



FRIENDS OF THE MIDDLE **NEWSLETTER #284 — DEC. 5, 2012**

Welcome to always lively political discussion and whatever else comes up.
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'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.

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20121204-04	12:11	Art	Re: "How Wall Street Hollowed Out Industrial America" (reply to SteveB, FotM Newsletter #283)
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20121204-01	08:16	SteveB	The GOP (to Republicans)
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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)
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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)
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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."

20121204-05 12:14 SteveG Fw: Common Cause Petition: Fix the Filibuster!

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

20121204-09	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/>.)

20121204-08	20:30	SteveG	Fw: SumOfUs Petition: Tell CEO's to Fix the Debt!
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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

20121204-06	18:42	SteveG	"Two Conservative Republicans Booted from House Budget Panel"
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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"
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"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:

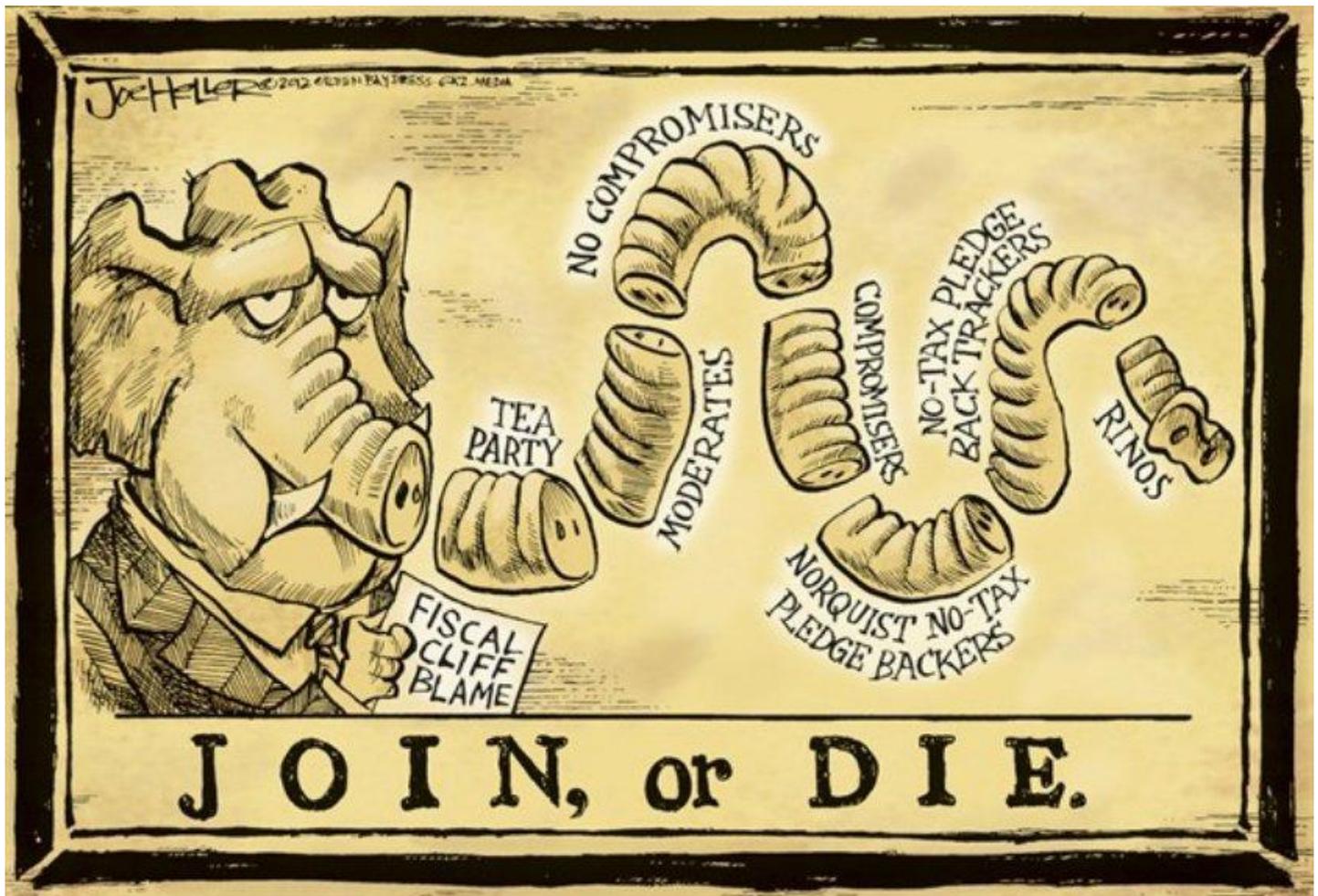
In Texas, where it's legal to carry guns into any church without a specific no-firearms policy, Heights Baptist in remote San Angelo began offering concealed carry classes in June. The class was a response to security concerns among congregants.

"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]

20121204-10 23:57 SteveG Cartoon: Cutting Off the Elephant's Nose to Spite His Face





<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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