forces—the Islamists' desire to impose an intolerant theology. Yet in Egypt and elsewhere the foundation of democracy is visible, if under threat. Whether the state of Egypt ends up replicating Pakistan (we hope not) or Turkey (we hope so), it surely will not be Iran. The Middle East is still a mess, from Syria to Iran. Yet it does appear to be moving in the right direction.

**Fourth, just because I can't resist coming back to this issue at least briefly, our financial system is still fraught with structural problems.** From insider trading to LIBOR bid-rigging to analysts still shilling for IPOs they have an interest in, the problems continue. It is part human nature, part our failure to sanction properly when we need to, part our government's failure to have the backbone to restructure a system that is clearly unstable and flawed.

What a year it has been. And while 2013 will not see a major national election, we can be sure that most Republicans will obstruct and some Democrats will appease. We can be sure that the Middle East will continue to be a source of vexing questions that need solutions. And we can be very sure that Wall Street will not fix itself.

Which is why we will have loads to discuss.

Have a wonderful holiday and New Year.

<a href="#">20121222-03</a>	10:23	Tom	Graphic: Booooooooooooo!
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20121222-05 16:59 SteveB Re: Graphic: Booooooooooooo! (reply to Tom, above)

Excellent! It did absolutely suck as an end of the world. Yeah!

I have to admit I had my doubts, but we stocked up on Twinkies anyway.

20121222-06 19:48 SteveB Fw: SignOn Petition: No Cuts to Social Security!

from SignOn.org:

The cuts in Social Security that President Obama offered to John Boehner are opposed by an overwhelming majority of voters and would amount to a cut of more than 5 percent for current retirees—and even more as the years go by.

For many retirees this would mean critical cuts to benefits that cover medicine, food, and other daily necessities. That's why I created a petition on SignOn.org urging President Obama and Congress, including the Florida delegation, to oppose cuts to Social Security as part of the fiscal showdown. Please click below to sign it and then share with your friends to keep it going:

To be delivered to: The United States House of Representatives, The United States Senate, and President Barack Obama

[Petition Statement](#)

**Please Do NOT BARGAIN WITH SOCIAL SECURITY.**

[Petition Background](#)

I am on Social Security Benefits. This program has been paid for by the people that worked for a lifetime and paid into the program year after year. It is not an entitlement program. The cost of living raises help to keep up with the increasing cost of living. The average benefit of 15K is poverty level. Please do not make life more difficult for us seniors. Leave Social Security alone.

Click here to sign my petition to stop cuts to Social Security in the fiscal showdown:

<http://www.signon.org/sign/no-cuts-to-social-security-8>.

Thanks! –Thora Wagner, North Port, Florida

20121222-07 21:25 SteveG Ethanol Producer

Makes sense...

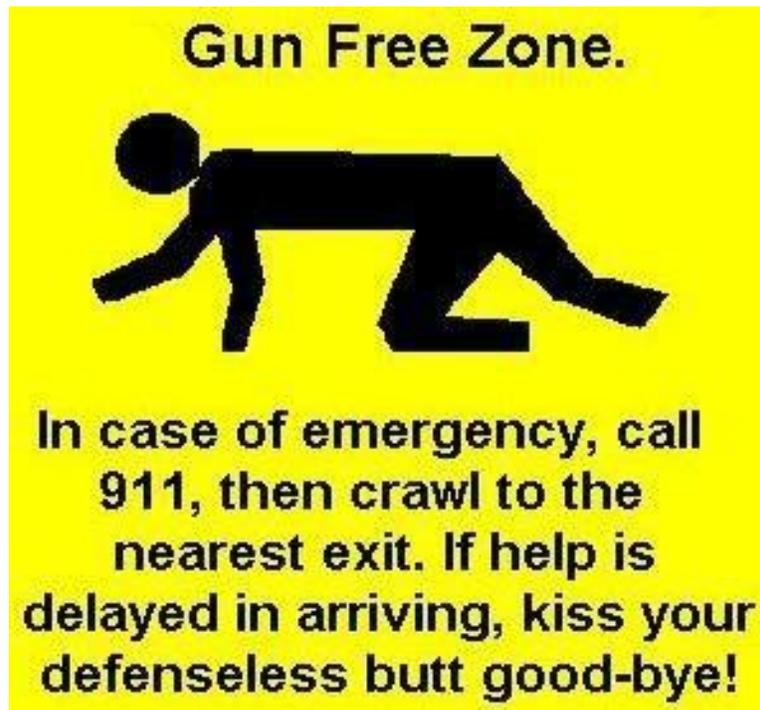
<http://www.coskata.com/>



20121223-03 14:13 SteveG Cliff

Republicans, Democrats, right, left, doesn't matter; senate, house, pres., doesn't matter – they should all be ashamed of their behavior and their part of our country's problems. All should be sitting in a room in D.C., figuring this all out and eating pizza UNTIL THEY DO. No showers, no baths, no smoke breaks – just pizza and work. Well, maybe a snicker doodle.

20121224-01 01:40 Tom Graphic: Gun Free Zone



20121224-02 09:53 Art "Enough!"

Merry Christmas!

Saw this today from Andrew Sullivan. My bold marks:

"Enough!" by Andrew Sullivan, The Daily Beast

Dec. 21, 2012, (<http://andrewsullivan.thedailybeast.com/2012/12/enough.html>)

Between the humiliating and chaotic collapse of Speaker Boehner's already ludicrously extreme Plan B and Wayne La Pierre's deranged proposal to put government agents in schools with guns, the Republican slide into total epistemic closure and political marginalization has now become a free-fall. This party, not to mince words, is unfit for government. **There is no conservative party in the West - except for minor anti-immigrant neo-fascist ones in Europe - anywhere close to this level of far right extremism.** And now the damage these fanatics can do is not just to their own country - was the debt ceiling debacle of 2011 not enough for them? - but to the entire world.

Those of us who have warned for years about this disturbing trend toward ever more extreme measures - backing torture, pre-emptive un-budgeted wars, out-of-control spending followed, like a frantic mood swing, by anti-spending absolutism of the most insane variety in a steep recession, vicious hostility to illegal immigrants, contempt

for gay couples, hostility even to contraception, let alone a middle ground on abortion ... well, you know it all by now.

But the current constitutional and economic vandalism removes any shred of doubt that this party and its lucrative media bubble is in any way conservative. They aren't. They're ideological zealots, indifferent to the consequences of their actions, contemptuous of the very to-and-fro essential for the American system to work, gerry-mandering to thwart the popular will, filibustering in a way that all but wrecks the core mechanics of American democracy, and now willing to acquiesce to the biggest tax increase imaginable because they cannot even accept Obama's compromise from his clear campaign promise to raise rates for those earning over \$250,000 to \$400,000 a year.

And this is not the exception. It is the rule. On abortion, the party proposes that it be made illegal in every state by amending the Constitution. Torture? More, please. Iran? It should be attacked if it merely develops the technological skill to make a nuclear bomb, let alone actually make one. Israel? Leading Republicans don't just support new settlements on the West Bank. They show up for the opening ceremonies!

Gun control? A massacre of children leads to a proposal for more guns in elementary schools and no concession on assault weapons. Immigration? Romney represented the party base - favoring a brutal regime of persecution of illegal immigrants until they are forced to "self-deport" - or rounding up as many as they can. Climate change? It's a hoax - and we should respond by shrieking "Drill, Baby, Drill!" Gay marriage? The federal constitution should be amended to bar any legal recognition of any gay relationships, including civil partnerships. Their legislative agenda in this Congress? To "make Obama a one-term president." Not saving the economy, not pursuing new policies, not cooperating to make Democratic legislation better. Just destroying a president of the opposite party. And, of course, failing.

Then there is the rhetoric. In just the last fortnight, House Republicans have asserted that secretary of state Clinton faked her recent fall and concussion at home in order to get out of testifying on the Benghazi consulate attack. And then the Weekly Standard quotes a Senate Republican staffer saying: "Send us Hagel and we will make sure every American knows he is an anti-Semite."

Enough. This faction and its unhinged fanaticism has no place in any advanced democracy. They must be broken. But the current irony is that no one has managed to expose their extremism more clearly than their own Speaker. His career is over. As is the current Republican party. We need a new governing coalition in the House - Democrats and those few sane Republicans willing to put country before ideology. But even that may be impossible.

20121224-13 15:42 Pam Re: "Enough!" (reply to Art, above)

I love Andrew Sullivan, and I love what he says here. Today on our local news there were reports of two rural churches in the neighboring county that were burned to the ground in the last two days. Arson is suspected. The churches were over a century old and an important part of their community. I find it deplorable that anyone would find justification in such destruction. Some people are just bad--or insane. Either way they must be contained, not by arming kindergarten teachers but with saner gun laws. I know gun violence may not seem the same thing as arson, but I think they're shoots off the same stem.

20121224-04 11:26 SteveG "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows"

We continue to expand our military globalization...

"Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" by Lolita C. Baldor, AP/Yahoo! News

Dec. 24, 2012, (<http://news.yahoo.com/army-teams-going-africa-terror-threat-grows-082214765.html>)

(WASHINGTON) A U.S. Army brigade will begin sending small teams into as many as 35 African nations early next year, part of an intensifying Pentagon effort to train countries to battle extremists and give the U.S. a ready and trained force to dispatch to Africa if crises requiring the U.S. military emerge.

The teams will be limited to training and equipping efforts, and will not be permitted to conduct military operations without specific, additional approvals from the secretary of defense.

The sharper focus on Africa by the U.S. comes against a backdrop of widespread insurgent violence across North Africa, and as the African Union and other nations discuss military intervention in northern Mali.

The terror threat from al-Qaida linked groups in Africa has been growing steadily, particularly with the rise of the extremist Islamist sect Boko Haram in Nigeria. Officials also believe that the Sept. 11 attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, which killed the ambassador and three other Americans, may have been carried out by those who had ties to al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb.

This first-of-its-kind brigade assignment — involving teams from the 2nd Brigade, 1st Infantry Division — will target countries such as Libya, Sudan, Algeria and Niger, where al-Qaida-linked groups have been active. It also will assist nations like Kenya and Uganda that have been battling al-Shabab militants on the front lines in Somalia.

Gen. Carter Ham, the top U.S. commander in Africa, noted that the brigade has a small drone capability that could be useful in Africa. But he also acknowledged that he would need special permission to tap it for that kind of mission.

"If they want them for (military) operations, the brigade is our first sourcing solution because they're prepared," said Gen. David Rodriguez, the head of U.S. Army Forces Command. "But that has to go back to the secretary of defense to get an execute order."

Already the U.S. military has plans for nearly 100 different exercises, training programs and other activities across the widely diverse continent. But the new program faces significant cultural and language challenges, as well as nagging questions about how many of the lower-level enlisted members of the brigade, based in Fort Riley, Kan., will participate, since the teams would largely be made up of more senior enlisted troops and officers. A full brigade numbers about 3,500, but the teams could range from just a few people to a company of about 200. In rare cases for certain exercises, it could be a battalion, which would number about 800.

To bridge the cultural gaps with the African militaries, the Army is reaching out across the services, the embassies and a network of professional organizations to find troops and experts that are from some of the African countries. The experts can be used during training, and the troops can both advise or travel with the teams as they begin the program.

"In a very short time frame we can only teach basic phrases," said Col. Matthew McKenna, commander of the 162nd Infantry Brigade that will begin training the Fort Riley soldiers in March for their African deployment. "We focus on culture and the cultural impact — how it impacts the African countries' military and their operations."

Thomas Dempsey, a professor with the Africa Center for Strategic Studies, said the biggest challenge will be the level of cultural, language and historical diversity across the far-flung continent.

"How do you train for that in a way that would be applicable wherever they go?" said Dempsey, a retired Army colonel. He said he's not sure using a combat brigade is the right answer, but added, "I'm not sure what the answer is. The security challenges differ so dramatically that, to be honest, I really don't think it's feasible to have a continental training package."

The Pentagon's effort in Africa, including the creation of U.S. Africa Command in 2007, has been carefully calibrated, largely due to broad misgivings across the continent that it could spawn American bases or create the perception of an undue U.S. military influence there. As a result, the command has been based in Stuttgart, Germany, rather than on the African continent.

At the same time, many African nations are eager for U.S. training or support, as they work to build their militaries, battle pirates along the coast and shut down drug trafficking, kidnapping and other insurgent activities.

McKenna acknowledged the challenge, but said the military has to tap its conventional fighting forces for this task because there aren't enough special operations forces to meet the global training needs. He said there will be as many as a dozen different training segments between February and September, each designed to provide tailored instruction for the particular teams.

The mission for the 2nd Brigade — known as the "Dagger Brigade" — will begin in the spring and will pave the way for Army brigades to be assigned next to U.S. Pacific Command and then to U.S. European Command over the next year. The brigade is receiving its regular combat training first, and then will move on to the more specific instruction needed for the deployments, such as language skills, cultural information and other data about the African nations.

Dagger Brigade commander Col. Jeff Broadwater said the language and culture training will be different than what most soldiers have had in recent years, since they have focused on Pashtun and Farsi, languages used mostly in Afghanistan and Iran. He said he expects the soldiers to learn French, Swahili, Arabic or other languages, as well as the local cultures.

"What's really exciting is we get to focus on a different part of the world and maintain our core combat skills," Broadwater said, adding that the soldiers know what to expect. "You see those threats (in Africa) in the news all the time."

The brigade will be carved up into different teams designed to meet the specific needs of each African nation. As the year goes on, the teams will travel from Fort Riley to those nations — all while trying to avoid any appearance of a large U.S. military footprint.

"The challenge we have is to always understand the system in their country," said Rodriguez, who has been nominated to be the next head of Africa Command. "We're not there to show them our system, we're there to make their system work. Here is what their army looks like, and here is what we need to prepare them to do."

Rodriguez said the nearly 100 assignments so far requested by Ham will be carried out with "a very small footprint to get the high payoff."

[20121224-06](#)

13:12

Pam

Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to SteveG, above)

OK. I am willing to keep an open mind about this, but it seems to me we need to do SOMETHING to fight terrorism globally. I'm certainly not a military strategist, but common sense tells me that using small, elite special forces units that can be flexible, able to adapt to conditions on the ground, and skilled in targeted ops is the prudent thing to do. It doesn't look like big land armies are going to be viable in the age of unmanned drones and IEDs, and they are certainly not suited to mountain warfare. If the "enemy" can come up with innovative ways to get at us with limited resources, why can't we be equally crafty? I could be wrong, but I imagine a big military bureaucracy sitting like a toad on a bunch of soldier-bugs that need to get out from under and scurry about. Not the best image, but it's all I could come up with. I don't like the idea of the U.S. being the police of the world, but when there are bad guys who want to kill us, what choice do we have? This does not mean I think we should have troops in Afghanistan or Iraq. Troubled nations should be left to sort themselves out, but international terrorists must be defanged. I know it's all way more complicated than I have presented it, and I don't know much of anything, but I do hope that, without my knowledge, someone somewhere is taking steps to root out the bad guys. Art, you're our military expert. Set me straight.

[20121224-07](#) 13:58 Dennis Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Pam, above)

**Pam (above):** I don't like the idea of the U.S. being the police of the world, but when there are bad guys who want to kill us, what choice do we have?

Could it be that the reason there are bad guys out to kill us is because we are trying to police the world? And could the reason why we try to police the world be because of the economic hegemonism of American capitalism? These are not original rhetorical questions, by the way.

[20121224-08](#) 14:15 SteveG Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Pam, above)

I really don't think the US has been or is the angel that we would have others believe and as we continue being the police of the world and expanding in some format the military industrial complex we can foresee more people wanting to do us harm. To continue in a path that is not working seems to be an illogical move, especially considering our budget and the portion of the budget attributed to defense. I am not saying that the state of the world or that terrorism focused on the US is our fault, but something is not right and we play some part in that – we need to identify and fix our part in the world being messed up.

[20121224-09](#) 14:40 Art Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to SteveG, above)

All good points. Somewhere there has to be a balance. We used to be the good guys in the world. Not so sure these days and maybe that ought to be the end objective, as we consider these things. How will this action be perceived? Not so ridiculous when you think it through.

I am reminded historically of how often nations found themselves with a robust military after some period of conflict and looked around for something for it to do. I personally saw this in Europe in the late 80's as the Wall came down. I was chief of the Africa program for EUCOM. The US Army Europe USAEUR suddenly found itself without a job (no more Russians coming through the Fulda Gap), so they decided maybe they would take over Africa. Didn't last long but it was an interesting observation of how these things can work.

Snowing up here at the cabin just now, so a perfect Christmas Eve.

Merry Christmas!

[20121224-11](#) 15:07 Bill Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Art & SteveG, above)

What [you both] have said seems logical: Maybe we need a new foreign policy that more rationally defines use of the military in regions where we have interests and, slightly more specifically, temporizes on global use of the military. The United States needs to be understood by the rest of the world as powerful and willing to use massive force, but committing advisers and troops everywhere would seem to galvanize the religious zealots and lovers of terrorism. There is an abundance of areas on the face of this earth that aren't worth military intervention and the taxation that we must bear. Afghanistan would seem just such a place that is much more medieval than modern and not at all susceptible to change. The Taliban were a matrix for Al Qaeda and others, and we have wreaked vengeance. Huge military effort for the long term in such places seems a waste; the citizenry and the culture are not hospitable to much of anything that we try to bring them. Similarly, becoming involved in lots of African countries only to the extent of committing advisers may engender further actions of dubious value to U. S. interests and huge costs.

[20121224-12](#) 15:35 Pam Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Bill, above)

I agree that America has done plenty to deserve the enmity of the rest of the world. Crowing about how we're #1 is the least of it. I agree with most of your arguments, Art, SteveG, and Dennis, but there still remains the fact of terrorist cells that are dedicated to our ruin, whether we deserve it or not. Yes, we should clean up our act, and I hope Obama will continue in that direction, but we can't just lay down our arms and expect everyone else to do the same. They won't. There will still be evil men bent on doing terrible things, and that's not all America's fault. Good old human nature surely has something to do with it. From bullies on a school bus to Saddam Hussein, there exists an evil streak that runs through humanity that will not be stopped with kindness or rationality. I think it was wrong of Clinton to stay out of Rwanda and to delay action in Sarajevo. Are you all suggesting that we allow Congolese soldiers to rape and maim innocent women and children? We must be judicious in our use of force, and of course we should do better on the international stage, but how can we do nothing to help the victims of an Assad or a Gaddafi?

[20121224-15](#) 16:29 SteveG Re: "Army Teams Going to Africa as Terror Threat Grows" (reply to Pam, above)

I did not mean to imply or infer – I get those 2 things mixed up – that we lay down our weapons and I certainly did not mean that everything is America's fault.. During the 50's we changed the wording to the Pledge of Allegiance, the US national motto, and a few other things to fight the USSR and the spread of communism. During the 60's we started a thing called the Peace Corps focusing on assisting developing countries. There are a multitude of things that we can do as a country and encourage other countries to do in order to make the world a better place – it all doesn't have to be military. If we are doing the other things we need to toot the horn on them, make them known far and wide. The good around the world needs to come from someone else too, not only the guy wearing a flak jacket and night vision goggles.

[20121224-05](#) 12:27 Tom "Navy SEAL Commander Dead in Afghanistan in Suspected Suicide"

"Navy SEAL Commander Dead in Afghanistan in Suspected Suicide" by Ian Simpson and Phil Stewart

Dec. 23, 2012, (<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/12/24/us-usa-afghanistan-seal-idUSBRE8BN00T20121224>)

(WASHINGTON) The commander of an elite U.S. Navy SEAL unit has died in Afghanistan, the Defense Department said on Sunday, and a U.S. military official said his death was being investigated as a suspected suicide.

Commander Job Price, 42, of Pottstown, Pennsylvania, died on Saturday of a non-combat related injury in central Afghanistan's Uruzgan Province, the Pentagon said in a statement.

"This incident is currently under investigation," it said.

Price, was assigned to a Naval Special Warfare unit in Virginia Beach, Virginia, and was the commanding officer of SEAL Team Four. He failed to show up for an event on Saturday and colleagues found him dead in his quarters, the U.S. military official told Reuters on condition of anonymity.

NBC News and CNN also quoted unnamed military officials as saying that the death was being looked at as a possible suicide.

Lieutenant David Lloyd, a spokesman for Naval Special Warfare Group Two, which comprises the four SEAL teams on the U.S. East Coast, declined to comment on the cause of death, saying it was under investigation.

Price was married and had a daughter. He had been a naval officer since May 1993, Lloyd said.

Captain Robert Smith, the Group Two commander, said in a statement: "The Naval Special Warfare family is deeply saddened by the loss of our teammate. We extend our condolences, thoughts and prayers to the family, friends, and NSW community during this time of grieving.

"As we mourn the loss and honor the memory of our fallen teammate, those he served with will continue to carry out the mission."

SEAL is an acronym for sea, air, land.

<a href="#">20121224-10</a>	14:54	MarthaH	"Six Political Lessons of 2012"
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"Six Political Lessons of 2012" by Julian Zelizer, CNN

Dec. 24, 2012, (<http://edition.cnn.com/2012/12/24/opinion/zelizer-lessons-2012/index.html>)

2012 has been a tumultuous year in American politics. With the presidential election capping off the year, Americans have witnessed a series of bitter domestic battles and turbulent events overseas. As the year closes out, it is worth thinking about some of the most important lessons that politicians and voters can learn from this year as they prepare for 2013.

Here are six:

1. The Republican brand name is in trouble.

The GOP took a drubbing in 2012. To be sure, Mitt Romney ran a problematic campaign. His inability to connect with voters and a number of embarrassing gaffes hurt the chances for Republicans to succeed.

Just as important to the outcome was the party that Romney represented. Voters are not happy with the GOP. Public approval for the party has been extremely low. Congressional Republicans have helped to bring down the party name with their inability to compromise.

Recent polls show that if the nation goes off the fiscal cliff, the Republicans would be blamed. According to a survey by NBC and the Wall Street Journal, 65 percent of people asked for a short word or phrase to describe the GOP came up with something negative. The Republican Party was also the lowest-rated political institution.

The exit polls in November showed that the GOP is out of step with the electorate on a number of big issues, including immigration and gay marriage. If Republicans don't undertake some serious reforms and offer fresh voices, all the new messaging in the world won't help them as the competition starts for 2016.

2. America has grown more liberal on cultural and social issues.

The election results confirmed what polls have been showing for some time. If the 1960s was a battle over conservative "traditional family values" and liberal ideals of social relations, liberals eventually won. Throughout the year, polls showed, for example, that the public was becoming more tolerant of gay marriage and civil unions. Americans support the view that gay sex should be legal by a margin of 2-1, compared to 1977 when the public was split.

In the election, same-sex marriage was approved in three states, voters in Wisconsin sent to office the first openly gay senator, and two states approved of referendums to legalize the recreational use of marijuana. Americans are accepting of social diversity, and expect that the pluralism of the electorate will be reflected by the composition of elected officials in Washington.

While there are some conservative voices who lament these changes and warn of a nation that is veering toward Sodom, a majority are more than comfortable that some of the taboos and social restrictions of

earlier eras are fading and that we live in a nation which is more tolerant than ever before. These social and cultural changes will certainly raise more questions about restrictive practices and policies that remain in place while creating pressure for new kinds of leaders who are responsive to these changes.

### 3. The Middle East remains a tinderbox.

In the years that followed Barack Obama's election, there was some hope that the Middle East could become a calmer region. When revolutions brought down some of the most notorious dictators in the region, many Americans cheered as the fervor for democracy seemed to be riding high.

But events in 2012 threw some cold water on those hopes. The Muslim Brotherhood won control of the Egyptian government. In Syria, the government brutally cracked down on opponents, reaching the point in December where Obama's administration has started to talk about the possibility of the al-Assad regime using chemical weapons, though the severity of the threat is unclear. The battles between Palestinians and Israel raged with rockets being fired into Tel Aviv and Israelis bombing targets in Gaza.

Although national attention is focused on domestic policy, it is clear that the Middle East has the capacity to command national attention at any moment and remains as explosive as ever.

### 4. Our infrastructure needs repair.

Hurricane Sandy devastated the Northeast in November, leaving millions of Americans on the East Coast without power and with damaged property. Soon after the hurricane hit, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo made an important point. The infrastructure of our cities is outdated and needs to be revamped so that it can withstand current weather patterns. Speaking of the need for levees in New York, Cuomo said: "It is something we're going to have to start thinking about ... The construction of this city did not anticipate these kinds of situations."

Regardless of whether Congress takes action on the issue of climate change, in the short term cities and suburbs must do more work to curtail the kind of damage wreaked by these storms and to mitigate the costs of recovery -- building underground power lines, increasing resources for emergency responders, building state-of-the-art water systems, and constructing effective barriers to block water from flooding.

### 5. The new immigrants are a powerful political and social force.

As was the case in the turn of the twentieth century when Eastern and Southern Europeans came into this country, massive waves of immigration are remaking the social fabric of the nation. Latino-Americans, Asian-Americans and other new portions of the electorate who have been coming into the country since the reform of immigration laws in 1965 are coming to represent a bigger and bigger portion of the electorate.

Not only are their numbers growing as a voting bloc, but they are more organized and active than ever before, both on election day as well as in policy making.

Soon after the election, The *New York Times* reported that 600 members of United We Dream, a network of younger immigrants who don't have their papers, met for three days to plan how to lobby for a bill that would enable 11 million illegal immigrants to become legal. One of the leaders, Christina Jimenez, explained: "We have an unprecedented opportunity to engage our parents, our cousins, our *abuelitos* in this fight." They have both parties scrambling as Democrats are working to fulfill the promises that brought these voters to their side in November, while some Republicans are desperate to dampen the influence of hard-line anti-immigration activists in their party.

### 6. We need to do something about guns.

The year ended with a horrific shooting at an elementary school in Connecticut. When a 20-year-old went on a rampage apparently using guns that had been legally purchased by his mother, the world watched with horror. Several prominent conservative advocates of gun rights, including former congressman and

television host Joseph Scarborough as well as Sen. Joe Manchin, made statements indicating that the time has come to impose stricter controls and regulations on the purchase of weapons. "I don't know anybody in the sporting or hunting arena that goes out with an assault rifle," Manchin said.

Over the next few weeks, there will certainly be a big debate about what caused this shooting. People from different perspectives will highlight different issues but making it more difficult for people to get their hands on certain kinds of weapons, while not a cure-all, can only diminish the chances of this happening again.

There are many more lessons but these six stand out. After the trauma of the past week, let's hope the new year starts off with better days.

<a href="#">20121224-14</a>	15:45	Art	Re: "Six Political Lessons of 2012" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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Great summary!! Thanks.

<a href="#">20121225-01</a>	03:41	SteveB	"Celebrating the Prince of Peace in the Land of Guns"
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"Celebrating the Prince of Peace in the Land of Guns" by Michael Moore, Huffington Post

Dec. 24, 2012, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-moore/gun-violence-united-states\\_b\\_2358115.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-moore/gun-violence-united-states_b_2358115.html))

After watching the deranged, delusional National Rifle Association press conference on Friday, it was clear that the Mayan prophecy had come true. Except the only world that was ending was the NRA's. Their bullying power to set gun policy in this country is over. The nation is repulsed by the massacre in Connecticut, and the signs are everywhere: a basketball coach at a post-game press conference; the Republican Joe Scarborough; a pawn shop owner in Florida; a gun buy-back program in New Jersey; a singing contest show on TV, and the conservative gun-owning judge who sentenced Jared Loughner.

So here's my little bit of holiday cheer for you:

These gun massacres aren't going to end any time soon.

I'm sorry to say this. But deep down we both know it's true. That doesn't mean we shouldn't keep pushing forward -- after all, the momentum is on our side. I know all of us -- including me -- would love to see the president and Congress enact stronger gun laws. We need a ban on automatic AND semiautomatic weapons and magazine clips that hold more than 7 bullets. We need better background checks and more mental health services. We need to regulate the ammo, too.

But, friends, I would like to propose that while all of the above will certainly reduce gun deaths (ask Mayor Bloomberg -- it is virtually impossible to buy a handgun in New York City and the result is the number of murders per year has gone from 2,200 to under 400), it won't really bring about an end to these mass slayings and it will not address the core problem we have. Connecticut had one of the strongest gun laws in the country. That did nothing to prevent the murders of 20 small children on December 14th.

In fact, let's be clear about Newtown: the killer had no criminal record so he would never have shown up on a background check. All of the guns he used were legally purchased. None fit the legal description of an "assault" weapon. The killer seemed to have mental problems and his mother had him seek help, but that was worthless. As for security measures, the Sandy Hook school was locked down and buttoned up BEFORE the killer showed up that morning. Drills had been held for just such an incident. A lot of good that did.

And here's the dirty little fact none of us liberals want to discuss: The killer only ceased his slaughter when he saw that cops were swarming onto the school grounds -- i.e, the men with the guns. When he saw the cops a-coming, he stopped the bloodshed and killed himself. Guns on police officers prevented another 20 or 40 or 100 deaths from

happening. Guns sometimes work. (Then again, there was an armed deputy sheriff at Columbine High School the day of that massacre and he couldn't/didn't stop it.)

I am sorry to offer this reality check on our much-needed march toward a bunch of well-intended, necessary -- but ultimately, mostly cosmetic-- changes to our gun laws. The sad facts are these: Other countries that have guns (like Canada, which has 7 million guns -- mostly hunting guns -- in their 12 million households) have a low murder rate. Kids in Japan watch the same violent movies and kids in Australia play the same violent video games (Grand Theft Auto was created by a British company; the UK had 58 gun murders last year in a nation of 63 million people). They simply don't kill each other at the rate that we do. Why is that? THAT is the question we should be exploring while we are banning and restricting guns: Who are we?

I'd like to try to answer that question.

We are a country whose leaders officially sanction and carry out acts of violence as a means to often an immoral end. We invade countries who didn't attack us. We're currently using drones in a half-dozen countries, often killing civilians.

This probably shouldn't come as a surprise to us as we are a nation founded on genocide and built on the backs of slaves. We slaughtered 600,000 of each other in a civil war. We "tamed the Wild West with a six-shooter," and we rape and beat and kill our women without mercy and at a staggering rate: every three hours a woman is murdered in the USA (half the time by an ex or a current); every three minutes a woman is raped in the USA; and every 15 seconds a woman is beaten in the USA.

We belong to an illustrious group of nations that still have the death penalty (North Korea, Saudi Arabia, China, Iran). We think nothing of letting tens of thousands of our own citizens die each year because they are uninsured and thus don't see a doctor until it's too late.

Why do we do this? One theory is simply "because we can." There is a level of arrogance in the otherwise friendly American spirit, conning ourselves into believing there's something exceptional about us that separates us from all those "other" countries (there are indeed many good things about us; the same could also be said of Belgium, New Zealand, France, Germany, etc.). We think we're #1 in everything when the truth is our students are 17th in science and 25th in math, and we're 35th in life expectancy. We believe we have the greatest democracy but we have the lowest voting turnout of any western democracy. We're biggest and the bestest at everything and we demand and take what we want.

And sometimes we have to be violent m\*\*\*\*\*f\*\*\*\*\*s to get it. But if one of us goes off-message and shows the utterly psychotic nature and brutal results of violence in a Newtown or an Aurora or a Virginia Tech, then we get all "sad" and "our hearts go out to the families" and presidents promise to take "meaningful action." Well, maybe this president means it this time. He'd better. An angry mob of millions is not going to let this drop.

While we are discussing and demanding what to do, may I respectfully ask that we stop and take a look at what I believe are the three extenuating factors that may answer the question of why we Americans have more violence than most anyone else:

## 1. POVERTY

If there's one thing that separates us from the rest of the developed world, it's this. 50 million of our people live in poverty. One in five Americans goes hungry at some point during the year. The majority of those who aren't poor are living from paycheck to paycheck. There's no doubt this creates more crime. Middle class jobs prevent crime and violence. (If you don't believe that, ask yourself this: If your neighbor has a job and is making \$50,000/year, what are the chances he's going to break into your home, shoot you and take your TV? Nil.)

## 2. FEAR/RACISM

We're an awfully fearful country considering that, unlike most nations, we've never been invaded. (No, 1812 wasn't an invasion. We started it.) Why on earth would we need 300 million guns in our homes? I get why the Russians might be a little spooked (over 20 million of them died in World War II). But what's our excuse? Worried that the Indians from the casino may go on the warpath? Concerned that the Canadians seem to be amassing too many Tim Horton's donut shops on both sides of the border?

No. It's because too many white people are afraid of black people. Period. The vast majority of the guns in the U.S. are sold to white people who live in the suburbs or the country. When we fantasize about being mugged or home invaded, what's the image of the perpetrator in our heads? Is it the freckled-face kid from down the street -- or is it someone who is, if not black, at least poor?

I think it would be worth it to a) do our best to eradicate poverty and re-create the middle class we used to have, and b) stop promoting the image of the black man as the boogeyman out to hurt you. Calm down, white people, and put away your guns.

### 3. THE "ME" SOCIETY

I think it's the every-man-for-himself ethos of this country that has put us in this mess and I believe it's been our undoing. Pull yourself up by your bootstraps! You're not my problem! This is mine!

Clearly, we are no longer our brother's and sister's keeper. You get sick and can't afford the operation? Not my problem. The bank has foreclosed on your home? Not my problem. Can't afford to go to college? Not my problem.

And yet, it all sooner or later becomes our problem, doesn't it? Take away too many safety nets and everyone starts to feel the impact. Do you want to live in that kind of society, one where you will then have a legitimate reason to be in fear? I don't.

I'm not saying it's perfect anywhere else, but I have noticed, in my travels, that other civilized countries see a national benefit to taking care of each other. Free medical care, free or low-cost college, mental health help. And I wonder -- why can't we do that? I think it's because in many other countries people see each other not as separate and alone but rather together, on the path of life, with each person existing as an integral part of the whole. And you help them when they're in need, not punish them because they've had some misfortune or bad break. I have to believe one of the reasons gun murders in other countries are so rare is because there's less of the lone wolf mentality amongst their citizens. Most are raised with a sense of connection, if not outright solidarity. And that makes it harder to kill one another.

Well, there's some food for thought as we head home for the holidays. Don't forget to say hi to your conservative brother-in-law for me. Even he will tell you that, if you can't nail a deer in three shots -- and claim you need a clip of 30 rounds -- you're not a hunter my friend, and you have no business owning a gun.

Have a wonderful Christmas or a beautiful December 25th!

20121224-16	22:32	Tom	Video: Punjabi Jingle Bell
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Check out this video on YouTube: <http://youtu.be/e1yEiSWp8Ws>.

"In Praise of Snow" by Cullen Murphy, *The Atlantic*

Jan., 1995, (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1995/01/in-praise-of-snow/305654/>)

(Watching it, understanding it, forecasting it, predicting how much water is in it—all this is a surprisingly large and intricate undertaking, one on which our society urgently depends.)

Snow Day (by Billy Collins)

(Hear Billy Collins read this poem (in RealAudio):

<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/ram/002snowday28.ram.>)

Today we woke up to a revolution of snow,  
its white flag waving over everything,  
the landscape vanished,  
not a single mouse to punctuate the blankness,  
and beyond these windows

the government buildings smothered,  
schools and libraries buried, the post office lost  
under the noiseless drift,  
the paths of trains softly blocked,  
the world fallen under this falling.

In a while I will put on some boots  
and step out like someone walking in water,  
and the dog will porpoise through the drifts,  
and I will shake a laden branch,  
sending a cold shower down on us both.

But for now I am a willing prisoner in this house,  
a sympathizer with the anarchic cause of snow.  
I will make a pot of tea  
and listen to the plastic radio on the counter,  
as glad as anyone to hear the news

that the Kiddie Corner School is closed,  
the Ding-Dong School, closed,  
the All Aboard Children's School, closed,  
the Hi-Ho Nursery School, closed,  
along with -- some will be delighted to hear --

the Toadstool School, the Little School,  
Little Sparrows Nursery School,  
Little Stars Pre-School, Peas-and-Carrots Day School,  
the Tom Thumb Child Center, all closed,  
and -- clap your hands -- the Peanuts Play School.

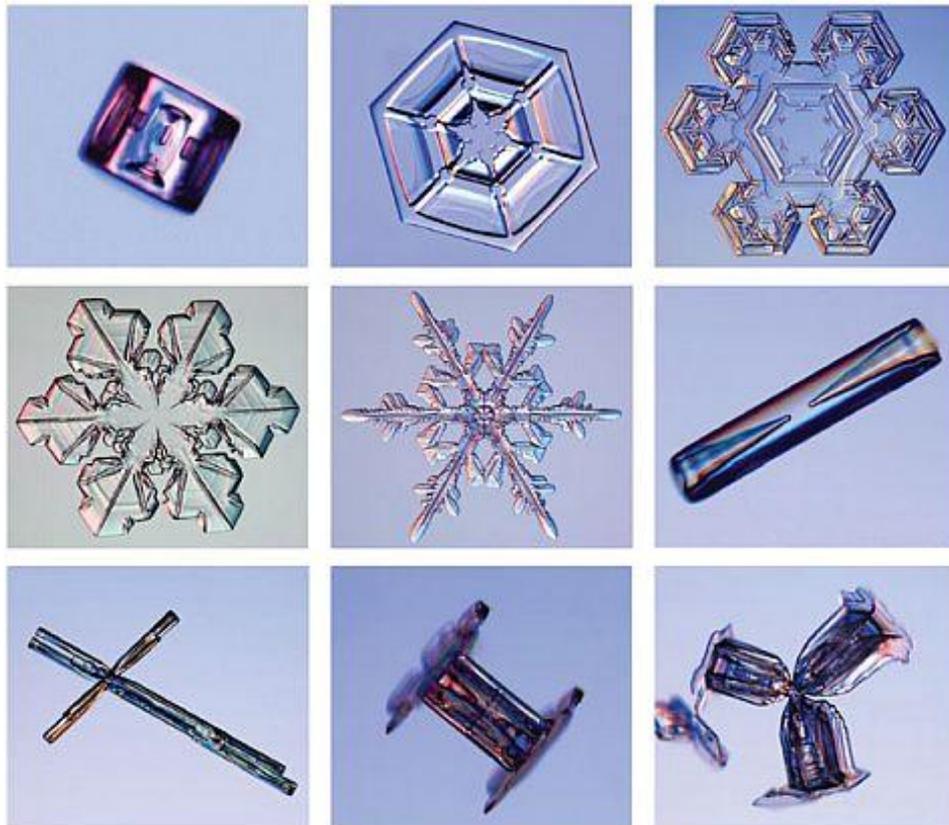
So this is where the children hide all day,  
These are the nests where they letter and draw,  
where they put on their bright miniature jackets,  
all darting and climbing and sliding,  
all but the few girls whispering by the fence.

And now I am listening hard  
in the grandiose silence of the snow,  
trying to hear what those three girls are plotting,  
what riot is afoot,  
which small queen is about to be brought down.

In the language of the Irish, scholars say, there are a dozen words for "peat." In the language of the Arabs, we've been told, there are many words for "sand." I, for my part, grew up speaking a language in which there are perhaps a hundred terms for snow, and I am not a native of Igloolik.

I learned some of those terms from a man named Mark Williams, a former ski-lodge operator who is a geographer at the University of Colorado and a specialist in the properties of snow. "If you're talking about snow crystals in the atmosphere," he told me recently, "well, then, there are scores of terms. There are needles and sheaths and columns. There are pyramids. Cups. Bullets. Plates. Scrolls. Branches. Dendritic crystals. Stellar crystals." And those are just some of the basic forms. Snow crystals also come in combinations. Stellar crystals with plates. Dendritic crystals with branches. Hollow bullets. Bullets with dendrites. Plates with scrolls. Plates with spatial dendrites. Rimed particles. Rimed needle crystals. Lump graupels.

Graupel-like snow with nonrimed extensions. Some of the names of snow crystals (branches, needles, bullets) are appropriately suggestive: in high wind, snow crystals can be as abrasive as sand.



After snow has fallen, the name for it picks up additional qualifiers as it begins to settle or drift, as heat and cold and wind and moisture and the snow's own weight begin to make their influence felt. Freshly fallen snow starts out as what Williams calls an "ice skeleton"—a loose scaffolding of crystals amid an enormous volume of air. To give his students an idea of the ratio of snow to air in a fresh snowfall, Williams has them compress a family-sized loaf of Wonder Bread to its smallest possible size. (It can be reduced to a two-inch cube.)

In fresh snow air can pass with little obstruction from the atmosphere through the snowpack to the ground: given life by differences in the temperature gradient, the snowpack breathes. But time changes that. The snow may metamorphose into what is called equitemperature, or ET, snow. This is snow at its most stable, the delicate crystals having matured into hardy granules in a snowpack of homogeneous temperature. It may turn into melt-

freeze snow, more commonly known as corn snow or spring snow. Where the snowpack meets the warmer ground, there may form a weak and porous stratum of what is known as kinetic snow or sugar snow or depth hoar—by whatever name, the mother of avalanches. If the snow survives for more than a year, it may begin hardening into something called firn, which is a step on the way to becoming glacial ice.

I met Mark Williams and a good many of his colleagues at last year's meeting of an organization called the Western Snow Conference, a gathering that occurs every spring when the season's snows are more or less over and the period of snowmelt is well under way. Collectively, the people who attend the Snow Conference meeting—hydrologists, geographers, meteorologists, biologists, chemists, agronomists, utility-company officials, state and federal government officials, representatives of Indian tribes—are known in the gray language of official reports as the "snow-resource community." They are interested in every aspect of the hydrologic cycle of snow, from the formation of the first crystals to the accumulation of snowpack to the onset of snowmelt to the release of the last drops of runoff into the Pacific Ocean or the Gulf of Mexico. They are interested in avalanche theory, in the seeding of clouds with silver iodide to induce snowstorms, in how to add certain bacteria to water so that ski resorts can make snow at higher temperatures. For decades they have been interested above all in the following questions, which turn out to be complicated ones: How much snow has fallen in the western United States in a particular winter? How much water will it turn into? Where will that water go?

### Snow dependency

Snow is a commodity we usually remember for either the pleasures it offers or the disruptions it causes. We call upon snow, too, for its utility as metaphor: symbol of purity, uniformity, isolation, protection, transience. We tend not to think about snow as the crucial variable upon which urban life and agricultural life in much of the world, particularly the United States—and especially the American West—happen to depend. Indeed, snow is largely missing, as the historian Bernard Mergen observes in a forthcoming study, from recent histories of water policy, in which one would expect it to play a highly visible role. And yet snow, hardened into glaciers, covers 10 percent of the planet's land area. Fresh snow falls each year on nearly one square mile of dry land out of every four; in the Northern Hemisphere the figure is one square mile out of two. Worldwide, at least a third of all the water used for irrigation comes from snow. In the western United States the figure is about 75 percent.

What makes snow important is not only its volume but also its relative dependability. Much of the West is in a state of drought or near-drought, with snowfall having been below normal in seven of the past eight years. In general, though, snow can be far more reliably counted upon to fall in substantial amounts in the mountains during wintertime than rain can be counted upon to fall in the spring and summertime. And snowmelt flows onto the scene at nearly the most useful time of year, having been stored at high altitudes until the weather warms and the demands of agriculture begin to make themselves felt. It is snow that powers the great rivers of the West—the Colorado, the Rio Grande, the Columbia, the Missouri—on their long journeys through sometimes parched or semi-arid terrain, ribbons of brown and silver that at times enverdure entire basins, at times support the merest Nilotic fringe of green. How much water does the West's winter snow turn into? The snowmelt that finds its way into the Columbia River alone in an average year comes to 26 trillion gallons, which is 81 million acre-feet—enough to cover all of Kansas in knee-deep water, or to raise Lake Michigan by almost six feet.

The Western Snow Conference typically holds its meetings someplace in sight of the mountains, where in springtime one can have a ready glimpse of snow. I was invited to attend the sixty-second annual conference, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, by a friend who is a hydrologist in California. I'm not sure why the prospect held such appeal, unless it is simply that snow is my favorite kind of weather. The first article I ever published, on a small printing press given to me on a snowy Christmas when I was six or seven, consisted of what was meant to be a report on snow depth in inches, and was distributed to neighbors. It read, in its entirety: "The snow 15." Snow seems to come into my life in the form of memorable coincidences. The Horatian ode "*Diffugere nives...*" about the melting of snow in springtime, was the first piece of Latin verse I ever translated completely on my own (it appeared on a test), an achievement that occurred at roughly the same time as my first reading of James Joyce's short story "The Dead," whose most famous words, in the haunting conclusion, are "snow was general all over Ireland." Snow makes me feel as snug as a vole. There were ten major snowstorms in my region of New England last winter, and I contentedly wrote a check to the snowplow man each time.

The focus of the Western Snow Conference's Santa Fe meeting was "Climate Change Effects on Snowmelt Water Supply," a big and important subject, but that was by no means the whole agenda. "Northern Latitude Snow Pillow Installation Procedures." "Snow Accumulation and Ablation Under Fire-altered Lodgepole Pine Forest Canopies." "Snow Chemistry and Physics of the Mogollon Rim in Arizona." There was something here, I realized, for even the most jaded of tastes. At lectures and in associated readings I picked up such arcane pieces of information as that a two-foot square of snow ten inches deep contains about a million snowflakes, and that if the potential precipitation in the earth's atmosphere at any given moment fell all at once, it would cover the entire surface of the planet to a depth of one inch. I was pleased to observe that, as with any professional group that has reached a certain level of maturity, the membership of the Western Snow Conference includes people who display what might be called occupational anthroponymy—that is, whose names resonate with their line of work. I ran into a Phyllis Snow and a Neil Berg, and discovered that a type of diagram used to show inflows and outflows from reservoirs was devised by a man named Rippl.

During my days at the Snow Conference meeting I also grew to admire the pluck and ingenuity of those charged with keeping track of our snow. It has been nearly ninety years since James E. Church fashioned his first snow tubes and began taking wintertime measurements in the mountains of Nevada. Some things haven't changed very much since that time, and some have changed profoundly.

### Falling crystals

"There is no material of engineering significance that displays the bewildering complexities of snow." I came across that matter-of-fact statement in the Handbook of Snow, an invaluable if glacially paced compendium edited by the eminent Canadian hydrologists D. M. Gray and D. H. Male. The formation of snow begins when water vapor or a supercooled droplet of water forms an ice crystal, almost always hexagonal in shape, around a nucleus consisting of one of the thousands of minute aerosol particles to be found in each cubic centimeter of the lower atmosphere—clay silicate, perhaps, or bits of volcanic ash, or material of extraterrestrial origin. From that moment on, the life of an ice crystal can be played out in various ways. The crystal may fall to the ground in its original form, as it does in the intensely cold regions of the Arctic and Antarctic. Or, more frequently, the ice crystal may grow into a snow crystal, gaining substance by means of sublimation—water vapor turning directly into ice, without passing through a liquid stage. Its shape, or "habit," will be determined mostly by temperature and the amount of water vapor in the air. As snow crystals descend, they may meet up with one another, forming aggregations. We know these as snowflakes. Or a snow crystal may in its descent encounter supercooled water droplets. Riming can then occur, as the droplets freeze immediately upon contact with a solid body. If the riming is substantial, the crystal may become graupel, or snow pellets.

All this activity has a powerful cleansing effect on the atmosphere—"washout" and "snowout," as two of the associated processes are called. A heavy snowstorm gathers particulate matter to itself and drags it to the ground, thereby preserving, until the snow melts, a sample of the atmospheric chemistry prevailing when that particular snowstorm began—a sample that speaks of climatic conditions generally and may speak more specifically of pollution. In the remote interior of Greenland, where the deposits of snowstorms do not disappear, such records go back a long way. A few years ago researchers at the Greenland Icecore Project drilled a hole through the Greenland icecap all the way to bedrock and extracted a core of ice that, if reassembled, would be close to two miles long. The ice at the bottom of the borehole is believed to have been formed from snow that fell some 200,000 years ago.

The symmetry of ice crystals was commented upon by the Chinese in the second century B.C. Europeans had recorded the same observation at least by the Middle Ages. The intellectual pedigree of snow scholarship in the West is distinguished. The Dominican scholastic Albertus Magnus wrote about snow crystals in the thirteenth century. At the beginning of the seventeenth century the same subject beguiled Johannes Kepler. "There must be some definite cause," he wrote in 1609, shortly after making the discovery that the planets travel not in circles but in ellipses, "why, whenever snow begins to fall, its initial formation invariably displays the shape of a six-cornered starlet. For if it happens by chance, why do they not fall just as well with five corners or with seven?" In his pamphlet Kepler drew parallels with honeycombs and the pattern of seeds inside pomegranates, but was unable to explain the flakes' hexagonal form. Somewhat later Rene Descartes discerned that branches sprout off each side of the stems of hexagonal snowflakes at an angle of 60 degrees, with an angle of 120 degrees thus separating the branches themselves. The process is complex, but the hexagonal shape of snowflakes essentially reflects the underlying atomic structure of water. One suspects that even the skeptic Descartes would have offered up a Te

Deum had he known that the two hydrogen atoms in a molecule of water branch off the oxygen atom with about 120 degrees of separation.

For all the scientific awareness of the symmetrical character of snow crystals, the ubiquity of their popular image—the one we see in children's paper cutouts and on bags of ice and signs for motels that have air-conditioning—is a relatively recent phenomenon. What snowflakes actually looked like was not widely known until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the book *Cloud Crystals*, with sketches by "A Lady," was published in the United States. The lady had caught snowflakes on a black surface and then observed them with a magnifying glass. In 1885 Wilson Alwyn "Snowflake" Bentley, of Jericho, Vermont, began taking photographs of snowflakes through a microscope. Thousands of Bentley's photomicrographs were eventually collected in his book *Snow Crystals* (1931). The fact that not one of the snowflakes photographed by Bentley was identical to another is probably the basis for the idea that no two snowflakes are ever exactly the same—an idea that is in fact unverifiable.

### Into the tubes

Aesthetics did not drive snow science. Even as Wilson Bentley was peering through the camera bellows of his photomicrograph, Americans by the millions were continuing to settle the lands beyond the Mississippi. From 1870 to 1910 the population of California grew by 325 percent. During the same period the population of the eleven western states as a whole grew by 600 percent. The newcomers confronted firsthand a truth about the West presciently stated by the explorer and naturalist John Wesley Powell: "In the whole region, land as mere land is of no value. What is really valuable is the water privilege." Unlike water in the East, water in the West could not be taken for granted; rainfall was in many places nonexistent or seasonal. It was no secret that the snow that fell in wintertime turned into most of the water that appeared in spring—albeit unpredictably in terms of volume and timing. What if some element of predictability was possible? Imagine the consequences for the building and management of reservoirs, the control of flooding, the rational allocation of water among various kinds of users.

Riverine data in some form have been collected by all civilizations, so essential are rivers to commerce and agriculture. Records of the annual high-water level of the Nile, for example, are complete all the way back to A.D. 622, save for one large gap in the early modern period. The U.S. government in the mid-1800s began attempting to gather reliable meteorological information on its rapidly expanding and geographically diverse domains, and by the turn of the century runoff data in the form of hydrographs existed for many of the important western rivers. It occurred to a number of investigators that if, by means of a crude model, one could correlate, year after year, the size of the snowpack at the moment of its greatest extent—the moment of what is now called "ripeness"—with the streamflow, then one would have a powerful forecasting tool. Moreover, if one measured the snowpack not only at the moment of greatest extent, which usually occurs in April, but also in March, February, and January, and kept detailed annual records, one might even be able, eventually, to make a preliminary forecast as early as midwinter, based on past trends. Of course, even if this methodology worked to perfection, it would never reveal how much snow had actually fallen or how much water that snow actually contained. It could, however, reveal that this year's runoff had a certain probability of being, say, roughly 20 percent less than average, or 15 percent more.

That, at any rate, was the idea entertained at the turn of the century by, among others, James E. Church, an active outdoorsman who was a professor of Latin and Greek at the University of Nevada, in Reno. Church was animated in part by the situation of Lake Tahoe, which epitomized the competition for water in the West. In this case the competition involved farmers downstream, who needed the lake's water to irrigate their crops; a hydroelectric-power company, which operated several power plants on the Truckee River, whose source is Lake Tahoe; property owners on the lake, who wanted its level to remain constant; and the Paiute Indians, who by federal treaty were guaranteed a certain amount of Tahoe water to feed their Pyramid Lake. Being able to predict snowmelt would simplify the management of the lake.

Because evaluating water content was his aim, and because the water content of snow varies widely from storm to storm and even within the context of a single "weather event," Church contended that a simple depth measurement would probably not suffice. The old rule of thumb for snow-to-water conversion is that ten inches of "average" newly fallen snow make for about one inch of water, but some snow is much wetter and some is much drier. In Colorado, famous among skiers for its powder, twenty inches of snow or more may be needed to produce one inch of water. The samples that Church required in order to create a historical index had to reflect the water content, the "snow-water equivalent." Church therefore employed a stainless-steel cylinder, which he forced through the snow to

extract samples from the surface of the snow to the ground. Once obtained, the samples would be weighed, weight being a reliable index of water content. Church's extraction instrument, which was more than six feet long, and onto which extensions could be screwed, came to be known as the Mount Rose sampler, after the mountain where he conducted his first surveys. Subsequent models have been waxed, polished, baked with silicon, and provided with teeth, and the stainless steel has given way to aluminum, but their design remains based on the original.

By 1911 Church and a U.S. Weather Bureau official named J. Cecil Alter were independently making systematic snow surveys, Church around Tahoe and Alter in the watershed around Great Salt Lake. They each developed the idea of the "snow course"—a series of sampling sites strung across a short distance, in order to reduce distortions caused by wind and drift. The very same sites, identified by tall markers, would be surveyed year after year, to ensure that the data were truly comparable. The surveyors' efforts were focused on the higher elevations, where there were no meteorological stations of any kind, and where, from the moment of first snowfall to the onset of spring thaw, the snowpack is less apt to melt: it is a more or less steadily accumulating resource. The altitude, though, brought problems of accessibility. Church and Alter and those who came after them had to trudge up to the snow courses on snowshoes and skis. There were blizzards to contend with. There were avalanches, and in the spring there were bears. I asked one veteran snow surveyor, Douglas Powell—a man who, as a graduate student, knew James Church, and who estimates that he has spent 1,600 days of his life in the high country on skis—if "grueling" was a word that accurately described the servicing of a snow course. He said no, the word he would use was "demanding," and he went on to tell about how once, in 1969, when he was conducting a survey in the Sierra Nevada, it snowed 150 inches in two days. Powell said, "All right, maybe grueling."

### Laws unto themselves

As the idea of snow surveys caught on, promoted first by private interests and universities, then by state governments, and ultimately by the federal government, with James Church playing the proselytizing role of Saint Paul, snow courses began to spread throughout the western mountains. With them came a modest support structure. Photographs from the 1930s and 1940s show the log cabins built to sustain snow surveyors on weeklong treks through alpine country; many of the cabins were topped by a wooden tower twenty or thirty feet high—the "Santa Claus chimney." In late winter the snow would often be so high that only a door at the top of the chimney offered access to the snug safety of the cabin deep below. Besides physical comfort there was the comfort offered by a professional guild: the Western Snow Conference was established in 1933. (An Eastern Snow Conference was established several years later; its focus is somewhat less on snow as a resource, somewhat more on snow as a nuisance.)

Snow courses proliferated in the West—there were about a thousand of them by 1940—because the data they provided and the models they made possible proved useful. The models were not subtle. They were at first based solely on the amount of snow on the ground, with the data being used in an equation that was found, through trial and error, to produce a semi-satisfactory result. It was not long, however, before hydrologists realized that every basin, every watershed, worked in a different way. George D. Clyde, a Utah governor and one of the great names in American hydrology, put it this way: "Each watershed seems to be a law unto itself." Patterns of precipitation in the mountains of the Northwest turned out to be vastly different from those in the mountains of the Southwest. The assumption that the depth of the alpine snowpack greatly exceeded that of the snowpack at lower elevations proved to be correct in most places, but often not in Arizona or California. In Nevada the relationship was sometimes turned on its head: it all depended on whether storms tended to come in low or high, and on what stood in their way.

New variables had to be added. One of the first was soil moisture at the time of the first snow. If the weather had been unusually dry, much of the spring snowmelt would drain into the ground, and would not immediately show up in streamflow; unexpected shortages would occur. If it had been unusually wet, not only would most of the water in the snow cover run off but the increased contribution from water in the soil might build streamflows of a size no one had anticipated. Other factors, too, needed to be considered—elevation, wind speed, air temperature, radiation, slope of terrain, extent of snow cover, extent of tree cover, spring precipitation. As these were gradually incorporated into models, the models began to look more and more like something that aspired to show conceptually how the natural world really worked.

That process would take decades—indeed, is still going on, the state of the art currently being represented by the National Weather Service's powerful and intricate River Forecast System model. Even in their primitive state, though, snow-water forecasts were valuable. They could certainly warn of impending extremes—vast oversupply and vast undersupply. The record over the years buoyed confidence in reliability, and water commissioners took heed. Bankers reviewed the forecasts before deciding how much credit to extend to farmers. Farmers adjusted their acreage accordingly. In Utah the 1934 spring forecast by George D. Clyde indicated that streamflows in the state would run at 25 to 50 percent of normal; farmers scaled back their planting and ranchers moved their cattle to less arid grazing lands out of state, averting disaster in what would be remembered in other states as the year that brought on the Dust Bowl.

It was largely owing to the experience of 1934 that the federal government began to support and coordinate snow-survey work in the western states, and to conduct snow surveys of its own—a role the Soil Conservation Service took on in 1939 and retains to this day. The Depression era also witnessed a vast amount of spending on dams, reservoirs, irrigation canals—public works that harnessed the annual snowmelt but made forecasts of its volume all the more important. People in the eastern United States and even many in the West don't necessarily appreciate the intricate web of snowmelt-filled waterworks that makes the western United States possible. The Colorado River alone today feeds 1,470 reservoirs.

Will infrastructure-building and management of the interior ever again seem as heroic and progressive as they did during the 1930s? Life magazine, the television of its time, sent photographers to record snow surveyors on the job, following R. A. ("Arch") Work, one of the founding fathers of the SCS system, and a ranger named Jack Frost (!) as they trekked from course to course high in the Cascades. Looking back wistfully on this period, the author of one engineering textbook calls it "the First Golden Age of Hydrology."

#### Better data, better models

I sat down for an hour at the Snow Conference meeting with Eugene L. Peck, who is the president of a hydrological engineering firm called Hydex, and who for more than three decades was on the hydrological staff of the National Weather Service; his career there culminated with the directorship of the Hydrologic Research Laboratory. When I asked him how deep his roots went in American hydrology, he replied, "I had breakfast with J. E. Church at the meeting of the Western Snow Conference in 1950." The National Weather Service and the Soil Conservation Service, which collect snow data in different ways and cooperate on streamflow forecasts, had numerous disputes in decades past over issues of procedure and turf. Peck, who spent almost all of his career doing the basic work of hydrology in the western states—collecting data, improving models, mapping, forecasting—seems to remember them all. He may even have started a few.

I had asked Peck if he could give me a capsule history of snow forecasting in America, and he arrived with several pieces of yellow legal paper, a chronology sketched out from memory. The entries began with "1907-1910—J. Cecil Alter using stove pipe for cutter, Mill Creek nr SLC, UT" and went through "1950s—Competition between SCS & NWS, many problems but made for better forecasts," up through "1969-78—Development of airborne gamma radiation to measure water equivalent of snow cover," and kept on going.

Later Peck showed me a few items of historical interest: a half dozen delicate photographic negatives on glass, depicting snow-survey stations at Wagon Wheel Gap, in Colorado, during the 1920s; a sere and brittle copy of Volume 1, Number 1 (1920) of the *Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society*; a copy, preserved in a plastic sleeve, of a blue-bound pamphlet titled "Snow Surveying: USDA Miscellaneous Publication No. 380 (1940)", which was the first official manual for snow surveyors; and, typed on translucent onionskin paper, corrected by hand, the text of a lecture by J. Cecil Alter, "Read before the Utah Academy of Sciences, Salt Lake City, Utah, Saturday, April 3, 1926." I picked up the last of these items with a certain reverence. I felt as if I were touching one of the *Dead Sea Scrolls* of hydrology.

Peck, though, is no antiquarian. He is involved in, among other things, NASA's boreas project, which is an ambitious attempt to create a meteorological and hydrological portrait of large parts of Canada—a portion of the continent whose freshwater resources in the form of snowmelt go largely uncaptured. In our conversations about snow and the water it contains Peck kept coming back to one basic point: that snowmelt forecasting still depends on having

some sort of data and some sort of model to plug the data into. The story of forecasting, then, is the story of a search for better data and better models.

There has from the beginning been a school, for example, that held that data gathered from precipitation gauges—open buckets, basically—could be used to predict streamflow as reliably as data from snow surveys done with snow tubes. Snow-tube surveys did have obvious disadvantages. As noted, they were arduous. They were labor-intensive and therefore costly. And frequently snow courses were sited in areas that, for one reason or another, proved unrepresentative of the actual snowpack. Precipitation gauges were easier to get to—they tended to be at lower elevations—and could even be automated. They could provide information about rain as well as snow. But precipitation gauges had drawbacks too. Even when they were equipped with shields, for example, high winds would impel much snow laterally across the orifice, in a process called eddying. The result was "undercatch": the gauges would underreport the volume of snow.

Precipitation gauges, too, can be sited in unrepresentative areas, a problem occasionally abetted by human agency. Peck told the story of the weather station in Shoshone, Colorado, whose precipitation-gauge data had been so erratic and variable that Peck, who at the time was the head of the National Weather Service's water-supply forecast unit, in Salt Lake City, decided to visit the place and talk to the man who had run it for years and years. "I found the can," Peck said. "It was hooked onto a metal stairway where the snow could slide into it off the roof. But precip couldn't get in there, it was up so close to the building. So I said to the old guy, 'Well, how long's it been there?' And he said, 'Actually, quite a while. You know, originally it was out by the highway, in the thirties.' And I said, 'What happened?' And he said, 'Everything went fine—it really was a good place—except when the snowblowers on the highway began blowing snow over it and it started filling up. So we decided to move it. We moved it behind the station, but the tree grew up and was covering it. So we moved it up by the school ground. But that didn't work too well, because we started getting precipitation when there was no precipitation. Kids were using it for a urinal.'"

Beginning in the 1960s, Peck went on, forecasters began experimenting with a device called a snow pillow. A snow pillow looks like a very large ravioli made of neoprene rubber or pliable metal. It is a square, perhaps six to ten feet on a side, and is filled with antifreeze. As snow falls and the snowpack gets heavier, the pillow is compressed; the degree of compression, reflecting the weight of the water above, is communicated by radio to a monitoring station. One great advantage of snow pillows is that they can be placed securely in remote locations, where they will transmit data throughout the winter. But they are prey to a variety of ailments. One is called "bridging": periods of thaw or rain followed by a freeze can result in the creation of a reinforced support layer or even a static frozen dome over the pillow, which effectively tricks it into thinking that no further accumulation has occurred when it has.

My conversation with Peck was suspended when a lecture began on the subject of the algae that live in snow and feed on the nutrients in it. The organic material the algae excrete may support colonies of bacteria, and the algae themselves serve as food for several varieties of snowworms. Sometimes algae are so prevalent that the snow turns red or yellow or blue; the colored snow may exude the smell of fresh watermelon. The lecture revealed one more novel element in the unfolding dynamic of snow—the fact that snow is an ecosystem. By the time the lecture began, Peck had gotten as far on his sheets of legal paper as "1979—Thomas Carroll to direct operational program in Minneapolis, MN." He was, it seemed clear, just getting going.

### The strategic snow command

There is a certain cast to the people who attend meetings of the Western Snow Conference. It is not, of course, exhibited universally, though I suspect that it would clearly emerge if one were somehow to add everyone together and take the mean. They are mostly men and mostly at the lower end of middle age. They seem to be independent-minded, friendly, physically fit. They are given to calling precipitation "precip," and partial to neatly trimmed facial hair and the kind of casual clothing one associates with people who do enlightened and brainy things outdoors. Formality never exceeds a bolo tie, the color of whose string indicates regional affiliation. The design of the clasp tends to reflect the year of one's first attendance at the Snow Conference; there were clasps around me going back to the 1940s.

One senses that there may be something of a division inside the Western Snow Conference between a younger generation that holds a firm faith in what new technology can accomplish and an older generation that idealizes

tramping about in snowshoes with a Mount Rose sampler. Even so, the nature of the work brings out a bit of the mountain man in almost everyone. I cautioned one hydrologist, who was about to make the harrowing drive up the mesa to nearby Los Alamos, "Hold on to your hat. It's pretty steep." He looked at me as if to say, "I could do steep in my sleep."

No one intends to give up the traditional manual outdoor snow surveys. Not only are they part of the romance that drew many people into the field to begin with, but, more important, they contribute an indispensable something for which, in this age of remote sensing, a specialized term has been developed: "ground truth." With respect to the specific variable of water content, snow surveys set a standard that other methods can only measure themselves against. Many of James Church's original snow-survey courses in the Sierra Nevada are loyally maintained to this day.

Still, the forecasting business has made some important advances during the past few decades (a period known to some as the Second Golden Age of Hydrology). In addition to the 1,600 or so traditional mountain snow courses that the Soil Conservation Service and other agencies continue to run, the SCS operates 550 SNOTEL (for "snow telemetry") sites in mountainous areas throughout the West, each with an array of snow pillows, precipitation gauges, and sensors to record temperature and sometimes other variables, such as wind speed and soil moisture. Information is brought back to headquarters by means of "meteor-burst transmission": a request signal from one of the two SNOTEL master stations is bounced to remote sites not off a satellite but off the ionized trails of some of the billions of tiny meteors that enter the earth's atmosphere every day; the remote stations bounce back their most recent data in the same way. Forecasting agencies still send out on paper monthly state-by-state bulletins, but increasingly all the relevant data is available electronically, often in real time or near-real time.

Actually, the term "data" is beginning to sound a little limited. The National Weather Service in its publications refers to what it inclusively calls "airborne and satellite snow-cover products." I spoke with Thomas Carroll, who was the chairman of the executive committee of the Santa Fe meeting, and who since 1979 has been the director of the weather service's National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center, which is based in Minneapolis. For much of North America the center functions as a kind of Strategic Snow Command. The NWS, Carroll said, runs snow courses after a fashion—more than 1,850 of them, in twenty-six states and seven Canadian provinces. Each one is about ten miles long and is monitored by aircraft. The basic idea behind these very long snow courses is relatively simple. The earth's surface emits natural gamma radiation from trace elements of potassium, uranium, and thorium in the soil. That radiation is attenuated by the amount of water in the snow. An estimate of water content can be obtained along any of the established flight lines by comparing a background reading previously made over bare ground with a fresh reading made over the same piece of ground under snow.

There are limitations. "All methodologies have deficiencies," Carroll said, and he frankly ticked off the ones that characterize his flight-line network. "One, we have to fly close to the ground—five hundred feet—so we can only fly in good weather. Two, flying close to the ground means that terrain is also a problem. We can do some mountain areas, but we can't do others. Three, when the snowpack gets above eight, ten, twelve feet, the gamma-radiation technique turns to mush. The biggest limitation of all is the cost. It takes a lot of money to fly airplanes."

The snow-water-equivalent estimates from overflights, like those derived from any snow course, represent only samples. But already it is possible to merge, using computer models, sample surveys of every kind with continent-wide snow-cover imaging obtained by microwaves from satellites. The images will be getting better. Last October the space shuttle Endeavour made its second series of experimental investigations (the first was in April) with a new radar system capable of looking at the snowpack. A powerful multipurpose remote-sensing platform called the Earth Observing System, consisting of several integrated satellites, is scheduled to go into operation in 1998, with a \$7 billion array of earth-monitoring equipment that will make the present Landsat satellite seem like a stereoscope in a Victorian parlor.

As we discussed satellites, Tom Carroll repeated, "All methodologies have deficiencies." The advantage of microwaves, Carroll said, is that they can see through clouds. The disadvantage is that they can show with confidence only the areal extent of the snowpack. They are much less able, given the present state of technology, to extract accurate information about water content. "That's a big problem," Carroll said. "Big problem." Even so, he went on, just being able to see the areal extent of the snow cover can make an important difference. Consider what happened in 1983 in the Colorado River basin. Forecasters knew from sampling that the water content of the

snowpack was running about 200 percent of normal—"There was a lot of snow all over the shop"—and were expecting much more than the usual runoff. Typically what happens in the West is that the lower elevations warm up before the higher elevations, and the runoff is therefore gradual, drawn out over time: what is known as a "soft landing." In 1983 there was very little early-spring runoff. Scattered local reports indicated that the lower snowpack was still in place, but no one had any idea of the vast size of the phenomenon. The weather stayed cold all through the spring, and then a weather system moved in and warmed the entire snowpack all at once. Big problem. "If we'd had a program then to monitor areal extent of snow cover," Carroll said, "we'd have noticed the anomalies in the lower elevations. We could have been more responsive."

Being "responsive" in this case would have meant releasing water from reservoirs downstream to accommodate the coming torrent. As it was, in 1983 the Colorado River spilled over the top of the Hoover Dam, creating a western version of Niagara Falls. Flooding in the Colorado basin did not end until autumn. Looking back at newspaper accounts, I noted with satisfaction that the federal official charged with overseeing the Colorado River dams was named Plummer.

### The future of snow

For all the improvements in detection, though, there remains something fundamentally unsatisfying about the forecasting endeavor. One hydrologist I met at the Snow Conference meeting resorted to a medical analogy. We have gone, he said, from the equivalent of Laennec's wooden tube to the stethoscope to the electrocardiogram in the space of a generation, but, as with the human body, we still don't know many fundamental things about snow. Nor do we understand its relation to weather and to climate—the dynamics of climate being one of the perennials on the "must figure out" list of science. And although, as in medicine, we can predict the likely course and consequence of certain conditions once they arrive, we find it a lot harder to predict the onset of many of those conditions very far in advance.

That is one of the tasks for the future. The Snow Conference meeting offered glimpses of some avenues of research. One paper speculated about a possible relationship between the size of the Himalayan snowpack in a given year and the size and timing of the subsequent monsoon. Another paper sought to document a link between the periodic *El Nino* warming trend and diminished snowfall in the Pacific Northwest, a link that would have practical significance for forecasters if the onset of *El Nino* could consistently be determined in advance. (I overheard someone behind me snort and say, "Yeah, but try telling water-conservation officials that you think there's going to be a shortage because of the barometric pressure in Tahiti.") Several papers looked ahead to what would probably happen to precipitation and snowmelt in certain locales in the event of global warming. One of them, which assumed a 3 degrees Celsius increase in average temperature, concluded that the volume of precipitation in the Sierra Nevada would not be much affected but the timing of the snowmelt would: nearly a third of the precipitation that would ordinarily appear as runoff in springtime, when farmers can use it right away, would appear as runoff in wintertime instead, meaning significant losses for watersheds that don't have adequate means of storage.

Even as global climate and large-scale circulation patterns affect snowfall, snowfall has a considerable impact in return, given that gains and losses of energy in the atmosphere are what swirl air masses around the planet. There is no natural surface on earth with a higher albedo—reflective power—than fresh snow. A field of planted farmland may reflect back as little as three percent of shortwave solar radiation. The Mojave Desert may reflect as much as 30 percent, sea ice as much as 40 percent. Fresh snow may reflect fully 95 percent. Rather than being retained as heat, the sun's energy is sent back where it came from. The melting of a winter's worth of snow takes so much energy that even though the sun in the Northern Hemisphere is at its most intense in June, the atmosphere remains cooler than it "ought" to be until August.

All the earth sciences began as applied sciences, spurred by basic considerations of economics and survival. In helping to organize the Western Snow Conference, James E. Church expressed the hope that the study of snow might be broadened beyond the pragmatic and the empirical. To some extent this is happening. Snow studies are, of course, still pragmatic, sometimes in ways that those in the so-called progressive conservation movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would never have anticipated. In the current period of drought, for instance, utility companies and water authorities are conducting cloud-seeding experiments in many areas of the West as part of an attempt to see if more snow can be put on the peaks. (Such efforts in the past resulted in some well-publicized legal tangles when snow suddenly fell in an unexpected place.) Snowmelt forecasting will also play a

big role as states throughout the West, under various mandates, begin to restore depleted rivers and lakes. To the list of competing uses for the snowpack's water, in other words, we must now add another.

As I prepared to leave Santa Fe, the space shuttle Endeavour was high overhead, in the midst of a successful ten-day test of its new radar. I drove north out of town to the banks of the Rio Grande, which flows through a broad plain between the Jemez and the Sangre de Cristo mountains. The snow in the lower elevations had begun to melt, and the river, though it was still shallow and slow-moving, had begun to rise. According to the newspaper that morning, the Sangre de Cristo Water Company's reservoirs in the Santa Fe Canyon, which trap the spring snowmelt and were now nearly full, would be releasing water into the Rio Grande in a matter of weeks. Looking up, I could see the alpine snowpack—still intact, and, on average, about ten feet deep, according to information I had received from the Soil Conservation Service. Or, as I might have put it at another time, "The snow 120." The cottonwoods along the Rio Grande displayed the haze of fuzzy lime-green they briefly exhibit every spring, reminding me that this was exactly the time of year that Horace had been writing about: "The snows have dispersed, now grass returns to the fields and leaves to the trees."

All those former needles and sheaths, those cups and bullets, those dendrites and stellar crystals—they were dispersed, or dispersing, to be sure. But, fortunately for all of us, they would be back.

20121225-02	15:54	MarthaH	Snow
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### Fw: Blizzard Warning

URGENT - WINTER WEATHER MESSAGE  
NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE INDIANAPOLIS IN  
241 PM EST TUE DEC 25 2012

...EXTREME WINTER STORM TO IMPACT HOLIDAY TRAVEL...

.LOW PRESSURE SYSTEM DEVELOPING OVER TEXAS WILL TRACK UP THROUGH  
THE TENNESSEE VALLEY TO THE OHIO VALLEY TONIGHT INTO WEDNESDAY.  
STRONG WINDS ALONG WITH HEAVY SNOW WILL HIT CENTRAL INDIANA.

INZ030-031-036>042-044>049-260345-  
/O.CON.KIND.BZ.W.0001.121226T1000Z-121227T0000Z/  
CLINTON-HOWARD-MONTGOMERY-BOONE-TIPTON-HAMILTON-MADISON-DELAWARE-  
RANDOLPH-PARKE-PUTNAM-HENDRICKS-MARION-HANCOCK-HENRY-  
INCLUDING THE CITIES OF...FRANKFORT...KOKOMO...CRAWFORDSVILLE...  
ANDERSON...MUNCIE...INDIANAPOLIS  
241 PM EST TUE DEC 25 2012

...BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 5 AM TO 7 PM EST  
WEDNESDAY...

A BLIZZARD WARNING REMAINS IN EFFECT FROM 5 AM TO 7 PM EST  
WEDNESDAY.

\* IMPACTS: 8 TO 12 INCHES OF SNOW. WINDS WEDNESDAY WILL BE GUSTING  
TO 40 MPH.

\* TIMING: BEGINNING AFTER 3 AM TONIGHT THROUGH WEDNESDAY EVENING.

\* WIND CHILL VALUES: NEAR 10.

\* FORECASTER CONFIDENCE: HIGH. THERE IS NOW RELATIVE CERTAINTY  
ABOUT THE PATH OF THE LOW PRESSURE THAT WILL AFFECT INDIANA.

\*

PRECAUTIONARY/PREPAREDNESS ACTIONS...

A BLIZZARD WARNING MEANS SEVERE WINTER WEATHER CONDITIONS ARE EXPECTED OR OCCURRING. FALLING AND BLOWING SNOW WITH STRONG WINDS AND POOR VISIBILITIES ARE LIKELY. THIS WILL LEAD TO WHITEOUT CONDITIONS...MAKING TRAVEL EXTREMELY DANGEROUS. DO NOT TRAVEL. IF YOU MUST TRAVEL...HAVE A WINTER SURVIVAL KIT WITH YOU. IF YOU GET STRANDED...STAY WITH YOUR VEHICLE.

[20121225-03](#) 16:04 SteveB Re: Snow (reply to MarthaH, above)

Mmmmm...it's 91 deg.F right now, with a nice breeze and not too much humidity.

Hope ya had a nice Christmas and all goes well in the storm. I'm missing snow today! Tell Larry to stay off those steps...

[20121225-04](#) 16:14 SteveB Re: Snow (reply to Art, above)

**Art** (above, [20121224-09](#)): Snowing up here at the cabin just now, so a perfect Christmas Eve.

Hey Art, where's your cabin? Glad you're having snow to enjoy! Bet the dogs love it if any are along!

[20121225-05](#) 16:38 Pam Re: Snow (reply to all, above)

I hope you are all having a peaceful, festive day, snow or no snow. It's been a long time since we've had a white Christmas in piedmont N.C. Let's make next year one to remember--for all good reasons. And STAY IN TOUCH. :-)

[20121225-06](#) 16:57 SteveB Re: Snow (reply to Pam & all, above)

Thanks, Pam, the same to you and yours! I hope all your family had a great Christmas! The same also to you all.

No snow here today. 91 deg.F, nice breeze, low humidity. For Christmas lunch: an incredible, perfectly aged and grilled Argentinean steak. Maybe not a goose or an entire pig (that was last night), but very nice.

I will definitely stay in touch and I hope all of you will too, my friends!

To a memorable new year!

[20121225-07](#) 23:09 Jim Photos: Snow Quilts #1

This is a lot of walking in the cold to make beautiful tracks. How can he keep track? Merry Christmas!

### Man Walks All Day to Create Spectacular Snow Patterns. SNOW QUILTS

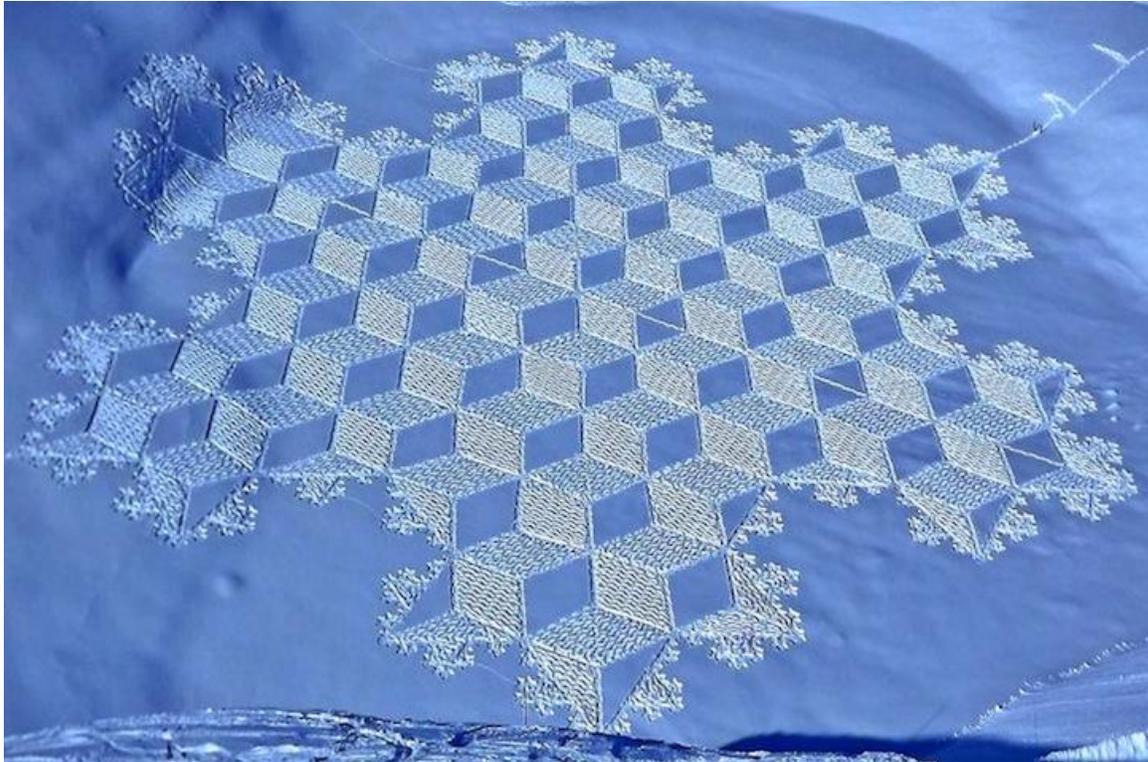
Artist Simon Beck must really love the cold weather! Along the frozen lakes of Savoie, France, he spends days plodding through the snow in raquettes (snowshoes), creating these sensational patterns of snow art.

Working for 5-9 hours a day, each final piece is typically the size of three soccer fields!

The geometric forms range in mathematical patterns and shapes that create stunning, sometimes 3D, designs when viewed from higher levels.

How long these magnificent geometric forms survive is completely dependent on the weather. Beck designs and redesigns the patterns as new snow falls, sometimes unable to finish a piece due to significant overnight accumulations:

The main reason for making them was because I can no longer run properly due to problems with my feet, so plodding about on level snow is the least painful way of getting exercise. Gradually, the reason has become photographing them, and I am considering buying a better camera. —Simon Beck







20121225-09

23:58

SteveB

Photo: Cats Imitating Art #8 (Edgar Degas, *Two Dancers on Stage*, 1874)



20121225-10

23:59

SteveB

Photo: Blizzard

[http://www.weathergeoff.com/2010\\_12\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.weathergeoff.com/2010_12_01_archive.html)



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

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Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>  
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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #298 — DEC. 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.**

## **'Yes, We Have No Bananas'**

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

This is not the newest article on the subject, but I think it's still one of the best. I'm going to miss our delicious bananas just as much as I miss old-fashioned tomatoes and watermelons—both nearly forgotten relics of the dead past. "Better living through chemistry." Or should that be "though stupidity"?

"Why Bananas Are a Parable for Our Times" by Johann Hari, Huffington Post

Jan. 7, 2009, ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johann-hari/why-bananas-are-a-parable\\_b\\_156102.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johann-hari/why-bananas-are-a-parable_b_156102.html))



Below the headlines about rocketing food prices and rocking governments, there lays a largely unnoticed fact: bananas are dying. The foodstuff, more heavily consumed even than rice or potatoes, has its own form of cancer. It is a fungus called Panama Disease, and it turns bananas brick-red and inedible.

There is no cure. They all die as it spreads, and it spreads quickly. Soon - in five, 10 or 30 years - the yellow creamy fruit as we know it will not exist. The story of how the banana rose and fell can be seen a strange parable about the corporations that increasingly dominate the world - and where they are leading us.

Bananas seem at first like a lush product of nature, but this is a sweet illusion. In their current form, bananas were quite consciously created. Until 150 ago, a vast array of bananas grew in the world's jungles and they were invariably consumed nearby. Some were sweet; some were sour. They were green or purple or yellow.

A corporation called United Fruit took one particular type - the Gros Michael - out of the jungle and decided to mass produce it on vast plantations, shipping it on refrigerated boats across the globe. The banana was standardised into one friendly model: yellow and creamy and handy for your lunchbox.

There was an entrepreneurial spark of genius there - but United Fruit developed a cruel business model to deliver it. As the writer Dan Koeppel explains in his brilliant history *Banana: The Fate of the Fruit That Changed the World*, it worked like this. Find a poor, weak country. Make sure the government will serve your interests. If it won't, topple it and replace it with one that will.

Burn down its rainforests and build banana plantations. Make the locals dependent on you. Crush any flicker of trade unionism. Then, alas, you may have to watch as the banana fields die from the strange disease that stalks bananas across the globe. If this happens, dump tonnes of chemicals on them to see if it makes a difference. If that doesn't work, move on to the next country. Begin again.

This sounds like hyperbole until you study what actually happened. In 1911, the banana magnate Samuel Zemurray decided to seize the country of Honduras as a private plantation. He gathered together some international gangsters like Guy "Machine Gun" Maloney, drummed up a private army, and invaded, installing an amigo as president.

The term "banana republic" was invented to describe the servile dictatorships that were created to please the banana companies. In the early 1950s, the Guatemalan people elected a science teacher named Jacobo Arbenz, because he promised to redistribute some of the banana companies' land among the millions of landless peasants.

President Eisenhower and the CIA (headed by a former United Fruit employee) issued instructions that these "communists" should be killed, and noted that good methods were "a hammer, axe, wrench, screw driver, fire poker or kitchen knife". The tyranny they replaced it with went on to kill more than 200,000 people.

But how does this relate to the disease now scything through the world's bananas? The evidence suggests even when they peddle something as innocuous as bananas, corporations are structured to do one thing only: maximise their shareholders' profits. As part of a highly regulated mixed economy, that's a good thing, because it helps to generate wealth or churn out ideas. But if the corporations aren't subject to tight regulations, they will do anything to maximise short-term profit. This will lead them to seemingly unhinged behaviour - like destroying the environment on which they depend.

Not long after Panama Disease first began to kill bananas in the early 20th century, United Fruit's scientists warned the corporation was making two errors. They were building a gigantic monoculture. If every banana is from one homogenous species, a disease entering the chain anywhere on earth will soon spread. The solution? Diversify into a broad range of banana types.

The company's quarantine standards were also dire. Even the people who were supposed to prevent infection were trudging into healthy fields with disease-carrying soil on their boots. But both of these solutions cost money - and United Fruit didn't want to pay. They decided to maximise their profit today, reckoning they would get out of the banana business if it all went wrong.

So by the 1960s, the Gros Michel that United Fruit had packaged as The One True Banana was dead. They scrambled to find a replacement that was immune to the fungus, and eventually stumbled upon the Cavendish. It was smaller and less creamy and bruised easily, but it would have to do.

But like in a horror movie sequel, the killer came back. In the 1980s, the Cavendish too became sick. Now it too is dying, its immunity a myth. In many parts of Africa, the crop is down 60 percent. There is a consensus among scientists that the fungus will eventually infect all Cavendish bananas everywhere. There are bananas we could adopt as Banana 3.0 - but they are so different to the bananas that we know now that they feel like a totally different and far less appetising fruit. The most likely contender is the Goldfinger, which is crunchier and tangier: it is known as "the acid banana."

Thanks to bad corporate behaviour and physical limits, we seem to be at a dead end. The only possible glimmer of hope is a genetically modified banana that can resist Panama Disease. But that is a distant prospect, and it is resisted by many people: would you like a banana split made from a banana split with fish genes?

When we hit up against a natural limit like Panama disease, we are bemused, and then affronted. It seems instinctively bizarre to me that lush yellow bananas could vanish from the global food supply, because I have grown up in a culture without any idea of physical limits to what we can buy and eat.

Is there a parable for our times in this odd milkshake of banana, blood and fungus? For a hundred years, a handful of corporations were given a gorgeous fruit, set free from regulation, and allowed to do what they wanted with it. What happened? They had one good entrepreneurial idea - and to squeeze every tiny drop of profit from it, they destroyed democracies, burned down rainforests, and ended up killing the fruit itself.

But have we learned? Across the world, politicians like George Bush and David Cameron are telling us the regulation of corporations is "a menace" to be "rolled back"; they even say we should leave the planet's climate in their hands. Now that's bananas.

Banana Flower or *Musa*



20121226-01 14:13 Art Re: My Fellow Citizens... (reply to SteveB, FotM newsletter #297)

As a former republican I feel impelled to respond to your're scurious attacks on brave Americans. You commie liberals have been brainwashed into drinking the cool aide, whatever that means. I mean there was this guy Jones a few years ago but it was mostly niggers. Obamma is a communist , faciest, socialist, atheist, moslem whos soul goal is to destroy America. All he wants to do is take away our guns and destroy our churches. If those first graders and firemen, and movie goers and mall walkers had been pack'n it would have been another story. Sure the death tool from friendly fire might have been three times what actually happened but we'd be proud Americans today. Sure we might be going off the farscal cliff today but that's because Obamma won't compromise. The Republikans stand for no tax hikes and Obamma offering no tax hikes for only 95% of Americans is showing no willingness on his part to compromise. Obamma created the deficit. We were doing just find under Bush until he came along. You may have lots of facts and data that says otherwise but we no that science and facts are just plots and twists by the liberal media to take away our freedoms. Look at this silly plot about global warming. Yeah, sure, it's been real hot for the past few years, but it's snowing today. See!!!! The earth was invented 6000 years ago by God and he sits in the sky today and guides our every move, all 7 Billion of us. We don't need no confusing science. So you can take your facts and your logic and stuff it. We ain't bying anything that black communist in the White Horse or you liberal pinkos says.

(This is kind of a composite of all of the letter responses I see in response to AOL posted news stories.)

20121226-02 14:18 Pam Re: My Fellow Citizens... (reply to Art, above)

This is brilliant!! You should send it to the *New York Times*.

20121226-03 15:10 Dennis "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior"

Next course for capitalism...

What'll it be: Another bubble, stagnation, or spiraling downward via austerity?

"No Santa Claus and Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" by Dan Baker, Truthout

Dec. 25, 2012, (<http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/13526-no-santa-claus-and-bill-clinton-was-not-an-economic-savior>)

The truth is often painful but nonetheless it is important that we live in the real world. Just as little kids have to come to grips with the fact that there is no Santa Claus, it is necessary for millions of liberals, including many who think of themselves as highly knowledgeable about economic matters, to realize that President Clinton's policies sent the economy seriously off course.

In Washington it is common to tout the budget surpluses of the Clinton years as some momentous achievement, as though the point of economic policy is to run budget surpluses. Of course the point of economic policy is to produce an economy that improves the lives of the people in a sustainable way.

Clinton badly flunked this test.

The Clinton economy was driven by a stock bubble. This is not a debatable point. The ratio of market- wide stock prices to corporate earnings was well over 30 to 1 at the peak of the bubble in 2000. This is more than twice the historic average.

This run-up in stock prices drove the economy in 2 ways. First, since any good huckster could make millions selling shares in dot.whatever, we had many hucksters starting nutball businesses that never had a prayer of making a profit. This is not much of a long-run economic strategy, but in the short-term it led to an increase in investment.

The other way that the bubble drove the economy is through the wealth effect on consumption. The run-up in stock prices generated roughly \$10 trillion in bubble wealth. The wealth effect from stock is usually estimated to be 3-4 cents on the dollar. This would mean that the bubble generated between \$300 billion to \$400 billion annually in additional consumption. This would have been 3-4 percent of GDP at the time (\$480 billion to \$560 billion annually in today's economy). This is born out in the Commerce Department's data which show that the saving rate fell from close to 7 percent at the start of the 1990s to around 2.0 percent at the peak of the bubble in 2000.

This was the economy that President Clinton handed to President Bush in January of 2001. It was an economy that was being carried by an unsustainable bubble that in fact already was in the process of deflating at the time Bush took office. The S&P 500 was more than 10 percent below its 2000 peak and the NASDAQ was down by more than 40 percent on the day that Bush took office. This pretty much guaranteed the recession that began in March of 2001 just as the collapse of the housing bubble placed President Obama in the middle of terrible recession in January of 2009.

The 2001 recession was the main reason that the surplus vanished in the 2002 fiscal year. Directing tax cuts to the wealthy was a foolish policy response to the downturn, but it was reasonable to turn to fiscal stimulus following the collapse of the stock bubble just as it was reasonable for President Obama to turn to fiscal stimulus following the collapse of the housing bubble. The Bush tax cuts did provide a boost to the economy, although they would have provided a larger boost if this money had been directed at moderate and middle income people or devoted to long-term investments like education and infrastructure.

The growth of housing bubble eventually provided the boost needed to recover from the 2001 recession, just as the stock bubble propelled growth in the 1990s. As the economy got back near full employment in 2006 and 2007, the deficits shrank to sustainable levels.

However, while the deficits were sustainable in the later years of the Bush presidency, the housing bubble was not. Its collapse gave us the most predictable economic disaster in human history, even if all our top economists somehow didn't see it.

To have a sustainable growth path we have to reverse one of the other central policies of the Clinton years, the over-valued dollar. This policy, which was put in place when Robert Rubin became Treasury Secretary, ensured that we would have large trade deficits. The trade deficits were good news for Wall Street with its obsession over inflation. It was also good news for companies looking to move operations overseas to take advantage of cheap labor.

However, the high dollar was terrible news for the country's workers who were placed at an enormous competitive disadvantage. It resulted in the loss of more than 4 million manufacturing jobs. It was also bad news for anyone who doesn't think that bubbles are a clever way to drive the economy.

Rubin and his allies control the Democratic Party with their money at the moment. Their financial power will not be easily overcome. However, it is important that people understand that the Rubin- Clinton team is every bit as much about redistributing money from the rest of us to the very rich as the Republicans.

The big difference is that, unlike the Republicans, the Rubin-Clinton crew believes that the rich should have to pay their taxes. That's something, but until there is someone in this debate who isn't pushing policies that redistribute before-tax income upward, the vast majority in this country can only lose.

[20121226-04](#)

15:24

Pam

Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Dennis, above)

Very good and no surprise. Much as I like Clinton, I've never understood how NAFTA helped Americans, which it hasn't apparently. Maybe being a politician means you virtually have to put money above all else. It's the one drug we seem unable to do anything about.

[20121226-05](#)

16:03

Art

Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Dennis, above)

Good article. I for one, never blamed Bush for his recession. I think problem is short term thinking. We're smarter than this but we never apply that knowledge. Smart people can see the "bubbles" and the false gains based on nothing, but our politicians are more interested in short term credit than long term adjustments. Not sure what the answer is. We sure aren't showing anything today but even more outright stupidity with this current House.

[20121226-07](#)

19:18

Bill

Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Art, above)

I think there's plenty of blame to go around, and George W. Bush must take a large share, especially for his administration's somnolence at the switch with respect to certain sectors of the securities markets, viz., sub-prime debt, and credit derivatives. NOTHING was done by the Bush administration, despite warnings. You can say very accurately that recessions will happen periodically (conventional wisdom is a seven-year cycle), but it can certainly be argued that the collapse of the debt-securities market and the insanity of the credit-derivatives overhang were the very powerful catalyst that ran the economy into a deep ditch.

Further, Alan Greenspan has admitted, in painful retrospect, that his policies were too loose with respect to money supply and interest rates. I can't give much credence to the article's author, who doesn't even mention the Federal Reserve Bank and its policies. The essence of Greenspan's confessions are that the Fed should have tightened credit to contract the bubble. This wasn't done.

[20121226-08](#)

19:51

Art

Re: "No Santa Claus & Bill Clinton Was Not an Economic Savior" (reply to Bill, above)

Hi, Bill, I think we agree, you just said it better.

[20121226-06](#)

16:48

MarthaH

"Congress Awaits Obama's Return for Late Push on Fiscal Cliff"

The way forward...

"Congress Awaits Obama's Return for Late Push on Fiscal Cliff" by Reuters

Dec. 26, 2012, (<http://nbcpolitics.nbcnews.com/news/2012/12/26/16165743-congress-awaits-obamas-return-for-late-push-on-fiscal-cliff?lite>)

The United States on Wednesday edged closer to the fiscal cliff as Congress waited for President Barack Obama to return from vacation in Hawaii and make one final attempt to avoid huge tax hikes and spending cuts in the New Year.

In the absence of Obama, there was no sign of either side in Congress making an effort to strike a deal. The corridors of the Capitol building were empty except for an occasional police officer, and members' office doors stayed locked.

House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner has not yet set a date for bringing House members back to Washington from their Christmas break, an aide of the Republican leader said. That makes the timing of a vote on any budget deal before December 31 more difficult.

The Boehner aide also said there were no plans for new talks between the top Republican in Congress and Obama, who flies overnight and is due back in the White House on Thursday morning.

The inaction notwithstanding, there was still just enough time to prevent a fiscal crunch that would upset global financial markets and likely push the United States into recession.

Reports of lackluster retail holiday sales added to the urgency for a deal. Shoppers might be spending less this holiday season in fear of looming income tax increases. U.S. stocks fell on Wednesday, dragged lower by shares of retail companies.

A modest, last-minute measure in Congress to avoid deep spending cuts set for January 1 and most of the tax hikes could pass the Democratic-controlled Senate by the New Year, although Republicans would need to agree not use a procedural roadblock known as a filibuster.

But senators probably would not make the effort unless there was a strong signal from Boehner that the House would find a way to go along.

A Senate Democratic aide downplayed chances for votes this week in the Senate, but suggested there could be legislative movement at the weekend.

"We can't do anything until Republicans either give us the 60 votes," which are needed to advance legislation without long procedural delays, or allow a short-cut that lets bills pass on a simple majority vote in the 100-member chamber.

The focus in Congress is shifting from broad deficit reduction to narrower efforts to avert the immediate shock of the December 31 cliff dive.

"This is the (emergency) scenario that we have long believed would rise in probability the closer we go to December 31, which essentially calls for extending all the rates for those individuals making under \$200K and households under \$250K and does not address the debt ceiling or the deficit," analyst Chris Krueger of Guggenheim Securities wrote in a research note.

Republican Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas, who is retiring at year's end, told MSNBC that \$250,000 "is too low of a threshold" for raising income taxes.

She said that in conversations she has had with some Senate Democrats, "they are saying maybe more in the \$400,000 to \$500,000 category."

Obama himself recently offered to raise the threshold to \$400,000, before negotiations with Boehner broke off.

But even if a handful of Senate Republicans support Democrats on a measure to avoid the worst of the fiscal cliff, time is short.

When the Senate returns on Thursday it is due to work on a disaster aid bill to help New York and New Jersey recover from Superstorm Sandy and other measures.

In the Republican-controlled House, any bill that raises taxes on anyone would need a rare bipartisan vote to win approval.

All 191 Democrats might have to team up with at least 26 Republicans to get a majority if the bill included tax hikes on the wealthiest Americans, as Obama is demanding.

Some of those votes could conceivably come from among the 34 Republican members who are either retiring or were defeated in the November elections and no longer have to worry about the political fallout.

An alternative is for Congress to let income taxes go up on everyone as scheduled. Then, during the first week of January, lawmakers would strike a quick deal to reduce them except on people in the highest brackets.

They would also pass a measure putting off the \$109 billion in automatic spending cuts that most lawmakers want to avoid.

Once the clock ticks past midnight on December 31, no member of Congress would have to vote for a tax increase on anyone - taxes would have risen automatically - and the only votes would be to decrease tax rates for most Americans back to their 2012 levels.

Americans' optimism that Obama and congressional leaders will reach a budget agreement before January 1 has waned in recent days, according to a Gallup poll.

Fifty percent believe a deal will be reached, a drop of 7 percentage points from the previous week, and 48 percent are doubtful. The poll was taken just after talks ran into trouble last week.

Starbucks Chief Executive Howard Schultz is urging workers in the company's roughly 120 Washington-area coffee shops to write "come together" on customers' cups on Thursday and Friday to send a message to politicians.

"We're paying attention, we're greatly disappointed in what's going on and we deserve better," Schultz told Reuters.

<a href="#">20121226-09</a>	20:11	SandyI	Re: "Congress Awaits Obama's Return for Late Push on Fiscal Cliff" (reply to MarthaH, above)
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I'm burning lots of candles to help the guys and gals in Congress "see the light". Hope they all remember how the voters voted and not how their handlers want them to vote.

<a href="#">20121226-10</a>	22:27	Jim	The AMT Monster
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I mentioned in an earlier post that the Congress could deal with the tax rate structure and withholding changes after the first of the year and it would not make much difference over doing it now except for the panic and uncertainty that they are deliberately maintaining.

This is not so with the Patch to the Alternative Minimum Tax that is also on their agenda.

This patch expired December 31, 2011 and so failure to extend that retroactively to January 1, 2012, is going to force the IRS to deal with a massive problem. About three times as many taxpayers who have never had to pay attention to that would be caught up in requirement to file and pay this extra tax and the IRS computers are not set up to process that.

They have been coasting on actually reprogramming the computers (though I am sure they have some programs written but perhaps not debugged) on the assumption that the extension would be passed again as it has been every year for several years. It ought to be made permanent but they have not done that.

The IRS has not yet finalized forms for taxes to be filed on for even basic forms like schedule A for itemized deductions. As I prepare for doing taxes for people starting in February I cannot even see the forms yet because the makers of my computer program are waiting for IRS who are waiting for Congress.

Now the IRS is saying that if the AMT extension does not pass, the changes to software and the necessary testing and verification processes may make the FIRST e-filing possibilities for everyone be delayed until about the middle of March. They hesitate to start the re-programming on their mainframes because it is a major expense and if Congress does pass the extension all that money will be wasted.

Check out these kids and the adults who are enabling this:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O6rgkCUstaE>.

[Very cool, and right next door to us in Paraguay. In Bolivia, we also have a lot of irrepressible indigenous making of musical instruments and orchestras, all in addition to the vast dance music. Very musical people! –SteveB]





<http://shineyourlight-shineyourlight.blogspot.com/>



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

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# FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE NEWSLETTER #299 — DEC. 28, 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.**

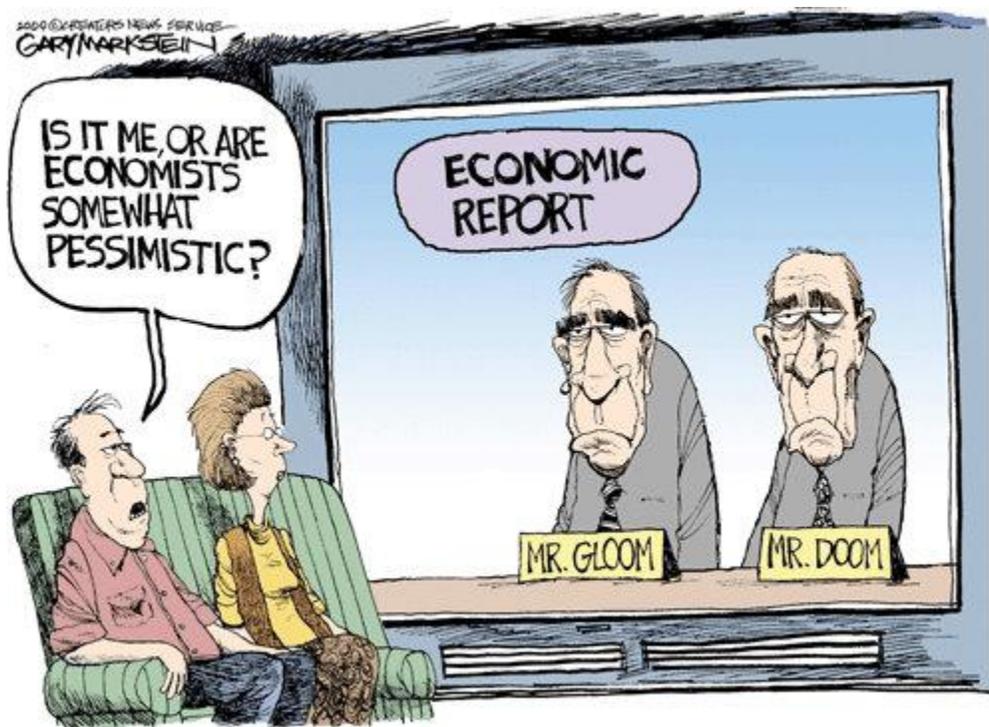
## **Gloom and Doom (for Profit)**

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

When something big goes wrong, you simply have to ask yourself, "Who makes money off that?"

"When Prophecy Fails" by Paul Krugman, *The New York Times*

Dec. 23, 2012, (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/opinion/krugman-when-prophecy-fails.html?ref=opinion&r=1&>)



Back in the 1950s three social psychologists joined a cult that was predicting the imminent end of the world. Their purpose was to observe the cultists' response when the world did not, in fact, end on schedule. What they discovered, and described in their classic book, "When Prophecy Fails," is that the irrefutable failure of a prophecy does not cause true believers — people who have committed themselves to a belief both emotionally and by their life choices — to reconsider. On the contrary, they become even more fervent, and proselytize even harder.

This insight seems highly relevant as 2012 draws to a close. After all, a lot of people came to believe that we were on the brink of catastrophe — and these views were given extraordinary reach by the mass media. As it turned out, of course, the predicted catastrophe failed to materialize. But we can be sure that the cultists won't admit to having been wrong. No, the people who told us that a fiscal crisis was imminent will just keep at it, more convinced than ever.

Oh, wait a second — did you think I was talking about the Mayan calendar thing?

Seriously, at every stage of our ongoing economic crisis — and in particular, every time anyone has suggested actually trying to do something about mass unemployment — a chorus of voices has warned that unless we bring down budget deficits now now now, financial markets will turn on America, driving interest rates sky-high. And these prophecies of doom have had a powerful effect on our economic discourse.

Thus, back in May 2009 the *Wall Street Journal* editorial page seized on an uptick in long-term interest rates to declare that the “bond vigilantes,” the “disciplinarians of U.S. policy makers,” had arrived, and would push rates inexorably higher if big budget deficits continued. As it happened, rates soon went back down. But that didn't stop *The Journal's* news section from rolling out the same story the next time rates rose: “Debt fears send rates up,” blared a headline in March 2010; the debt continued to grow, but the rates went down again.

At this point the yield on the benchmark 10-year bond is less than half what it was when that 2009 editorial was published. But don't expect any rethinking on *The Journal's* part.

Now, you could say that *The Journal's* editors didn't give a specific date for the fiscal apocalypse, although I doubt that any of their readers imagined that they were talking about an event at least three years and seven months in the future.

In any case, some of the most prominent deficit scolds have indeed been willing to talk about dates, or at least time horizons. In early 2011 Erskine Bowles confidently declared that we would face a fiscal crisis within around two years unless something like the Bowles-Simpson deficit plan was enacted, and Alan Simpson chimed in to say that it would be less than two years. I guess he has about 10 weeks left. But again, don't expect either Mr. Simpson or Mr. Bowles to admit that there might have been something fundamentally wrong with their analysis.

No, very few of the prophets of fiscal doom have acknowledged the failure of their prophecies to come true so far. And those who have admitted surprise seem more annoyed than chastened. For example, back in 2010 Alan Greenspan — who is, for some reason, still treated as an authority figure — conceded that despite large budget deficits, “inflation and long-term interest rates, the typical symptoms of fiscal excess, have remained remarkably subdued.” But he went on to declare, “This is regrettable, because it is fostering a sense of complacency.” How dare reality not validate my fears!

Regular readers know that I and other economists argued from the beginning that these dire warnings of fiscal catastrophe were all wrong, that budget deficits won't cause soaring interest rates as long as the economy is depressed — and that the biggest risk to the economy is that we might try to slash the deficit too soon. And surely that point of view has been strongly validated by events.

The key thing we need to understand, however, is that the prophets of fiscal disaster, no matter how respectable they may seem, are at this point effectively members of a doomsday cult. They are emotionally and professionally committed to the belief that fiscal crisis lurks just around the corner, and they will hold to their belief no matter how many corners we turn without encountering that crisis.

So we cannot and will not persuade these people to reconsider their views in the light of the evidence. All we can do is stop paying attention. It's going to be difficult, because many members of the deficit cult seem highly respectable. But they've been hugely, absurdly wrong for years on end, and it's time to stop taking them seriously.

The article on bananas is most enlightening, and it gives me one more reason to question the whole premise of capitalism. It's such a mixed bag. On the one hand, it creates a motive for invention and progress, raises the standard of living, and generates opportunity for individual and corporate growth. On the other, it is by its nature exploitative and amoral. I didn't know that was the origin of "banana republic," and I know other foods have been similarly manipulated, apples for one. We're down to just a few basic types in the stores, so another shortcoming of capitalism is the very thing that makes it work: standardization. I'm beginning to think the reason homo sapiens rule is because we eliminated our gentler, kinder relatives. Force always wins, whether it's a question of economics or territory or religion. Does this mean we're doomed as a species to ultimately destroy everything, maybe not in 100 years but perhaps in 1000? Will there be a 3001 for human beings? Or is there another option besides totalitarianism, capitalism, or despotism?

Gore Vidal stated several years ago that America had one political party with two right wings—Right-wing America. He was prescient!

"There Is No American Left" by Salvatore Babones, Truthout/*Australian Options*

Dec. 27, 2012, (<http://truth-out.org/opinion/item/13567-there-is-no-american-left>)

In September 2012 Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel attempted to break the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) with a bid to privatize Chicago's public schools. The mayor's proposal was based on a plan to subject teachers (and schools) to performance measurement based on students' standardized test scores.

Teachers whose students scored poorly would be fired. Schools whose students scored poorly would be closed. The students would then be farmed out to so-called "charter schools" - for the most part, for-profit institutions run by corporations like Edison Schools, Rocketship, Victory Schools, and Educational Services of America.

The CTU went out on strike with the goal of maintaining public education in Chicago, America's third largest city. Schools in Philadelphia, America's fifth largest city, have already been largely privatized, and the state of Texas is currently in the process of privatizing its local public school systems.

Under threat of a court injunction that might force them to return to work without a contract, the CTU ended its strike after just six business days. The negotiated settlement terms included a longer working day (for the same pay), teacher evaluations based 30% on student test scores, and complete mayoral discretion over teacher hiring and firing.

As Reuters reported on September 18, "those were major goals for Emanuel and positive outcomes for any Emanuel financial backers associated with the national education reform movement." The outcome, however, was widely viewed in the United States as a victory for the teachers, since (amazingly, to most Americans) they retained their pre-strike jobs, salaries, and health insurance benefits.

Rahm Emanuel, mayor of Chicago, is a Democrat.

The Obama administration: Center-right Democrats

Rahm Emanuel is not just any Democrat. He was Barack Obama's first chief of staff, responsible for hiring many of the Obama administration's key personnel. One of Obama's appointees, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, is a former "Chief Executive Officer" of the Chicago public school system. In Chicago he had promoted the expansion of for-profit charter schools.

In Washington, Secretary Duncan developed the \$4.35 billion "Race to the Top" program to encourage states to privatize their schools. The funding was structured as a competition. All 50 states adopted the Race to the Top program in hopes of receiving scarce federal funding during a severe recession; only 12 actually received any grants. The tournament format was designed to ensure maximum institutional impact for the smallest possible investment.

It's not just in education policy that the Obama administration has pursued a broadly neoliberal, center-right agenda. For example, President Obama has taken no action to improve minimum wages or working conditions. The US federal minimum wage is \$7.25 per hour, with no guaranteed sick days, holidays, or vacation time. The last increase was in 2009, under a law passed by the Bush administration in 2007. President Bush actually supported the increase - in combination with business tax cuts.

The federal minimum wage for restaurant staff (and others who might be expected to receive customer tips) is just \$2.13 an hour, against which the value of meals provided by the employer can be deducted.

But of course President Obama's signature program is health care reform. The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act of 2010 is proudly or derisively (depending which side you're on) known as Obamacare. America has long been the only rich country without universal health insurance. Obamacare is intended to extend health insurance coverage to all Americans.

What is Obamacare really? At its heart is a requirement that all Americans will have to buy health insurance, mainly from private, for-profit insurance companies. Insurance premiums will remain largely unregulated, subject to the single requirement that insurance companies will have to accept all applicants and not be allowed to turn away those with pre-existing conditions.

People who refuse to buy health insurance will be forced to pay a \$695 penalty. Given that the cost of the most basic private health insurance in the United States is far greater than this, many people are likely to remain uninsured even after Obamacare is fully implemented in 2014.

What's more, starting in 2017 states will essentially be able to opt out of Obamacare if they present an alternative plan that is approved by the Secretary of Health and Human Services. This requires no further action by Congress. So if the next US president is a Republican, expect every Republican-controlled state to opt out of universal healthcare as soon as that president is inaugurated.

And then there's foreign policy. The Obama administration foreign policy is slightly to the left of ... Dick Cheney. The Obama administration embraces targeted assassination and maintains a kill list - sorry, "disposition matrix" - of people it considers fair game for drone attacks. The Obama administration embraces the use of torture on people in US custody (with the sole specific exclusion of waterboarding). The Obama administration embraces the infliction of national collective punishment to induce civilian populations to overthrow their governments.

The Obama administration maintains a gulag archipelago of secret CIA prisons around the world, and automatically as a matter of policy classifies as "enemy combatants" any adolescent or adult male civilians who are killed in its military operations on the logic that if they were killed, they must have been combatants.

Non-Americans who applaud the Obama administration on the very limited basis that it hasn't invaded any other countries (yet) might consider these facts before forming their opinions. For a balanced view of the American foreign policy consensus, one need only listen to the October 22, 2012 third US presidential debate. Democrats are no doves.

### And Then There Are the Republicans

If Democrats are no doves, Republicans are virtual velociraptors - and proud of it. Mitt Romney was considered a "moderate" Republican and easily the least right wing of the major contenders for the Republican nomination. In fact, his "moderateness" was the main charge made against him in the Republican primaries.

Nonetheless, Romney's official electoral platform called for a trade war with China, the privatization of old age pensions, the elimination of inheritance taxes, further expansion in US military spending, and of course the de-unionization of public employees.

Romney planned to create 12 million jobs by building oil pipelines, expanding offshore oil drilling, and working to "eliminate regulations destroying the coal industry." Offshore oil drilling alone would supposedly employ an additional 1.2 million Americans - the population of Dallas - in some New Atlantis floated on oil. In the immortal words of former Alaska governor Sarah Palin: "Drill, baby, drill."

The official Republican party platform for the 2012 elections called for a return to the gold standard, the complete outlawing of all abortions, the disenfranchisement of the (mainly black) residents of the District of Columbia, the vitiation of food and drug regulation, "consumer choice" in education, a flat income tax, and the building of a nationwide missile defence system. It had an entire 26-point section on "American Exceptionalism" based on "the conviction that our country holds a unique place and role in human history."

The most loathsome of Republican policies, however, is not listed on any party platform. It is the wholesale use of voter suppression as a strategy for electoral victory. Far from being mandatory, in the US, voting is a minority activity, governed by state-by-state rules and procedures. Less than 60% of the adult population votes in presidential elections, far less in congressional and local elections. Every American government is a minority government.

With its pro-rich tax policies, demonization of Spanish-speaking immigrants, opposition to all things feminist, anti-idealism that turns off young voters, and outright racism, the Republican Party simply can't win a fair national election. There just aren't enough rich middle-aged white male racists to win a majority. So it tries to suppress the vote of everyone else.

Republicans have made proof of citizenship (and, more importantly, mailing address) a major campaign issue, despite the fact that only 10 (yes, ten) cases of in-person voter fraud have been identified over the five federal elections between 2000 and 2010. The real purpose of these Republican-sponsored voter ID laws is to disenfranchise those who move frequently or have no fixed address: the young, the homeless, the very old, and the poor. In other words, Democrats.

Even more frightening, Republican state administrations around the country have vigorously pursued the installation of computerized voting machines made by companies that are controlled by activist Republican campaign contributors. These are not machines made by IBM or Apple or some other monolithic multinational firm (scary as that might be). These are voting machines made by - among others - companies in which the Romney family are investors.

In 2003 Diebold CEO (and major Bush fundraiser) Walden O'Dell infamously declared, "I am committed to helping Ohio deliver its electoral votes to the president next year." In 2004 Ohio's Republican government duly reported a late-evening change in voting patterns that swung Ohio (and the presidency) from John Kerry to George Bush. Ohio used Diebold voting machines.

In a country where voting is voluntary, however, it doesn't take a computer conspiracy to swing the vote. The Ohio state government overstaffed voting stations in Republican areas and understaffed then in Democratic ones. As a result, white suburbanites could vote in two minutes while some black inner-city dwellers waited in line for up to 10 hours. Waits of 2-3 hours or more were reported as commonplace in black districts.

Sadly, in the democratic United States of America such shenanigans aren't even illegal. For the Republican Party, they're just part of the game. Voter suppression works. Where suppression isn't enough, outright fraud is possible. It may be happening already. With unencrypted, paperless electronic voting machines that can't be audited and a lack of exit polling to verify results, we'll never know.

The End, or at Least the Ending

Why are the only two choices in US politics the responsible center-right and the barbarian nationalist extreme? It wasn't always this way. Though social scientists have long investigated / bemoaned the non-existence of a socialist alternative in the United States, the Democratic party of the 1930s - 1960s was at least as progressive as any social democratic party in Western Europe. Even the 1950s Republican party of Dwight Eisenhower maintained Roosevelt's New Deal reforms, including a 90% top marginal tax rate.

In fact, the Republican Party once had a liberal (i.e., left) faction. No more. In 1996, arch-conservative Barry Goldwater reportedly wondered in amazement that he and presidential candidate Bob Dole were by then on the left of the Republican party. Goldwater died in 1998; both parties have since moved much farther to the right. Today, Goldwater would be considered left even for a Democrat.

Over the past forty years, America has become much more politically correct with regard to gender and sexuality. Men do not openly display calendars featuring topless models on their office walls, and public gay bashing is now considered inappropriate, even in Republican circles. But gender and sexuality are issues that transcend social class. Even rich, powerful men have gay children - or may be gay themselves. Even rich, powerful men have wives.

On every other issue, America - or at least American politics - has swung violently to the right. The more social class is involved, the further to the right America has swung. Poverty was once a social disease to be cured; it is now an individual crime to be punished. Put it down to individualism, conservatism, neoliberalism, or whatever -ism you want, America is now the world's greatest reactionary force.

Unfortunately, all the evidence is that the rest of the world is following America down the road to perdition. Nowhere are national health insurance schemes, access to free education, and old age pensions being expanded. Nowhere is the world moving forward. Everywhere the social gains of the twentieth century are either being eroded, or destroyed.

The mid-late twentieth century may or may not turn out to have been the highpoint of human civilization. Progress may yet return. But if it does, it will not be led by the United States. It will be resisted by the United States. It's up to the rest of the world to provide the hope for the future that once emanated from Washington, New York, and California. Otherwise you will become just like us.

[Yes, things really are this bad in the U.S. Let's keep doing something about it! -SteveB]

20121227-03	15:42	MarthaH	"The Year in Politics - in Quotes"
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Wish you'd said THAT?

"The Year in Politics - in Quotes" by Domenico Montanaro, NBC News

Dec. 27, 2012, (<http://firstread.nbcnews.com/news/2012/12/27/16191484-the-year-in-politics-in-quotes?lite>)

JANUARY

**Mitt Romney:** "I like being able to fire people who provide services to me." (Jan. 9)

**Rick Perry:** "There is a real difference between a venture capitalist and a vulture capitalist." (Jan. 10)

**Gingrich:** "No... [applause], but I will. I think the destructive, negative, vicious nature of much of the news media makes it harder to govern this country, harder to attract decent people to run for public office, and I am appalled that you would begin a presidential debate on a topic like that." -- Asked during a CNN debate if he'd like to respond to allegations by an ex-wife that he wanted an open marriage. (Jan. 19)

**Gingrich:** "By the end of my second term, we will have the first permanent base on the moon, and it will be American." (Jan. 25)

## FEBRUARY

**Romney:** "I'm not concerned about the very poor." (Feb. 1)

**Romney:** "There are some things that you just can't imagine happening in your life. Uh, this is one of them." [Laughter] – on Donald Trump's endorsement. (Feb. 2)

**Romney:** "I was a severely conservative Republican governor." (Feb. 10)

**Foster Friess** (Santorum supporter): "You know, back in my days, they used Bayer aspirin for contraception. The gals put it between their knees, and it wasn't that costly." (Feb. 16)

**Romney:** "It seems right here, the trees are the right height. I like seeing the lakes. I love the lakes." (Feb. 17)

**Romney:** "Ann drives a couple of Cadillacs actually." (Feb. 24)

**Rick Santorum:** "President Obama once said he wants everybody in America to go to college. What a snob!" (Feb. 25)

**Romney:** "I have some friends who are NASCAR team owners." (Feb. 26)

**Romney:** "I like those fancy raincoats you bought, really sprung for the big bucks." (Feb. 26)

## MARCH

**Romney:** "The best thing I can do for you is to tell you to shop around." (March 5)

**Romney:** "I've got a lot of good friends — the owner of the Miami Dolphins and the New York Jets — both owners are friends of mine." (March 12)

**Eric Fehrstrom** (Romney adviser): "Everything changes. It's almost like an Etch A Sketch. You can kind of shake it up and restart all over again." (March 21)

**Romney:** "Russia, this is, without question, our number one geopolitical foe." (March 26)

**President Barack Obama:** "This is my last election. After my election I have more flexibility." – to Russian President Medvedev. (March 26)

## APRIL

**Ann Romney:** "Well, you know, I guess we better unzip him and let the real Mitt Romney out because he is not!" – Asked by a radio host about the criticism that her husband "comes off stiff." (April 2)

**Hilary Rosen** (Democratic strategist): "Guess what? His wife has actually never worked a day in her life." (April 11)

**Romney:** "I'm not sure about these cookies. They don't look like you made them. Did you make them? You didn't, did you? They came from the local 7-11, bakery, or wherever." (April 17)

**Biden:** "I promise you, the president has a big stick. I promise you." (April 2012)

## MAY

**Ann Romney:** "Stiff, he's not, he's funny... There's a wild and crazy man inside there." (May 1)

**Vice President Joe Biden:** "I am absolutely comfortable with the fact that men marrying men, women marrying women, and heterosexual men and women marrying another are entitled to the same exact rights, all the civil rights, all the civil liberties." (May 9 on Meet the Press)

**Obama:** "He probably got out a little bit over his skis, but out of generosity of spirit. ... Would I have preferred to have done this in my own way, in my own terms, without, I think, there being a lot of notice of everybody? Of course. But all's well that ends well." (May 10)

## JUNE

**Romney:** "I met a guy yesterday, seven feet tall. Yeah, handsome, great big guy, seven feet tall! Name is Rick Miller—Portland, Oregon. And he started a business. Of course you know it was in basketball. But it wasn't in basketball! I mean, I, figured he had to be in sport, but he wasn't in sport." (June 6)

**Obama:** "The private sector is doing fine." (June 8)

**Obama:** "The highest Court in the land has now spoken. We will continue to implement this law. And we'll work together to improve on it where we can. But what we won't do -- what the country can't afford to do -- is refight the political battles of two years ago, or go back to the way things were." – on the health-care law being upheld, 5-4, by the Supreme Court with Chief Justice Roberts being the deciding vote. (June 28)

## JULY

**Romney:** "Lemon. Wet. Good." -- asked how his lemonade was. (July 4)

**House Speaker Boehner:** "The American people probably aren't going to fall in love with Mitt Romney." (July 7)

**Obama:** "If you've got a business – you didn't build that. Somebody else made that happen." (July 14)

**Romney:** "There are a few things that were disconcerting." – Romney on the London Olympics security preparations. (July 26)

**David Cameron:** "Of course it's easier if you hold an Olympic games in the middle of nowhere." (July 26)

**Romney:** "Culture makes all the difference. Culture makes all the difference." – on why the Palestinian economy is worse than Israel's. (July 30)

## AUGUST

**Romney:** "I'm not a business." – on why he's not releasing his taxes. (Aug. 9)

**Romney:** "Join me in welcoming the next president of the United States, Paul Ryan." – introducing Ryan as his vice presidential pick. Romney came back on stage: "Every now and then I'm known to make a mistake. I did not make a mistake with this guy. But I can tell you this. He's going to be the next vice president of the United States." (Aug. 11)

**Paul Ryan:** "I got a new bow last year. ... Oh, I got a new chainsaw. It was nice. It's a Stihl." -- asked by People magazine what his last splurge was. (Aug. 12)

**Biden:** "They gonna put y'all back in chains." (Aug. 14)

**Romney:** "The fascination with taxes I paid I find to be very small minded." – at a news conference he arranged on Medicare using a white board. (Aug. 16)

**Todd Akin:** "If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down." (Aug. 19)

**Ryan:** "I'm a Catholic deer hunter. I am happy to be clinging to my guns and to my religion." (Aug. 21)

**Biden:** "I've got a little bumper sticker for you: Osama bin Laden is dead and General Motors is alive." (Aug. 21)

**Ann Romney:** "I love you womeeen!!!!" (Aug. 28)

**Ann Romney:** "Tonight, I want to talk to you about love." (Aug. 28)

**Chris Christie:** "Tonight, we're going to choose respect over love." (Aug. 28)

**Neil Newhouse** (Romney pollster): "We're not going to let our campaign be dictated by fact-checkers." (Aug. 28)

**Romney:** "Four years from the excitement of the last election, for the first time, the majority of Americans now doubt that our children will have a better future. It is not what we were promised." – Romney acceptance speech. (Aug. 30)

**Clint Eastwood:** "What? What do you want me to tell Romney? I can't tell him to do that. That. He can't do that to himself." (Aug. 30)

## SEPTEMBER

**Bill Clinton:** "Listen to me, now. No president — no president, not me, not any of my predecessors, no one could have fully repaired all the damage that he found in just four years." And: "It takes some brass to attack a guy for doing what you did." – DNC convention speech. (Sept. 5)

**Jennifer Granholm:** "Well, in Romney's world, the cars get the elevator; the workers get the shaft." (Sept. 5)

**Obama:** "America, I never said this journey would be easy, and I won't promise that now. Yes, our path is harder, but it leads to a better place." – convention speech (Sept. 6)

**Romney:** "It's disgraceful that the Obama administration's first response was not to condemn attacks on our diplomatic missions, but to sympathize with those who waged the attacks." (Sept. 12)

**Romney:** "I think the best answer is as little as possible." -- when asked what he wears to bed at night. (Sept. 14)

**Romney:** "Middle income is \$200... 250,000 or less." (Sept. 14)

**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." (Sept. 17 – when the video was first unveiled)

**Benjamin Netanyahu:** "Where should a red line be drawn? A red line should be drawn right here." – speaking before the U.N. talking about Iran's capability for a nuclear weapon and using a red marker to draw a red line on a diagram of a bomb. (Sept. 27)

## OCTOBER

**Romney:** "And congratulations to you, Mr. President, on your anniversary. I'm sure this was the most romantic place you could imagine — here with me!" -- first presidential debate. (Oct. 3)

**Romney:** "Look, I've got five boys. I'm used to people saying something that's not always true, but just keep on repeating it and ultimately hoping I will believe it." – first presidential debate. (Oct. 3)

**Romney:** "I like PBS, I love Big Bird. I actually like you, too." -- to moderator Jim Lehrer of PBS in the first presidential debate. (Oct. 3)

**Obama:** "Well, Jim, I want to thank you, and I want to thank Governor Romney, because I think was a terrific debate." (Oct. 3)

**Biden:** "With all due respect, that's a bunch of malarkey." (Oct. 11)

**Brad Sherman:** "Do you want to get into this?" -- to fellow Democrat Howard Berman with whom he was competing for a redistricted congressional seat. (Oct. 11)

**Romney:** "I went to a number of women's groups and said: 'Can you help us find folks,' and they brought us whole binders full of women." (Oct. 16)

**Obama:** "Please proceed, governor." (Oct. 16)

**Tagg Romney:** "You want to jump out of your seat and rush down to the debate stage and take a swing at him." -- said of President Obama after a debate in which the two candidates exchanged verbal barbs and got in each other's space. (Oct. 18)

**Obama:** "Obviously, I had an off-night." -- to Jon Stewart in reference to his first debate performance. (Oct. 19)

**Obama:** "Well, governor, we also have fewer horses and bayonets." (Oct. 22)

**Richard Mourdock:** "Life is that gift from God. And even when life begins in that horrible situation of rape, that it is something that God intended to happen." (Oct. 23)

**Obama:** "If you say you love American cars in the debate, but you wrote an article called 'Let Detroit Go Bankrupt,' you might have Romnesia." (Oct. 23)

**Obama:** "The second thing I'm confident we'll get done next year is immigration reform. And since this is off the record, I will just be very blunt. Should I win a second term, a big reason I will win a second term is because the Republican nominee and the Republican Party have so alienated the fastest-growing demographic group in the country, the Latino community." (Oct. 24)

**Romney:** "The President's campaign has a slogan: it is 'forward.' But to the 23 million Americans struggling to find a good job, these last four years feel a lot more like 'backward.' We cannot afford four more years like the last four years." -- Romney economic speech (Oct. 26)

**Christie:** "The president has been all over this and he deserves great credit" -- on the response to Hurricane Sandy (Oct. 31)

## NOVEMBER

**Obama:** "Don't boo. Vote! Voting is the best revenge." (Nov. 4)

**Romney:** "I pray that the president will be successful in guiding our nation." -- Romney concession speech (Nov. 6-7)

**Obama:** "Tonight, in this election, you, the American people, reminded us that while our road has been hard, while our journey has been long, we have picked ourselves up, we have fought our way back, and we know in our hearts that for the United States of America the best is yet to come." -- Obama victory speech (Nov.6-7)

**Romney:** "The president's campaign focused on giving targeted groups a big gift -- so he made a big effort on small things. ... You can imagine for somebody making \$25,000 or \$30,000 or \$35,000 a year, being told you're

now going to get free health care, particularly if you don't have it, getting free health care worth, what, \$10,000 per family, in perpetuity, I mean, this is huge." (Nov. 14)

**Stu Stevens:** "[H]e was a charismatic African American president with a billion dollars [who did not demonstrate that he despises common citizens, –SteveB], no primary, and media that often felt morally conflicted about being critical [of Republicans! –SteveB]." (Nov. 28)

DECEMBER

**Tagg Romney:** "He [Mitt Romney] wanted to be president less than anyone I've met in my life. He had no desire to...run." (Dec. 22)

[20121227-04](#) 16:44 SteveB Graphic: How to Tell If You're Too Progressive



1 month ago

sometimes i cry while chopping carrots cause i dont want onions to think theyre ugly or something

Reply · 993 👍👎 in reply to

[20121227-05](#) 23:57 SteveB Photo: Cats Imitating Art #10 (Guido Reni, *Repentance Of St. Peter*, 1635)





<http://www.staplenews.com/home/2010/5/8/solar-city-tower-with-urban-waterfall-for-2016-rio-olympics.html>



THIS WORLD IS A FUNNY WORLD INDEED  
AND PEOPLE ARE HARD TO SUIT  
THE MAN WHO PLAYS THE PICOLLO  
IS A BORE TO THE MAN WITH THE FLUTE  
AND OFTEN TO MYSELF I'VE THOUGHT HOW LOVELY IT WOULD BE  
IF EVERY PERSON I EVER MET WOULD SIMPLY AGREE WITH ME

BUT SINCE THEY WONT  
I THINK THE WAY TO MAKE THE WHOLE WORLD BRIGHT  
IS NEVER TO MIND WHAT OTHERS SAY  
AND DO WHAT I THINK IS RIGHT



The 3% and the 97%. They think they're so hot!



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

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Your email address will always be kept strictly confidential.

Feel free to forward this Newsletter to anyone you know on the Right or the Left, though your motives might be different in each case. Regardless, PASS IT ON! Help keep your friends and acquaintances informed and thinking.

<http://www.FriendsOfTheMiddle.org>  
[FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com](mailto:FriendsOfTheMiddle@hotmail.com)

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# **FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE** **NEWSLETTER #300 — DEC. 31, 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.**

## **Fear Is Our Greatest Enemy**

(posted by Steven W. Baker / SteveB, Dec. 31, 2012)

We have reached the milestone of the final edition of our *FotM Newsletter*. For me, an epoch is ending and another just beginning. Hopefully, the future will bestow its just rewards.

I need to say a few words in closing. This has been such a labor of love that I have my regrets at the parting, even though I also feel a little relieved. It has been an arduous journey at times...mainly happy, but sometimes a little sad. There was much to learn and do and, sometimes, great victories. And there is always another battle that lies ahead, but I, for one, have learned much and carry forward certain enhanced appreciations and awarenesses.

I believe our enterprise has been a success. I always wanted to have 1000 readers/members and reach some big number of issues, like 300. Our subscribers peaked at over 800, we have had over 100 contributors, produced more than 7,500 pages in 14 eBooks, have a website and blog that will continue as long as my heirs permit, and look—this is *FotM Newsletter #300!*

The best of the best has been that I have made so many new, interesting friends. I thank all of you for reading, for writing, for sometimes pouring out your hearts, for being sincere and open. Thank you for making that extra effort to do what we so often fail to do—communicate. That's really where everything begins and ends. You did that! And I believe it changed the world just a little, tiny bit. I know it changed me. Thank you for not being afraid to be informed, for looking at all sides of the arguments, for teaching me, and, most of all, for speaking out! I hope you will all continue to do so in whatever way you can.

Many of us, I believe, come away from this enterprise with a newly heightened awareness of the quasi-hidden ruling plutocracy in America—money and greed and human nature. So what else is new? Well, maybe you thought you were living in a democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people? Wrong! The system is rigged in favor of the rich, pure and simple. It always has been, but their power waxes and wanes, and lately it has done little but grow and grow. Even our "socialist" President appears to be under their thumb at times. This is just common sense observation of the news, not conspiracy theory.

Meanwhile, we now know with certainty that the GOP has moved so far to the right that they're willing to obstruct government and lose elections rather than bend to the will of the majority of Americans. They are ruled instead by a majority of dollars. They appear to me to be completely unable to explain how they are not anti-women, anti-privacy, anti-minority, anti-middle-class, anti-education, anti-government, anti-small business and jobs, and, therefore, anti-American. And what are they for? They are pro big money! What else? War! Guns! Pollution! Oh ya, pro-life, they say...but, if your life already exists, though they claim to be so much more Christian than the rest of

us heathens, they'll throw you in the trash if you can't carry your own weight and pay the same share of taxes as the billionaires, because that's what's fair to Republicans in 2012. This is all so extremely, well, ugly to me.

But the worst of the worst, for me, has been that there are friends I appear to have lost because of what I consider to be inconsequential political differences. I guess I was the only one who considered them inconsequential. :-) And I will be the first to admit that I don't pull many punches, but I always strive to get at the truth, not the drivel some radio host shouts for monetary reward. I have reread many of the older *FotM Newsletters* to try to determine why communication breaks down and why in such a seemingly permanent way.

I have noticed three kinds of things that happen here in the *FotM Newsletter*—entertainment (which I don't need to deal with here), information (with, let's face it, a little propoganda thrown in), and debate.

Since early 2007, no one can doubt that the evidence of 7,500 pages is nearly exactly the same as the actions of Congress for the same period of time—there has actually been very little or no true debate. FotM progressives have brought thousands of pages of expert testimony and historical and statistical analysis to the table. FotM conservatives have attempted to fool us with lies, media talking points, discredited forwarded emails, and bogus statistics. When that fails to work, they invariably start throwing hate and/or race bombs, calling people names and slandering reputations, acting hurt that any progressives would dare to challenge their God-given conservative assumptions, and, invariably, getting angry, taking their marbles, and going home to mama.

Never has one conservative position been argued positively in any coherent, logical manner in these pages. Such debates apparently are not in the Republican playbook. If conservative opponents don't know why the talking points are true and maybe even handed down from God or Ronald Reagan, then there's no sense talking about it! End of argument.

When all is said and done, the conclusions that can be legitimately drawn from the evidence are pretty apparent. There has been a class war going on in America for a long time and the moneyed class has been winning. Their percentage of the pie has radically increased since Reagan, at the same time their percentage of the burdens of society has declined. In the form of tax law and government spending, this class war is the key conundrum of our times and the reality behind the inability of Congressional Republicans to come to terms with the "fiscal cliff". Well...that and the simple fact that their handlers don't want to pay a penny more of their billions in taxes (at least in the U.S.).

I have yet to find one conservative who even shows an interest in facts. It's like when R0mney's campaign manager told reports that they weren't going to pay any attention to the fact checkers. Why would Republicans be concerned with facts?

Many progressives criticize President Obama and Democrats. Obama is scaring the hell out of me in the current fiscal cliff negotiations. I have to worry about him giving way on Social Security, etc. But you will find hardly one word of criticism of conservative politicians or positions by conservatives, especially here in the *FotM Newsletters*. Not in the talking points.

I find progressives will integrate new information into their world views rather quickly and efficiently. Conservatives run as fast in the opposite direction as they possibly can.

So I asked myself, what is it that conservatives and most Republicans are afraid of? And this question, it seems to me, points to something extremely important. It's obvious, when you look at the evidence and think about it, that they are *afraid!* They are driven by fear!

One of those great fears appears to be the fear that the world might be a very different place than conservatives imagine it to be. I guess they're afraid that anything might be different than they imagine. But if you simply refuse to permit conflicting views to enter your headspace, you'll never have to deal with this fear. Very convenient. This is how conservatives run away from the truth and from the inherent paradoxes in their positions, such as the one that successful people owe society nothing in return for their success, or the illusion that you can build a great nation without investing in the children—their health, food, housing, safety, and their educations.

I am sad that this mode of thinking prevents conservatives from connecting with the real world, but I am made even sadder by the fact that the fear-induced dogmatism of the right is a huge impediment to normal human discourse and relationships. We have certainly seen plenty of evidence of that here at FotM. And I'm sorry that sometimes there's no cure for fear, the fearful are simply too cutoff to reach...they refuse to be reached, refuse to grab a proffered hand of friendship...

How do conservatives get over this fear...this fear, essentially, that they might be wrong? Simple: they must face the truth head-on...while carrying a handgun, if that makes them feel more secure.

Will any of them do it? Well...Art and I did, at least. I hope more and more conservatives will awaken from their long Rip Van Winkle sleep, which must have begun sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

And, as the article below shows, fears have a whole range of levels of reality. (And I'll admit that there are times I'm a little afraid of Oliver Stone too.)

In closing, let me give special thanks to all the FotM contributors, especially to our talented, rational, and intelligent regulars: Pam, Art, SteveG, Dennis, Bill, MarthaH, Ben, Tom, Jim, Charis, Beth, Kim, GaryC, Dale, SteveM, Marci, and many more.

I hope to see at least some of you in our travels next year. Meanwhile, keep emailing me! Have a great New Year's and new year. Let love, truth, and friendship be your guides. Fight against fear! *iAdios, amigos!*

"Oliver Stone: 'US Has Become an Orwellian State'" by RT

Dec. 28, 2012, (<http://rt.com/news/oliver-stone-us-orwellian-022>)

Americans are living in an Orwellian state argue Academy Award-winning director Oliver Stone and historian Peter Kuznick, as they sit down with RT to discuss US foreign policy and the Obama administration's disregard for the rule of law.

Both argue that Obama is a wolf in sheep's clothing and that people have forgiven him a lot because of the "nightmare of the Bush presidency that preceded him."

"He has taken all the Bush changes he basically put them into the establishment, he has codified them," Stone told RT. "It is an Orwellian state. It might not be oppressive on the surface, but there is no place to hide. Some part of you is going to end up in the database somewhere."

According to Kuznick, American citizens live in a fish tank where their government intercepts more than 1.7 billion messages a day. "That is email, telephone calls, other forms of communication."

RT's Abby Martin in the program "Breaking the Set" discusses the Showtime film series and book titled *The Untold History of the United States* co-authored by Oliver Stone and Peter Kuznick.

**RT:** It took both of you almost five years to produce this series. And in it you have a chapter called "Obama: Management of a Wounded Empire". You give a harsh critique of the Obama administration. What in your eyes has been the most troubling aspect of his presidency, Oliver?

**Oliver Stone:** I think under the disguise of sheep's clothing he has been a wolf. That because of the nightmare of the Bush presidency that preceded him, people forgave him a lot. He was a great hope for change. The color of his skin, the upbringing, the internationalism, the globalism, seemed all evident. And he is an intelligent man. He has taken all the Bush changes he basically put them into the establishment, he has codified them. That is what is sad. So we are going into the second administration that is living outside the law and does not respect the law and foundations of our system and he is a constitutional lawyer, you know. Without the law, it is the law of the jungle. Nuremburg existed for a reason and there was a reason to have trials, there is a reason for due process – 'habeas corpus' as they call it in the United States.

**RT:** Do you agree Peter?

**Peter Kuznick:** I agree, if you look at his domestic policy, he did not break with the Bush administration's policies. If you look at his transparency – he claimed to be the transparency president when he was running for office. There has not been transparency. We have been actually classifying more documents under Obama than we did under Bush. All previous presidents between 1970 and 2008 indicted three people total under Espionage Act. Obama has already indicted six people under the Espionage Act. The surveillance has not stopped, the incarceration without bringing people to trial has not stopped. So those policies have continued.

Then there are war policies, militarization policies. We are maintaining that. We are fighting wars now in Yemen, Afghanistan, we are keeping troops in Afghanistan. We have not cut back the things that we all found so odious about the Bush administration and Obama added some of his own. The drones policy – Obama had more drone attack in the first eight months than Bush had his entire presidency. And these have very dubious international legality.

**OS:** Peter was hopeful that in the second term there will be some more flexibility, we hope so. But, there is a system in place, which is enormous – the Pentagon system.

**RT:** It almost seems that they took the odious CIA policies and just branded them, so it is now acceptable – the assassinations, the extrajudicial executioner without the due process. It is fascinating.

**PK:** We complained during Bush years that Bush was actually conducting surveillance without judiciary review. Obama is killing people, targeted assassinations without judiciary review. That to us is obviously much more serious.

**RT:** You also cover Pearl Harbor, which of course led to the internment of Japanese American citizens. I do not think a lot of people acknowledge that once again underreported aspect of really what that meant. When you look at the surveillance grid in America today it almost seems like it is an open-air internment camp, where they do not need to intern people anymore because we have this grid set up in place. What do you guys think about that?

**PK:** The US government now intercepts more than 1.7 billion messages a day from American citizens. That is email, telephone calls, other forms of communication. Can you imagine: 1.7 billion? We've got this apparatus set up now with hundreds of thousands of people, over a million of people with top security clearances in this kind of nightmarish state, this 1984 kind of state.

**OS:** One million top security clearances. That is a pretty heavy number. In other words, we are living in a fish pond and I think the sad part is that the younger people accept that. They are used to the invasion. And that is true, how can we follow the lives of everybody? But the truth is that we are all ultimately watching ourselves. It is an Orwellian state. It might not be oppressive on the surface, but there is no place to hide. Some part of you is going to end up in the database somewhere.

**PK:** And it can be oppressive on the surface. One of the things we feared after 9/11 was that if there was a second serious attack like 9/11 then the constitution would be gone. The crackdown would be so outrageous at that point. And there is still this obsessive fear. The US fears things, we fear the rest of the world. We spend as much money on our military security intelligence as the rest of the world combined. Do we have enemies that we feel so threatened by? Do we really need this anymore? Is this what our priorities should be? No we think not, we want to turn that around.

**RT:** The evisceration of the rule of law, especially the National Defense Authorization Act, which eradicates due process – our basic fundamental freedom in this country. I wanted to bring up another interesting point that really struck me in the film series, which are the kamikaze pilots. They were brave, that was the bravest act that you could do and then I can't help but think of suicide bombers today and Bill Maher, he goes out and loses his show for saying these people are brave. And you have people like Ron Paul get up there and talk about blowback as a reality and he is ridiculed. How did we get here, where the discourse is just so tongued down when we can't even acknowledge the truths such as that?

**OS:** Primitive of course. There has been a blind worship of the military and patriotism. I strongly believe in the strong military, but to defend our country, not to invade other countries and to conquer the world. I think there is a huge difference that has been forgotten: morality. Once you take the laws away, as Einstein once said famously, the country does not obey its laws, the laws would be disrespected. So it seems that the fundamental morality has been lost on us somewhere on the way recently and now it is what is effective. Can we kill Bin Laden without having to bring him to trial, can we just get it done? And that 'get it down' mentality justifies the ends and that is where countries go wrong, and people go wrong. All of our lives are moral equations. Does the end justify the means? No, it never did.

**PK:** And the other side of what you are asking is about the constraints upon political discourse in this country. Why are people so uninformed? That is what we are to deal with in the series. If people don't understand their history, then they don't have any vision of the future and what is possible. If they think what exists now – the tyranny of now – is all that is possible, then they can't dream about the future. They can't imagine the future that is different from the present. That is what I am saying – people have to understand the past because if you study the past then you can envision a future that is very different.

We came really close on many occasions to going into very different direction in the future. We came very close in 1944-1945 to avoiding atomic bombing and potentially not having the kind of Cold War that we had. We came very close in 1953 upon Stalin's death to ending the Cold War. We came close in 1963 when Kennedy was assassinated to ending the war in Vietnam, to ending the Cold War, to heading into a very different direction. Then there were the Carter years, again a possibility of a different direction. And at the end of the Cold War in 1989 Gorbachev was reaching out to Bush. Did Bush take that olive branch that Gorbachev was giving him? No, very much different. What did we do instead? We applauded the Soviets for not invading when countries were liberating themselves from the Soviet Union and then we immediately go and invade Panama and then we invade Iraq.

So we are saying that "it is great that you are showing restraint, but we are not going to because we are the hegemon." As Madeline Albright, Secretary of State under Bill Clinton, says "if the US uses force it's because we are the United States of America; we are the indispensable nation. We see further and stand taller than other nations." That is the attitude that Oliver and I are challenging. This sense of American exceptionalism that the US is a city on the hill, God's gift to humanity, if we do it, it is right. And that is not acceptable.

**OS:** It is very funny because the book has been out a few weeks, series have been playing for the fifth week now. We go to TV shows, we sit in these beautiful sets and they are always rushing and rushing. They got news in Gaza, they got Obama. And they ask us what are you talking about? History? What does it have to do with today? What is your point? We sit there very patiently and it is very bizarre to me that they say the past is prologue, that is all happened before and if we are smart you will see it more calmly and won't overreact. We also argue that this kind of media is driven by dollars, the greed. You have a show and it is really not a news show, it is about rating and how you can get that – with a lot of speed, a lot of zoom and a lot of fancy sets and people watch. Goal is to keep it moving, don't think, just keep it moving.

**PK:** A show like this, we can actually discuss the issues at a little more depth, a little more critically.

**RT:** If both of you are to make a film about this generation right now, what is one facet that you think is the most underreported or misrepresented?

**OS:** I don't know about the younger generation, I have three children. I think it is an eternal story in some degree. People no matter what have a similar morality and consciousness, patterns re-emerge again and again. The young men and young women want to make their way into the world. And it is not that far off from what we went through. So I believe in cyclical history and I think my children are going through what I and my father and mother went through. I always look for those patterns first beyond the superficiality.

**PK:** I find that my students care very passionately about what is going on in the world. They are all doing lots of volunteer work. But what I find in this generation, like Oliver's and my generation, is that they treat the symptoms. They are not asking the questions about the root cause of all of these problems. They care, they try to change things, but it is more superficial.

What we are challenging them to do is look at the patterns. Look at what has happened from the 1890s all the way through to today. Look at the consistency of the wars, interventions, the military expenditures, the paranoia, they fear of outsiders, the oppression. And get it to the root, what is making the system as a whole sick in a certain ways and how can we root out those deeper causes.

Now that we understand that, we can begin to change that. The Occupy movement did some of that there have been times in the 1930s, 1970-80s, 1960s when people were challenging on that scale. We want the country to begin thinking about these big questions again. What is our past, how did we get here, what are the possibilities for the future, what have we done wrong and what can we get right?

**RT:** Do you think these superficialities in the conventional wisdom that we hear are perpetuated to keep us in a perpetual state of war?

**PK:** I don't know if it is quite so deliberate, but that seems to be the effect – dumbing down the population to the point where they cannot think critically and then you can pull anything over their eyes. They have a five-minute attention span and a five-minute memory of what happened in the past. We are saying learn your history, study it and think about what the alternatives are, think in utopian ways how different the world could be, how better it could be if we start to organize it rationally in the interest of people, not in the interest of profit, not in the interest of Wall Street, not in the interest of military, in the interest of our common humanity, the six billion of us who occupy this planet.

**OS:** The model of the series of *The World at War*, which was made by the BBC in the 1970s about WWII. Ours are 10 feature films, cut with care, an hour each, pure narration, music, and sometimes clips of films that make our point or don't make our point. Either way we try to keep it flowing so a young person could enjoy it like a movie, I am glad you did.



*Some days I'm terrified of being fearless.*





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[That Coca Cola Company is really going downhill! –SteveB]

"Bob Hope and the Persistent Military Presence" by Ken Butigan, NationofChange

Dec. 28, 2012, (<http://www.nationofchange.org/bob-hope-and-persistent-military-presence-1356706871>)



Typically this is a strange week, between Christmas and New Year's, when most of us face the rigors of winter, the chronic stop-and-go commotion that passes for merrymaking, and the nagging remorse for all the things we earnestly committed ourselves to do this year—which, by now, we've sheepishly decided to carry over into 2013 like a cheap bookkeeping trick. These annual existential tremors got an extra jolt last Friday as we faced the prospect of the world coming to an end—first physically, then financially.

Given the peculiarity of this week, I found myself in a holiday mood surfing Netflix and landed on a strange helping of Bob Hope. For those who don't know him, Hope was a mid-century comedian featured in a string of low-budget road pictures, in which he often co-starred with Dorothy Lamour and Bing Crosby. Bob Hope and Christmas? It was probably his long-time collaboration with Crosby, who sang "White Christmas," that induced this neural cross firing. In any case I clicked on what turned out to be the first episode of a short-lived television show called "Bob Hope: The Comedy Hour" and found myself peering into a temporal periscope that zoomed me back in time to the United States of 60 years ago.

Delivered on the blotchy-gray canvas of the precursor of videotape, the program is a cultural snapshot that would allow us to evaluate social progress if, like our children, we subjected our society to a periodic standardized test. And my would-be assessment: America's cozy relationship with the military has both changed and stayed the same.

In this first episode, it is May 1952 and the show is being broadcast live from a makeshift outdoor theater at the Presidio Army Base in San Francisco. The camera pans across the San Francisco Bay, the then-active prison on Alcatraz Island and the gleaming city, until it finally focuses on the stage and the thousands of members of the Armed Forces in the audience. Hope is doing stand-up, spouting one-liners and his own brand of self-deprecating humor. This is years before Johnny Carson—and light-years before David Letterman—but the template for the late-night monologue is here: banter with the bandleader, cracks about the weather (the sun keeps disappearing into the fog), and a string of jokes about the political scene. The presidential election is on, and there is a cascade of gags about the Democrats (Adlai Stevenson would be the party's nominee but Hope's airspace is devoted to Estes Kefauver, the Senator from Tennessee who had made a name for himself by leading a Congressional investigation into organized crime) and Republican Dwight Eisenhower, who would eventually win the fall contest. The show consists of guests, skits and musical numbers.

The humor is fairly genial and safe. The pioneering comedy of Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, Mort Sahl and Richard Pryor — let alone today's work by Sarah Silverman, Louie C.K or Margaret Cho—are years off. Their efforts to assert

freedom of speech or to tackle the political and cultural realities of racism, sexism and homophobia will, beginning in the 1960s, seriously challenge both the assumptions about comedy and the society which comedy encodes and reinforces.

Just as future comedians will challenge the world that Hope so confidently projects, so will social movements a decade later begin to challenge a world that assumes the cozy relationship with the military on display here. Hope, who emigrated from Britain in 1908 at five years old, cultivated a strong sense of U.S. patriotism throughout his life. This was not his first show on an army base. Beginning in 1941, he entertained troops throughout World War II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War and right on up to the Persian Gulf War in 1991. His 57 tours were sponsored by the Defense Department, his corporate sponsors and NBC, which often broadcast them as television specials.

This coziness with the military comes through in the references that Hope makes during his monologue to an atomic bomb test that had occurred a few days before at the Nevada Test Site. The aboveground test was filmed and broadcast nationally.

"The other morning," he says, "I went over to Nevada for the atomic broadcast. That was really something. I had quite an honor there. I was selected as the human being to stand closest to the blast. It was a little crowded. I was in a crate with four goats. That was quite an experience, and I must be loaded with electrons, because the other night I got off a streetcar and it followed me up into my porch. What a blast. A drunk was standing in a bar in Las Vegas, and after the building stopped shaking he slapped the bartender on the back and said, 'Atta boy, now you're mixing them the way I like 'em.' And it's changed gambling quite a bit over there. Now they don't shake the dice, they just lay 'em on the table."

In the early 1950s the national security state sought to normalize nuclear weapons. To do this it had to transform something that signified unmanageable terror into a something of manageable fear. It had to establish support for this new weapon system by conveying its awesome power but also its domestication. It was dangerous, but controllable. Hope's bit strikes these chords. Atomic power is clearly hazardous and unpredictable, but its volatility and side effects can be brought down to earth. Most of all, they can provoke laughter—which, like almost all laughter, relieves tension and anxiety. Nothing could provoke tension and anxiety more in 1950s America than the prospect of thermonuclear war. Bob Hope, among others, helped alleviate this fear without removing its cause, something that all-powerful regimes rely on to manage the populace.

Eventually, a series of social movements would challenge this domestication of nuclear arms and the public acquiescence on which it rested. (These movements had some of their roots in San Francisco of 1952, including the then-emerging Beat generation and Allen Ginsberg's percolating poem, "Howl.") With the emergence of people power movements from the 1960s forward, a national broadcast of a nuclear detonation or a comedy show from an Army base would at least provoke critical questions and likely would not be countenanced in the free and easy way that Hope's 1952 program would. Nor would several other aspects of that particular broadcast, including what are now considered—with our post-liberation movement lenses six decades later—to be offensive skits about Chinese-Americans, Italian-Americans and traditional gender roles. The notion of the United Service Organization road show entertaining troops provoked strong criticism during the Vietnam War, which Francis Ford Coppola captured in his vivid depiction of a show going very wrong in Indochina in his film *Apocalypse Now*. And, perhaps most tellingly, the Presidio Army Base—which served as the backdrop of Hope's first episode of the comedy hour—was converted to a national park in the 1990s.

However, the shifts since 1952, while real, have not dislodged the fundamental militarism at the heart of this society. In our own time, the Pentagon seems to have decided that public support is such a given that it can afford to pursue a McLuhanesque "cool" approach to its interface with the population. Yet, "cool" or not, the Pentagon's power is immense and will not hesitate to call on the next Bob Hope to buttress it.

In 1997, I spent several days camping out at the Vietnam Wall. I was considering writing my dissertation about the wall as a site of U.S. pilgrimage, and I wanted to get a sense of how people respond to it. (In the end, I wrote about something else.) Like many others, I was struck by the instantaneous reverence these thousands of pilgrims each day assumed as they approached the wall with over 58,000 names of the U.S. war dead. On the third afternoon, there was an unusual uproar, and then the whirl and clicking of press cameras. A golf cart pulled up — Bob Hope was sitting there. He had just been to the White House, where President Bill Clinton bestowed a national

honor on him. Now he was here, to see the wall. He clambered out of the cart and shambled over to the monument. He simply stared at it. He was 94 years old, and he seemed to be in another world. The reporters tried to get him to touch the wall. In the end he did, but only when they told him that, on this chilly day, it was warm. As he walked back to the cart he straightened up and tried to say something, but it didn't come.

I was thinking about this moment when I watched the 1952 video. I cannot presume to know what he was thinking about this wall dedicated to a war he promoted. Perhaps it simply confirmed something about his life. Perhaps it was a question, tugging at him. Or perhaps he was formulating a question that is there for all of us.

20121229-03	06:51	SteveB	"The Human Casualties of the War on Drugs"
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"The Human Casualties of the War on Drugs" by Andrew Cohen, *The Atlantic*

Dec. 28, 2012, (<http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/12/the-human-casualties-of-the-war-on-drugs/266622>)

Let's stop humoring ourselves, says the filmmaker Eugene Jarecki -- America can no longer afford to keep millions of its citizens locked away. Now he's taking his law-and-order documentary on the road.

The year began with a line that was as much a lamentation as it was an astute observation. "The scale and brutality of our prisons are the moral scandal of American life," Adam Gopnik wrote in a trenchant essay in the January 30th issue of the New Yorker. "How did we get here? How is it that our civilization, which rejects hanging and flogging and disemboweling, came to believe that caging vast numbers of people for decades is an acceptably humane condition?"

The year ends with filmmaker Eugene Jarecki touring the country -- visiting prisons, prosecutors' conferences, schools -- showing off his heartbreaking documentary, *The House I Live In*, an acclaimed collection of interlocking stories about the mournful human impact of America's failed war on drugs. Did you know there is a man serving a life sentence in Oklahoma for "trafficking" three ounces of methamphetamine? Did you know that the rise of privately-owned prisons means that there is now a direct financial incentive to incarcerate people?

The 11 months in between these two statements were extraordinarily fruitful ones in this area of law and justice. And almost all of the change seemed to reflect a growing sense of unease, or even disgust, on the part of America's criminal justice community -- lawyers, judges, politicians, prison officials, etc. -- a sense that the status quo is unsustainable, that America can no longer afford, on either financial or moral terms, to keep millions of its citizens locked up. It's too early to label 2012 a turning point in our war against the war on drugs. But it's not too early to see a definitive trend in that direction.

In June, for example, in a case styled *Dorsey v. United States*, the United States Supreme Court endorsed new federal sentencing rules that finally reduced the disparity in minimum sentences between crack and powder cocaine offenders. In a 5-4 ruling, over the objections of the conservative justices, the court declared that the new, more lenient rules applied to defendants who had committed their crimes before the 2010 law came into effect but who were sentenced afterward. The ratio is still too high -- 18-to-1, by Congressional decree -- but the 2010 law and the 2012 ruling were significant advances toward a just cause.

That same week in June, an important new federal civil rights lawsuit was filed in Denver, alleging the mistreatment and abuse of mentally ill prisoners at the nation's most famous prison, the ADX-Florence "Supermax" facility in Colorado. The litigation is still in its nascent stage, but the complaint highlights some of what Gopnik and Jarecki each chronicled. If the courts permit the case to proceed to discovery, and thus force the Bureau of Prisons to answer under oath for the conduct of its prison officials, Congress will have little choice but to intercede, the same way the Obama Administration ultimately was pressured into doing something this year about juvenile rape in prison.

Then, in November, voters in California decided finally to minimize the effects of its "three strikes" law -- which is only partially responsible for the fact that the state's prisons are so dangerously overcrowded that the federal courts

have ordered the release of thousands of prisoners. Voters there also came close to gutting the state's costly, ineffective and unfair death penalty regime -- nearly 6 million California residents voted to end capital punishment, an extraordinary outpouring of support for an idea which is growing in popularity all over the country.

That same month, voters in Colorado and Washington voted to legalize marijuana for recreational use, a dramatic break from both federal law and policy. Why didn't the Obama Administration immediately crack down? Why do conservatives like Pat Robertson want to reduce the nation's prison population by decriminalizing marijuana? As Robertson said in March, "California is spending more money on prisons than it spends on schools." Last month, a federal judge in Iowa, Mark W. Bennett, who appeared in Jarecki's film, wrote a poignant piece in *The Nation*. "If we don't speak up, who will?" he asked.

To his immense credit, Jarecki is speaking up. He says his film is no advocacy piece but rather a movie "driven by real people's stories." But the advocacy is there, in virtually every scene. The "real people" Jarecki shows us are complex individuals, generators of sympathy and empathy, outrage and sorrow, sometimes all at the same time. And in that sense, if no other, they are powerful tribunes for the message he seeks to send: Drug crime is caused by drug addiction, drug addiction is a public health matter, and all of us pay in one manner or another for short-sighted policies that treat drug abuse as a matter for the criminal courts.

Jarecki contends that the "war on drugs" is more warlike than any of us are willing to believe and that it has been waged disproportionately for decades on America's poor. If every lawyer, judge, cop, prison guard, politician, policy maker, and economist in America saw this film, fewer families might be devastated by the "lock-em-up" approach to the problem. And fewer taxpayers would have to foot the bill. Here is my interview with him, conducted by telephone on December 23.

**COHEN:** Your work touched upon many different components of the failed war on drugs. If you had to choose two sentences to describe the film -- two thesis sentences -- what would they be?

**JARECKI:** Well, you described it as a failed war on drugs and I'm delighted to hear you refer to it that way. If there are two sentences that my film wants to communicate, it's that the war on drugs has failed and must be thrown on the ash heap of history as a kind of accident from which we must move on. The second sentence is that what was wrong with it from the start must be corrected -- namely, that it took a public health concern, drug abuse, and treated it instead as a criminal matter, and by doing so has made an explosion in our prison population of incarcerating the non-violent as through they were violent.

**COHEN:** The Holocaust. You went there. Can you share a little bit of your thinking into why you made that analogy toward the end of the film? I can imagine some folks, including people who generally are sympathetic to the movie's message, won't quite get the comparisons. Have you received any blowback?

**JARECKI:** Almost none, and I think it's because the framing of the message by David Simon, who created *The Wire*, and by Richard Lawrence Miller, the historian who drew his analogy from Raoul Hillberg's analysis of what went on in the Third Reich. All of them work with great surgery to ensure that they are not making some kind of clumsy, ham-fisted analogy that blurs the differences between discrete elements of history.

Anyone with a scalpel involved in that enterprise will find that there are discomfiting patterns that mankind has engaged in, where we have seen groups persecuted by the larger society, often predicated on some habit of the theirs, or practice of theirs, or custom special to a group. As someone who comes out of the Holocaust experience, as the child of survivors, I take any analogy of the Holocaust with great seriousness. But if one is surgical and is learning from that horror that so impacted my family, then history is finally being the educator that it's supposed to be.

**COHEN:** One of the most powerful components of your film was the use of old footage to show just how bipartisan has been the zeal to wage this war on drugs. Did you go back to some of the politicians whose speeches you cited - like Vice President Joe Biden or Bill Clinton -- and ask them whether and to what extent their views have changed on the failed war on drugs?

**JARECKI:** No, we didn't in the case of Bill Clinton and Joe Biden. We did in the case of current policy makers because the film was not really designing itself to give a platform for mea culpas or for expressions of regret by former policy makers. My film is dominated, the screen time is dominated, by these individual stories of people whose lives are like directly touched by the war on drugs. It's more a revenge of the voiceless truth than it is a perpetuation of the top-down structure.

**COHEN:** You talked to a federal judge and police officers and journalists and investigators, and they all were very poignant, each in their own way. But there wasn't a current prosecutor of victims' rights voice, at least none that I can remember. Were these people simply unwilling to involve themselves in the project?

**JARECKI:** When we approached people who were active prosecutors, they were a little bit more uncomfortable in appearing. And I think the reason is that the war on drugs is very hard to defend these days. Its track record of failure is so vast, and so manifest, that you find greater defensiveness, greater anxiety, about communicating.

But also, interestingly enough, I don't see the prosecutor as the villain in the equation. I think prosecutions in America are villainous but I think it's the laws as written by Congress, namely the mandatory minimum sentencing laws, that have so warped the administration of justice in our courts. That overly empower the prosecutor and disempower judges.

Americans always like a good villain, and one of the reasons they like it is that it makes the world safe for them to be apolitical. So I didn't want to put prosecutors on screen who might have come across as provocative, tough-as-nails, tough on crime. Because if there is a good villain in the movie, then they can just blame that guy.

**COHEN:** Along the same lines, I like the idea of traveling to prisons to share the film with inmates and prison officials. But what about the idea of taking the film, and your message, to places of political power, like police and prosecutors' conferences? Have you received any invitations to take your show into this hostile territory?

**JARECKI:** We've done that. We have been at several conferences with law enforcement people, we've been at conferences with DAs, conferences of sheriffs, conferences of judges, conferences of defense lawyers. It's a very fundamental part of our plan, alongside what we do in prisons, churches, schools, and community centers, to people who are on the receiving end of the war on drugs power rather than the enforcement end. We show it to the powerful and the powerless.

**COHEN:** And what has the reaction been when you've gone to a prosecutors' conference?

**JARECKI:** We get a very good reaction. It's about what they think about the most, so it's about their world, and they certainly have a great interest in that. I think they believe that the people are treated with great fairness in the movie. All the characters are very textured people. You don't have caricatures walking around; you don't have a cop as a simplistic person made out to look like he's a heartless, tough monster. And you don't have drug dealers made out to be savage monsters who have only the worst interests of society at heart.

In general, and from both ends of the spectrum, what I always find when I go out with a camera is how rich and textured and majestic people are. And I capture that on screen and that's really what I do, my best contribution.

20121229-04	07:57	MarthaH	"The Top 10 Political Quotes of 2012" (w/videos)
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"The Top 10 Political Quotes of 2012" (w/ videos) by Aaron Blake, *The Washington Post*

Dec. 28, 2012, (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/12/28/the-top-10-political-quotes-of-2012>)

The year 2012 is in the rearview mirror, and 2013 is just around the corner.

What better time to look at the soundbites that defined the year that was — politically speaking, of course.

Below, we recap the top 10 political quotes of the year, with special deference for quotes that defined the election in some way, shape or form.

10. Gingrich's campaign defined the word "grandiose." The candidate often seemed shocked that his opponents could be beating someone of his intellect. And his plans for a moon colony exemplified the disconnect between Gingrich's own vision of himself and the way the public perceived him. The *National Review* even ran a cover featuring Gingrich's face on Marvin the Martian's body.

By the end of my second term, we will have the first permanent base on the moon, and it will be American.  
—Newt Gingrich

9. Bush's admission of his own status as an albatross even four years after his presidency was telling. Republicans struggled to argue that they would be the better stewards of the economy than President Obama, even though he was the incumbent, and much of that struggle has to do with lingering memories that it all started on Bush's watch.

I wish they weren't called the 'Bush tax cuts.' If they're called some other body's tax cuts, they're probably less likely to be raised. —George W. Bush

8. This quote makes our list mostly because it's totally awesome. But it also pretty well sums up the adjustments made by many tea party-backed politicians who were elected in 2010. Many of them proved unconventional, to say the least, and Scott heads that list.

(Florida Gov.) Rick Scott doesn't seem to have any political skills at all. I'd give him a 'B' for governing. I'd give him an 'A' for strangeness. —Former Florida GOP chairman Tom Slade

7. Fehrnstrom's ill-advised metaphor, delivered during a TV interview toward the end of the primary season, once again called into question just how genuine Romney's political evolution over the years had been. Romney-as-flip-flopper wasn't the reason he lost, but it did feed the narrative of a guy who was out of touch and a little slippery.

Well, I think you hit a reset button for the fall campaign. Everything changes. It's almost like an Etch A Sketch. You can kind of shake it up and restart all over again. —Romney adviser Eric Fehrnstrom

6. Romney's awkwardness is hard to sum up in one quote; his campaign was replete with moments like this. But betting another candidate \$10,000 on stage at a debate? He might as well have donned a monocle.

Rick, I'll tell you what. Ten thousand bucks? Ten thousand dollar bet? —Romney

5. We're including the context of Obama's remarks here, but most people never saw them. All they saw was "You didn't build that" — a pithy little soundbite for the GOP to tie Obama to big-government policies.

There are a whole bunch of hardworking people out there. If you were successful, somebody along the line gave you some help. There was a great teacher somewhere in your life. Somebody helped to create this unbelievable American system that we have that allowed you to thrive. Somebody invested in roads and bridges. If you've got a business — you didn't build that. —Obama

4. The most bizarre moment of the 2012 campaign was easily Eastwood's speech at the Republican National Convention, in which he engaged in a halting, improvised conversation with an empty chair that was supposed to be Obama. This line got laughs — as did some others — but the fact that this charade took place right before Romney's address made the whole thing awkward to say the least. (Side note: *The Outlaw Josey Wales* is still an amazing film.)

What do you want me to tell Romney? I can't tell him to do that. I can't tell him to do that to himself. You're crazy. You're absolutely crazy. You're getting as bad as Biden. —Clint Eastwood, talking to an empty chair at the GOP convention

3. Akin's odd and offensive theory turned a likely pickup for Senate Republicans into a sure loss on Election Day. And if there's one moment that really seemed to turn the battle for the Senate in Democrats' favor, it was this. Democrats, whose majority was supposed to be in jeopardy, instead *gained* two seats.

It seems to me, first of all, from what I understand from doctors, that's really rare. If it's a legitimate rape, the female body has ways to try to shut that whole thing down. —Rep. Todd Akin (R-Mo.)

2. Perhaps no 10-word statement better summed up Obama's reelection than this one. Bin Laden was Obama's big foreign policy success, and the successful auto bailout was both a big success domestically and a big political win, likely delivering Obama key votes in Ohio.

Osama bin Laden is dead, and General Motors is alive. —Vice President Biden

1. This was the most damning quote of the entire election. Romney's campaign was totally knocked off its game when a hidden camera video featuring this quote was released, and it never really recovered. Suddenly, he was a plutocrat dismissing nearly half the country as freeloaders.

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 that 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. —Romney

(Sean Sullivan and Chris Cillizza contributed to this report.)

20121229-05	14:26	Tom	"Georgetown Veteran Slain in Vietnam to Receive Medal after 45 Years"
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"Georgetown Veteran Slain in Vietnam to Receive Medal after 45 Years" by Claire Osborn, *American-Statesman*

Dec. 28, 2012, (<http://www.statesman.com/news/news/local-military/georgetown-veteran-slain-in-vietnam-to-receive-med/nThK4>)

(GEORGETOWN, TX) Ben Snowden enlisted in the army in 1954 at age 17 while he was still in Georgetown High School. Twelve years later, he was on his third tour of duty in the Vietnam War when he tried to rescue several soldiers under fire on a patrol in Laos.

The helicopter that he was on had to hover about eight feet from the ground because tree stumps prevented it from landing. Snowden, a member of the special forces who was 6 feet 6 inches tall, reached down to grab a soldier being lifted up by a commander.

He never made contact. An enemy shot him several times in the chest with a machine gun, and Snowden died instantly. It was June 15, 1967.

His family found out this month — 45 years after he died — that he will be awarded the Silver Star for his courage.

"Our family is just thrilled it finally happened," said one of his brothers, John Snowden of Georgetown. Snowden, a Marine, said he didn't find out all the details of his brother's death until 30 years after he died because the information was labeled classified.

He didn't try to get a medal for his brother because his brother was a modest person. "He never cared about medals and thought he was just doing his job and probably if he was alive would have never pushed for it," Snowden said.

The person who did push for the medal was Roger Widdows, a Vietnam veteran who lives in Georgetown and who never knew Ben Snowden. He said he met John Snowden on Memorial Day in 2009 and was struck by the similarities in their lives.

"It turned out that we had both lost our younger brothers in helicopter incidents in Vietnam," Widdows said. "I said to myself if that had been my brother who was not getting any recognition for what he did, I would not feel good about it."

Widdows said he contacted U.S. Sen. John Cornyn's office in 2009 about Ben Snowden but that it took three years to supply all the documents detailing what happened in order to get approval for the medal. "I must have contacted about 75 people, and many wanted to remain anonymous," he said.

Widdows said he read a book called *SOG: The Secret War of American Commandos in Vietnam* by another Vietnam veteran named John Plaster, which provided details of Snowden's last mission. He said Plaster helped him track down one of Ben Snowden's former commanders — Lowell Stevens — who saw the incident. Stevens, who has since died, was able to help supply Widdows with an eyewitness account, Widdows said.

Snowden's helicopter had to crash land in a ditch after Snowden was shot, Stevens wrote in an email he sent in 2004 to Carra Elkins, one of Snowden's sisters. "For reasons I still can't explain, I insisted on counting the bullet holes in the chopper he was on," the email said. "There were 68 holes in the chopper. ... He sacrificed his life in an attempt to help his fellow soldiers."

"Ben was a vital part of our family, and we still miss him every day," Elkins said. "He has always been my hero, but now he is everyone's hero."

Ben Snowden was 29 years old and married with three children when he died. His wife, Betty, never remarried and is recovering from surgery in Tennessee, John Snowden said.

Ben Snowden was the first soldier from Georgetown to die in Vietnam, John Snowden said. Georgetown VFW Post 8587 is named in his honor.

20121229-06	17:06	SteveB	"How Your Cat Is Making You Crazy"
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I told you the mind parasites were coming to get you! If the smell of cat urine drives you crazy...

This stuff is so weird because, if you test positive (and many people do), you probably have an incurable invasion of parasites in your brain that are manipulating things. You are no longer just you. Creepy! I think I want to get tested just so I'll know.

Talk about grand conspiracy theories...this one is more like the mother of all conspiracy facts. We're lucky there aren't more human mind parasites out there. Wait! Maybe there are...

"How Your Cat Is Making You Crazy" by Kathleen McAuliffe, *The Atlantic*

March, 2012, (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/03/how-your-cat-is-making-you-crazy/308873>)

(Jaroslav Flegr is no kook. And yet, for years, he suspected his mind had been taken over by parasites that had invaded his brain. So the prolific biologist took his science-fiction hunch into the lab. What he's now discovering will startle you. Could tiny organisms carried by house cats be creeping into our brains, causing everything from car wrecks to schizophrenia?)

No one would accuse Jaroslav Flegr of being a conformist. A self-described "sloppy dresser," the 53-year-old Czech scientist has the contemplative air of someone habitually lost in thought, and his still-youthful, square-jawed face is framed by frizzy red hair that encircles his head like a ring of fire.

Certainly Flegr's thinking is jarringly unconventional. Starting in the early 1990s, he began to suspect that a single-celled parasite in the protozoan family was subtly manipulating his personality, causing him to behave in strange,

often self-destructive ways. And if it was messing with his mind, he reasoned, it was probably doing the same to others.

The parasite, which is excreted by cats in their feces, is called *Toxoplasma gondii* (*T. gondii* or *Toxo* for short) and is the microbe that causes toxoplasmosis—the reason pregnant women are told to avoid cats' litter boxes. Since the 1920s, doctors have recognized that a woman who becomes infected during pregnancy can transmit the disease to the fetus, in some cases resulting in severe brain damage or death. *T. gondii* is also a major threat to people with weakened immunity: in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, before good antiretroviral drugs were developed, it was to blame for the dementia that afflicted many patients at the disease's end stage. Healthy children and adults, however, usually experience nothing worse than brief flu-like symptoms before quickly fighting off the protozoan, which thereafter lies dormant inside brain cells—or at least that's the standard medical wisdom.

But if Flegr is right, the "latent" parasite may be quietly tweaking the connections between our neurons, changing our response to frightening situations, our trust in others, how outgoing we are, and even our preference for certain scents. And that's not all. He also believes that the organism contributes to car crashes, suicides, and mental disorders such as schizophrenia. When you add up all the different ways it can harm us, says Flegr, "*Toxoplasma* might even kill as many people as malaria, or at least a million people a year."

An evolutionary biologist at Charles University in Prague, Flegr has pursued this theory for decades in relative obscurity. Because he struggles with English and is not much of a conversationalist even in his native tongue, he rarely travels to scientific conferences. That "may be one of the reasons my theory is not better known," he says. And, he believes, his views may invite deep-seated opposition. "There is strong psychological resistance to the possibility that human behavior can be influenced by some stupid parasite," he says. "Nobody likes to feel like a puppet. Reviewers [of my scientific papers] may have been offended." Another more obvious reason for resistance, of course, is that Flegr's notions sound an awful lot like fringe science, right up there with UFO sightings and claims of dolphins telepathically communicating with humans.

But after years of being ignored or discounted, Flegr is starting to gain respectability. Psychedelic as his claims may sound, many researchers, including such big names in neuroscience as Stanford's Robert Sapolsky, think he could well be onto something. Flegr's "studies are well conducted, and I can see no reason to doubt them," Sapolsky tells me. Indeed, recent findings from Sapolsky's lab and British groups suggest that the parasite is capable of extraordinary shenanigans. *T. gondii*, reports Sapolsky, can turn a rat's strong innate aversion to cats into an attraction, luring it into the jaws of its No. 1 predator. Even more amazing is how it does this: the organism rewires circuits in parts of the brain that deal with such primal emotions as fear, anxiety, and sexual arousal. "Overall," says Sapolsky, "this is wild, bizarre neurobiology." Another academic heavyweight who takes Flegr seriously is the schizophrenia expert E. Fuller Torrey, director of the Stanley Medical Research Institute, in Maryland. "I admire Jaroslav for doing [this research]," he says. "It's obviously not politically correct, in the sense that not many labs are doing it. He's done it mostly on his own, with very little support. I think it bears looking at. I find it completely credible."

What's more, many experts think *T. gondii* may be far from the only microscopic puppeteer capable of pulling our strings. "My guess is that there are scads more examples of this going on in mammals, with parasites we've never even heard of," says Sapolsky.

Familiar to most of us, of course, is the rabies virus. On the verge of killing a dog, bat, or other warm-blooded host, it stirs the animal into a rage while simultaneously migrating from the nervous system to the creature's saliva, ensuring that when the host bites, the virus will live on in a new carrier. But aside from rabies, stories of parasites commandeering the behavior of large-brained mammals are rare. The far more common victims of parasitic mind control—at least the ones we know about—are fish, crustaceans, and legions of insects, according to Janice Moore, a behavioral biologist at Colorado State University. "Flies, ants, caterpillars, wasps, you name it—there are truckloads of them behaving weirdly as a result of parasites," she says.

Consider *Polysphincta gutfreundi*, a parasitic wasp that grabs hold of an orb spider and attaches a tiny egg to its belly. A wormlike larva emerges from the egg, and then releases chemicals that prompt the spider to abandon weaving its familiar spiral web and instead spin its silk thread into a special pattern that will hold the cocoon in

which the larva matures. The “possessed” spider even crochets a specific geometric design in the net, camouflaging the cocoon from the wasp’s predators.

Flegr himself traces his life’s work to another master of mind control. Almost 30 years ago, as he was reading a book by the British evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, Flegr was captivated by a passage describing how a flatworm turns an ant into its slave by invading the ant’s nervous system. A drop in temperature normally causes ants to head underground, but the infected insect instead climbs to the top of a blade of grass and clamps down on it, becoming easy prey for a grazing sheep. “Its mandibles actually become locked in that position, so there’s nothing the ant can do except hang there in the air,” says Flegr. The sheep grazes on the grass and eats the ant; the worm gains entrance into the ungulate’s gut, which is exactly where it needs to be in order to complete—as the *Lion King* song goes—the circle of life. “It was the first I learned about this kind of manipulation, so it made a big impression on me,” Flegr says.

After he read the book, Flegr began to make a connection that, he readily admits, others might find crazy: his behavior, he noticed, shared similarities with that of the reckless ant. For example, he says, he thought nothing of crossing the street in the middle of dense traffic, “and if cars honked at me, I didn’t jump out of the way.” He also made no effort to hide his scorn for the Communists who ruled Czechoslovakia for most of his early adulthood. “It was very risky to openly speak your mind at that time,” he says. “I was lucky I wasn’t imprisoned.” And during a research stint in eastern Turkey, when the strife-torn region frequently erupted in gunfire, he recalls being “very calm.” In contrast, he says, “my colleagues were terrified. I wondered what was wrong with myself.”

His bewilderment continued until 1990, when he joined the biology faculty of Charles University. As it happened, the 650-year-old institution had long been a world leader in documenting the health effects of *T. gondii*, as well as developing methods for detecting the parasite. In fact, just as Flegr was arriving, his colleagues were searching for infected individuals on whom to test their improved diagnostic kits, which is how he came to be asked one day to roll up his sleeve and donate blood. He discovered that he had the parasite—and just possibly, he thought, the key to his baffling self-destructive streak.

He delved into *T. gondii*’s life cycle. After an infected cat defecates, Flegr learned, the parasite is typically picked up from the soil by scavenging or grazing animals—notably rodents, pigs, and cattle—all of which then harbor it in their brain and other body tissues. Humans, on the other hand, are exposed not only by coming into contact with litter boxes, but also, he found, by drinking water contaminated with cat feces, eating unwashed vegetables, or, especially in Europe, by consuming raw or undercooked meat. Hence the French, according to Flegr, with their love of steak prepared *saignant*—literally, “bleeding”—can have infection rates as high as 55 percent. (Americans will be happy to hear that the parasite resides in far fewer of them, though a still substantial portion: 10 to 20 percent.) Once inside an animal or human host, the parasite then needs to get back into the cat, the only place where it can sexually reproduce—and this is when, Flegr believed, behavioral manipulation might come into play.

Researchers had already observed a few peculiarities about rodents with *T. gondii* that bolstered Flegr’s theory. The infected rodents were much more active in running wheels than uninfected rodents were, suggesting that they would be more-attractive targets for cats, which are drawn to fast-moving objects. They also were less wary of predators in exposed spaces. Little, however, was known about how the latent infection might influence humans, because we and other large mammals were widely presumed to be accidental hosts, or, as scientists are fond of putting it, a “dead end” for the parasite. But even if we were never part of the parasite’s life cycle, Flegr reasoned, mammals from mouse to man share the vast majority of their genes, so we might, in a case of mistaken identity, still be vulnerable to manipulations by the parasite.

In the Soviet-stunted economy, animal studies were way beyond Flegr’s research budget. But fortunately for him, 30 to 40 percent of Czechs had the latent form of the disease, so plenty of students were available “to serve as very cheap experimental animals.” He began by giving them and their parasite-free peers standardized personality tests—an inexpensive, if somewhat crude, method of measuring differences between the groups. In addition, he used a computer-based test to assess the reaction times of participants, who were instructed to press a button as soon as a white square popped up anywhere against the dark background of the monitor.

The subjects who tested positive for the parasite had significantly delayed reaction times. Flegr was especially surprised to learn, though, that the protozoan appeared to cause many sex-specific changes in personality.

Compared with uninfected men, males who had the parasite were more introverted, suspicious, oblivious to other people's opinions of them, and inclined to disregard rules. Infected women, on the other hand, presented in exactly the opposite way: they were more outgoing, trusting, image-conscious, and rule-abiding than uninfected women.

The findings were so bizarre that Flegr initially assumed his data must be flawed. So he tested other groups—civilian and military populations. Again, the same results. Then, in search of more corroborating evidence, he brought subjects in for further observation and a battery of tests, in which they were rated by someone ignorant of their infection status. To assess whether participants valued the opinions of others, the rater judged how well dressed they appeared to be. As a measure of gregariousness, participants were asked about the number of friends they'd interacted with over the past two weeks. To test whether they were prone to being suspicious, they were asked, among other things, to drink an unidentified liquid.

The results meshed well with the questionnaire findings. Compared with uninfected people of the same sex, infected men were more likely to wear rumpled old clothes; infected women tended to be more meticulously attired, many showing up for the study in expensive, designer-brand clothing. Infected men tended to have fewer friends, while infected women tended to have more. And when it came to downing the mystery fluid, reports Flegr, "the infected males were much more hesitant than uninfected men. They wanted to know why they had to do it. Would it harm them?" In contrast, the infected women were the most trusting of all subjects. "They just did what they were told," he says.

Why men and women reacted so differently to the parasite still mystified him. After consulting the psychological literature, he started to suspect that heightened anxiety might be the common denominator underlying their responses. When under emotional strain, he read, women seek solace through social bonding and nurturing. In the lingo of psychologists, they're inclined to "tend and befriend." Anxious men, on the other hand, typically respond by withdrawing and becoming hostile or antisocial. Perhaps he was looking at flip sides of the same coin.

Closer inspection of Flegr's reaction-time results revealed that infected subjects became less attentive and slowed down a minute or so into the test. This suggested to him that *Toxoplasma* might have an adverse impact on driving, where constant vigilance and fast reflexes are critical. He launched two major epidemiological studies in the Czech Republic, one of men and women in the general population and another of mostly male drivers in the military. Those who tested positive for the parasite, both studies showed, were about two and a half times as likely to be in a traffic accident as their uninfected peers.

When I met Flegr for the first time, last September, at his office on the third floor of Charles University's Biological Sciences building, I was expecting something of a wild man. But once you get past the riotous red hair, his style is understated. Thin and slight of build, he's soft-spoken, precise with his facts, and—true to his *Toxo* status—clad in old sneakers, faded bell-bottom jeans, and a loose-fitting button-up shirt. As our conversation proceeds, I discover that his latest findings have become—to quote *Alice in Wonderland*—"curiouser and curiouser," which may explain why his forehead has the deep ruts of a chronic worrier, or someone perpetually perplexed.

He's published some data, he tells me, that suggest infected males might have elevated testosterone levels. Possibly for that reason, women shown photos of these men rate them as more masculine than pictures of uninfected men. "I want to investigate this more closely to see if it's true," he says. "Also, it could be women find infected men more attractive. That's something else we hope to test."

Meanwhile, two Turkish studies have replicated his studies linking *Toxoplasma* to traffic accidents. With up to one-third of the world infected with the parasite, Flegr now calculates that *T. gondii* is a likely factor in several hundred thousand road deaths each year. In addition, reanalysis of his personality-questionnaire data revealed that, just like him, many other people who have the latent infection feel intrepid in dangerous situations. "Maybe," he says, "that's another reason they get into traffic accidents. They don't have a normal fear response."

It's almost impossible to hear about Flegr's research without wondering whether you're infected—especially if, like me, you're a cat owner, favor very rare meat, and identify even a little bit with your *Toxo* sex stereotype. So before coming to Prague, I'd gotten tested for the parasite, but I didn't yet know the results. It seemed a good time to see what his intuition would tell me. "Can you guess from observing someone whether they have the parasite—myself, for example?" I ask.

"No," he says, "the parasite's effects on personality are very subtle." If, as a woman, you were introverted before being infected, he says, the parasite won't turn you into a raving extrovert. It might just make you a little less introverted. "I'm very typical of *Toxoplasma* males," he continues. "But I don't know whether my personality traits have anything to do with the infection. It's impossible to say for any one individual. You usually need about 50 people who are infected and 50 who are not, in order to see a statistically significant difference. The vast majority of people will have no idea they're infected."

Still, he concedes, the parasite could be very bad news for a small percentage of people—and not just those who might be at greater risk for car accidents. Many schizophrenia patients show shrinkage in parts of their cerebral cortex, and Flegr thinks the protozoan may be to blame for that. He hands me a recently published paper on the topic that he co-authored with colleagues at Charles University, including a psychiatrist named Jiri Horacek. Twelve of 44 schizophrenia patients who underwent MRI scans, the team found, had reduced gray matter in the brain—and the decrease occurred almost exclusively in those who tested positive for *T. gondii*. After reading the abstract, I must look stunned, because Flegr smiles and says, "Jiri had the same response. I don't think he believed it could be true." When I later speak with Horacek, he admits to having been skeptical about Flegr's theory at the outset. When they merged the MRI results with the infection data, however, he went from being a doubter to being a believer. "I was amazed at how pronounced the effect was," he says. "To me that suggests the parasite may trigger schizophrenia in genetically susceptible people."

One might be tempted to dismiss the bulk of Flegr's work as hokum—the fanciful imaginings of a lone, eccentric scholar—were it not for the pioneering research of Joanne Webster, a parasitologist at Imperial College London. Just as Flegr was embarking on his human trials, Webster, then a freshly minted Ph.D., was launching studies of *Toxo*-infected rodents, reasoning, just as Flegr did, that as hosts of the parasite, they would be likely targets for behavioral manipulation.

She quickly confirmed, as previous researchers had shown, that infected rats were more active and less cautious in areas where predators lurk. But then, in a simple, elegant experiment, she and her colleagues demonstrated that the parasite did something much more remarkable. They treated one corner of each rat's enclosure with the animal's own odor, a second with water, a third with cat urine, and the last corner with the urine of a rabbit, a creature that does not prey on rodents. "We thought the parasite might reduce the rats' aversion to cat odor," she told me. "Not only did it do that, but it actually increased their attraction. They spent more time in the cat-treated areas." She and other scientists repeated the experiment with the urine of dogs and minks, which also prey on rodents. The effect was so specific to cat urine, she says, that "we call it 'fatal feline attraction.'"

She began tagging the parasite with fluorescent markers and tracking its progress in the rats' bodies. Given the surgically precise way the microbe alters behavior, Webster anticipated that it would end up in localized regions of the brain. But the results defied expectations. "We were quite surprised to find the cysts—the parasite's dormant form—all over the brain in what otherwise appeared to be a happy, healthy rat," she says. Nonetheless, the cysts were most abundant in a part of the brain that deals with pleasure (in human terms, we're talking sex, drugs, and rock and roll) and in another area that's involved in fear and anxiety (post-traumatic stress disorder affects this region of the brain). Perhaps, she thought, *T. gondii* uses a scattershot approach, disseminating cysts far and wide, enabling a few of them to zero in on the right targets.

To gain more clarity on the matter, she sought the aid of the parasitologist Glenn McConkey, whose team at the University of Leeds was probing the protozoan's genome for signs of what it might be doing. The approach brought to light a striking talent of the parasite: it has two genes that allow it to crank up production of the neurotransmitter dopamine in the host brain. "We never cease to be amazed by the sophistication of these parasites," Webster says.

Their findings, reported last summer, created immediate buzz. Dopamine is a critical signaling molecule involved in fear, pleasure, and attention. Furthermore, the neurotransmitter is known to be jacked up in people with schizophrenia—another one of those strange observations about the disease, like its tendency to erode gray matter, that have long puzzled medical researchers. Antipsychotic medicine designed to quell schizophrenic delusions apparently blocks the action of dopamine, which had suggested to Webster that what it might really be doing is thwarting the parasite. Scientists had already shown that adding the medicine to a petri dish where *T. gondii* is happily dividing will stunt the organism's growth. So Webster decided to feed the antipsychotic drug to newly

infected rats to see how they reacted. Lo and behold, they didn't develop fatal feline attraction. Suddenly, attributing behavioral changes to the microbe seemed much more plausible.

As the scientific community digested the British team's dopamine discoveries, Robert Sapolsky's lab at Stanford announced still more attention-grabbing news. The neuroscientist and his colleagues found that *T. gondii* disconnects fear circuits in the brain, which might help to explain why infected rats lose their aversion to cat odor. Just as startling, reports Sapolsky, the parasite simultaneously is "able to hijack some of the circuitry related to sexual arousal" in the male rat—probably, he theorizes, by boosting dopamine levels in the reward-processing part of the brain. So when the animal catches a whiff of cat scent, the fear center fails to fully light up, as it would in a normal rat, and instead the area governing sexual pleasure begins to glow. "In other words," he says, "*Toxo* makes cat odor smell sexy to male rats."

The neurobiologist Ajai Vyas, after working with Sapolsky on this study as a postdoctoral student, decided to inspect infected rats' testicles for signs of cysts. Sure enough, he found them there—as well as in the animals' semen. And when the rat copulates, Vyas discovered, the protozoan moves into the female's womb, typically infecting 60 percent of her pups, before traveling on up to her own brain—creating still more vehicles for ferrying the parasite back into the belly of a cat.

Could *T. gondii* be a sexually transmitted disease in humans too? "That's what we hope to find out," says Vyas, who now works at Nanyang Technological University, in Singapore. The researchers also discovered that infected male rats suddenly become much more attractive to females. "It's a very strong effect," says Vyas. "Seventy-five percent of the females would rather spend time with the infected male."

After I return from Prague, Flegr informs me that he's just had a paper accepted for publication that, he claims, "proves fatal feline attraction in humans." By that he means that infected men like the smell of cat pee—or at least they rank its scent much more favorably than uninfected men do. Displaying the characteristic sex differences that define many *Toxo* traits, infected women have the reverse response, ranking the scent even more offensive than do women free of the parasite. The sniff test was done blind and also included urine collected from a dog, horse, hyena, and tiger. Infection did not affect how subjects rated these other samples.

"Is it possible cat urine may be an aphrodisiac for infected men?," I ask. "Yes. It's possible. Why not?" says Flegr. I think he's smiling at the other end of the phone line, but I'm not sure, which leaves me wondering whether I've stumbled onto a topic ripe for a "Saturday Night Live" skit, or a matter worthy of medical concern. When I ask Sapolsky about Flegr's most recent research, he says the effects Flegr is reporting "are incredibly cool. However, I'm not too worried, in that the effects on humans are not gigantic. If you want to reduce serious car accidents, and you had to choose between curing people of *Toxo* infections versus getting people not to drive drunk or while texting, go for the latter in terms of impact."

In fact, Sapolsky thinks that *Toxo*'s inventiveness might even offer us some benefits. If we can figure out how the parasite makes animals less fearful, he says, it might give us insights into how to devise treatments for people plagued by social-anxiety disorder, phobias, PTSD, and the like. "But frankly," he adds, "this mostly falls into the 'Get a load of this, can you believe what nature has come up with?' category."

Webster is more circumspect, if not downright troubled. "I don't want to cause any panic," she tells me. "In the vast majority of people, there will be no ill effects, and those who are affected will mostly demonstrate subtle shifts of behavior. But in a small number of cases, [*Toxo* infection] may be linked to schizophrenia and other disturbances associated with altered dopamine levels—for example, obsessive-compulsive disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, and mood disorders. The rat may live two or three years, while humans can be infected for many decades, which is why we may be seeing these severe side effects in people. We should be cautious of dismissing such a prevalent parasite."

The psychiatrist E. Fuller Torrey agrees—though he came to this viewpoint from a completely different angle than either Webster or Flegr. His opinion stems from decades of research into the root causes of schizophrenia. "Textbooks today still make silly statements that schizophrenia has always been around, it's about the same incidence all over the world, and it's existed since time immemorial," he says. "The epidemiology literature contradicts that completely." In fact, he says, schizophrenia did not rise in prevalence until the latter half of the

18th century, when for the first time people in Paris and London started keeping cats as pets. The so-called cat craze began among “poets and left-wing avant-garde Greenwich Village types,” says Torrey, but the trend spread rapidly—and coinciding with that development, the incidence of schizophrenia soared.

Since the 1950s, he notes, about 70 epidemiology studies have explored a link between schizophrenia and *T. gondii*. When he and his colleague Robert Yolken, a neurovirologist at Johns Hopkins University, surveyed a subset of these papers that met rigorous scientific standards, their conclusion complemented the Prague group’s discovery that schizophrenic patients with *Toxo* are missing gray matter in their brains. Torrey and Yolken found that the mental illness is two to three times as common in people who have the parasite as in controls from the same region.

Human-genome studies, both scientists believe, are also in keeping with that finding—and might explain why schizophrenia runs in families. The most replicated result from that line of investigation, they say, suggests that the genes most commonly associated with schizophrenia relate to the immune system and how it reacts to infectious agents. So in many cases where the disease appears to be hereditary, they theorize, what may in fact be passed down is an aberrant or deficient immune response to invaders like *T. gondii*.

Epstein-Barr virus, mumps, rubella, and other infectious agents, they point out, have also been linked to schizophrenia—and there are probably more as yet unidentified triggers, including many that have nothing to do with pathogens. But for now, they say, *Toxo* remains the strongest environmental factor implicated in the disorder. “If I had to guess,” says Torrey, “I’d say 75 percent of cases of schizophrenia are associated with infectious agents, and *Toxo* would be involved in a significant subset of those.”

Just as worrisome, says Torrey, the parasite may also increase the risk of suicide. In a 2011 study of 20 European countries, the national suicide rate among women increased in direct proportion to the prevalence of the latent *Toxo* infection in each nation’s female population. According to Teodor Postolache, a psychiatrist and the director of the Mood and Anxiety Program at the University of Maryland School of Medicine, a flurry of other studies, several conducted by his own team, offers further support of *T. gondii*’s link to higher rates of suicidal behavior. These include investigations of general populations as well as groups made up of patients with bipolar disorder, severe depression, and schizophrenia, and in places as diverse as Turkey, Germany, and the Baltimore/Washington area. Exactly how the parasite may push vulnerable people over the edge is yet to be determined. Postolache theorizes that what disrupts mood and the ability to control violent impulses may not be the organism per se, but rather neurochemical changes associated with the body’s immune response to it. “As far-fetched as these ideas may sound,” says Postolache, “the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention was willing to put money behind this research.”

Given all the nasty science swirling around this parasite, is it time for cat lovers to switch their allegiance to other animals?

Even Flegr would advise against that. Indoor cats pose no threat, he says, because they don’t carry the parasite. As for outdoor cats, they shed the parasite for only three weeks of their life, typically when they’re young and have just begun hunting. During that brief period, Flegr simply recommends taking care to keep kitchen counters and tables wiped clean. (He practices what he preaches: he and his wife have two school-age children, and two outdoor cats that have free roam of their home.) Much more important for preventing exposure, he says, is to scrub vegetables thoroughly and avoid drinking water that has not been properly purified, especially in the developing world, where infection rates can reach 95 percent in some places. Also, he advises eating meat on the well-done side—or, if that’s not to your taste, freezing it before cooking, to kill the cysts.

As concerns about the latent infection mount, however, experts have begun thinking about more-aggressive steps to counter the parasite’s spread. Inoculating cats or livestock against *T. gondii* might be one way to interrupt its life cycle, offers Johns Hopkins’ Robert Yolken. Moving beyond prevention to treatment is a taller order. Once the parasite becomes deeply ensconced in brain cells, routing it out of the body is virtually impossible: the thick-walled cysts are impregnable to antibiotics. Because *T. gondii* and the malaria protozoan are related, however, Yolken and other researchers are looking among antimalarial agents for more-effective drugs to attack the cysts. But for now, medicine has no therapy to offer people who want to rid themselves of the latent infection; and until solid proof

exists that *Toxo* is as dangerous as some scientists now fear, pharmaceutical companies don't have much incentive to develop anti-*Toxo* drugs.

Yolken hopes that will change. "To explain where we are in *Toxo* research today," he says, "the analogy I always give is the ulcer bacteria. We first needed to find ways of treating the organism and showing that the disease went away when you did that. We will have to show that when we very effectively treat *Toxoplasma*, some portion of psychiatric illness goes away."

But *T. gondii* is just one of an untold number of infectious agents that prey on us. And if the rest of the animal kingdom is anything to go by, says Colorado State University's Janice Moore, plenty of them may be capable of tinkering with our minds. For example, she and Chris Reiber, a biomedical anthropologist at Binghamton University, in New York, strongly suspected that the flu virus might boost our desire to socialize. Why? Because it spreads through close physical contact, often before symptoms emerge—meaning that it must find a new host quickly. To explore this hunch, Moore and Reiber tracked 36 subjects who received a flu vaccine, reasoning that it contains many of the same chemical components as the live virus and would thus cause the subjects' immune systems to react as if they'd encountered the real pathogen.

The difference in the subjects' behavior before and after vaccination was pronounced: the flu shot had the effect of nearly doubling the number of people with whom the participants came in close contact during the brief window when the live virus was maximally contagious. "People who had very limited or simple social lives were suddenly deciding that they needed to go out to bars or parties, or invite a bunch of people over," says Reiber. "This happened with lots of our subjects. It wasn't just one or two outliers."

Reiber has her eye trained on other human pathogens that she thinks may well be playing similar games, if only science could prove it. For example, she says, many people at the end stages of AIDS and syphilis express an intense craving for sex. So, too, do individuals at the beginning of a herpes outbreak. These may just be anecdotal accounts, she concedes, but based on her own findings, she wouldn't be surprised if these urges come from the pathogen making known its will to survive.

"We've found all kinds of excuses for why we do the things we do," observes Moore. "'My genes made me do it.' 'My parents are to blame.' I'm afraid we may have reached the point where parasites may have to be added to the laundry list of excuses."

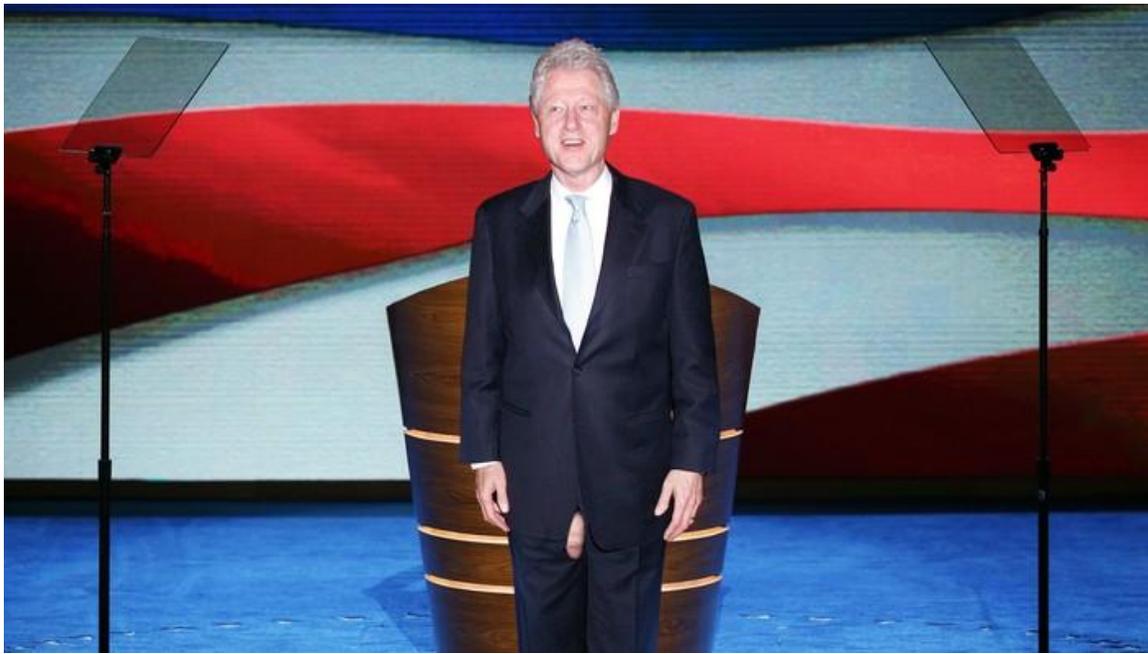
She has a point. In fact, I've been wondering whether *T. gondii* might in some small way be contributing to my extreme extroversion—why I can't resist striking up conversations everywhere I go, even when I'm short of time or with strangers I'll never see again. Then it occurs to me that cysts in my brain might be behind my seesaw moods or even my splurges on expensive clothes. Maybe, I think with mounting conviction, the real me would have displayed better self-control, had I not been forced to swim upstream against the will of an insidious parasite. With my feline pal Pixie on my lap (for the record, she's an outdoor cat), I call to get the results of my *Toxo* test. Negative. I don't have the latent infection.

I call to tell Flegr the good news. Even though I'm relieved, I know my voice sounds flat. "It's strange to admit," I say, "but I think I'm a little disappointed." He laughs. "People who have cats often feel that way, because they think the parasite explains why they behave this way or that," he says. "But," I protest, "you thought the same way." Then it hits me. I may have dodged *T. gondii*, but given our knack for fooling ourselves—plus all those parasites out there that may also be playing tricks on our minds—can anyone really know who's running the show?

Somehow, in all the other pre-election excitement, I missed this at the time it happened...

"Bill Clinton Finally Just Shows America His Penis" by *The Onion*

Sept. 5, 2012, (<http://www.theonion.com/articles/breaking-bill-clinton-finally-just-shows-america-h,29453>)



(CHARLOTTE, NC) During his speech Wednesday evening at the Democratic National Convention in downtown Charlotte, former U.S. president Bill Clinton finally just unzipped his fly and showed the entire country his penis.

Sources at the convention told reporters that shortly after stepping onstage at the Time Warner Cable Arena, the 42nd president of the United States quieted the audience's extended standing ovation with his raised hands and began to speak loudly and confidently.

"My fellow Americans, for the past 20 years you have all, at various points, talked and thought about my penis, or at least heard direct or indirect references to my penis in news reports, in court records, or in the culture at large," the former commander in chief said. "My penis has, in a sense, been a central part of American life for the better part of two decades. And yet, the nation has never seen it. Tonight, I'd like to finally change that."

"So should we just get this over with then?" the president asked the 20,000-member audience, as well as millions watching the nationwide telecast. "Should I show you my penis?"

Immediately after Clinton asked this question, there was reportedly a brief pause, after which a few murmured consents of approval were audible in the crowd, as well as a number of voices clearly shouting "okay" and "sure."

Sources said the sounds of convention attendees shifting in their seats could then be heard as the president stepped forward to the end of the stage.

"Okay, I'm going to show you my penis now," said the former president, his hand reaching for his pants zipper as a dead quiet fell over the arena. "Wow. You know, it's funny, now that it's finally happening, I actually feel a little nervous. I think it's good that I'm doing it, but still... Okay, here goes."

Clinton then slowly unzipped his fly, gingerly reached inside his pants, and retrieved his flaccid penis, which he proceeded to let hang out in the open in clear view.

"There's my penis," the nation's former chief executive said on live television. "There he is."

"I'm just going to leave it out for a while so everybody can get a good look," added Clinton, turning his waist from side to side in order to give everyone in the audience an optimal view. "Can everyone in the back see okay? Make sure the cameras here in the front can get a good close-up of my penis."

After a full five minutes of standing silently with his penis in full view as cameras flashed all around him, the president carefully tucked his penis back into his pants, zipped up his fly, smiled, told the audience, "Thank you, God bless you, and God bless America," and walked off stage.

When reached for comment on the speech, President Obama told reporters, "We are glad to have President Clinton's support."

<a href="#">20121229-08</a>	19:29	SteveB	"Filthy Mitt Romney Delivers Campaign Speech to Audience of Confused Shoppers in Ohio Safeway"
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Look what Obama has turned his rival into! I hope this isn't what Obamacare is going to be like!

"Filthy Mitt Romney Delivers Campaign Speech to Audience of Confused Shoppers in Ohio Safeway" by *The Onion*

Nov. 27, 2012, (<http://www.theonion.com/articles/filthy-mitt-romney-delivers-campaign-speech-to-aud,30522>)



(CANTON, OH) According to eyewitnesses at the scene, an unkempt and thoroughly disheveled Mitt Romney gave an impassioned campaign speech Monday to a group of bewildered shoppers inside a local Safeway.

Sources confirmed the filth-covered former presidential candidate walked into the store unannounced early yesterday evening, went to the store's cereal aisle, and started to play Kid Rock's "Born Free" on a portable boom box, enthusiastically waving and pointing to no one in particular.

As customers began to recognize the 2012 GOP nominee through his scraggly beard and uncombed hair, Romney reportedly picked up a can of Pringles from a nearby shelf, held it near his mouth, and began loudly addressing the growing crowd of confused onlookers.

"How are we feeling out there, friends?" said Romney, who paused briefly as though waiting for applause from the baffled and completely silent supermarket shoppers. "First and foremost, thank you so much for coming out here today and for your continued support throughout the campaign. We're making our voices heard across the country—that's for sure!"

"Together, we're going to bring some real change to Washington!" added Romney, who staggered slightly as he spoke but maintained his balance.

Witnesses told reporters that Romney walked around the store barefoot as he gave his speech, wearing only a pair of dirt-caked jeans and a wrinkled dress shirt covered in food stains.

Safeway patrons also said the former Massachusetts governor gave off an incredibly strong odor and appeared to have gone "days, possibly weeks" without bathing.

"President Obama is trying to distract everyone from his record, because he knows his policies have done nothing to rebuild our economy," said Romney, eating from a large box of croutons he had taken from the salad dressing aisle. "My five-point plan will scale back the job-killing policies of the current administration, promote small business, cut tax burdens, and put Americans back to work again."

Sources said a weeping Ann Romney at one point attempted to pull her husband out of the store by his arm but was angrily rebuffed, with the 65-year-old retired businessman yelling that he was "trying to do [his] job here."

Romney then reportedly climbed atop a checkout counter, rolled up the torn sleeves of his shirt, and started calling on different customers for questions about his tax policy.

"And now, I'd like to welcome on stage the best decision I ever made aside from marrying Ann—the next vice president of the United States, Paul Ryan!" Romney exclaimed as he grabbed the hand of a nearby cashier and attempted to pull her onto the counter to stand alongside him. "From the moment we take office, Paul and I are going to fight for each and every one of you and restore the promise of this great nation."

According to reports, Safeway employees finally called local authorities when Romney attempted to grab an infant from the arms of her mother "for a quick photo op."

After three police officers managed, with some effort, to subdue Romney in the produce section, he could be heard shrieking incoherently at the top of his lungs for several moments before he finally trailed off, muttering about a plan to "create 12 million jobs by the end of [his] first term."

"We're going all the way to the White House!" Romney loudly proclaimed in the parking lot as he was gently guided into the back of a police car. "Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America!"

[20121229-09](#)

19:39

SteveB

"Study Finds Millennial Generation Stays on Phone with Parents Throughout Entire Day"

"Study Finds Millennial Generation Stays on Phone with Parents Throughout Entire Day" by *The Onion*

Dec. 11, 2012, (<http://www.theonion.com/articles/study-finds-millennial-generation-stays-on-phone-w,30725>)

(According to the study, Americans under 30 require near constant parental reassurance over the phone.)

(DURHAM, NC) In a groundbreaking study published this week in the Journal Of Social Psychology, scientists reported that members of the millennial generation typically spend the entirety of their waking lives seeking emotional support from their parents over the phone.

Drawing on extensive field observation, the study found that the vast majority of the nation's 80 million millennials—Americans born between 1982 and 2000—insist on maintaining unbroken verbal contact with their

mothers and fathers from the time they wake up until the time they go to bed, requiring as many as 18 hours of reassurance and validation via telephone each day.

“In contrast to previous generations, millennials are using technology to demand and receive a nearly endless stream of parental affirmations,” said behavioral psychologist George Wright, the study’s lead author. “Like helpless infants, members of this demographic group instinctively seek out the security of their parents the moment they encounter even the slightest hint of unhappiness, and in most cases cannot fall asleep without the soothing sound of their mother or father’s voice flowing directly into their ears.”

“Moreover, because they are incapable of doing anything at all by themselves, millennials need to ask their parents for advice on every single decision they make,” Wright continued. “Remarkably, this even includes judgments as simple as when they should get their hair cut, what foods they should purchase at the supermarket, and how warmly they should dress for the day.”

Wright confirmed that members of this age group all appeared to possess a deep-rooted belief that they were unique and special, which innately drove them to demand their parents’ full attention at all times, even from thousands of miles away. As a result, millennials reportedly forced their mothers and fathers to field dozens of calls per day, both at home and at work, and listen patiently as they explained every aspect of their lives, seemingly under the impression that each minute detail of their existence was worthy of exposition and acknowledgment.

Unlike the preceding Generation X, whose members typically speak to their parents for 30 minutes every one to three weeks, millennials were found to spend an average 6.5 hours talking to one parent from morning to afternoon before asking that the phone be handed to the other parent, with whom they then remained in conversation well into the night.

Moreover, a survey of research participants found that 93 percent spent the entire day in a single uninterrupted conversation with one or both parents, which typically continued when the young adult ate, watched television, drove, attended classes, or went on social outings with friends or on dates.

“What’s interesting is that instead of trying to deal with problems on their own, millennials prefer to vent to their parents in a ceaseless chain of grievances that lasts on average from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m. daily,” said sociologist Rick Winter, noting that participants in the study failed even to attempt such outwardly simple tasks as writing checks or mailing packages by themselves, and only proved capable of performing such actions under explicit parental direction. “What we’re seeing is a whole generation that has reached adulthood without having moved any closer to independence from the generation that raised it. It’s astonishing.”

According to Winter, when experiencing any form of anxiety, millennials were invariably observed seeking immediate assurance that their parents had felt similar insecurities at their age, and appeared to grow agitated and uncomfortable without a near constant stream of verbal confirmation that their parents were proud of them and the life choices they had made.

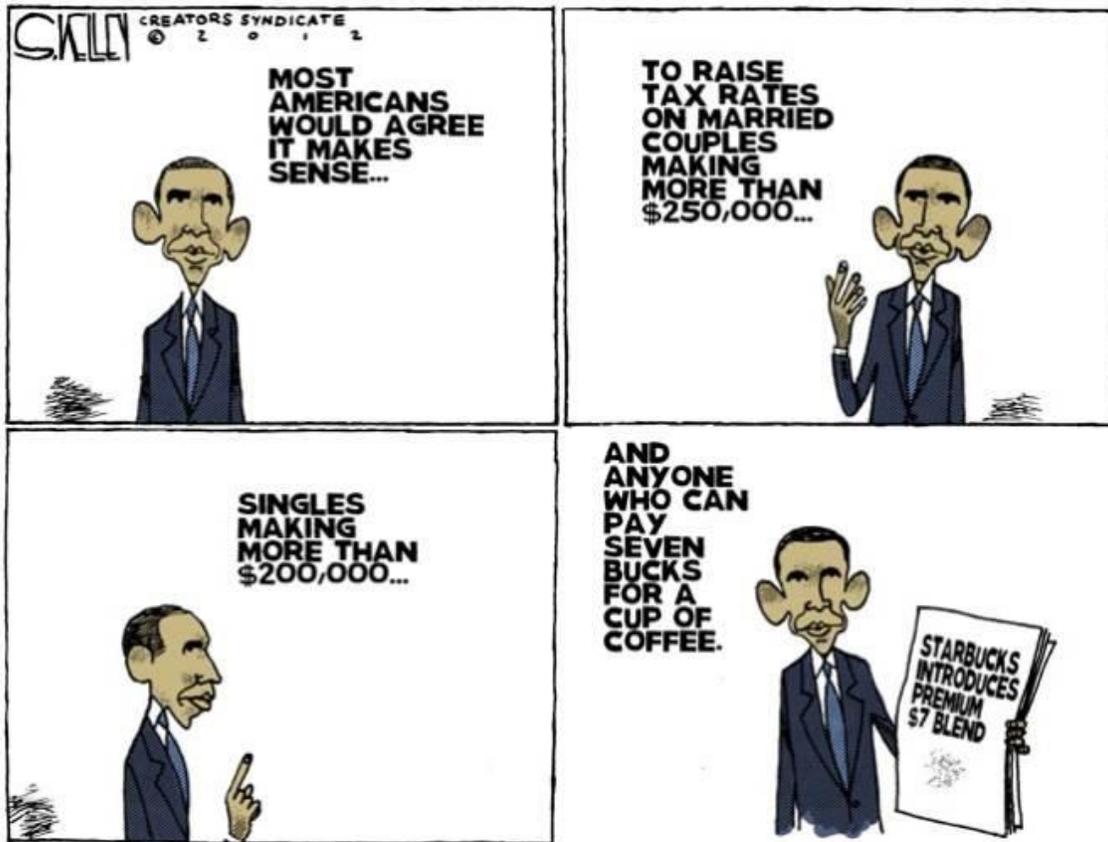
Additionally, participants who were unable to talk with their mothers or fathers via telephone for any longer than five minutes suffered evident mental anguish ranging from mild panic attacks to full-on nervous breakdowns, which they quickly sought to alleviate by contacting their parents via e-mail, text, or online chat services.

“I appreciate that my son cares enough to call home, but it’s getting to be a bit tiring,” said 48-year-old Carol Finn, estimating that she spends 95 hours a week on the phone with her son Keegan, a junior in college. “He called me three times today to ask what the permanent-press setting on the washing machine means and to tell me every last detail about some girl he talked to who works at the campus library. I don’t know how much longer I can deal with this.”

“Oh, jeez,” added Finn, sighing and rolling her eyes as her cell phone began ringing.

[OK, I admit it, I was seduced by *The Onon!* –SteveB]

Cartoons say it all...



WOW! Our history in 2 minutes! It's a final project by a high school student worth watching a couple of times.....excellent.

<http://marcbrecy.perso.neuf.fr/history.html>

"Our Pathetic Congress" by John Avlon, The Daily Beast

Dec. 30, 2012, (<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/12/30/our-pathetic-congress.html>)

(On "Meet the Press," David Brooks said, "What's happening in Washington right now is pathetic.")

(Surprised that our lame-duck representatives can't reach a fiscal-cliff deal? You shouldn't be. John Avlon on how our government turned to self-sabotage.)

Welcome back to Washington, House of Representatives. Hope you all had a great vacation. While you were out, your inaction caused markets to tumble, and now America is just hours away from collectively being pushed off the fiscal cliff.

Your colleagues in the Senate—the supposedly responsible body—have been working the last three days, trying to put together some kind of deal your fractious asses can pass by New Year's Eve. The bad news is that as of Sunday morning, they still didn't have a plan to avoid the fiscal cliff. Agreement that 98 percent of Americans shouldn't have their taxes raised isn't enough. And deficit and debt reduction? Forget about it—this is all now a desperate exercise in political pain avoidance.

The fiscal cliff is, of course, the world's most predictable crisis. Congress set this time bomb themselves—and now they can't agree on how to defuse it, despite more than a year of debate and a presidential election largely centered on the subject.

In a surreal twist, Democrats are readying bills for the first days of the new congress to pass the largest middle-class tax cut in American history if they can't get enough Republicans to agree we shouldn't go over the cliff.

The implications are not adequately captured by the catchy visual metaphor. Not only will your taxes be raised, but America's economic recovery could be reversed, with congressional incompetence pushing America back into recession.

Congressional approval now stands at 18 percent. **The real question is why is it so high?**

The current 112th Congress—characterized by Tea Party congressmen elected two years ago—is the least productive since the 1940s. It makes Harry Truman's infamous "Do-Nothing Congress" look like a paragon of speed and efficiency.

The problem of course is that polarization—the decline of competitive swing districts due to the rigged system of redistricting—has made most Republican congressmen terrified of being primaried from the right for being too reasonable. This problem has been compounded by the rise of partisan media, which has dumbed down civic discourse into an angry, idiotic us-against-them exercise. The result is congressional division and dysfunction. Congratulations.

But direct culpability in creating the conditions for this crisis hasn't stopped the professional partisan activist class from arguing that at this pivotal moment, members of Congress should do nothing and just go over the cliff.

FreedomWorks and Americans for Prosperity have been emailing their supporters to tell them to pressure their congressman not to vote for any tax increases. That might sound impressively principled, until you realize that it's really an insult to their supporters' intelligence—because all taxes will be raised automatically, unless congress votes to keep taxes low on 98 percent of Americans, as our supposedly socialist president has repeatedly proposed.

On the left, the Progressive Change Campaign Committee is also arguing for no compromise, with its cofounder Adam Green emailing supporters: "Democrats need to continue a bright line position: Raise tax rates on those making \$250,000 at least to the Clinton rates and no cuts to Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security benefits. Period." This also ends up being an argument for going over the cliff, because it dooms any hope of even a modest deal as a good-faith basis for future action on the deficit and debt.

If this supposedly liberated lame-duck Congress can't agree on basic outlines of a grand bargain agreement that has been debated in detail for the past two years, why should we believe that the next Congress will have more success? Immigration reform, gun reforms—those more difficult debates will be effectively DOA from day one.

This is self-government committing economic suicide, putting ideological absolutism ahead of solving problems. The idea of a productive lame-duck session after the contentious election has been erased. Hopefully, Senators Reid and McConnell will surprise us with some kind of patchwork compromise by the self-imposed deadline of 3 p.m. today, but they have been keeping rumors of progress to themselves. (Update: they didn't.)

Beyond the looming fiscal abyss, senators have been busy passing a flurry of last-minute legislation that can be categorized as the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. They finally agreed to not be complete grinchers and pass a Hurricane Sandy relief bill, but it seems far from assured from passage in the House. By a lopsided vote of 73 to 23, the Senate also extended Bush-era warrantless wiretapping until 2017; civil libertarians screamed, but not loud

enough. And thanks to an executive order by President Obama, members of Congress will see a modest pay raise in the new year. You know, as a reward for all their good work over the past two years.

This congressional Kabuki is killing us, because it masks a more fundamental problem. Congress seems unable to act unless confronted with a crisis at the last minute—and even then, they can't agree on anything significant or substantive that actually deals with long-term problems. Maybe they should just stay on vacation and spare us the rhetoric. But as the clock ticks to New Year's, they should have a guilty conscience that might inspire a genuine resolution to reform. Because they created this crisis and now seem unable to fix it. We're the ones who will feel the pain. **It is an epic act of self-sabotage.**

[20121230-04](#) 23:57 SteveB Photo: Cats Imitating Art #11 (Mariano Fortuny, *Odalisque*, 1861)



<http://www.great-pictures-of-cats.com/black-cats.html>



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Steven W. Baker (SteveB), Editor/Moderator

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