

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**January 01, 2010**

## **"WE KNOW WHAT WE DON'T LIKE!"**

Six weeks before the 1994 mid-term elections, Congressional Republicans issued a document called the "Contract with America." Based largely on President Ronald Reagan's 1985 State of the Union address, the "Contract" consisted of a series of promises; detailed actions the Republicans promised they would enact if they became the majority party in the House of Representatives for the first time in more than 40 years. History records that the GOP did successfully take back both the House and Senate in the 1994 election, and did manage to turn some of those promises into law -- for better or for worse, depending on one's point of view.

Precisely what role the "Contract" played in that victory is still a matter of debate. Many argue that its overwhelmingly conservative agenda -- shrinking the size of government, lowering taxes, deregulation, tort, welfare reform, term limits -- struck a resonant chord with American voters, thus proving to be the lynchpin for Republican victory. Others dispute this, noting that Gingrich, DeLay, Armey, Boehner *et al* did not release the Heritage Foundation-drafted "Contract" until very late in the election cycle. These folks argue that voter anger and resentment over the Clintons' failed health care reform proposals had as much -- if not more -- to do with the historic Republican victory.

Regardless of what side of the debate one supports, there is a single undeniable truth before us: that in 1994, Republican conservatives clearly knew what they were against, and were just as clearly capable of articulating both an ideology and a political program -- that which they were intent upon doing. Whether or not one was for or against the "Contract With

America" is, for purposes of this op-ed piece, *not* the point. What *is* the point is that back in 1994 -- well before the talkmeister revolution -- Republicans, neoconservatives, and libertarians could actually state what they liked.

Oh that this were still the case in 2010!

Years ago Monty Python did a hilarious three minute sketch in which the Pope (John Cleese) berates Michelangelo (Eric Idle) over "The Last Supper," in which the latter has depicted that historic event as having had 28 disciples. After a riotous back-and-forth argument, the Pope jumps down from his throne and angrily chases Michelangelo off the stage shouting, "**I MAY NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT ART, BUT I KNOW WHAT I LIKE!**" And, despite the fact that this punch line was around long before Monty Python was created, it remains one of their all-time best routines. [[Monty Python: The Pope and Michelangelo](#)]

I have to believe that if Cleese, Idle, Chapman, Gilliam, Jones and Palin (Michael, not Sarah) were still in business today, they would come up with a new routine dealing with the current political scene here in America. In this sketch, they would have dead ringers for say, John Boehner, James Imhofe, Jim DeMint, Sarah Palin, Laura Ingraham, Glen Beck or Ann Coulter complaining vehemently about virtually any and every aspect of the Democratic agenda. They would go on to proclaim that Barack Obama has never -- and will never -- be right about anything; that he was:

- **Wrong** to bow before Japanese Emperor Akihito;
- **Wrong** to support cap-and-trade;
- **Wrong** to accept the Nobel Peace Prize;
- **Responsible** for the Nigerian terrorist on that Christmas Day flight, and
- **Guilty** of being "A Communist/Socialist/Fascist/Liberal intellectual elitist."

I can further envision the sketch containing a character whose sole purpose is posing a question:

*"Now that you've all told us what you don't like -- what is so all-fired dangerous about Democrats, liberals, progressives and the like -- what in the world do you want to replace them with? And don't just say*

*'Republicans.' Tell us what you would do -- and how you would deal -- with all the problems and issues you raise with such skillful abandon."*

Then would come the punch line: **"WE MAY NOT KNOW MUCH ABOUT GOVERNANCE, BUT WE KNOW WHAT WE *DON'T* LIKE!"**

Unlike today's crop of *k'vetchers*, the Republicans of 1994 had a concrete set of proposals. And whether you loved, liked, were neutral, disliked or abhorred their "Contract with America," at least they were doing more than holding their collective noses and screaming "this stinks!" They staked themselves to specific programs and policy changes under-girded by a reasonably coherent (though to my taste wrong-headed) political philosophy. The truth is, much of what Newt and his acolytes enacted, is responsible for the fix we find ourselves in today. OK. Their political philosophy has been shown to have a lot of flaws. But that's fair game. At least they didn't just sit back and complain.

And so I ask the Limbaughs, Imhofes, Ingrahams and Levins of 2010: where is *your* program? What are *you* proposing besides tax cuts and ridding America of all government regulation and every Democrat? What is your step-by-step prescription for curing what ails us?

I'm waiting . . . .

I'm still waiting . . . .

Yes indeed, it's easy acting like a clown when you aren't the one responsible for running the circus.

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January 08, 2010

## **BEWARE THE SWINGING PENDULUM**

Although no one is absolutely positive who first noted "*The more things change, the more they stay the same*," it is more than obvious that he or she hit the nail squarely on the head. (**Note:** Many ascribe the original -- "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*," to the French Victorian novelist Alphonse Karr.) Without question, time *does* possess a pendulum-like quality, moving inexorably back and forth betwixt apogee and perigee, heroism and cowardice, patriotism and treachery.

Forty years ago -- back when Barack Obama was still in grade school and Bill and Hillary had yet to start dating -- there was this hydra-headed beast known to most of us as "The Establishment." It was this "Establishment" that got us into Vietnam, was responsible for spying on us at anti-war rallies, and pulled virtually every one of society's crucial levers -- all for the sake of profit. It was omniscient, omnipotent and omnivorous. It controlled both government and politics, business and media. Indeed, it was fear and wariness of the "Establishment" that caused many of the then student-left to change the spelling of our native land to A-m-e-r-i-*k*-a, as if it were some sort of a fascist regime.

Being the sons and daughters of parents who went through the Depression and fought in World War II, we certainly got an earful. We, who didn't trust anyone "over the age of thirty," were told in no uncertain terms that America was the greatest nation in the history of the world, and we had precisely two choices: to "love it or leave it." We were also told something to the effect that "If you're young and not a liberal you haven't got a heart; if you're an adult and haven't become more conservative, you haven't got a smart." As



leftists and radicals (or so we thought at the time), we believed that the "Establishment" was targeting us for extinction. We thought we were so politically wise and astute. It never dawned on us that although America was by no means perfect, and Richard Nixon did have his plumbers' unit wiretapping thousands of phones, this country -- unlike almost any other on the planet -- both afforded and guaranteed us the opportunity to protest and express pretty much any opinion we might have. It never dawned on us that eventually, the pendulum's arc would change and we would all stand a good chance of it hitting us in the tush.

Forty years ago, many of us didn't see it that way. For many, fear and utter distrust of the "Establishment" made clear vision a virtual impossibility. For many, the pendulum had swung way over to the right. I remember

Today, the pendulum's arc has gone off in the opposite direction. Today, the roles have been pretty much reversed, and it is the right that is beset by fear. For them, the "Establishment" is made up of liberals, progressives and other "lower life forms." One of the areas in which the pendulum swing is most easily discernible, is in our views on the media. Hardly a broadcast hour goes by without someone angrily charging the "government-controlled media" of failing to inform us of the truth -- of "what's *really* going on."

Egad, what in the world are they talking about? If the government really, truly controlled the media, would Fox News still be in business? Would Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, Ann Coulter, Michael Savage, *et al* be permitted to make fortunes by telling outright falsehoods? In an America in which the Obama Administration and the entire left controlled the media, would:

- Rudy Giuliani be permitted to tell millions that "We had no domestic attacks under President George W. Bush," or
- Glenn Beck proclaim that Senator Chris Dodd is retiring because "there are a few bars he hasn't hit in Connecticut," or that
- It wasn't until January 7, 2009, that President Obama "finally noticed" that "we are at war with terrorists," or that
- George Will and other Fox News Network personalities have repeatedly claimed that "the earth has been cooling ever since 1998," or that

- Kevin Jennings, President Obama's director of the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools is "a well-known pervert" with "a penchant for teaching deviant sexual practices to little children."

If indeed, America had a "government-controlled" media, none of these stories would be permitted to see the light of day. But that is not exactly what is being argued. What seems to upset those reporting these "news stories" is that they are not being aired by NBC, ABC, CBS or CNN, and running in neither the *Los Angeles Times*, the *New York Times*, or the *Washington Post*. Perhaps because these media outlets have standards, and actually require that news stories *be* news stories before they will run or air them?

Yes, the pendulum has certainly swung in a huge arc since the days when many of us feared the "Establishment." Yesterday, we feared the "Establishment." Today, we are that "Establishment." Back then, it was the liberals and progressives who feared what the conservatives were doing to undermine our freedoms. Amazingly, many of us are still liberals and progressives. Today, it is the conservatives who stand in fear of all the leftists they believe are in control of society -- whose conscious motivation is the destruction of Capitalism, Christianity, freedom and America itself. To them we might say, "Don't let the pendulum hit you in the tush. You are just as deluded today as we were forty years ago."

***"Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose."***

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**January 16, 2010**

## **Rush Limbaugh and Pat Robertson Weigh in On Haiti**

Marcus Tullius Cicero once wrote that "Any man can make mistakes, but only an idiot persists in his error." By this, I have to presume that the philosopher/linguist/lawyer was referring to Rush Limbaugh and the Reverend Pat Robertson. For during the current earthquake devastation in Haiti -- while many people of compassion are marshaling resources -- Limbaugh and Robertson are up to their old idiotic tricks.

Limbaugh just couldn't wait to use the situation in Haiti as a means of attacking President Obama and the Democrats. Talk about idiocy! Speaking on his radio show yesterday, the 14th of January, Limbaugh said the earthquake in Haiti "will play right into Obama's hands" by allowing him to play up his "compassionate" and "humanitarian" credentials. Moreover, the man who calls himself "El Rushbo" claimed that the president would use the crisis to "boost his credibility with the black community." And, in one of his must stunningly insensitive statements in quite some time, Rush added, "We've already donated to Haiti; it's called U.S. Income Tax."

And then, not wishing to be outdone in idiocy, there is the Rev. Pat Robertson. On his first television address after the Haitian earthquake, Robertson felt fit to proclaim "the Haitians need to have a great turning to God." OK, he's entitled to his opinion. But then he traipsed over into the terrain spoken of above by Marcus Tullius Cicero . . . idiocy. For Robertson quickly added: "Something happened a long time ago in Haiti [which] people might not want to talk about."

Unbelievably, this is what Robertson told his listeners that the Haitian people "might not want to talk about": "They were under the heel of the French, you know Napoleon the Third or whatever. And they swore a pact to the devil. They said, 'We will serve you if you will get us free from the prince.' True story. And the devil said, 'OK, it's a deal.' And they kicked the French out. The Haitians revolted and got themselves free. But they have been cursed by one thing after another . . ."

This is the way to respond to human tragedy? This is the manner in which a supposedly religious figure musters his troops to do battle against the forces of devastation, thirst and hunger? To use a crisis like that the earthquake in Haiti in order to "prove" that unless people do what Robertson urges, they are all doomed to perdition?

Living in a country that both guarantees and protects freedom of speech means that from time to time we have to put up with bouts such as these; verbal blasts meant to knock down and lay low groups and individuals at times when people should be pulling together. That Limbaugh and Robertson have as many listeners as they do has long been a mystery to me. Oh yes, people do like to be entertained. And in some obnoxious, cantankerous way Limbaugh *is* entertaining. But then there are all those people who really, truly think they understand what goes on in this world of ours because they have immersed themselves in Limbaugh 1-0-1.

I certainly hope that all our readers will make contributions to one of the many organizations sending relief to Haiti. That is the way compassionate people respond. With care. With cash. With kindness.

Might the tragedy in Haiti be the final straw? When enough good people proclaim, "We will not listen while this catastrophe is used for partisan political or religious purposes. We are truly better than that. We, unlike Limbaugh and Robertson, are not idiots . . ."

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January 21, 2010

## When Tragedy Fosters Humanity

Last week we dealt with the cruelty and insensitivity that can emerge from tragedy: Rush Limbaugh and the Rev. Pat Robertson's responses to the horrific earthquake in Haiti. This week, let us turn our attention to the 180-degree bipolar opposite: the incredible acts of compassion and selflessness that such a catastrophe can bring to light. And here, specifically, we refer to the unbelievable response of the people of Israel.

Yes, Israel, the Jewish State, pariah nation *par excellence*. When the Jewish State responds to aggression on the part of Hamas in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon, she becomes a target for stern international criticism. Indeed, Israel's response in cases like these is widely, broadly and angrily condemned for being totally disproportionate. The Jewish State is portrayed as no better than a predator nation that possesses little or no regard for the sanctity of human life. When Israel defends itself from -- or responds to -- terrorist attacks, these actions receive instantaneous international condemnation; folks from Afghanistan to Zaire are made aware of the Jewish State's "perverseness."

However, let Israel respond to a crisis with alacrity, generosity and humanity -- as in the Haitian earthquake disaster -- and the rest of the world loses its collective power of speech. Few know of the incredible response on the part of Israel. Let's change that.

The United States has of course sent military, medical and rescue personnel as well as materiel. Great Britain has sent 64 firemen and 8 volunteers; France has sent troops for Search and Rescue. Many large and wealthy nations have sent money. To date, the Arab and Muslim world has done virtually nothing. Israel, on the other hand, has already sent a team of more than 250 people that includes doctors, nurses, lab and x-ray technicians -- even a psychiatrist. They have already established the largest field hospital in Haiti; one capable of treating upwards of 5,000 patients per day. This field hospital includes a pharmacy, a surgical unit, and even a maternity ward. Shortly after setting up that ward, a Haitian woman gave birth to a child she named "Israel."

One of the most touching threads in the story deals with the volunteers from "ZAKA," a volunteer rescue organization made up of ultra-Orthodox Israeli Jews. This past Saturday -- the Jewish Shabbat -- members of ZAKA were digging in the rubble of a collapsed multi-story building at the university. After hours of effort, they managed to pull 8 students from that rubble, alive. When they had successfully rescued the students, the volunteers paused, donned their *tallitot* (prayer shawls) and recited their Sabbath prayers -- something which the Haitians on the scene had undoubtedly never experienced. When the rescuers had finished their prayers, a crowd of people gathered around them and kissed their *tallitot*.

According to one report, Mati Goldstein, the head of the ZAKA mission said: "We did everything to save lives, despite it being the Jewish Sabbath. People asked us, 'Why are you here? There are no Jews here.' But we are here because the Torah commands us to save lives."

"ZAKA" [*Zihuy Korbanot Ason* -- literally "Disaster Victim Identification"] is a network of voluntary community emergency response teams first established in Israel in the early 1990s. Members of ZAKA -- most of whom are Orthodox Jews -- assist ambulance crews, aid in identification of the victims of terrorism, road accidents and other disasters -- such as the Haitian earthquake. To date, ZAKA has been involved in assisting forensic teams in Thailand, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia in the aftermath of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake, where they were nicknamed "the team that sleeps with the dead," because of their willingness to work around the clock. Members of ZAKA refer to their organization as *chesed shel emet* -- "true kindness" -- because they are dedicated to having the bodies of Jewish victims of terrorist acts buried according to *halacha* -- Jewish law. That they would also venture to Haiti -- where there are likely no Jewish victims -- shows that they are people of great compassion and humanity.

And yet, hardly anyone knows about the fantastic work they have been doing in the earthquake's aftermath. *Anyone interested in finding out more about ZAKA can go to the group's website: [ZAKA](#) (Hebrew) or [A ZAKA Blog From Haiti](#) (English).*

It might be nice if people the world over were made to know about just how involved the Israelis are; not only this time around in Haiti, but wherever and whenever disaster strikes. That is the way good-hearted people respond; with care, with cash and above all, with commitment.

Sometimes tragedy *does* foster humanity . . .

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**January 29, 2010**

## **Damned If You Do . . .**

Shortly, Israel will be releasing their response -- rebuttal really -- to the so-called "Goldstone Report." Authored by Richard Goldstone -- former judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa and former prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda -- this 575-page United Nations-sponsored report, which was released last September, was supposed to be a thorough, unbiased investigation of Israel's three-week invasion of Gaza which lasted from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009. (**Note:** *For those wishing to download a copy, go to [Goldstone Report online](#)*) We write "supposed to be" unbiased, because in reality, the conclusions reached by Justice Goldstone -- who is himself Jewish -- and the members of the "United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict" were anything but.

In brief, Goldstone and his peers found Israel to be guilty of grave violations of both international and humanitarian law, and called on the Jewish State to launch its own independent investigation. In its conclusions, the Goldstone Report accused Israel of a host of lethal and destructive acts which it alleged were part of "an official plan to terrorize the Palestinian population." One of the most notorious of these alleged "crimes against humanity" was the destruction of Gaza's sole flour mill (el-Badr), which, Goldstone reported, was "hit by an air strike, possibly by an F-16," and meant to essentially starve the Palestinian populace. Also, Goldstone contended that Israel military forces "knowingly and purposefully" destroyed a wastewater plant, thereby "leading to an enormous outflow of raw sewage." Also included were charges that Israeli forces attacked and destroyed such non-military targets as "chicken coops, water wells, a cement plant and some 4,000 homes." These acts, Goldstone concluded, were "crucial building blocks" in Israel's ultimate purpose: "to eliminate infrastructure so as to cause intense civilian suffering." The report further characterized the Israeli invasion as "A disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population, radically diminish its economic capacity both to work for itself, and to force upon it an ever increasing sense of dependency and vulnerability."

For its part, Israel -- which all along had claimed that the only reason they launched the three-week assault was because they could "no longer tolerate indiscriminate rocket attacks being launched on Israel from Gaza" -- refused to cooperate with the investigation and dismissed its findings as "unworthy of attention." However, when the Jewish State

found much of the international community taking the Goldstone Report's findings seriously and itself accused of war crimes, they began rethinking their response. As Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would say at a recent press conference: "We face three strategic challenges. The Iranian nuclear program, rockets aimed at Israel and Goldstone."

This past weekend, Netanyahu announced that the Israeli military is completing what he categorized as "a rebuttal" to the Goldstone Report findings. Although specifics of the Israeli investigation will continue to be under official wraps until such time as they are delivered to United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, several key items are already known. Israel will argue that although mistakes were undoubtedly made, the rules of war needed to be adapted to the kind of "asymmetric warfare" they increasingly face: "fighting a popular military that intentionally mixes with the civilian population." The Israeli report will also offer evidence that many of the civilian "non-strategic" physical structures that were destroyed were actually weapons caches storing missiles, ammunition and flammable materiel. They will also hand over what one Israeli official termed "incontrovertible photographic proof" that the flour mill, far from being purposefully obliterated by an F-16, was in reality "accidentally hit by artillery in the course of a firefight with Hamas militiamen."

To be certain, there are some powerful voices being raised in Israel's defense -- people like [Professor Alan Dershowitz](#), Boston College History Professor [Richard Landes](#), and former Bush-era Middle Eastern policy analyst [Elliott Abrams](#). The three, although recognizing that mistakes have been -- and no doubt will continue to be -- made, nonetheless agree that Israel had both a legal and a strategic right to invade Gaza in December 2008.

Already, I can hear the catcalls: *"Ah, but the three are Jewish; what do you expect them to do? Disagree with Israel?"*

Why not? Anyone who thinks that all Jews are in lockstep when it comes to Israel -- or indeed or anything -- have never heard the old saw, "Three Jews, five opinions!"

Well, one of the most fascinating and air-tight defenses of Israel's actions during the Gaza invasion comes from anything but a pro-Israel source: the BBC. In a nearly 11-minute video produced and aired by the B.B.C, Iraq War veteran and author (*The Rules of Engagement*) [Lt. Col. Tim Collins](#), traveled to Gaza, where he uncovered evidence of missiles being stored in mosques, and Hamas engaging in acts of sabotage in order to cast blame upon Israel. He concludes that Israel has been well within its rights to invade Gaza, and that her actions -- far from being out of control -- were in fact more measured than might be expected.

OK.

Great!



Fantastic!

Hurray for our side!

But in the end, will any of it amount to a hill of beans? Even if every single United Nations ambassador gets a personal visit from an Israeli diplomat; and even if all of those diplomats were able to spend unlimited amounts of time making a case on Israel's behalf; and even if each diplomat were able to hand over a thousand photographs overwhelmingly proving that Israel neither knowingly nor purposefully committed war crimes; and even if they managed to get across the point that having 9,000 rockets fired across one's borders and in to their towns and villages in less than three years is the real crime; . . . Even if all these things could be done, said and proven, would it change anything? Would all these United Nations Diplomats -- and the countries they represent -- come to understand that the Goldstone Report is terribly biased and just plain wrong? That although all armies must engage in killing and regrettably -- most regrettably -- noncombatants must always die -- that Israel, far far more than most countries -- strives to be as moral, humane and respectful of human life as is possible?

Even if all these things could be done, said, shown and proven, would it create more friends for Israel?

I really, truly hate to say it, but most likely not. Much of the world is far more interested in what Israel supposedly did or did not do in Gaza than what she is undoubtedly doing in Haiti.

You see, I have long wondered which came first: Jews or anti-Semites?

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**February 05, 2010**

## **Coach's Corner**

Of the literally hundreds and hundreds of *bar* and *bat mitzvah* students I have had the honor of teaching and mentoring over the past 30-plus years, few have ever meant more to me than the young man I nicknamed "Coach." Although Coach has definitely had far fewer material and medical advantages than the vast majority of my other students, he has always been possessed of far more grit, moxie, maturity and character than the rest. And although they can all easily outrun him on a track, none can keep up with him in that great race called life. There's just something ineffably special about Coach.

Coach is currently a high school student here in Coral Springs. Without question, his favorite (and best) subject is broadcast journalism. I have a feeling that one day he will become either a first-rate sportswriter or sportscaster. In the meantime, he is learning the art of interviewing, working in front of a camera, editing, etc. Whenever he posts one of his newsy videos on the Internet, he sends me an email so that I can take a gander and give him some feedback. His stories have run the gamut from a preview of the new National Hockey League season and "Hanukkah Harry vs. Santa Claus," to a piece on the cars his fellow students drive and just yesterday, an eye-opener he titled "Markwalking." What used to be called back in the day a "man in the street" essay, "Markwalking" has Coach asking a variety of on-camera questions to various students at his school.

In his video, Coach asked his schoolmates a series of questions that most of us would consider utterly basic . . . like:

- "Who lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue?"
- "Who is the Vice President of the United States?"
- "The upcoming Super Bowl is XLIV; what does XLIV stand for?" and
- "Complete the following sentence: *America is in an economic . . .*"

Horribly, none -- virtually *none* -- of those Coach interviewed had the slightest idea of what the answers to these or a bunch of other relatively benign questions were. However, when Coach asked questions like:

- "Who lives in a pineapple under the sea?"
- "Can you name the Jonas Brothers?" and
- "What famous pop star was Chris Brown recently arrested for assaulting?"

Their answers were immediate, precise and right on the money. If these were the sorts of questions asked in Final Jeopardy, they would all have walked away as winners.

Now, if you have three minutes, 15 seconds of free time, I urge you to watch Coach's latest video, ["Markwalking."](#) OK, it's not going to win an Emmy or an Oscar. Nonetheless, it is a real revelation into the world of today's teens; of how little they know and . . . of how seemingly unembarrassed they are to admit it. For far too many of Coach's generational peers, "dumb" is in. This is *not* to say that these kids are necessarily dumb, unintelligent or developmentally challenged in the Stanford-Binet or Bender-Gestalt sense of the terms. Rather, it *is* to flatly state how frightening it is to discover that in an increasingly complex, fast-paced, and knowledge-driven world; at a time where increasingly, there is more and more to know; that there is an increasing number of young folks who have proudly chosen to enshroud themselves in a cloak of obliviousness. And you can't even call it escapism, because from what I can tell, most of them don't even know from what they are escaping.

This is by no way means meant to imply that all of Coach's peers suffer from informational bulimia; for they certainly do not. I know plenty of young folks -- beginning with Coach -- who are vitally concerned and knowledgeable about what is going on in the world; who *are* interested in -- and knowledgeable about -- issues like healthcare, global warming, the war in Afghanistan and America's current economic crisis; who can just as easily

identify Joe Biden, Hillary Clinton or "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," as they can Shakira, Lady Gaga or "Who Dat? Who Dat? Who Dat?" In short, Coach's generation is a lot like the rest of America: a place with an ever-widening gap between knowledge and fear, fact and fable, activism and disengagement.

There is perhaps no greater indicator of this growing bifurcation than the results of a new poll released just this week. In this poll, which was conducted by "Research 2000," 2000 self-identified Republican voters were asked a host of questions about America in the year 2010. Among the poll's results, we find that:

- 63% of those polled think the president is a Socialist.
- 53% believe Sarah Palin is more qualified to be president than Barack Obama.
- 39% believe that President Obama should be impeached.
- 36% believe that the president was not born in the United States.
- 31% believe the president is a "Racist who hates White people."
- 25% believe the president "wants the terrorists to win."
- 23% believe their state should secede from the Union.

Let me ask you: how many people do *you* know holding any of these beliefs? I don't know about you, but I find it incredibly unnerving.

This country has come too far and done far too much good to crumble under the weight of those who neither know nor care. Those of us who *do* pay attention and want to make a positive difference; who neither see evil conspirators lurking behind every corner nor get our news from *The National Enquire*; we owe it to ourselves, our world, our nation -- indeed, to young folks like Coach -- to spread the word and set an example. For unless we can help assure that the coming generations are both engaged and knowledgeable; unless we can somehow show them that enjoyment and responsibility are not mutually exclusive; unless they can discover that "dumb" is bad, and that "bad" does not mean "good" -- then we're going to fade into oblivion.

Thomas Jefferson -- a man who most of Coach's peers likely could not identify -- put it succinctly when he wrote:

*An enlightened citizenry is indispensable for the proper functioning of a republic. Self-government is not possible unless the citizens are educated sufficiently to enable them to exercise oversight.*

Anyone for joining me in Coach's corner?

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**February 12, 2010**

## *Socialist You Say?*

Don't know about you, but I'm beyond fed up with all those talking heads who persist in referring to President Obama -- and just about every Democrat of note -- as a "Socialist." Indeed, depending on the time of day or the phase of the moon for all I know, they are also calling him a "Maoist," "Communist," and "Ultra-Liberal," as if they really know what they're talking about, and as if the all those terms are synonymous. I am just as fed up when these same talking heads blithely dismiss any Democratic proposal -- health care, a bill to create jobs, an end to "don't ask, don't tell" -- as "socialist."

And so, to Rush Limbaugh, Sean Hannity, Sarah Palin and all those who would have us believe that they are really "in the know," permit me to ask one extremely simple, straightforward question:

What, in the Hell, *is* Socialism?

And while we're at it, if -- as you so frequently proclaim -- the president -- and the vast majority of his Democratic colleagues are in fact Socialists, would you please be so kind as to inform us precisely what *kind* of Socialism is it that they are espousing and/or practicing?

Let's get one thing straight at the outset: Socialism -- like Christianity, Judaism, Islam or virtually *any* body of tenets and beliefs -- is neither monolithic nor unitary; it is fractionated. Just as there are "branches" or "approaches" to the three major Western religions (In Judaism, as an

example, one can be Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Reconstructionist, Humanist or Polydox), there are also many, many "branches" or "approaches" to Socialism. Or, as one Henry Griffin noted in a letter to the *New York Times* published on [March 6, 1906](#), "*There are said to be as many kinds of socialism as there are brands of pickles.*" (Click on the date, and it will take you to the original of Mr. Griffin's letter, published nearly 104 years ago.)

Without wishing to turn this op-ed piece into a "Poli-Sci 101" lecture, let's spend a few sentences getting down and serious.

*The Oxford English Dictionary* defines *socialism* (lower-case "s") as "*A theory or policy of social organisation which aims at or advocates the ownership and control of the means of production, capital, land, property, etc., by the community as a whole, and their administration or distribution in the interests of all people.*" In the main, orthodox socialists hold that capitalism tends to concentrate both power and wealth among a small segment of society; that this "small segment" controls capital and tends to derive its wealth through exploitation, which in turns creates gross inequality in society.

This is, broadly speaking, socialism *in theory*. In practice, the individual might subscribe to:

- **Democratic Socialism** -- which seeks to further socialist ideals within the context of a democratic society. Sweden is a prime example of a Democratic Socialist country.
- **Christian Socialism** -- which seeks to blend socialist ideology with the doctrine of the social gospel. Helen Keller, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Paul Tillich all considered themselves "Christian Socialists."
- **Labor Zionism** -- a grafting of socialist ideology onto Zionist activism. David Ben Gurion, Golda Meier and Albert Einstein are prime examples of this socialist branch.
- **Ethnic and Regional Socialism** -- one can find differences in socialism as "practiced" in Africa, amongst Muslims or Irish Republicans.

*(Nota bene: The above is by no means meant to be either exhaustive or complete.)*

Every Communist is a Socialist. However, only a small percentage of Socialists are Communists. Broadly speaking, Communists -- some of whom advocate violence, many of whom do not -- seek a classless, stateless, oppression-free society where decisions on what to produce and what policies to pursue are made democratically, with virtually every member of society having equal participation. This is "pure" Communism. It has never existed in practice, although there are those who would argue that an Israeli *kibbutz* comes close.

As with Socialism, there are many different approaches to Communism. Although most Socialists and all Communists consider themselves Marxists, there are different subsets

**Leninism**: Named for the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, father of the Russian Revolution, this approach stresses the need for a highly disciplined party structure. In practice, this led to great brutality.

**Stalinism**: Named for Lenin's successor, Joseph Stalin, "Stalinism," strictly speaking, refers more to government structure than ideology. Often referred to pejoratively as "Red Fascism."

**Trotskyism**: Named for Leon Trotsky, Lenin's co-leader, Trotskyites arose in opposition to what they saw as the betrayal of the Russian Revolution's goals. They stand for "Permanent Revolution," internationalism, and a united front against all forms of fascism.

**Maoism**: The Chinese version of Stalinism, Maoists believe that there is such an inherent antagonism between Capitalists and Communists, that even when the proletariat (the working class) take over the reins of society, the class struggle must continue.

(*Nota bene*: Once again, the above is by no means an exhaustive list; there are even more approaches to Communism. Don't worry, there's no test at the end of the essay.)

So tell me Mr. Limbaugh; define for me Gov. Palin: by your lights, which brand of "socialism" is it that President Obama is practicing? Is Speaker Pelosi a Maoist or a Schactmanite? Is Senator Schumer a Trotskyite or a mere Democratic Socialist? Are the Democrats plotting a collectivist



revolution based on the principles of Marx, Bakunin or A.D. Gordon? Do you have any idea of what you're talking about or are you just piling up sound bites? If it be the former, explain for us if you will, what is inherently "socialistic" about bailing out Wall Street, struggling to curb greenhouse gasses, or trying to make it possible for all Americans to be covered by some form of health insurance? And, if it is merely that you disagree with these and other programs, policies or proposals, be adult enough to admit it. There's nothing wrong with having a different opinion; that's what Democracy is all about. To persist in tagging or labeling those people or proposals with which you disagree is *not* what Democracy is all about; that's McCarthyism.

Let me state this as plainly as I can: Barack Obama is *not* a Socialist. Our president *is not* some sort of wild-eyed ultra liberal. From where I sit, if anything, he's what you might call "militant far-middle." One of the glories of America is that we've never strayed too far to the right or the left. Oh sure, we've always had fringe elements "out there" on the edges of the political spectrum. But for the most part, we've been pretty moderate in our politics. In the nearly 225-year history of the United States Congress, we the people have elected precisely three socialists: one from Wisconsin, one from New York and one from Vermont. Heck, we've elected far more segregationists, than socialists; one heck of a lot more populists than progressives.

Please, cut out all this "Socialist," "Communist," "Maoist," "Ultra-Lib" claptrap. It's a crock and you know it.

As Mr. Griffin noted in his long-ago letter to the *Times*, "*When you use the word 'socialism,' you should tell what you mean by it.*"

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 19, 2010

## **Hypocrisy: "Prejudice Wearing a Halo"**

The Yiddish word for "face," as most people here in South Florida know, is *pumin*. In Hebrew -- which antedates Yiddish by at least two millennia -- its the exact same word, although pronounced *pah-NIM*. No matter whether one speaks of *a shayna punim* [Yiddish] or *panim yafot* [Hebrew] -- both meaning "a pretty face" -- they are using a plural noun; for in both Yiddish and Hebrew, the word for *face* is literally *faces*.

Here comes an obvious question: why? Why is it that in both Yiddish and Hebrew, the word for "face" is only in the plural?

One possible answer is that every *punim* (or *pah-NIM*) has a *schnoz* (or *ahf*) - a nose -- which divides said mug or kisser into two more-or-less equal halves.

Then again, perhaps the word is pluralized in recognition of the tendency so many of us have, to be hypocrites -- namely, "**two**-faced". Goodness knows, with each passing week, we are seeing a definite increase in the number of folks who are fearlessly -- not to mention fecklessly -- putting both sides of the old puss on display.

Hypocrisy, of course, is not limited to any one field of endeavor; there are just as many actors and athletes as there are preachers and politicians who, to paraphrase Ralph Waldo Emerson, have failed to "put their creed into their deed." Of late, it seems, members of the current 111th Congress have been particularly guilty of showing off both sides of the old visage. How many representatives and senators for example, have made their steadfast opposition to any and all "pork barrel" legislation as clear as the nose on one

of their faces, and then gone back home to proudly -- and publicly -- take credit for some project or program which they voted against?

Then too, how many representatives and senators have failed to vote in favor of legislation for which they were actual co-signers? This has happened more times than one might imagine. Just recently, the Senate failed to pass a resolution calling for a bipartisan commission to propose ways to rein in the federal deficit. Many of those voting against the resolution were among its original cadre of co-sponsors.

Another form of political hypocrisy is finding fault with the actions of one administration when the exact same policies, when done by a previous administration, drew nary a peep. This is the case with all those who have disparaged A.G. Eric Holder and the Obama Administration for Mirandizing Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab the so-called "Underwear Bomber," and then declaring that he would be tried in a civilian court on American soil, rather than a military tribunal at Guantanamo. For reading Abdulmutallab his rights and all that goes with it, Holder, Obama and the entire Department of Justice have been declared "weak on terrorism," "lacking backbone," and "insufficiently patriotic." However, these same folks were uniformly mute when the previous administration Mirandized approximately 300 suspected terrorists and then tried all of them in civilian courts.

The next place we can expect to see two faces on display is going to be with health care legislation. There is a reasonable chance that the Senate may attempt to pass legislation through a process called "reconciliation," which only requires 51 votes, rather than a supermajority of 60. ,

First a little background: The idea that it takes 60 votes to pass *any* legislation is of relatively recent vintage. Throughout most of its history, the United States Senate has enacted significant legislation via simple majority. Having 60 votes becomes important when one side wishes to invoke "cloture" -- cutting off a filibuster. Throughout the health care debate Senate Republicans have made it known that they are not averse to filibustering if necessary. In that way, they can -- at least in theory -- exercise a tremendous amount of power despite being in the minority. To date, they have not, in fact, engaged in anything resembling a real filibuster. (*Think Jimmy Stewart in "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington," where the good senator held the floor day and night, not being permitted to sit, and reading aloud from the Bible while trying to stay awake. I challenge the Republicans to really filibuster; let the national*

*television-watching public see you guys engage in round-the-clock speechifying. See how long it takes before the public begins to question your patriotism, not to mention sanity.)*

As mentioned above, there is another process, called "budget reconciliation," which requires only 51 votes for passage. It also sets a limit for debate of 20 hours. Budget reconciliation, which allows for "expedited consideration of legislation affecting taxes or mandatory spending programs," was originally authorized in the Congressional Budget Act of 1974. According to the Congressional Research Service, "Congress passed 22 reconciliation bills between 1980 and 2008, including three vetoed by Bill Clinton." In 1996, a Republican-dominated Congress used the reconciliation process to pass sweeping welfare reform that punched holes in the safety net. In 2001, another Republican Congress used the process to enact the largest federal tax cuts in more than two decades.

Even as this is being written, Senator Reid, Speaker Pelosi and the White House are giving serious consideration to enacting health care legislation -- perhaps even including a public option -- via reconciliation. Already there are nearly 40 Senate Democrats who are likely to vote "aye." Needless to say, this has brought about a thunderstorm of disapproval from the Republicans.

New Hampshire Senator Judd Gregg, for example, said that if Democrats resorted to budget reconciliation, "you're talking about the exact opposite of bipartisan. You're talking about running over the minority, putting them in cement, and throwing them into the Chicago River." Senator Gregg, one must know, supported budget reconciliation when it came to passing the above-referenced tax cuts in 2001.

Similarly, Utah Senator Orrin Hatch, who supported the reconciliation process on more than a half-dozen occasions during the previous administration, now claims that such a move would be "one of the worst grabs for power in the history of the country."

Hypocrisy of course, is not the private purview of one political party. There are just as many Democrats sporting two faces as there are members of the GOP. It's just that some are more brazen than others. Increasingly, public attention is turning to the gap between Emerson's "creed" and "deed." Increasingly, people are beginning to question why that which was once good or strategically "kosher" is now ghastly or stereotypically craven. The

problem with putting two faces on display is that eventually, people begin to wonder which -- or either -- is real.

In 1911, Ambrose Bierce (1842-1914), one of America's truly great satirists, published *The Devil's Dictionary*. In this, his masterwork, Bierce offered up his definitions of literally hundreds of words, such as:

- **Bigot:** *n.* "One who is obstinately and zealously attached to an opinion that you do not entertain."
- **Love:** *n.* "A temporary insanity curable by marriage."
- **Politician:** *n.* "An eel in the fundamental mud upon which the superstructure of organized society is reared."

And for purposes of this op-ed piece, most importantly:

- **Hypocrite:** *n.* "One who, professing virtues that he does not respect, secures the advantage of seeming to be what he despises." And lastly,
- **Hypocrisy:** *n.* "Prejudice with a halo."

Don't be fooled by halos, for as Bierce further noted, "It is a mere optical illusion."

Just like the two sides of the *punim* . . .

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



February 26, 2010

## **Of Glocks, Glaciers and Giant Sequoias**

Just this past Monday, February 22, 2010, 94 years of legal sanity came to a crashing end. For as of last Monday, it is now perfectly legal for licensed gun owners to bring weapons into any of America's national parks or wildlife refuges, so long as they are allowed by state law. Another newly-enacted law permits gun owners to bring weapons on to Amtrak trains. Further, the first measure permits folks to "openly carry rifles, shotguns and even semiautomatic weapons on ranger-led hikes and campfire programs at national parks."

You read me right:

- Want to carry a Colt to Crater Lake? Go ahead.
- Got an itch to ride with a Ruger through the Redwoods? Be my guest.
- Have a burning desire to brandish a Beretta in Bryce? No problem.
- Gotta have a Glock at Glacier Bay? The law says "OK!"

The law making this all possible was passed by a DEMOCRATIC House and a DEMOCRATIC Senate in May 2009 by votes of -- respectively -- 279-147 and 67-29. The measure, which was appended to the "Credit Cardholder's Bill of Rights Act of 2009," drew the support of 105 Democrats in the House and 27 in the Senate. It was then signed into law by that ULTRA-LIBERAL, GUN HATING DEMOCRAT, President Barack Obama. No matter how one looks at it, the enactment of this measure was a stinging defeat for gun-control advocates and

hoplophobes everywhere. (**Hoplophobe:** From the Greek *hoplon* -- weapon -- one who exhibits a morbid fear of firearms.)

When the issue first came before Congress in the latter days of the Bush Administration seven former directors of the National Park Service signed a letter opposing a relaxation of gun restrictions in parks. These former park officials said the stricter regulations -- which had been in place since 1915 -- made national parks "among the safest places in America." In response, the measure's sponsor, Oklahoma Senator Tom Coburn proclaimed that his bill "protects every American's Second Amendment right," and further said, "Visitors to national parks should have the right to defend themselves in accordance with the laws of their states."

Ah, guns and politics . . . a marriage made somewhat south of the highest heavens.

Few issues in American political life attract as much passion, conviction, or anger as guns-versus-gun control. For the so-called "Second Amendment crowd" -- those who support unfettered access to weapons -- *any* attempt to rein in the number of guns one may possess is but another step toward tyranny; a return to the days of King George III. Indeed, one of the most oft-verbalized fears of the nascent "Tea Party" crowd is that "Obama and the Democrats are coming to take our guns away." In response to this fear -- and despite the fact that since his inauguration he has said little and done nothing about controlling weapons -- states are enacting a slough of laws to make gun ownership even easier. Consider that:

- Last week, the Virginia General Assembly approved a bill permitting people to carry concealed weapons in bars and restaurants that serve alcohol.
- At the same time, the Virginia House of Delegates voted to repeal a 17-year old ban on people purchasing more than one handgun a month.
- Arizona and Wyoming are considering laws that will permit citizens to carry concealed weapons without a permit.
- Both Tennessee and Montana passed laws last year exempting their states from federal regulation of firearms and ammunition that are "made, sold, and used in state."

- Last month, the Indiana legislature passed a bill that blocks private employers from "forbidding workers to keep firearms in their vehicles on company property."

When asked how anyone could conclude that a president who signs a law making it legal to carry weapons into state parks or on Amtrak trains can be considered anti-gun, the National Rifle Association's (NRA) chief executive, Wayne LaPierre responded, "The two measures [were] attached as amendments to larger pieces of legislation that the president wanted passed." (As noted above, the guns-in-national parks issue was appended to a bill cracking down on credit card companies; the Amtrak issue was part of a transportation appropriations bill.) In other words, LaPierre and the NRA would have us believe that the president was so intent upon enacting credit card legislation and funding transportation projects that he was willing to go against one of his core beliefs. It just doesn't wash . . .

On the other side of the argument are the advocates of gun control. As convinced as the Second Amendment crowd is that Obama's *lack* of action is a sure sign that he's about to do something, the gun control folks are becoming increasingly uncertain about whether the president has caved in to the NRA. After all, he has signed the bill permitting weapons in national parks and on Amtrak. And, federal background checks for gun purchases between November 2009 and January 2010 are down a full 12% compared with the same months a year earlier. This, they argue, shows that the president really isn't all that concerned about gun control -- an issue on which he campaigned in 2008.

The United States has the the most heavily-armed citizens on the face of the planet, with the possible exception of Afghanistan and Israel. According to the FBI, there are over 200 million privately-owned firearms in the United States. Add to that the number of weapons owned by the military and law enforcement, it likely comes out to one gun for every man, woman and child in this country. About one in four Americans own a gun. FBI statisticians have concluded that on average, firearm owners own four guns each.

The folks at Gallup report that 44% of those polled believe that gun control laws should be "made more strict," and 43% believe should be "kept as they currently are." Interestingly, only 1% of those polled had



no opinion. Tell me: can you think of any other issue on which 99% of the American public has an opinion?

The gun issue is huge in most campaigns. The National Rifle Association, although far from being the largest or richest lobby in America (truth to tell, it is relatively small) is nonetheless seemingly everywhere. They have a huge cadre of devotees who frequently will look to a candidate's position on gun-related issues first, his or her position on all others second. As a result, for many politicians it is an ineluctable fact of life: supporting gun control can be hazardous to one's health.

I hope there will be legal challenges galore to what I'll call the "Glocks 'n Glaciers" law. I simply cannot see any reason anyone to be "strapped" at a national park. For many, the answer to the question "why?" is simply, "because we can." To me, that's not good enough. For as long as I can remember, I've been pro-gun control. Personally, I do not believe that owning a weapon or weapons is all that stands between me and tyranny. Then too, I obviously don't read the 2nd Amendment with the same set of eyes as many others.

This does not mean that I am intractable. I am open to suggestion and may well modify my position.

How's about this:

Anyone can own as many weapons of any sort as they desire. They may purchase as many as they choose with absolutely no restrictions on time, date or place.

In exchange, we'll simply pass a law making the manufacture, sale or transportation of ammunition . . . illegal.

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March 05, 2010

## **The Monotony of Insomnia**

Anyone who has ever suffered an occasional bout of insomnia knows the definition of both monotony and tortuous evil: late-late night television. For somewhere around 2:00 or 3:00 AM, all the reruns and rebroadcasts are replaced by a monotonous stream of infomercials. To the uninitiated or inexperienced, "Infomercial Land" is a kind of malevolent Brigadoon where guaranteed riches and pain free weight loss come to life until dawn's early light. In "Infomercial Land," even the most languid of couch potatoes can become a sculpted Adonis -- if only he or she will purchase a lifetime supply of green tea, or a DVD that teaches the marvels of perspiration-free low-impact aerobics.

If it's not weight loss, body remodeling or teeth whitening, then it's fool-proof, risk-free investment in real estate or gold. Where but in "Infomercial Land" is it possible to purchase a three-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath shack for under \$20,000 (no money down, of course) and then sell it in two shakes of a lamb's tail for double the purchase price? And of course, in order make this come true, all one need do is learn "the secret," which the infomercial pitchman will be delighted to share with you at absolutely no cost whatsoever . . . just a slight fee for postage and handling.

"Infomercial Land" is the place where everything is free and everyone just as pleased as punch to help make your dreams come true. All it takes is postage, handling . . . and a total suspension of common sense. Watching ten or fifteen minutes of these late-late night prevarication-fests causes a question to arise: does *anyone* really, truly believe any of the claims being made? The answer, of course, is a resounding "YES!" How else could the marketing mavens of "Infomercial Land" continue paying for airtime (which admittedly is not hugely expensive at in the early A.M.) if they weren't finding gullible customers?

George Hull -- and *not* P.T. Barnum -- was 100% correct when he said "There is a sucker born every minute." The hucksters of late-late night television are grateful for those suckers; they form the very ballast of their economic success, and are under no obligation to concern themselves with whether or not they are leading said suckers astray.

In the Biblical book of Leviticus (19:14), there is an injunction against putting an obstacle or stumbling block in the path of a blind person. On a literal, concrete level, the meaning of the verse is obvious: it is a despicable sin to stick out one's leg in order to trip a blind person. In their writings, ancient and medieval commentators expanded greatly upon both the definition of blindness and the amazing variety of obstacles or stumbling blocks. To their way of thinking "blindness" was not merely the lack of physical sight; it could also be understood as an intellectual or moral handicap. Then too, "stumbling blocks" could just as easily be verbal as physical; purposefully misleading a naive soul by telling deliberate untruths.

To some extent, an infomercial is a kind of stumbling block placed in the path of the blind -- in this case, a consumer with both a credit card and a case of insomnia. Where in the Bible the obstacle-maker is to be guided by both his/her fear of -- and belief in -- God, in the world of the late-late night infomercial, there is no such stricture -- merely the FTC and the FCC . . . hopefully.

There is, however, a far more serious violation of this "moral tort" -- of putting a stumbling block in the path of the blind -- occurring during prime time; one over which neither of the above-mentioned agencies have any sway or authority. This stumbling block also originates in "Infomercial Land," and also requires a suspension of common sense. But instead of snake-oiling foreclosed properties, fat-burning green tea or Pilates, this one hucksters something far more ephemeral: the truth.

Today, much of what used to be called "the news" is little more than an infomercial. And just as in the late-late night variety -- in which stumbling blocks are strewn in before the blind -- the prime-time variety takes advantage of those whose vision is blurred. Every time a Glenn Beck, an Ann Coulter, a Rush Limbaugh, a Karl Rove, a Michelle Malkin "sells" their listeners or viewers their take on reality --

- That there is no difference between Speaker Pelosi and someone who trains suicide bombers;
- That global warming is both a lie and a conspiracy;
- That the president is trading judgeships for support of his health care plan;
- That Congressional Democrats are intent on raising the top tax rate to 70%;
- That "Reconciliation" and the "Nuclear Option" are the same thing; and

- That the Democrat's health care bill contains provisions for "death panels" and abortions being paid for with federal funds --

They are effectively running a prime time infomercial for what might be charitably described as a "neo-feudal" point of view. And, in many cases, they are broadcasting patent lies; drinking the tea will simply not turn an obese gorgon into a svelte goddess . . . unless along with it the gorgon refashions his/her eating habits, gets off the couch, and begins working out regularly at least three times a week.

I understand why we have all those the late-late night infomercials; they are relatively inexpensive to air and enough folks find them entertaining and plausible to turn a profit for their backers. To them it is business, plain and simple. What I do not understand is why all those so-called "journalists" persist in "selling" their products. Either

**A:** They really believe that they report facts for the sake of our future, or

**B:** They know they engage in fiction, but do it for the sake of entertainment and ego.

If **A**, then they are seriously deluded; they have permitted their partisanship to utterly control and overtake their vision . If **B**, they stand accused of placing a tremendous stumbling block in the path of a lot of, shall we say, "civically blind" people. And for what? For personal gain? To be able to say "Hey! I am a somebody! People really listen to me and trust me! I have power!!"

In either case, I can tell you that what you are not patriots. Your professed love of this country is a pose. You are hucksters, plain and simple.

You know something? I think I'm beginning to understand why I suffer from insomnia . . .

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**March 12, 2010**

## **"NOT THE FILLING OF A PAIL . . ."**

Years ago, the progressive British economist John Maynard Keynes defined education as *"The inculcation of the incomprehensible into the indifferent by the incompetent."* I have to believe that Lord Keynes, the towering (6' 6") father of macroeconomics, was having a lousy day when he wrote those words. Then again, despite leading a rather charmed life, Keynes (1883-1946) was also a robust cynic. Who but a cynic would define Capitalism as *"The astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone."*

Keynesian Economics -- which advocates government intervention, or demand-side management into a nation's economy as the best way to achieve full employment and stable prices -- has, after more than a generation of desuetude and mistrust, begun creeping back into vogue. Those who question the efficacy or plausibility of Keynesian theory in what is now being called the "Great Recession" should direct their queries to either Larry Summers or Paul Krugman, not me. For purposes of this week's article, my interest in Keynes deals with his alliterative comment on education; is it indeed *"The inculcation of the incomprehensible into the indifferent by the incompetent?"*

According to Florida Senator John Thrasher (R. St Augustine), this may well be true. How else could one explain S.B. 6? Thrasher's bill -- which has already passed the Senate Education Pre-K-12 Committee by a party-line vote of 6-2 -- would put teachers on annual contracts, tying both their retention and their pay to student performance on an as yet-to-be-determined statewide test. If Thrasher's bill becomes law -- which considering the overwhelmingly Republican makeup of

the Florida legislature is quite likely -- neither tenure nor advanced degrees will enter in to the decision as to whether teacher X shall be retained and rehired on another one-year contract; only how their students do on whatever test shall be devised. Eliminating due process from teacher's contracts won't teach a single child how to read.

Additionally, any local school district that chooses not to comply with the new rules would lose 5% of their state funding. This would in turn likely force those district to raise local property taxes to make up the difference -- a move that would likely see most school board members defeated for reelection.

Those who consider themselves conservative generally speaking support S.B. 6. One of the key rules in the conservative playbook is that governmental authority should be as decentralized -- as close to "we the people" -- as possible. And yet, this bill would do precisely the opposite; having the state, rather than the county come up with a standardized test, thus mandating state-wide criteria for the continued employment of teachers. Am I the only one who sees a glaring inconsistency here?

For the past decade, all public school children in the Sunshine State have taken the so-called "FCAT," the "Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test." When instituted back in the late 1990s, "FCAT" -- a pet project of former Governor Jeb Bush -- was hyped as "part of Florida's overall plan to increase student achievement by implementing higher standards." Individual schools would then be given overall letter grades ranging from "A" to "F" depending on how their students performed.

Supporters of "FCAT" proudly point out the number of schools that have, over the past several years, raised their overall grade. Today, these folks inform us, there are far fewer schools rated "D" or "F," and more rated "A," "B" and "C." While statistically this is true, it does not necessarily follow that Florida students are any better educated in 2010 than they were in 2000; that they are any better prepared for high school, college or the workplace. One argument that has been used against the "FCAT" -- and indeed, most standardized testing -- is that it forces teachers and students to spend far more time in preparation for the test, far less time in preparation for life. Despite a decade of "FCAT," Florida still ranks in the bottom-third of the 50 states when it comes to education -- in terms of high school graduation rates, SAT scores, teacher pay and most other reliable quantifiers.

The fact that students at one school score far better on a standardized test than the students at another does not necessarily mean that one school has better, more dedicated teachers. Many factors can go in to making one school perform better than another. One school can have a much higher percentage of students for whom English is not their native language; or parents who don't speak English and never went beyond elementary school and thus are not in a position to help their children with their studies. And yet both schools can have equally talented, equally motivated teachers. According to Senator Thrasher's proposed legislation, the teachers at the first school would likely not be rehired, because their students did not perform up to some predetermined level.

I don't believe that Senator Thrasher or his colleagues really understand what it means to be a classroom teacher. Let us suppose that Senator Thrasher, who is an attorney, had 40 people in his office at one time, all of whom had different needs, and some of whom didn't want to be there and were thus causing trouble. Now, let us assume that Senator Thrasher, without any assistance, had to represent them all with professional excellence for 9 months . . . all for about \$40,000 a year. Then he might get some idea of what it means to be a teacher.

Needless to say, the lion's share of public school teachers stand steadfastly against S.B. 6. Already overworked, underpaid and dissatisfied with having to "teach to the test," many are "getting out" of a profession they love but can no longer afford. Many see a none-too hidden agenda behind S.B. 6: the breaking of the various local teachers' unions. Although little more than powerless paper tigers in reality, teachers' unions are nonetheless portrayed as the crux of Florida's educational "problem;" that the unions protect incompetent teachers, drive up educational costs and in general, keep students from achieving all they can. As one husband/ team--both teachers -- wrote in a piece that appeared in the *Palm Beach Post*, *"This is exactly why my wife and I are planning to get out of Florida. They don't respect teachers here in this state. The system is broken and needs to be fixed. The unions in other states would never allow this to happen. Florida's teacher's union is powerless."*

My wife has taught in the Broward County public school system; many of our friends are teachers. They are among the hardest-working, most dedicated people you could ever meet. They frequently spend their own money in order to provide their students with materials that they would otherwise go without. For many, teaching is not just their career or profession; it's their art-form -- an art-form which gets less and less support with every passing year.

The French-born American philosopher Jacques Barzun hit the nail on the head when he wrote, "Teaching is not a lost art, but respect for it is a lost tradition."

On the positive side, there is a bill (S.B. 4) working its way through the Florida legislature, which would require high school students to take geometry, two years of algebra, biology, chemistry or physics and an additional "rigorous" science course in order to graduate. If this sounds like what we all were expected to take when we went to high school way back when, you are correct. This new legislation would merely mandate getting back to where education was 20, 30 40, or more years ago.

At the same time, the Obama Administration, working with both the National Governor's Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers, are coming up with nation-wide Math and English standards for each grade. At present, the range of standards across the fifty states is anything but consistent. What is considered essential for twelfth-graders to know in one state might not even be up to what another state believes its six-graders need to know. That is where the nation-wide standards come in. And before anyone pipes in with how this is yet one more example of "creeping Socialism," please know that 48 of the 50 states (the two exceptions being Texas and Alaska) have signed on to this project, which will likely lead to standardization of textbooks and testing across the country.

The Irish poet William Butler Yeats noted, *"Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire."*

What we need to be doing is devising as many ways as possible to light those fires.

Teaching to test and then judging the teacher solely on that test -- that is the filling of a pail, plain and simple.

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March 19, 2010

## Sometimes a Rose Is Just a Rose

I would imagine that everyone who has ever lived has a list of personal pet peeves. And just as some lists are longer than others, some peeves are undoubtedly more frivolous than others. Then too, some folks' peeve lists include serious human failings. I know that I have both on mine. Among the more frivolous ones are:

- People who, for whatever reason, neglect to put their cell phones on vibrate during public gatherings . . . especially MY lectures!
- Using the word "like" in any other sense than "similar to" or "admire," such as in "I like told her . . ."
- Qualifying virtually every statement with the word "kinda," as in "I *kinda* don't understand what you're saying."

Now, among the more serious peeves on my list are three mostly interconnected matters:

- Those who question the motive of another;
- Those who claim to know what another person's motive *really* is; and
- Those who, when they cannot defend their position, resort to either lying or what we intellectual snobs call *argumentum ad hominem*

(**n.b.** an *argumentum ad hominem*, Latin for, "argument toward/against the person," goes like this: **1.** Person X makes a claim. **2.** I object to person X, arguing not against his/her claim, but rather that he/she is "nothing but a dirty, lowdown philatelist." **3.** Ergo, claim X must be wrong. Never mind that a "philatelist" is a stamp collector; to many it sounds like a sexual perversion)

How can any of us ever really, truly know what motivates another person to do what they do or say what they say? In truth of course, we cannot. For those who are predisposed to believing that other people's motives are base, no amount of proof, evidence or cajolery will ever convince them that they are wrong, let alone get them to change their minds. By the same token, many people will tell you what another person's motivation is with such utter certainty, that one might believe it was a truth written in the stars or brought down from Mt. Sinai.

Goodness knows all three of my most nausea-inducing peeves have been on display during our interminable national debate over health care in America -- or as I prefer to call it, "**I.R.F.A.**" -- "**Insurance Reform For America.**" (*If what the House and Senate has been debating were truly -- **Health Reform For America,** -- "**H.R.F.A.**" -- we would have been hearing all sorts of proposals dealing with such things as preventive medicine, pre-natal care and wellness.* That would be a true health care -- not merely insurance -- debate)

As I write this op-ed piece, it is just past 3:00 p.m. on Friday, March 19, 2010. Word has it that the House will be voting on *I.R.F.A.* in a mere 46 hours. This means that in just under two days we will know if an additional 30+million Americans are going to be covered by health insurance; if rejecting people for having preexisting conditions is going to be against the law; if President Obama and the Democrats are going to emerge as leaders of consequence or as political invertebrates.

For months, we have been hearing that "what truly motivates the Democrats" in the entire health care debate is nothing more, nothing less, than their desire to bring Socialism to America; to "nationalize" more than one-sixth of our G.D.P. (**Gross Domestic Product**); to "utterly destroy the private sector." Throughout the nearly year-long debate, opponents of *I.R.F.A.* have used terms like "National Health Insurance," and "Socialized Medicine;" they have warned of dire fiscal consequences if anything the Democrats propose be enacted; they have informed us that seniors will be told when to die, that government will stand between us and our doctor, and that abortion will be paid for with our hard-earned tax dollars. These sorts of arguments peeve me no end, for they are all lies.

Period.

Just yesterday, the Congressional Budget Office -- C.B.O. -- came out with its long-awaited cost/benefit projections on the health care bill. According to their figures, the plan would cost approximately \$940 billion over the next decade. Moreover they find that it will actually *increase* revenue and cut "other costs" by more than that projected figure. So much so, the good folks at the C.B.O. inform us, that the bill stands to help *reduce the federal deficit by* as much as \$138 billion in the same ten-year period. And, in the ten years after that, it will cut the deficit by as much as \$1.2 *trillion*. Now, no one knows for sure whether these projections will prove to be 100% -- or even 85% -- accurate; that's the problem with projections . . . they're predictions. Already though, opponents of health care legislation are claiming that the Democrats "jobbed" the C.B.O. in order to further their Socialist program, and that the C.B.O. is merely an extension of the Democratic Party.

Not true!

The C.B.O. contains some of the wonkiest wonks in the federal government. They are the kind of people who find far more stimulation in flow charts, decimals and percentages than in pornography, payoffs, or political favors. In short, anyone who claims the men and women of the C.B.O. have fudged figures in order to be in the good graces of the Democrats is talking through their hat. In fact, before the Republicans continue their disparagement of the C.B.O., they would do well to remember that these are the guys who heavily *over estimated* the cost of the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit -- which benefited *your side*!

Whether House Democrat X votes for or against **I.R.F.A.** this Sunday will not matter one iota to the Republicans. If Democrat X votes *for* the so-called health bill, that is the headline that will be used against them in their district during the Fall election; that they voted in favor of "Socialized medicine." But if Democrat X votes *against* the so-called health bill, not only will he/she likely draw a primary opponent; the headline will be that she/he only voted against Socialized medicine "so that you wouldn't vote against them in the election . . . but please know that he/she really did support it!"

A classic case of "Damned if you do, and damned if you don't." So why not take a stand and vote in favor of it?

It is tempting to take a swipe or two at what really motivates all those Republicans and Blue-Dog Democrats who are so vehemently against any form of health care -- or insurance -- reform. It would be easy to say that they are far more interested in what is best for their own political careers than for the millions upon millions of Americans who are currently uninsured. Claiming that their position has much to do with the health insurance lobby's deep pockets would be a no-brainer. Opining that they haven't the slightest idea -- or care -- about how most people live is also a possibility.

However, as tempting as it may be to question their motivation, I'm not going to do it. I will take them at their word that they are motivated by their understanding and appreciation of -- and support for -- the free market. In exchange for not questioning the motives of those who oppose what hopefully will pass this Sunday, I merely ask them to return the favor and not question the motives of those who are going to vote *aye*.

When we say we favor overhauling the health insurance industry for the sake of all those millions of American men, women and children who are uninsured, don't question our motive and claim that we really, truly want to bankrupt an America we hate.

We are telling the truth. We are *not* seeking to Socialize America; we just want to make it a healthier, more equitable place.

If you'll quit calling us Socialists, Communists and Stalinists, we won't refer to you as Fascists or heartless, intolerant elitists.

We got a deal?

Somehow I doubt it.

Well, in any event, let me leave you with one more thought -- this from Gertrude Stein:

*Rose is a rose is a rose/Loveliness extreme.*

*Extra gaiters/Loveliness extreme.*

*Sweetest ice cream.*

***Pages ages, page ages, page ages.***

In other words, sometimes things are pretty much what they appear to be.

Sometimes a rose is just a rose.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



March 26, 2010

## **A Letter to Edward Moore Kennedy**

Dear Senator Kennedy:

It certainly has been an exhilarating couple of days. Late Sunday night the House finally, finally passed health care legislation, extending coverage to more than 30 million Americans. In the hours leading up to that vote your son Patrick took the floor to deliver an impassioned speech terming this legislation your legacy. On Tuesday, President Obama signed the legislation -- using 22 different pens -- amidst much hoopla, good cheer and, I am sure, utter exhaustion. Then the measure went over to the Senate where, despite predictions that the sky was about to fall, it survived and went back to the House, where yesterday, the ever-so-slightly revised measure passed once again.

It is now the law of the land.

Throughout all this, I have found myself thinking a lot about you. It saddens me that you did not live long enough to see the enactment of this measure -- which in many ways was the cause closest to your heart during your 47 years in the Senate. But please do know senator, that though you could not physically be there for either the final vote or the signing ceremony, your presence was duly noted time and time again. For 77 years, you were larger than life; for the past 7 months, you have been larger than death.

Throughout the past several days, people have been coming to your burial site in order to express their silent gratitude. Your son Patrick left a note on his official Congressional stationary. It said simply, "Dad: the 'unfinished business' is done." One tour guide pointed to the white cross atop your grave and recalled "The great Senator Ted Kennedy, the man who championed health care." Mrs. Kennedy, along with your three dogs, came, bearing camellias. You've got to know how much time she put into the fight for health care. From almost the moment you passed last August 25, she has been an all but perpetual presence on Capitol Hill; prodding, poking, cajoling and encouraging wavering Democrats to vote *aye*. She did a magnificent job, and indeed was standing next to the president when he signed *your* health care bill into law. Although the pundits call it "Obama Care," it is really "Kennedy Care." Your colleagues in the senate stood a full minute in silence on your behalf. It was the sanest sixty seconds of the past week . . .

I am sure that the bill your colleagues passed would not be your first choice. It is by no means a perfect piece of legislation. I am sure you would see it as a work in progress. After all, ever since you filed your first reform bill -- way back in 1970 -- you have been an unwavering advocate for *universal* health care. Nonetheless, I am sure you would be as happy and as proud as anyone on the Democratic side of the aisle for what dreams have managed to become reality.

Are you aware, Senator, that the bill passed both the House and Senate without a single Republican vote? What's been going on is unbelievable. During the final days and hours leading up to that final vote, the House floor had all the decorum and collegiality of a high school locker room at half time. The level and intensity of partisanship is off the historic charts. And, it has become downright rancorous. The Republicans are now vowing that if only the American voters will "fire" every single Democrat in Congress who voted *aye*, they will "repeal and replace." As we say in rabbinic parlance, *qeev'yachol* -- "As if it were possible."

Would you believe me if I told you that numerous Democratic members of Congress -- and at least one Republican -- have been subjected to death threats by anonymous 'patriotic' cowards? Or that a former candidate for Vice President has come out with a fund raising ad which features white and red gun crosshairs drawn over districts whose Democratic representatives voted for health care? Is there any question why some crazies are making

death threats? You should hear what they have to say on talk radio! It would make your white hair fall out. Your colleagues on the other side of the aisle have responded rather limply to these outrages -- and only after much prodding. This is not an atmosphere which either you or your brothers would have tolerated.

But I forget the purpose of this missive . . .

Senator, I just wanted you to know how much we owe you; how many thankful prayers we are currently praying, how much motivation your memory provides. I know that you are not everyone's cup of tea; that you, like the rest of us, had deep flaws and shortcomings, and were the author of some pretty egregious actions and missteps. But so far as I can recall, you never ran for sainthood; only for the senate; you never sought beatification, merely nomination. And if this is not enough, there is the concept of "Hating the sin but loving the sinner" which, if memory serves correctly comes from Mahatma Gandhi.

Having said this, I want to conclude by once again thanking you for devoting so much of your life to that which so many claimed was either unconstitutional or just plain impossible. Because of you -- and your brothers -- there is a bit more dignity in America. You never gave up. You never took "no" for an answer.

What you said about your brother Bobby at his funeral nearly 42 years ago (!) could just as easily be said of you:

*"You see things; and you say, 'Why?' But I dream things that never were; and I say, Why not?"*

Senator, thank you for never being afraid to ask *'Why not?'*

*Kurt F. Stone*

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April 02, 2010

## THANK GOD FOR THE EXODUS

Most Jewish folks are familiar with the *Yiddishe shrei* ("cry" or "shriek") *Oy, iz es shver tzu zein a yid* -- "It's tough being a Jew." An even cursory reading of Jewish history can give one a basic understanding of the phrase. At this time of the year one is also justified in altering this age-old *tayne* ("complaint") and stating *Oy, iz es tayer tzu zein a yid* -- roughly, "It ain't cheap being a Jew." To get an understanding of why this phrase is particularly meaningful at this time of the year, all one need do is go shopping for all the things that go into a proper Passover Seder.

As but one example: every Seder plate is adorned with various objects. One of these is called *z'roah* -- the roasted shank-bone of a lamb, symbolic of the lamb the ancient Hebrew slaves slaughtered at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Since the beginning of time, one could pick up a *z'roah* from their local *shoyhet* ("kosher butcher") for free; after all, it's just a bone. Incredibly, this year it cost Annie nearly \$6.00 for the bloody thing! Yes indeed, *Oy, iz es tayer tzu zein a yid!*

Nonetheless -- and despite the cost -- *Pesach* is an amazing holiday. Each year one hopefully adds to their understanding of the celebration's significance. Each year one hopefully gets a new slant, a new way of interpreting words and phrases they have read dozens upon dozens of times. To me, the most significant words in the entire Seder have long been:

- "Therefore, even if we were all of us wise, all of us people of knowledge and understanding, all of us learned in the Law, it nevertheless would be incumbent upon us to speak of the departure from Egypt . . ." and
- "In every generation each individual is bound to regards him or herself as he he/she had personally gone forth from Egypt,"

One of the central lessons to be learned during the paschal season is that one must never take freedom for granted. The story of the Hebrews' redemption from slavery to freedom is far far more than just an ancient story; it is a motivator -- a none-too-gentle reminder or prod that so long as any of the human family remains in slavery, none of us is totally free. I guess this is one reason why throughout the ages, so many Jews have been at the forefront of liberation movements. At the same time, I am fully cognizant of all those who will find fault with this statement, pointing to the manner in which the State of Israel deals with its "Palestinian" neighbors. This is, however, neither the time nor the place to engage in that discussion. This year while sitting at table leading the *Seder*, I found myself thinking about how incredibly fortunate the Hebrews were to have escaped the bonds of Egyptian slavery. Indeed, had this not occurred, there would be no Jewish people today. It also dawned on me that had the Jewish people disappeared from history, it would have been an incredible tragedy; not only for those of us who are Jewish, but indeed, for all humanity. Think about it: had there never been an Exodus, had all those hundreds of thousands of slaves and their descendants merely faded into oblivion:

- There would never have been a **Moses Maimonides** (1138-1204); without him, we would have virtually no knowledge of **Aristotle**.
- There never would have been a **Giacomo Meyerbeer** (1791-1864), the man who created **grand opera**.
- There likely would never have been an **American Revolution**; it was largely financed by **Haym Salomon** (1740-1785) who loaned the fledgling nation and its founders more than \$345,000.
- There would never have been an **Emile Durkheim** (1858-1917), the founder of modern **sociology**.
- **Movies** would likely never have grown from a novelty to a major industry without the likes of men such as **Adolph Zukor** (Paramount), **Harry Cohen** (Columbia) **Carl Laemmle** (Universal) **William Fox**, **Louis B. Mayer**, **Sam Goldwyn**, **Irving Thalberg** (MGM) and the **Warner Brothers**.
- Much of **Roman history** would be lost to us without the writings of historian **Flavius Josephus** (38-100).
- Without **David Ricardo** (1772-1823), there would be no field of **Economics**.
- Without **Jonas Salk** (1914-1995) and **Albert Sabin** (1906-1993), **Polio** would still be a contagion.
- There would never have been a **Sigmund Freud** or **Albert Einstein**.
- The world would have been bereft such major **literary** talents as **Franz Kafka**, **Marcel Proust**, **Arthur Miller**, **Gertrude Stein**, **Heinrich Heine**, **Nelly Sachs**, **Boris Pasternak**, **S.Y. Agnon**, **Isaac Singer** or **Saul Bellow**.
- The world of music and theater would have been without **Gustav Mahler**, **Arnold Schoenberg**, **Leonard Bernstein**, **Beverly Sills**, **Michael Tilson Thomas**, **Stephen Sondheim**, **George Gershwin**, **Jerome Robbins**, **Benny Goodman** and **Bob Dylan**.

- Even the world of sports would have been poorer without the likes of baseball players **Sandy Koufax**, **Hank Greenberg**, **Sid Gordon** and **Al Rosen**, basketball coaches **Red Auerbach**, and **Abe Saperstein** (The Harlem Globetrotters), boxers **Benny Leonard**, and **Barney Ross**, broadcasters **Marv Albert**, **Mel Allen** and **Howard Cosell**, swimmer **Mark Spitz**.

And this is really just touching the surface. Virtually every Ivy League school has at one time or another had a Jewish president:

- Harvard: Lawrence Summers (2001-2006)
- Princeton: Harold Shapiro (1988-2001)
- Yale: Richard Levin (1993- )
- Dartmouth: James Freedman (1987-1998)
- Brown: Sheila E. Blumstein (2000-2001)
- Cornell: Jeffrey Lehman (2003-2005)
- Columbia: Michael Sovern (1980-1993)
- University of Pennsylvania: Amy Gutmann (2004 - )

And so, not only is the expression *Oy, iz es tayer tzu zein a yid* ("It ain't cheap being a Jew!") appropriate at this time of the year. One can also say, *Iz es zkhie tzu zein a yid* . . . "It's a privilege to be a Jew." It's a privilege to try and make the world a better, healthier, more just and entertained place.

Thank God for the Exodus!

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April 09, 2010

## Something For Charlie Crist to Consider

Dear Governor Crist:

Well governor, the Legislature has gone and done it; they have plunged a virtual dagger into the heart of public education in the Sunshine State. By passing Senator Thrasher's monumentally idiotic SB 6 -- not to mention a host of other retrogressive legislative measures -- they have eliminated almost a generation's worth of state-wide advances. Unless you find the courage to veto SB6, future pay raises -- not to mention basic job security -- for Florida's 167,000 public school teachers will be based almost exclusively on student test scores. And, when you factor in two other bills Thrasher and his Paleolithic pals enacted -- one to increase the number of students per class and another to massively increase the statewide voucher program (which pays for low-income students to attend private and religious schools) -- it is obvious that they simply couldn't give a rat's rear end about public education.

Governor, can you say *Qu'il mangent de la brioche*?

Better yet, do you understand the meaning of *Que la lumière soit*?

To possibly refresh your memory, the first translates to say "Let them eat cake." Such an attitude is the very essence of insensitivity and elitism, both of which *your* Republican colleagues are oversupplied with. The second translates as, quite simply, "Let there be light." This is the attitude or philosophy that I would hope motivates you -- the need to do that which brings the greatest amount of light to the greatest number of people.

In other words governor, I believe that just beneath your political surface, there beats the heart of an intelligent, sensitive *mensch*; someone whose natural inclination is to side with Florida teachers and veto SB 6. You know it's a bad deal. You know your Republican colleagues are more interested in "sticking it" to the Florida Education Association than in improving education for our children; in providing lucrative contracts to their campaign contributors to create new comprehensive "one-size-fits-all" tests, and in gutting public education so more and more of our children can be educated in

institutions that stress Creationism over Darwinism and the old "3Rs" over multiculturalism. Of course, if this were not enough, there is the overwhelming response of the people. It is my understanding that as of early this morning, you have received something like 6,160 phone calls, 6,600 emails and nearly 3,400 "organized campaign" emails -- all from folks who are encouraging and/or demanding that you veto SB 6. By comparison, I've heard that only 53 people have either called or emailed you to voice support for Thrasher's lunacy.

Nonetheless governor, despite all of the above you *are* a politician . . . and one currently seeking the Republican nomination for United States Senate. About the only reason I could see you *not* vetoing SB6 -- of going against your natural human instinct -- is the thought that perhaps -- just perhaps -- in signing it, you might convince voters that you really are a rock-ribbed conservative.

Sorry governor, that train pulled out of the station a couple of months ago. You've got about as much a chance of this occurring as President Obama did of getting a handful of Republican senators to vote in favor of health care. There was a time, not so long ago, when all the smart money was on you in the senate race. You seemingly had it all: an enviable political resume; an aura of moderation and invincibility; a fabulous tan, great head of white hair and a winning smile; a wealthy wife, and millions upon millions of bucks in the campaign coffers. Then along came Marco Rubio, the Tea Party movement, and your willingness to accept TARP funds from President Obama, the 'most despised man on the planet.' Before too long Rubio started becoming competitive; while you ceased being invincible. The more that photo of you and the president made the rounds, the worse you polled. Today, your chances of winning the Republican primary are somewhere between "absolutely none" and "less than that."

Unless . . .

To borrow part of a title from Jonathan Swift, I would like to make a "Modest Proposal." Without taking up too much of your time, the proposal goes like this:

In exchange for you vetoing SB6, we, the Democratic activists of the Sunshine State would do everything in our power to get as many people as possible to register Republican for the sole purpose of voting for you -- and against Rubio -- in the GOP primary. In that way, you just might defeat Marco Rubio. Needless to say, you would then be on your own in the general election; most of our friends would return to the Democratic fold come November. From my perspective though, it is a "win-win" situation: teachers, students and the entire education system wins because of the veto. You win because you would now have a fighting chance of defeating Marco Rubio in the Republican primary. America wins because no matter who occupies the senate seat, it will be someone who looks forward and rather than back; who doesn't believe the solution to every challenge is either "Cut taxes!" or "just say no!" lives in the early twenty-first, rather than the mid-twentieth century.

What do you say governor? Is this doable? Why don't you kick it around with your wife, folks and close advisers, and then get back to me.

But please Governor Crist as it says on the grandmother clock out in the hall, *tempus fugit* . . . namely, "time flies."

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



April 16, 2010

## IRONIC, ISN'T IT?

Irony, isn't it?

On **Wednesday**, former Arkansas Governor, current Fox commentator and possible 2012 Republican presidential nominee Mike Huckabee "frigastulated" on the topic of homosexuality in general, and gay marriage in particular. In an interview published in the College of New Jersey student paper *The Perspective*, Huckabee said the effort to allow gays and lesbians to marry is "comparable to legalizing incest, polygamy and drug use." Furthermore, Huckabee told the student journalists that gay couples should not be permitted to adopt because "Children are not puppies." (Thanks for clearing that one up governor.)

So where's the irony?

Well, on **Thursday**, President Obama issued an Executive Order mandating most of the nation's hospitals to grant the same visitation rights to gay and lesbian partners that they do to heterosexual couples. Specifically, the president's memo ordered Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to "ensure that all hospitals getting Medicare and Medicaid money honor all patients' advance directives, including those concerning . . . who may visit them or make medical decisions on their behalf . . . regardless of sexual orientation."

In other words, at virtually the same moment the Reverend Governor Huckabee is holding forth on the base depravity and utter sinfulness of homosexuality, President Obama is issuing a directive that sees gays, lesbians and transgenders for what they are: children of God. From what he told the student journalists of *The Perspective*, it is clear that not only does Governor Huckabee understand homosexuality to be depraved and sinful; he sees it as a conscious choice -- like indulging in illicit drugs or taking on a multiplicity of spouses. (*By the way governor, the Bible hasn't got a problem with polygamy; just ask the patriarch Jacob or King Solomon*). On the other hand, President Obama understands that homosexuality is *not* a subjective choice; it is but part of humankind's hard-wiring.

Governor Huckabee feels perfectly justified in denying all sorts of rights to gays and lesbians. To do otherwise would be, according to his *weltanschauung*, going against God's law, as literally spelled out in Leviticus, chapter 18, verse 22: *v'et zachar, lo tishqav mish'qivei eesha; toayva he* -- namely, "Do not lie with a male as you would with a woman, since this is a perversion." There is no getting around the fact that these *are* the words the Bible uses to describe the homosexual act -- for males. Governor Huckabee -- and untold millions of religious folk -- take this admonition as law; the clear-cut word of God Almighty which must be followed to the letter.

I have long been confused by the selectivity many employ in understanding and following Biblical dictates. For if it is unquestionably true that the Bible condemns sexual acts between people of the same gender, it also literally true that:

- Stubborn and rebellious children are liable to death by stoning at the hands of community elders (Deut. 21:18-21).
- There is no problem -- either legal or moral -- for people owning slaves (Lev. 25:44) or selling their daughters (Exodus 21:7).
- It is a detestable sin to eat pork (Lev. 11:7), shellfish (Lev. 11:10) or to mix meat and milk (Ex. 23:19; 34:26; Deut. 14:21).
- Those who work on the sabbath shall surely be put to death (Ex. 35:2).
- Anyone who curses their father and/or mother shall surely be put to death (Lev. 20:9; Deut. 27:16).



- It is expressly forbidden to "sow thy field with two kinds of seed," which also means that wearing garments made of different kinds of threads is out (Lev. 19:19)

If the word of God is clear, unerring and immutable in the case of homosexuality, why wouldn't it also apply to owning slaves, eating pork chops or telling one's parents to take a long walk off a short pier? Sorry to say I don't have an answer, because I don't agree with the basic premise. Ironical, isn't it? Many of us who *do* refrain from eating pork and shellfish, who *won't* mix milk and meat and *don't* work on the Seventh Day, refuse to condemn homosexuals or treat them like lepers or social outcasts.

Predictably, there is already a hue-and cry surrounding the president's directive permitting gay and lesbian partners to have the same rights as married couples in medical situations. Much of it comes from those who pick and choose their Biblical injunctions. Peter Sprigg, senior fellow for policy studies at the conservative Family Research Council (a gent I presume *does* eat lobster and *does* wear cotton/polyester blend garments) said that [the president's memorandum](#) " . . . clearly constitutes pandering to a radical interest group [and] undermines the definition of marriage and furthers a big-government federal takeover of even the smallest details of the nation's healthcare system." (*It should be noted that several states already grant hospital rights to gays and lesbians. North Carolina recently enacted a law giving patients "the right to designate visitors whether said visitors are legally related or not." Delaware, Nebraska and Minnesota already have similar laws.*)

I am sure that the president's directive will continue drawing fire for days -- perhaps weeks -- to come. He will be accused of "grossly expanding the role of the federal government," of "legalizing sin," of becoming America's "morality tsar," not to mention "undermining Christianity in America." The truth, of course, is that the president has done none of these things. He is simply -- and I believe correctly -- recognizing that in today's world, if the definition of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" can be expanded to include corporations, it jolly well can be expanded to include all the children of God. In the eyes of many, there is virtually nothing Barack Obama can do that is right. To

many, even when he does what is right, just and moral, he is wrong, unjust and filled with sin.

So prepare yourself: the president is about to be trashed for *expanding* liberty.

Ironic, isn't it?

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



April 23, 2010

## **Sorry Mayor Koch: You're Wrong!**

Don't get me wrong: I like Ed Koch. To me, he's always been a "one-of-a-kind" kinda' guy: smart, funny, widely accomplished and down to earth. I've spent time with him, interviewed him, and written extensively about him. I own all of his autobiographies and have even read his three mystery novels: *Murder at City Hall*; *Murder on Broadway*; and *The Senator Must Die*. I first met him way back in the summer of 1969, when I was interning for a politically moderate senator and he was serving as arguably the most liberal member of the House of Representatives.

In 2010, Ed Koch is neither the man nor the politician he was more than forty years ago. Back then, "Hizzoner" was, as mentioned above, what used to be called a "bleeding-heart liberal." He was both anti-war and a passionate champion for human rights. Within a few years, he began edging noticeably to the political right. With the passage of time, he moved all over the political map. In 1980, upon his return from the Democratic National Convention (where he was a delegate supporting Jimmy Carter) Koch invited then presidential candidate Ronald Reagan to visit him at Gracie Mansion shortly before the November election. This was widely seen as a tacit endorsement. In the years to come, Koch would endorse such prominent Republicans as Rudy Giuliani, Al D'Amato and George W. Bush. In 2008, Koch returned to the Democratic fold, endorsing Barack Obama over John McCain; he even came to South Florida and campaigned extensively, hopping from synagogue to synagogue, from retirement community to retirement community, singing the praises of the young Illinois senator, and deflecting any fears that he wasn't a tried-and-true friend of both the Jewish community and the State of Israel. I know all about his

tour of South Florida; the Obama campaign asked me to accompany Mayor Koch and introduce him at his various stops.

All of which makes Koch's latest article so hard to swallow. Published by the archconservative online magazine ["Newsmax.com"](http://Newsmax.com) the title says it all: "Obama Slanders, Abandons Israel." Koch begins his 1,400-word screed informing us, *"I weep as I witness the outrageous verbal attacks on Israel. What makes these verbal assaults and distortions all the more painful is that they are being orchestrated by President Obama."* Koch then brings up, among other historic tragedies, Vespasian's military attack on Israel in 70 CE (Koch uses the letters "A.D."), the mass suicide on Masada, and the Jordanian takeover of East Jerusalem in 1948. What all of this is leading up to is Koch's warning: that unless he is somehow stopped, Barack Obama will become the next Vespasian or Titus -- one who will also destroy the Jewish State. As Koch writes, *"I weep today because my president, Barack Obama, in a few weeks has changed the relationship between the U.S. and Israel from that of closest of allies to one in which there is an absence of trust on both sides."*

Koch complains that while the Obama Administration has treated the Karzai government "as an ally . . . with dignity," it has "demeaned and slandered" the Nethanyahu government. He sees in this a diabolic plot; one in which President Obama will "throw Israel under the bus" in order to "create a whole new relationship with the Arab states of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq as a counter to Iran." Koch tell us just how "shocked" he is that no one -- not AIPAC (the pro-Israel lobby) not the members of Congress -- have stood up and pointed an accusing finger at the president and his henchmen. Koch claims that a big part of the problem can be laid at the feet of Democratic members of Congress who are, in his words, "simply afraid to criticize President Obama."

Oh really?

Sorry Mayor Koch: you're wrong!

I don't know about you, but I'm getting fed up to here with all the screaming emails proclaiming that Barack Obama hates Israel and wants nothing more than to destroy the Jewish State. I'm really, truly sorry to see Mayor Koch lining up on this side of the argument. The fact of the matter is that although Israel and the United States are going through a period of

difficulty right now, it is by no means the end of a long-term relationship. Our interests and those of Israel are simply too closely interconnected for any one argument or set of disagreements to lead to "divorce." "Acrimony" and "abandonment" have precious little in common -- outside of being four-syllable words that both begin with the letter "a."

So much of this situation has been playing so "loudly" in the media -- whether it be cable, the Internet, or the various chatterboxes on A.M. radio -- that we often lose sight of what's going on far more quietly behind the scenes. Already, the paperwork required for the additional housing units in West Jerusalem has been put on hold . . . but this has *not* been widely reported. And, despite the level of public rancor and finger pointing betwixt Israelis and Palestinians there is movement behind the scenes for getting back to holding unofficial talks between the two sides.

Sometimes in the game of politics, public statements are used to send messages that otherwise would become lost in transit. They can also be used to divert attention from what is going on behind the scenes. The Obama Administration is not going to be selling Israel down the river -- regardless of what Dick Morris, Rush Limbaugh, Michael Reagan, Michael Savage (all of whom write for "Newsmax.com") or even Ed Koch say.

The other day, AIPAC reported that 76 out of 100 senators and three-quarters (333) of the 435 members of the House signed and sent a bipartisan letter to the president "underscoring the importance of the U.S.-Israel relationship, and laying out the bedrock support that exists in the United States Congress for the U.S.-Israel alliance." The letter -- which was drafted, circulated and signed within an unbelievable 72 hours -- came on the heels of General David Petraeus' public declaration that "Israel is, has been, and will be an important strategic ally of the United States." General Petraeus, who is Commander of the U.S. Central Command was stating a truth well understood by the White House, the vast majority of Congress, and people who understand that arguments and disagreements -- even loud ones -- do not have to lead to divorce. Sometimes, arguments and disagreements can serve to strengthen a relationship.

I still like you a lot Mayor Koch. You're still smart, funny and a "one-of-a-kind" kinda' guy. It's just that in this case, we cannot and will not agree.

That's the way healthy relationships go.

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Posted by Kurt Stone on April 23, 2010 in [America and Israel](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(12\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**April 30, 2010**

## **Head and Heart**

Of late, a fascinating debate has been wending its way through academic circles: to wit, are liberals smarter than conservatives? This past March, Satoshi Kanazawa, a researcher at the London School of Economics and Political Science published a paper in the journal -- *Social Psychology* that reached a fascinating conclusion: more intelligent people -- as measured by IQ -- are more likely to say they are liberal. Interestingly, they are also less likely to say they go to religious services.

Kanazawa's findings -- especially the part about intelligence-and-liberalism -- are nothing new. Two earlier studies, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health ("Add Health") and the General Social Survey ("GSS") came to pretty much the same conclusion. "Add Health," which surveyed more than 20,000 kids concluded, "The mean IQ of adolescents who identify themselves as 'very liberal' is 106, as compared with a mean IQ of 95 for those calling themselves 'very conservative.'" (N.B. *The self-identification upon which the studies' conclusions are based can be quite misleading. Heck: if **adults** have a hard time defining the terms "liberal" and "conservative" how can anyone reasonably expect their **children** to do much better?*)

Now, before anyone mounts their elevated equine, this is *not* an essay on whether liberals are smarter than conservatives.

Personally, I could care less. Although I have rarely -- if every -- agreed with such conservative thinkers/practitioners as Thomas Sowell, William F. Buckley, Irving Kristol or New Gingrich, I know they are just as intelligent as liberals like Paul Krugman, Robert Reich, Joseph Stiglitz or Barney Frank. One should be able to appreciate their intellectual acuity even while finding fault with their conclusions.

One thing which *does* intrigue me, is why conservatives are, generally speaking, so much more successful than liberals when it comes to rallying the troops. I mean, try as we may, liberals and progressives have failed to come up with anything even remotely as successful or engaging as the Tea Party Movement. And with regards to media:

- When it comes to viewers, ratings and ad revenues, MSNBC comes in a distant second to FOX.
- Air America -- the liberal radio network -- crashed and burned in January 2010 after barely 6 years.
- For every progressive talker like Thom Hartmann, Stephanie Miller or Bill Press (all of "Dial Global," which I bet most have never heard of) there are dozens of conservatives like Limbaugh, Hannaty, and Beck.

While the arch-conservative right has emerging "superstars" in Sarah Palin, Michelle Bachmann and Arizona Governor Jan Brewer, the progressive left can counter with . . . with . . . ? With Alan Grayson? Jane Harman? Debbie Wasserman Schultz? While the Tea Party folks classify Harvard Law grads like Grayson, Harman and Obama (all of whom came from either broken or immigrant working-class families) as "effete," they treat blue bloods like George W. Bush and Mitt Romney as "just one of the guys." And while liberals and progressives make reasoned arguments about the fundamental fairness of making health insurance available to all, the inherent illegality of Arizona's new immigration law or question the wisdom of new off-shore drilling, conservatives and regressives counter with such slogans as "Death Panels," "If the Feds won't take action we will," and "Drill Baby Drill."



So what's going on here? Why is it that conservatives generally have the upper hand when it comes to rallying the troops, or getting them to watch, listen and then parrot their mouthpieces? At the same time, why do liberals and progressives, by comparison, seem to be so much more "medium cool."

Head and heart . . . heart and head.

In thinking about this over a long period of time, I have come to the conclusion that the differences between liberals and conservatives, between progressives and regressives, has precious little to do with intelligence; it has more to do with at what the two sides are taking aim -- with how they shape their arguments. For liberals, arguments are generally layered with logic and aimed squarely at the head -- at the reasonable intellect. Those on the other side of the aisle tend to aim straight for the heart or gut; their arguments are generally more visceral than analytic. And although those aiming for the heart may be just as intelligent as those aiming for the head, their arguments tend to be anti-intellectual. Should we then be surprised that there are so many people "knowingly" fulminating over "Death Panels," "Forced bank bailouts," and "Selling America down the river?" Their leaders and opinion-makers shower them with slogans. For liberals, our leaders and opinion-makers regale us with reason.

Perhaps we would do well to learn a lesson from the conservatives. Appeals to reason are fine, but cannot be expected to carry the day all that often. Addressing the heart -- instead of the head from time to time -- can be marvelously profitable.

Just ask Harlen Cobin and Stephen King; they've been outselling Melville and Faulkner for a long, long time.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

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May 07, 2010

## **HEY: THIS IS WAR!**

I gotta admit that upon first hearing about Senator Lieberman's proposal for getting around the whole Miranda rights debate for U.S. citizens -- he would simply strip those accused of terrorism of their citizenship rights and then haul their traitorous *tuchises* off to Guantanamo -- that I was nonplussed, agitated, furious and just plain pissed. I mean, what in the name of all that is holy ever happened to the 5th Amendment which, if I remember correctly, provides that *"No person shall be held to answer for a capital or otherwise infamous crime unless, on a presentment of indictment of a grand jury . . . nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process of law."* In introducing the legislation, Lieberman, along with Massachusetts senator Scott Brown explained, *"If you have joined an enemy of the United States in attacking the United States and trying to kill Americans, I think you sacrifice your rights of citizenship."*

The Lieberman-Brown bill -- cosponsored on the House side by Reps. Joe Altmire (D-PA) and Charlie Dent (R-PA) would revise a law on the books since 1940 that gives the State Department the authority to revoke citizenship from someone who performs certain acts "with the intention of relinquishing United States nationality." For the past 70 years, those "certain acts" have been limited primarily to joining the army of a foreign government in order to engage in warfare against the United States. This new legislation

would add supporting or joining a terrorist organization to the list of "certain acts."

So what precisely got me so nonplussed, agitated, furious and just plain pissed? Well, for starters, how about the bill's inherent unconstitutionality? I mean, regardless of the fact that we *are* "at war" with the forces of terrorism, this *is* still the United States of America where everyone -- both citizen and non-citizen alike -- is guaranteed due process of law. Additionally, what purpose does stripping a person of their citizenship rights serve when it comes to meting out justice? Recent history has shown how time and again, those who are tried in our civilian courts for acts of terrorism are regularly found guilty and then sentenced to long, long prison sentences. Of all those housed at Guantanamo . . . we are still waiting for them to be put on trial.

But you know something? In thinking over this legislation -- especially in light of the two major news stories of the past several days -- I think I'm beginning to change my mind. I mean, if Faisal Shahzad, the Pakistani-born naturalized citizen accused of the failed Times Square bombing should lose his citizenship rights because he is a terrorist, what about all the others who similarly are giving "aid and comfort" to the enemy? Never mind that Mr. Shahzad has purportedly been singing like a caged canary *both before and after* being Mirandized. He was allegedly doing the bidding and furthering the aims of al-Qaeda -- or the Pakistani Taliban or Jaish-e-Muhammed (JeM) or Lashkar-e-Taiba (LetT) -- avowed enemies of the United States; so why shouldn't he be stripped of his citizenship rights?

If so, what about all those loudly proclaiming that the President of the United States was "in sympathy" -- if not "in league" -- with Faisal Shahzad? Or that the explosive-laden vehicle Mr. Shahzad abandoned in Times Square was quickly hustled out of the area "before anybody could hop and maybe see an 'Obama 2012' bumper sticker on the damn car." Or that Shahzad is a Democrat who has "voted for Obama many times." Or that the entire scenario was staged so that the Left could have "a big May Day blast." Rush Limbaugh, Michael Savage, Bill O'Reilly and Mark Levine have all claimed that Shahzad received his citizenship papers under terms of

a special program the current administration has set up specifically for Muslims! I ask you, Free Speech aside, isn't there more than a trace of "aiding and abetting the enemies of America" in all this? Don't these folks -- who have a combined audience in the tens of millions bear some responsibility for the baseless and irresponsible lies they put into the ears of their viewers/listeners? Hey, this is war! Whatever happened to that old patriotic saw that "Loose lips sink ships?"

Even the remarkable capture of Faisal Shahzad "proves" that "neither the president, his administration nor the FBI have the slightest idea of how to deal with terrorism." How's that? Well, if they knew or cared about terrorism, so the argument goes, they would have prevented Faisal Shahzad from ever getting to Times Square . . . let alone becoming an American citizen.

Unbelievable!

Then there are those who have blamed both the president and "environmental wackos" of purposefully causing the destruction of the Gulf oil rig in order to make sure there would be no further off-shore drilling -- and that this occurred precisely twenty-four hours before "Earth Day," which just happens to be Lenin's birthday! Doesn't El Rushbo bear some responsibility for his words? Isn't he being less than supportive in a time of war?

"Listen" to Rush Limbaugh: "What better way to head off more oil drilling [and] nuclear plants than by blowing up a rig?" Or former Bush press secretary Dana Perino, who likewise introduced a conspiracy theory about the rig explosion by saying, "I'm not trying to introduce a conspiracy theory, but was this deliberate? You have to wonder . . . if sabotage was involved." (Yes Dana and Rush: the so-called "Environmental Wackos" have access to a robotic device capable to blowing up an oil pipeline fully a mile under the sea. It is undoubtedly the Beatle's fabled "Yellow Submarine!")

While it is true that those knowingly spreading lies are entertainers, not journalists, it is also true that they do bear a measure of responsibility for their words -- for how they may motivate their viewers, listeners and devotees to act. And we, the

folks who find their words, their lies so monstrously evil; we too have a responsibility: to expose those lies however and whenever we can.

Perhaps Senators Lieberman and Brown should consider amending their legislation to include stripping citizenship rights of those who play fast and loose with the truth. Or short of that, how about a bill requiring that if a media outlet wishes to be licensed by the F.C.C., it must provide both balanced programming and perhaps a disclaimer that states: "The following program is not a news broadcast, but rather a satiric commentary on the events of the day meant solely for entertainment purposes and the amassing of gelt."

Yes I know, under terms of the 1st Amendment all gasbags have a right to lie; it is called "Free Speech."

But hey, this is war!

In my folk's generation it was "Loose lips sink ships!"

Today, it's more like "Verbal impurity endangers security!"

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**May 14, 2010**

## **Let the Show Begin!**

**Question:** What is the definition of "The most dangerous, left-leaning Marxist-activist Supreme Court nominee in the history of the United States?"

**Answer:** Virtually anyone nominated by President Barack Obama.

In other words, it would not have mattered a whit if the president had nominated Solicitor General Elana Kagan, Harvard Law School Dean Martha Minnow, Judge Diane Wood (of the U.S. 7th Circuit), Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano, Judge Merrick Garland -- or "Law and Order" D.A. Jack McCoy for that matter; the campaign against any future Obama nominee had already been outlined, scripted and rehearsed to within an inch of its life.

In other words, the ever-percolating campaign against Elana Kagan should come as no surprise. Even *before* the president's announcement that the former Harvard Law School Dean and current U.S. Solicitor General was being nominated to replace retiring justice John Paul Stevens, the commentators and chatterboxes were warning us about her being "just another liberal Ivy-educated, East Coast elitist "who didn't even get a driver's license until she was past 20"; someone who would undoubtedly "rule with her heart rather than her head"; an enemy of both the military and the 2nd Amendment; one who supports terrorists, favors late-term abortions, and is a radical lesbian to boot. Hell, she's even been scored by several of the chatterboxes for being ugly!

How these folks "know" so much about Elana Kagan is beyond me.

Not surprisingly, Kagan has also been raked over the coals for never having held a judicial position -- "an issue of utmost importance" according to the script. It's funny how so many of those who have voiced this opinion never

found fault with the fact Harriet Miers (remember her?) had likewise never been a judge before being nominated to the Supreme Court. Then too, neither had Justices Brandeis, and Frankfurter, nor Chief Justices John Marshall, Earl Warren and William Rehnquist, to name but five.

Unbelievably, many are comparing Kagan to Miers, proclaiming that outside of their relative "judicial philosophies," they are really very similar. Yeah, right. Southern Methodist University, where Miers earned both her bachelor's and law degrees isn't all *that* dissimilar from Princeton and Harvard Law; it's just in a warmer climate. And being George W. Bush's personal lawyer isn't all that dissimilar to clerking for Justice Thurgood Marshall. Now, it is true that both Miers and Kagan have never been married. In Ms. Kagan's case, she has been "accused" of being a lesbian -- as if that's a bad thing. I don't recall anyone ever speculating that Miers was a lesbian -- despite being good friends with two other famously single members of the Bush Administration -- former Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and former Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman. To my way of thinking whether or not either woman prefers men, women or Yorkshire Terriers is 100% irrelevant, and need not be discussed. Believe it or not, several members of the Right-wing media have even have targeted Elana Kagan's physical appearance! Radio host Neal Bortz compared her to "Shrek," the cartoon ogre voiced by Mike Myers in the DreamWorks film series. Michael Savage told his listening audience that he found Ms. Kagan's appearance "personally grotesque," and said she "looks like she belongs in a kosher deli." Jason Mattera of "Human Events" proclaimed that Kagan, Justice Sonia Sotomayor and Janet Napolitano "all look like linebackers for the New York Jets." Since when did Supreme Court justices have to look like Hedy Lamarr or Catherine Zeta Jones? Anyone taken a gander at Justice Samuel Alito recently? He ain't no Pierce Brosnan!

This is serious commentary? This actually has something to do with being confirmed as a Justice of SCOTUS (The Supreme Court of the United States)?

We've also heard that Kagan is a "dedicated Socialist." And what is the proof for this charge? Simply that her honor's thesis at Princeton was on Socialism; a 130+ page paper entitled "To the Final Conflict: Socialism in New York City, 1900-1933." The thesis -- which can be easily obtained and read -- sought to determine why Socialism never caught on in America as a viable political movement. It was neither supportive nor critical of Socialist aims, policies or positions. Rather, it was -- and still is -- a closely reasoned, well-written academic thesis. *(n.b. If merely writing on a particular subject makes one an adherent of that subject's point of view, than I must be a dyed-in-the-wool McCarthyite; my senior thesis studied the role that McCarthyism played in the 1952 president election.)*

I find it simply amazing that so many people can "know" so much about a woman who has made a career out of being fairly closed-mouthed; a legal

scholar who has written few articles and granted even fewer interviews. While with one hand they slap her down because she has no judicial experience, they use the other paint a portrait of an individual "whose past track record proves" that she would be a "dangerously far-left jurist."

What crystal ball have they been gazing into?

I myself have a few concerns about Elana Kagan and what sort of Justice she might make. While I stand in awe of her intellect and academic achievements, at the same time I fear that she will actually take the court a bit further to the . . . right! Yes, you read me correctly; to the right, not the left. Nothing in her record -- from her days working in the Clinton White House to her years at Harvard to her brief stint as Solicitor General -- shows her to be that much of a liberal. If anything, she would appear to be pretty much middle-of-the-road.

Over the past generation or so, SCOTUS has moved far to the right. According to a 2008 academic paper by Professor William M. Landes and Judge Richard A. Posner entitled "Rational Judicial Behavior: A Statistical Study," of the 41 men and two women who have served on the Supreme Court in the seventy years between 1937 and 2006, five of the ten most *conservative* are currently on the bench: Thomas (#1), Scalia (#3), Roberts (#4), Alito (#5) and Kennedy (#10). Conversely of the ten most *liberal* justices during that period, only one -- Ruth Bader Ginsberg (#9) is currently on the court. (By comparison, the retiring Justice Stevens was ranked the 12th most liberal jurist of the period; the most liberal was Elana Kagan's old boss, Justice Thurgood Marshall.)

To proclaim that Elana Kagan would be "the most left-wing jurist in the history of the Supreme Court" then, is stuff and nonsense. And the fact of the matter is that most -- if not all -- of the pundits know this. As but one example, the *Weekly Standard's* Bill Krystal told Fox News host Chris Wallace that while he believed Ms. Kagan would make "a respectable member of the Supreme Court," he nonetheless thought, "the Republicans should oppose her" because it makes "good political sense." What Krystal and his colleagues are engaging in is not the defense of the Constitution or SCOTUS; rather, they are once again engaging in partisan politics, plain and simple. They are still smarting over the treatment meted out to Judge Robert Bork by a Democratic Senate more than 20 years ago. They are putting their hope for victory in the next election above the needs of the country.

I don't think there is any question that Elana Kagan will be confirmed by the Senate. She *will* become the 112th person -- the fourth woman and eighth Jew -- to serve on SCOTUS. Once she is confirmed, as has been noted by many, it will be the first time in American history that none of the justices will be Protestant; rather, it will be made up of six Catholics and three Jews.



Whether the nine Republicans who voted to confirm her as Solicitor General will also vote for her now remains to be seen. Whether the attacks on Kagan's politics, appearance, sexuality and judicial philosophy will lessen and a greater degree of civility obtain also remains to be seen. Much will depend on how closely the opening night performance is going to stick to the script currently being used during its out-of-town tryouts.

Let the show begin!

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



May 21, 2010

## **A Time to Speak**

I never had the pleasure of meeting my father-in-law, the late Isaac Zamosc. He passed away about a year before I met his daughter, my wife Anna. Nonetheless, I know quite a bit about him, and along with Anna and what remains of the Zamosc clan, have visited Gombin, the small Polish village where Isaac was born and raised.

The earliest record of Jews living in Gombin dates back to 1564. In 1710, the community built a beautiful wooden synagogue; it was restored in 1893. In 1939, there were precisely 2,312 Jews living in Gombin. Isaac Zamosc was not one of them; through extraordinary luck, he had received an exit visa and left, eventually winding up in South America. He never saw any of his family again. The 375-year history of Jewish life in Gombin basically came to an end in a single day. The Nazis came in, rounded up all the Jews, and exterminated them in the first death camp, Chelmno. It has been 70 years since a single Jew lived in Gombin.

Isaac Zamosc was one of the lucky ones; he survived the Holocaust, built a new life in Argentina, and eventually immigrated with his wife and daughter to the United States. But for millions upon millions of others -- Jews, gypsies, trade unionists, priests, homosexuals, intellectuals -- the brutality of the Holocaust was unfathomable; to say it was humankind's darkest, most savage hour doesn't even come close to stating the truth. It was so very much worse than anyone could ever imagine . . .

I don't think anyone save a survivor could ever fully grasp just how unspeakably vile, how unalterably bestial the Nazis and the Holocaust truly were. And yet, of late, people in the public eye have been blithely throwing around such toxic terms as "Nazi," "Holocaust," "Kristallnacht" and "death

camps" in order to score cheap political points with their followers. To my mind, they are doing nothing less than spitting upon the unmarked graves of millions upon millions of Holocaust victims -- including everyone my late father-in-law knew during the first decade and a half of his life.

What am I talking about?

- The other day, while addressing the House on the Republican bill to repeal the Health Care Reform Act, Tennessee Democrat Steve Cohen likened GOP claims to tactics used by Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. "They say it's a government takeover of health care, a big lie, like Goebbels," Cohen said. He also called the Republican claims a "blood libel."
- In his most recent book, *"To Save America: Stopping Obama's Secular-Socialist Machine,"* former House Speaker (and potential 2012 presidential candidate) Newt Gingrich brazenly declared, *"The secular-socialist machine represents a threat to America as Nazi Germany or the Soviet Union once did."* When challenged by Fox interviewer Chris Wallace that perhaps this comment was a bit "over the top," Gingrich refused to backtrack.
- In a Feb. 19, 2010 op-ed piece about tax-exempt status for churches, former Ohio Secretary of State and Family Research Council Fellow Ken Blackwell wrote: *"What we are witnessing right now is an anti-Christian programmatic pogrom. What is a 'pogrom' [? It's] the word that describes anti-Jewish raids by Cossacks and others in czarist Russia, but a programmatic pogrom best describes what is happening right now. These are not isolated attacks. And while we no longer have Cossacks to threaten, we now have left-wing bloggers who actually call themselves Kossacks."*
- During a March 26, 2010 interview on "Fox and Friends," Tea Party Express chair Mark Williams proclaimed, "Liberals [in Congress] are obviously brushing up on their old copies of *Mein Kampf* in order to learn how to criminalize dissent."
- On his March 12, 2010 show, television host Glen Beck compared protests taking place at the G-20 summit then going on in Pittsburgh to "Kristallnacht" -- the "Night of Breaking Glass" in which 267 synagogues were destroyed in Germany within 24 hours (Nov. 9-10, 1938).

- On October 9, 2009, the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC) tweeted a link to a U-Tube video likening then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to Adolph Hitler.
- On October 6, 2009, then-Connecticut Republican senatorial candidate Peter Schiff described his candidacy as follows: *"I'm not interrupting my career. It's not like I want my new career in politics. But I'm willing to interrupt it the same way that somebody interrupted their career and joined World War II and went off to fight the Nazis."* (In other words, running to replace a Democrat in the United States Senate is, to Schiff's way of thinking, akin to fighting Nazis!)
- In an August 2009 speech at a local picnic, Virginia House of Delegates member Steve Landes (R) compared White House actions to those of "the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany."
- For nearly the past five years, rumors have been flying around the Internet that the Federal Government, in conjunction with FEMA, is setting up a series of "death camps" in Montana and Wyoming.

OK, you get the idea. There are a lot of ill-informed, insensitive people out there making a whole bunch of hurtful, outrageous and just plain moronic comments. And for what? To rally the troops? Could they all be so abysmally ignorant of history as to actually believe that President Obama, Minority Leader Pelosi and the congressional progressives are no different from Hitler?

As apoplectic as I am over comments like these, I am even more furious over the relative silence with which this noxious bloviating has met. To give credit where credit is due, I must acknowledge MSNBC's Joe Scarborough -- a former Republican member of the House from Florida -- who thoroughly condemned the former Speaker for his abusive Holocaust rhetoric: *"To compare Barack Obama to Stalin, who killed 50 million people . . . or Hitler, who started a war that killed tens of millions . . . to compare President Obama to Stalin or Hitler, that is just sick. I hope you're making a lot of money on your book Newt . . ."*

But aside from Joe Scarborough, who is out of politics and thus not running for anything but ratings, not one Republican has spoken out -- has said:

ENOUGH ALREADY!

NOT ONE MORE WORD OF THIS NASTY,  
UNCONSCIONABLE HOLOCAUST RHETORIC!

IT IS WRONG!

IT IS DISGUSTING!

IT IS IMMORAL AND DOES A GROSS, GROSS DISSERVICE TO  
THE MILLIONS WHO ACTUALLY DIED AT THE HANDS OF THE  
NAZIS!!

As it says in the book of Ecclesiastes (3:7):

*There is a time to mend and a time to sew; a time to keep silent and a time  
to speak.*

Ladies and gentlemen, this is definitely the time for the sensitive,  
caring majority to speak -- and to speak out loudly -- in order to convince,  
cajole or force the insensitive, uncaring minority to keep silent -- TO SHUT  
THE HELL UP!

I thank you.

My late father-in-law thanks you as well.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**May 28, 2010**

## **"It's Not Whether You Win or Lose, It's . . ."**

The eminently quotable Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) once defined Democracy as ". . . the process by which people choose the man who will be blamed." Despite the fact that Russell had obviously stuck his lordly tongue firmly into his aristocratic cheek, he was nonetheless stating a sad but painfully honest truth. Today, perhaps more than at any time in human history, many people's first response to crisis or catastrophe is the affixing of blame. It is no longer that collective "rolling up of the sleeves" which used to precede taking decisive steps towards the amelioration of whatever the crisis or catastrophe may have been. In turn, playing this blame game" creates two severe difficulties or inabilities -- one obvious, the other a bit less so:

1. Obviously, it keeps people from truly solving the problem at hand, and
2. Not so obviously, it makes it incredibly difficult to learn what to do in order to (hopefully) keep the problem from reoccurring.

Take the Gulf oil spill as a prime example.

From almost the first moment that the Deepwater Horizon oil rig exploded more than five weeks ago, Democrats and Republicans, corporate spokespeople and cable chatterboxes have been engaged in a massive campaign of finger pointing. And although British Petroleum has unequivocally stated that they will be responsible for the costs of cleaning up this unbelievable mess, the finger pointing persists. (*B.P. bloody better*

*well pick up the tab for both the cleanup and the devastation. Goodness knows they can afford it; they earned \$5.6 **billion** in the first quarter of 2010.)*

But lost in all this caterwauling are some unnerving facts:

- That 11 human beings lost their lives in the explosion and resulting fire.
- That tens of thousands of barrels of oil have been gushing out on a daily basis from more than a mile beneath the ocean surface.
- That B.P.'s initial estimate of 5,000 barrels per day has proven to be grossly inaccurate.
- That the size of the oil spill is now larger than the state of North Carolina (as of today a more than 22-mile plume)
- That this is already the worst such man-made disaster in American -- if not global -- history.
- That this is both an ecological and an economic crisis of unfathomable proportions; one from which we will not be fully recovered for years and years to come.

This is simply not the time -- nor these the circumstances -- for anyone -- be they Democrat, Republican, Independent or Libertarian -- to be wasting time in an attempt to score political points. Certainly there needs to be an exhaustive investigation of why the drilling rig's failsafe mechanism did not work and where the various government oversight entities fell down. Additionally, it is essential that the government determine whether, in addition to an obvious financial liability, British Petroleum may also be subject to criminal charges. (I for one strongly believe they should be arrested for both criminal violations of the [Clean Water Act](#) and [negligent and reckless homicide](#)). The answers to these and many, many other questions are both proper and absolutely essential. But they are not part of the "blame game" of which we speak.

More critically, what in the world will we learn, what knowledge can we gain, from this catastrophe? Most important of all, how will this new found knowledge serve us? How will it ultimately affect the way we act in the future in order to save our planet?

I for one see a golden possibility emerging from all the muck and drek currently threatening our economy and ecosystem; a possibility that we will

finally, finally come to the conclusion that as stewards of the planet, we have no choice but to end our reliance on oil. There are reasons aplenty -- some economic, some political, and some environmental.

- The U.S. uses roughly 25% of the world's oil -- 7.5 billion barrels per year -- but we have only 2-3% of the world's proven petroleum reserves.
- Even if we were able to successfully drill and refine all of our proven reserves, it would provide us with just a bit over 1% of all the oil we use and would "drive down" the per gallon price of gasoline by a whopping **3 cents** by 2030. By comparison, raising the fuel efficiency standards of American automobiles to 35.5 miles per gallon for cars and trucks (as President Obama is doing) will save us the equivalent of **\$1 per gallon** by 2030. And, were we to raise the standards to 55 miles per gallon, we would wind up saving the equivalent of **\$1.45 per gallon** by 2030. It would also save us from importing **3.9 million barrels** of oil seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- *(It should be noted that the European Union already gets 42 miles per gallon and is moving to 65 miles per gallon by 2020. In 2010, China, Canada, Japan and South Korea all have stronger fuel economy standards than we do.)*
- Even if offshore oil--drilling technology is 99% safe, that is not safe enough. The current crisis proves this in spades. If, God forbid, we suffer yet another catastrophic oil spill we will do well to recall the old English proverb which teaches, "He who is shipwrecked the second time cannot lay blame on Neptune."

There have already been incredible advances in solar, geothermal, biomass and wind-power technology that are just ripe for the development. There is also Senator Bernard Sanders' legislation to require the above-mentioned fuel efficiency standards. We should let everyone in Washington know that we stand behind the senator's proposal.

Without question, freeing ourselves from oil is possible. It is also absolutely essential and terribly difficult. It will take money, government involvement and a level of political will, leadership and bipartisan cooperation that has been sorely missing for more than a generation. What such an extended -- calling it revolutionary -- effort will require is something that President Kennedy addressed nearly a half-century ago . . . political will:



*"Let us not seek the Republican answer or the Democratic answer, but the right answer. Let us not seek to fix the blame for the past. Let us accept our responsibility for the future."*

One of the things we have been lacking in this country for a long, long time is a national challenge. Here is one that, to my way of thinking, we have no choice but to tackle. Radically altering the way we fuel our nation, our economy, our society, is not a fad; it is a change of both reality and lifestyle we *have* to make. Period. It will create new industries, which in turn will create new jobs and new exports. It will release us from the stranglehold in which so many hostile nations and peoples have us, and truly free us to become moral stewards of the earth that has been entrusted to us by the Divine.

***Remember: we are not the earth's masters; we are its stewards.***

For too long we have lent far more energy to uncovering who is to blame for our problems and challenges than in rolling up our collective sleeves and rectifying the difficulties, which beset us. We can no longer afford to live as if Lord Russell's words were true. Or worse, to follow the dictum of his older contemporary Oscar Wilde, who proclaimed, "It's not whether you win or lose, it's how you place the blame."

As witty as Russell and Wilde may have been, let us prove that they were wrong.

It *does* matter whether you win or lose . . . especially when it comes to the future of the planet.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



June 04, 2010

## **Z'mahn Kasheh**

The Israelis have a term for what's been going on this week: *z'mahn kasheh* -- literally, "difficult times."

And how!

Video snippets of the Israeli commando assault against the "Free Gaza Movement" (FGM) flotilla -- most notably the *Mavi Marmara* -- have already been viewed by millions of people around the world. They are convinced that the commandos' attack was both unwarranted and inhumane; that the people on board the *Mavi Marmara* were unarmed. At the same time, tens, perhaps hundreds of millions have already made up their minds that far from defending themselves and their country, the commandos were engaged in a murderous, illegal, preplanned attack on folks whose only aim was providing humanitarian aid to the poor powerless folk of the Gaza Strip.

*Z'mahn kasheh.*

With near lightning-quick speed, the majority of so-called civilized -- and not so civilized -- nations of the world have once again turned against Israel and joined in a chorus of condemnatory catcalls against the Jewish State. To listen to many of the world's

so-called leaders, one would think that the Israeli commandos' actions on board the *Mavi Marmara* were nothing less than a replay of the notorious [Malmédy Massacre](#):

- France's Nicolas Sarkozy: ". . . a disproportionate use of force."
- Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan: ". . . state terrorism."
- Syria's Youssef Ahmed: ". . . blatant defiance of civilized values."
- Italy's Stefania Craxi: "The massacre of Gaza."
- Pakistan's Union of Journalists: "The true face of barbarism."

Don't know about you, but I don't seem to remember any of these concerned leaders raising their voices in protest over the actions of Iran, North Korea, Rwanda, Bosnia or any of a number of other countries where true genocide and acts of barbarism have occurred. This is certainly not to imply that any supporter of Israel is gloating over the loss of life in the *Mavi Marmara* assault; they are not. It's like Golda Meir once said: "We can forgive you for killing our sons. But we will never forgive you for making us kill yours. . ."

Many have called for an immediate end to Israel's four-year old blockade of Gaza.

Bosnia's Haris Silajdžić likened the blockade to the 1992-1996 siege of Sarajevo -- in which a minimum of 10,000 died. Catherine Aston, the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs demanded "an immediate, sustained and unconditional opening" of the Gaza blockade. What many have (perhaps) willfully forgotten are a couple of important facts:

- That Israel instituted the blockade only after Hamas -- a terrorist organization dedicated to the utter destruction of the Jewish State -- took over Gaza in 2006.
- That Hamas is easily as much -- if not more -- to blame for suffering in Gaza as Israel.

- That there is no food shortage, no starvation in Gaza, and that despite the blockade, Israel has permitted shipments of food, medicine and basic supplies on a daily basis.
- That Israel attempted to reach a rapprochement with flotilla leaders whereby they would sail to the Israeli port city of Ashdod, where their cargo would be off-loaded, inspected, and then transported via truck into Gaza. Flotilla leaders -- most notably I.H.H. -- refused.
- That Hamas steadfastly refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist, is responsible for hundreds -- perhaps thousands -- of rocket attacks on Israel as well as the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilead Shalit.
- That Egypt has also maintained a blockade of Gaza, and generally kept most goods from being transported into the area.
- That until just the other day, the European Union, along with Russia, the United States and the United Nations, has publicly held that no one could deal with Hamas until that organization fulfilled three conditions: "Recognize Israel's right to exist; renounce violence; accept agreements already made by previous Palestinian negotiators." Hamas has not met any of these conditions.

*Z'mahn kasheh.*

If Israel is guilty of anything -- and I believe she is -- it would be lethal myopia; of being so incredibly shortsighted as to walk (or in this case, to rappel) directly into a lethal buzz saw. The Israeli's have another word which is useful at this point: *ahndr'lamusia* -- utter confusion or chaos.

Let's face facts: the "Free Gaza Movement" flotilla was brilliantly orchestrated and masterfully undertaken; it was no spontaneous activity that caught the Israelis off guard. While proclaiming to the world that they are "only motivated by humanitarian concerns," FGM is comprised of long-time anti-Israel extremists who advocate using confrontational tactics against the Jewish State. Just days before the flotilla set sail from Turkey, Al Jazeera broadcast footage of passengers on one of the ships chanting songs from the Palestinian intifada and praising martyrdom.

One of the flotilla's major organizers and backers (and owner of three of the six ships including the *Mavi Marmara*) is a group called "I.H.H." -- short for "Insani Yardim Vakfi," Turkish for "The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief." (The acronym "I.H.H." comes from its German name, *Internationale Humanitäre Hilfsorganisation*.) Founded in 1992, it was formally registered in Istanbul in 1995. It is headed by Bülent Yildirim. On April 7, 2010, Yildirim told a press conference in Istanbul that the flotilla would be "a test for Israel," and declared that should Israel oppose the flotilla it would be considered "a declaration of war on the countries whose activists arrived on board the ships."

At the launching of the *Mavi Marmaris* on May 23, Yildirim told Israel, "Handle this crisis well. If you prevent [the flotilla] you will remain isolated in the world and harm yourselves." Two days before that, Muhmammed Kaya, head of I.H.H.'s branch office in the Gaza Strip said there was a plan to send flotillas to Gaza every month. Moreover, organizers of the flotilla were Webcasting live from the open sea as the confrontation started, using the services of "Livestream," a New York-based company that hosts free Webcasts. In other words, I.H.H. chose to make it a media event.

And the Israelis walked right into it. As *New Yorker* staff writer George Packer noted in an online article, *"It doesn't really matter that the 'humanitarians' on the ship immediately resorted to violence; what the world will remember is that Israel's first impulse was direct confrontation with civilians bringing aid . . . It's not always the bloodiest incidents that evoke the strongest reaction and bring the most lasting consequences."*

It would be easy -- and somewhat emotionally satisfying -- to throw up one's hands and shout:

"HEY WORLD, YOU'VE GOT IT ALL WRONG! THE ISRAELIS AREN'T THE BAD GUYS HERE. IT'S FRIGGIN' HAMAS AND THEIR TERRORIST BUDDIES! ISRAEL'S GOT JUST AS MUCH OF A RIGHT TO DEFEND ITSELF AND ITS CITIZENS AS ANY OTHER COUNTRY! WHY ALWAYS THE SPECIAL CONDEMNATION WHENEVER IT COMES TO ISRAEL? YOU'RE JUST A BUNCH OF JEW-HATERS!!

As emotionally satisfying -- and perhaps true -- as such an outburst might be, it is beside the point. Of course Israel has every right to defend itself. Yes, they made every effort to avert this crisis by offering to inspect the cargo in Ashdod. Yes, the so-called "peace activists" of I.H.H. had bigger and more obvious fish to fry than merely delivering crayons and wheel chairs. Yes, both Egypt and "The Quartet" (E.U. Russia, the United States and the United Nations) knew that Hamas was bad news and supported the blockade. Yes, most of the world knows all this.

But it still doesn't amount to a hill of beans. Once again, Israel is in trouble for doing what any other country would have done. Once again, the condemnatory response is totally out of proportion to the actual event. But hey, it's Israel. It's so much easier to criticize and condemn a nation of 7.5 million people (1.5 million of whom are Arabs who possess more political equality than any of their brethren) for killing nine people than it is to come down hard on countries whose populations are in the dozens and hundreds of millions.

Recognizing that this is the way things go doesn't make the reality any less painful. Hopefully, Israel will not repeat this mistake; will not take the bait and fall into the traps its enemies set. Aside from that, they will survive. If any country in the family of nations knows how to survive, it is Israel.

*Z'mahn kasheh . . .*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



June 10, 2010

## "I Pity the Poor Immigrant . . ."

In his day, the now long-forgotten Israel Zangwill was one of the most widely-read, widely-respected writers in the English speaking world. The author of such classics as the picaresque *King of Schnorrers*, *Children of the Ghetto* and *The Big Bow Mystery* (the very first "locked-room" murder mystery), Zangwill (1864-1926) was also a first-class playwright. A British subject who was born, lived and died in the U.K., Zangwill's most famous play, *The Melting Pot*, was written specifically for an American audience. One measure of his immense popularity and renown is the fact that when *The Melting Pot* debuted in Washington, D.C. in October 1909, Zangwill's "date" for the evening was none other than the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt.

In *The Melting Pot*, David, the play's hero, emigrates to America shortly after the Kishinev pogrom, in which his entire family has been killed. Once in America, David writes a great play -- "The Crucible" -- in which he expresses his hope for a world in which all ethnicity has melted away, and falls in love with a Russian Christian immigrant named Vera. The play's dramatic highpoint comes when David meets Vera's father, who turns out to be the Russian officer responsible for the annihilation of David's family. Vera's father admits his guilt, David's symphony is performed to great accolades and, as the curtain falls, the couple begin making plans for their wedding. At one point, David proclaims, *America is God's crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all races of Europe are melting and reforming . . .*

*Germans and Frenchmen, Irish and Englishmen, Jews and Russians -- into the crucible with you all! God is making the American!*

Without question, Zangwill's vision -- his *weltanschauung* -- is by now a relic of a simpler, less complicated age. America is *not* a "melting pot"; it is, more properly a "salad bowl" -- an ever-evolving entity made up of diverse "ingredients," all of which are still readily identifiable. A "melting pot," on the other hand, is a mishmash, an anthropological alloy in which none of the ingredients can any longer be identified. But if, as many still claim, America is indeed a "melting pot" who is to say precisely what that alloy is? The governor of Arizona? Members of Congress? Tea Party acolytes? Let's face it: the America of which Zangwill wrote back in 1909, is *not* the America of 2010. If it were the same, we would no longer be here; our country would have fossilized.

I am both troubled and angry every time I hear someone blather on about who is or is not a "*real* American" -- that anthropological alloy mentioned above. In most cases, so far as I have seen or heard, the person claiming to "know" who is or is not a "*real* American" is a white, Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP). Well I'm here to tell you as an "AGAJ" (Anglo-German American Jewish) that *real* Americans come in all colors, attend churches, synagogues, mosques, shrines and coffee houses, and speak every language under the sun. Every time I read a letter to the editor that says, ". . . this is America; either learn to speak English or go back to where you came from," I get nauseous. Without question, people living in America *should* learn English. Then again, people born in this country would do well to learn Spanish . . . , Chinese, Arabic, or Portuguese.

Yes, in Zangwill's day, folks from Russia and Poland, from France, Ireland and Italy did tend to assimilate rather quickly into America. They *did* apply themselves to learning English, Americanizing their children and getting ahead. In many, many cases they were escaping the dark thunderclouds of oppression, intent upon emerging into the bright sunshine of freedom and democracy. The thought that they might some day go back to -- let alone communicate with -- the place of their birth was pretty far from their thinking. The world was much bigger then. Today, the place one left is a mere cell phone call or Internet link away.

American history is replete with episodes of xenophobia -- fear and/or hatred of those we now refer to as "aliens." These episodes generally occur



when the economy takes a header; we need someone to blame. The economic panic of the late 1830s/early 1840s was blamed largely on the Irish who were at that point coming to America in droves. "Real Americans" of the day formed a nativist party (known to history as the "Know Nothings"), called for draconian changes to the nation's immigration laws. They sought to make aliens wait up to twenty years for something they called "Federal Citizenship," and looked upon the Federal Government as "the enemy." They did manage to elect a couple of mayors, one governor and a handful of Congressional representatives. By the 1850s, they had become Republicans. In the late 1890s/early 1900s, "Real Americans," responding to economic doldrums and labor unrest, formed a Populist Party which sought to bar Eastern European immigrants. In the aftermath of World War I, America changed its immigration quotas in order to make it much more difficult for people from Eastern Europe, Asia or Latin America to gain entry. These folks were accused of stealing jobs from "Real Americans." Today, of course, we have the Tea Party folks, who claim that much of the "Great Recession" is due to all the illegal aliens who have taken jobs away from "Real Americans."

Indeed, there is nothing new under the sun.

What all of these nativist movements have in common -- besides their aversion to "aliens" and certain knowledge of who is "real" -- is the relative simplicity of their message. There is hardly any nuance in the "Know Nothing," "Populist" or indeed, "Tea Party" approach to politics. "This is the way things have to be," they argue. "We know who the good guys and who the bad guys are. And we shall never compromise with the bad guys." They see the world as black-and-white and America as a "melting pot."

We have gotten to a point in our history when the last thing we can afford is lethal partisanship. There is so much we have to accomplish, whether it be in the areas of immigration reform, financial regulation, health care or energy policy, to name but just a few. Nothing is impossible if we are ready and willing to understand that those with whom we disagree are potential partners not eternal enemies. To continue on as we have of late -- to view America as a "melting pot" rather than a "salad bowl" -- is to continue being at loggerheads at the absolute worst possible time.

Back in December 1967, Bob Dylan released "John Wesley Harding," his eighth studio album. The album contained one of Dylan's most enigmatic

songs: "I Pity the Poor Immigrant." Based largely on the Biblical Book of Leviticus (26:19-26), the song contains the lyric:

*I pity the poor immigrant,  
Who tramples through the mud  
Who fills his mouth with laughing  
And who builds his town with blood.  
Who's visions in the final end  
Must shatter like the glass,  
I pity the poor immigrant  
When his gladness comes to pass.*

I have long believed that what Dylan is trying to tell us is that in the end, it is *we* who are the immigrants; we are all strangers in the land. And until we understand that fact, our dreams will be as nightmares, our reality an illusion.

As a sixties-era bumper sticker read:

***Columbus didn't discover the Indians; the Indians discovered Columbus.***

In other words, we are a salad bowl, not a melting pot.

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## *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**June 16, 2010**

# **Skill Baby Skill**

You've got to wonder if Barack Obama would have run for president if he'd known, say, back in June of 2007, precisely how much would be on his plate in June of 2010? I mean, who runs for president thinking, *"I can't wait to deal with high unemployment and a flaccid economy. I can't wait to deal with a growing arch-conservative movement that sees the federal government as the enemy of the people; going through the nation's worst environmental disaster while Iran thumbs its nose at the civilized world, Israel commits P.R. hari-kari, and North and South Korea are back to rattling sabers at one another. Not to mention that Greece has gone bankrupt, the men and women of Fox News want to nail my hide to the wall and a hefty percentage of the American people are convinced I'm a committed Socialist. And all this for a paltry \$400,000 a year! Hell's bells, it takes Alex Rodriguez all of eight at bats to make that!!"*

You get the picture. I cannot imagine any president -- whether he or she be Barack Obama, John McCain, Hillary Clinton . . . Franklin D. Roosevelt or Abraham Lincoln for that matter . . . being able to succeed with all that is going on in the country and around the world. What makes things so much more difficult for the president today -- as opposed to in days of yore -- is that he is attempting to lead people who may well be unleadable; folks who are looking for simple answers and solutions to unbelievably complex questions and challenges.

Unlike many, I still have faith in President Obama; faith that he can use the skills the good Lord gave him to begin effecting both amelioration and change. However, if he is to do this, it will take not just skill on his part; it will also require faith, courage, imagination and a measure of *chutzpah* on ours. For far too long, far too many Americans have acted as if citizenship's primary requirement was complaining, not acting; of demanding, not dreaming. And while it is still true that

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step," we tend to lose interest after taking whatever that initial step may be.

As mentioned above, now is the time for a bit of faith, courage, imagination, and a measure of *chutzpah*. With your kind permission, I would like to indulge for the nonce in the latter two . . .

To my mind, the most daunting challenge facing America today -- even beyond the economy and joblessness -- is the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. For not only is it an economic catastrophe of epic, epic proportions, and the worst man-made environmental disaster in the history of this nation -- perhaps this planet; it is also an act of ultimate immorality. We have utterly failed in that divinely ordained mission to be shepherds and stewards of the earth: *"Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not the shepherds also take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock."* [Ezekiel [34:2-4]

This disaster *is* overwhelming; so far it has defied all technological remedies. It is also an ongoing political disaster for the president. "Why hasn't he done more?" people ask. "Doesn't he care?" Each day tens of thousands of gallons of oil despoil the gulf. Best estimates are that the oil will continue to flow until at least August. With each passing day, the political fallout also continues to gush.

All of this has of course led to calls for a radical change in the nation's -- if not the world's reliance on oil. The president spoke briefly about this from the Oval Office last night. Although he did not propose anything concrete, he did allow that we must commit ourselves to breaking our addiction to oil. Many have opined that where they had hoped for the president to "hit a grand slam" with his speech, it was merely a "bunt single." For many, the man simply cannot succeed no matter what he says or does.

At the same time, the president is being accused of "throwing Israel under the bus"; of showing greater favor and concern for the Arabs than the Jewish State. "Why," many ask, "has he not gone to Israel?" The fact that he has not yet been to Jerusalem, these folks claim, is proof positive that he harbors a not-so-secret dislike for Israel.

I for one strongly disagree. The Obama Administration has done plenty with and for the security of the Jewish State. And while the fact that he has yet to go to Jerusalem is indeed lamentable, I think I understand why. As much as he may want to go -- and soon -- what would he say? To merely restate the obvious -- that

Israel and the United States are inextricably bound together by bonds of history, democracy and legacy -- would sound rather hollow.

Here comes an idea: one that I hope combines the sort of imagination and *chutzpah* I mentioned above. I believe that there is a possible solution to our need for energy independence to be found in Israel. I also believe that Israel's so-called "P.R. problem" may find a bit of amelioration in working to free America from its addiction to oil.

"How's that?" you ask. As the punch line to an old joke began, "*Vell I'll tell 'ya . . .*"

There is no country on earth that is farther ahead in the alternate energy field than Israel. In fact, no country is father ahead in most forms of technology than the tiny Jewish State. Israel is the first country to actively promote zero-emission electric cars. They have already prepared their infrastructure for mass marketing such vehicles. Already, "Better Place," an Israeli company, is marketing lithium-ion batteries to power the cars and the infrastructure to refresh or replace them. One battery permits cars to travel 125 miles between charges. "Better Place" is currently installing parking meter-like plugs on city streets and constructing service stations along highways to replace the batteries.

SolarPower, Ltd., an Israeli solar power integrator, has already built a 50-kilowatt rooftop solar power system in Kiyat Gan, Israel. Solel Solar Systems, Ltd., helped design a solar energy plant in Las Vegas that uses 190,000 curved parabolic mirrors. The mirrors concentrate desert sunlight to 750 degrees Fahrenheit, which heats synthetic oil inside tubes that, in turn, create steam and drive a turbine that produces enough electricity to power nearly 50,000 homes.

Israel is also a world leader in creating biofuels from algae, energy from ocean waves, and the use of Thorium in place of Uranium. (Thorium-232, which the United States Government experimented with during World War II is a naturally-occurring radioactive metal. It decays very slowly; its half-life is about three times the age of the earth. A piece of Thorium the size of a ping pong ball can release enough energy to provide an individual with a lifetime supply of energy. Unlike Uranium, it is incapable of being used in weapons, and exists in great and cheap abundance. The United States alone has more than 400,000 tons of the stuff, roughly 15% of all the Thorium on earth.)

So, I can imagine President Obama going to Jerusalem and, standing with Prime Minister Netanyahu, announcing that the United States is going to be signing

innumerable contracts with various Israeli companies to begin the process of turning America into a nation fueled by solar, geothermal, wave, biomass and Thorium energy. If I were the president, I would use that skill he has communicating to say something like, *"We are going to plug into the mainframe known as Israel in order to change the course of history. In so doing, we look forward to not only weaning ourselves from non-renewable sources of energy, but to creating millions of new jobs in new clean industries that can lead to billions and billions of dollars of new exports. Together, we can lead the world into a clean energy future that potentially can benefit every man, woman and child on this planet, and bring us all just a little closer together. . ."*

Yes, I know, the above is both a tall and idealistic order, to be certain. But I have to believe that this is precisely what Barack Obama signed on for: a supreme challenge that calls for faith, imagination, *chutzpah* and "skill baby skill."

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



June 24, 2010

## **THE PRICE AND THE PROMISE OF CITIZENSHIP**

Whatever happened to school paper drives? Or returning pop bottles for a penny or two apiece? Back in the 1950s when I was a student at Erwin Street Elementary, we had paper drives a couple of times a year. Students were encouraged to go around their respective neighborhoods and get as many discarded copies of the *Los Angeles Times*, *Mirror*, *Examiner* or *Van Nuys News and Valley Green* as possible and then bring them to school. I well remember the tens of dozens of bundles all carefully stacked high against the chain-link fence just outside the school grounds. Each stack was identified by grade and teacher. Whichever class won, received a certificate and the undying gratitude of our principal, Mrs. Hodges, who informed us that in addition to being winners, we were, more importantly, being good citizens.

We didn't know it at the time, but paper drives were a holdover from World War II, when folks saved virtually everything from rubber bands, old pots and pans and the aluminum foil from gum wrappers to cooking grease and tin cans. It was part of the price one paid for being an American citizen.

Then there were all those soft-drink bottles (cans were, as I recall an extreme rarity). I remember the summer my sister Riki and I, along with our across-the-street neighbor Gary discovered that Mr. Harris' garage was filled floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall with bottles. (Being kids, we weren't aware that both Mr. Harris and his wife were, as

they used to say, "common drunks," and all these bottles represented "mixers.") The three of us approached Mr. Harris and offered to get rid of all the thousands of bottles in his garage -- free of charge. He gave us permission -- along with a key to the garage door -- and we then proceeded to spend the rest of the summer taking all those bottles back to the Hillview Market, where we got anywhere from 2¢ to 5¢ a bottle. Over the course of that summer we took back virtually every bottle, wound up the proud owners of a shiny new red wagon (to more haul bottles in, of course) and, as I recall, \$100 cash, which we split three ways.

The fact that Mr. Harris never threw out a single bottle was again, a holdover from World War II, when everything was saved, collected and turned in. Again, it was part of the price one paid for being a citizen. As with all things, the habit of saving, collecting and recycling that had begun with the war began to die out; the war -- and with it, the price of citizenship -- was becoming an increasingly distant memory. So much so that by January 1961, President Kennedy had to remind the nation to "*Ask not what your country can do for you -- ask what you can do for your country.*" The price of citizenship had become terribly devalued.

One other indelible memory of those days involves going to the downtown train station, the old Lockheed Airport, a ball game at the Memorial Coliseum -- anywhere one might see lots and lots of people. Among this mass of humanity, one could always count on a percentage of folks -- generally men -- being decked out in military uniforms. Today, anyone walking through an airport or mall wearing an Army, Navy or Marine uniform would stick out like a sore thumb. When you stop and think about it, it's rather odd that we rarely if ever see men or women wearing military uniforms; especially considering that we are still in the midst of waging the longest, most frustrating war in our history. Back in the day, everyone's father -- and some mothers -- had their old uniforms hanging in the closet gathering dust. During World War II my father served in the Army Air Corps as a weather forecaster; he was sent to India. As for my



mother, she worked stateside in an Italian prisoner of war camp. Everyone did something; all part of the price of citizenship.

What about today? What is the price of citizenship? What is being asked of us? More importantly, what are we asking of ourselves? What is our definition of "*The price of citizenship?*"

Merely paying taxes?

Complaining about the folks in office and then not voting?

Having a growing fear that government is the enemy and that our leaders are selling us out?

Demanding *either* that government stay the hell out of our lives or that it solve our most pressing problems overnight?

Counterbalancing the *price* of citizenship is its *promise*. In his inaugural address, Barack Obama used precisely this term -- "The price and the promise of citizenship" -- to leave no doubt that citizenship was going to form the bedrock of his philosophy on rebuilding America. In that speech, he said,

*"What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility -- recognition on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world. Duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining to our character, than giving our all to a difficult task. This is the price and promise of citizenship."*

Now, nearly a year-and-a-half since the president first spoke those words, the message seems as foreign and as distant, as incomprehensible as the runic alphabet. People have become so angry, so frustrated and at loggerheads with one another that the message of citizenship -- that it has both a price and a promise -- has all but disappeared from view.

And yet, the reality persists; citizenship *does* require something from each of us. I for one would heartily endorse some sort of

"National Service" legislation whereby every able-bodied adult serve the country in some capacity for a minimum of two years. It doesn't have to be the military, although I can see a couple of good reasons for reinstituting the draft. Back in the days when people were drafted, it had a democratizing effect on a couple of generations of American boys. My father often told me that as a result of serving in the Army Air Corps, he met, worked alongside and lived with people he otherwise would never have met; people from every walk of life and every inch of the country. As a result, I think he had a far greater sensitivity to other people than he otherwise might have had. Additionally, by reinstituting the draft, wars become far more personal; it's no longer "them" that are fighting . . . it's "us." I think that one of the reasons why the current generation hasn't put together a stronger, more vibrant anti-war movement is that they have no stake in it; it's not "their" war. Believe me: had a draft been instituted just after 9/11, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan would never have lasted this long.

Further, I believe that through a program of national service we can put people to work performing the sorts of jobs and tasks done by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Great Depression. There is so much infrastructure work we need done; why not put America to work doing it? It should be viewed as part of the price we pay for being citizens.

Then there is the *promise* of citizenship. I believe this promise involves equality of respect and dignity; of providing opportunities for people to escape poverty and enter the middle class; of protecting people from predators of all stripes; of ensuring that we are treated not merely as consumers, but as people of inherent human worth.

Is all this on the idealistic side? You bet it is. I know that many will disagree and anticipate receiving some ego-deflating email in the next couple of days. But if ever there was a country whose very basis is idealism writ large, it is ours -- a nation where the price and the promise of citizenship are likewise writ large.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**July 02, 2010**

## **Getting Spoiled on \$300 a Week**

You've got to hand it to Sharron Angle, the Nevada Republican aiming to "take out" Senator Majority Leader Harry Reid: she actually makes Sarah Palin look like she's got half a brain. Angle, whose fondness for weightlifting and for her .44 Magnum have made her the darling of Tea Party acolytes from coast-to-coast, is even more of a Luddite than the former Alaska Governor. And that, my friends, is really saying something. A brief perusal of Sharron [Angle's website](#) and an even briefer inquiry into her public statements will turn up the following:

- **While serving in the Nevada Legislature**, Ms. Angle sponsored an unsuccessful bill that would have required the "dissemination of information concerning the scientific link between induced abortion and increased rates of breast cancer."
- **Angle supports** both the privatization of Medicare, and the phasing out of Social Security.
- **Angle believes** that the U.S. Department of Education is unconstitutional and should be eliminated. The same goes for the Environmental Protection Agency.
- **Angle favors** the termination of the Energy Department and much of the IRS tax code; complete elimination of the National Endowment for the Arts, Freddie Mac and Fanny Mae.
- **Angle has called** for the United States to withdraw from the United Nations: *"The U.N. has been captured by the far left and has become ineffective and costly. The U.N. continually threatens U.S.*

- sovereignty, with endless rhetoric and treaties, and it has now become the 'umpire' on fraudulent science, such as global warming.*
- **In her first taste of national exposure** -- an April 15, 2010 "tea party" event at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. -- [Angle invoked God and guns](#) as her leading issues. She told the assembled throng, *"You know I feel a little lonely today. I usually bring Smith and Wesson along, and I have to tell you I'm going to give Washington, D.C. a lesson in the Constitution, especially the Second Amendment. But I didn't come alone today. I brought God — always bring him — and I brought my husband of 40 years, Ted Angle."*
  - **Angle proposed legislation** to implement of "Second Chance," a detoxification and rehabilitation program for drug-addicted prisoners that is administered by the Church of Scientology.
  - **Angle claims** that the doctrine of the Separation of Church and State is not to be found in the Constitution. When pressed by political reporter John Ralston as to what then, Thomas Jefferson meant, Angle responded, *"Actually, Thomas Jefferson has been misquoted like I've been misquoted out of context."*
  - **While appearing on the "Lars Larson Show"** -- a conservative radio talk show, Angle said, *"If this Congress keeps going the way it is, people are really looking toward those Second Amendment remedies and saying, 'My goodness what can we do to turn this country around?' And I'll tell you the first thing we need to do is take Harry Reid out."* (In an interview a few days ago, Angle retracted the remark explaining, "I meant 'take him out 'of office . . . I changed my rhetoric."
  - **When asked about her position on abortion**, Angle told interviewer Bill Manders that she opposed abortion even in cases of rape and incest. A pregnancy under those circumstances, she explained, was "God's plan."
  - **When questioned about the job situation**, Angle told interviewer John Ralston that she would not support extending jobless benefits; that she was really getting sick and tired of the long-term unemployed taking home all those "cushy" unemployment benefits. In one speech, Angle explained, *"You can make more money on unemployment than you can getting one of those jobs that is a job but it doesn't pay as much. We've put so much entitlement into our government that we really have spoiled our citizenry."* Angle has further claimed that there are "lots and lots of jobs available," if only people are willing to work in entry-level positions for minimum wage.

And you thought Sarah Palin was living in the political Dark Ages?

This past Wednesday, the Senate adjourned for its 4th of July break without passing an extension of unemployment benefits. By a vote of 58-38, the upper chamber failed to enact a two-pronged measure that included a \$34 billion six-month extension. Predictably, Democrats blamed the defeat on the Republicans, accusing them of being heartless and more interested in politics than in helping the chronically unemployed. Just as predictably, Republicans insisted that they were all for helping the unemployed; the Democrats were responsible for the measure's defeat because, in the words of Minority Leader McConnell, *"They [the Democrats] simply refuse to pass a bill that doesn't add to the debt. We can't support job-killing taxes and adding tens of billions to the already unsustainable national debt."*

Somewhere in Nevada, Sharron Angle must be delighted. The bill's defeat means that all those millions of spoiled, coddled Americans who've been sitting home watching TV and drinking tall cold ones will now have to get off their collective duffs, turn off the set, put down their brewskies, lace up a pair of work-boots and march on down to the local MacDonalds where they can apply for an "honest job." In Sharron Angle's -- and the GOP's -- book, people have actually been getting fat and sassy on unemployment insurance and other government entitlements, like Foodstamps. I wonder if Angle, McConnell, Boehner and the rest of the conservative posse have checked out precisely how much (or how little) one receives in weekly unemployment benefits. In Nevada, the maximum weekly benefit is \$362; in McConnell's Kentucky, it's \$415; in Boehner's Ohio it's \$372; here in Florida, it's a paltry \$275. Nationally, the average weekly unemployment check is \$293, ranging from a maximum of \$230 in Mississippi to \$626 in Massachusetts. And mind you, these benefits are taxable.

So, according to Angle and her conservative colleagues, families are able to live the Life of Riley on just over \$15,000 a year. I want to know how they do it.

I would imagine that when Congress reconvenes on July 12, the Senate will manage to enact the six-month extension of unemployment benefits. Nearly 2 million chronically unemployed Americans will be able to count on at least a bit of financial assistance in these truly harrowing economic times. Let the Angles, Pauls and Boehners of the world deride unemployment benefits as a cynical Democratic ploy to ensure votes in the Fall. Let them proclaim that the major reason so many people are without jobs is precisely because they can do even better on government assistance. Let them tell us that there are tons of jobs out there for the taking -- if only one is willing to take an entry-level position.

Perhaps we can ensure that come November, Sharron Angle and people of her stripe will be among those who are spoiled, coddled and unemployed.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**July 09, 2010**

## **We Have Everything to Fear AND Fear Itself**

Make no mistake about it: we live in an era when being phobic is about as common as putting bananas on your corn flakes or rooting for the Miami Heat now that LeBron James has joined the team. And lest one think that phobias -- irrational fears -- are limited to old standbys like *Claustrophobia* (fear of confined spaces), *Agoraphobia* (fear of open spaces), *arachnophobia* (fear of spiders) or *Triskaidekaphobia* (fear of the number 13), guess again. To paraphrase Pete Seeger and The Byrds: *"To every sting, churn, churn, churn; There is a season, churn, churn, churn . . . And a time and a purpose under heaven."*

Among the more fascinating irrational fears for which there are now names we find:

- *Bibliophobia*: fear of books;
- *Centophobia*: fear of new ideas;
- *Eleutherophobia*: fear of freedom;
- *Geumophobia*: fear of knowledge,
- *Hippopotomonstrosesquippedaliophobia*: fear of long words, and
- *Politicophobia*: fear or intense dread of politicians.

Silly me: Before doing a bit of research for this article, I was of the opinion that the only thing to fear was fear itself!



Among the literally hundreds of phobias that are known to exist, I selected the six above for a reason: these are the irrational fears upon which America's newest seat of higher learning are based. And here, I am of course referring to the online *Glenn Beck University*. For if ever there were a "university" based on the fear and dread of knowledge, it would be this academic abortion. In announcing the creation of his eponymous institution, Beck touted it as providing a *"unique academic experience bringing together experts in the fields of religion, American history and economics."* Considering what we have learned about "The Dean's" worldview and knowledge of history, economics, government and world events over the past several years, it would probably be smart to think twice before enrolling. Given to misstatement, hyperbole and downright factual inaccuracy -- not to mention the long list of things he gets his "students" to fear -- Beck's notion of education leaves more things to be desired than a gathering of hedonists could ever imagine.

In announcing the creation of his online university a week ago today, Beck wrote on [his website](#), *"Through captivating lectures and interactive discussions, experts will explore the concepts of Faith, Hope and Charity, and show you how they influence America's past, her present, and most importantly, her future."* Beck's knowledge of history, science, economics -- even the arts is, to say the least, unique:

- In his 2009 book *Arguing With Idiots*, actually praised a obsolete provision of the U.S. Constitution (**Article I, Section 9, Clause 1**) that prohibited Congress from outlawing the slave trade before 1808, and capped taxes on the slave trade at \$10 per slave. The section uses the words "Migration or importation of Persons." In his book, Beck highlights in yellow the phrase "ten dollars for each person," and, concluding that "Migration or importation of Persons" actually means immigration, concludes, *"The Founders actually put a price tag on coming to this country: \$10 a person. Apparently they felt like there was a value to being able to live here. Not anymore. These days we can't ask anything of immigrants -- including that they abide by our laws. [Page 278]*

- Beck frequently points to what he sees as an "obvious, undeniable" link between progressivism and Communism. A couple of weeks ago Beck complained to his listeners that children "are not being taught the evil of Communism and Socialism," which, he claims, enables progressives to, in his words, "mutate it," so that it "goes underground." In attempting to enlighten his listeners to the grave dangers of Communism, Beck has repeatedly told them that Senator Joseph McCarthy was "right," and "telling the truth."
- The good professor frequently warns his students "there will be rivers of blood if we don't have values and principles," thus intimating that America will soon undergo a violent and bloody revolution. (*"The Revolution of 1776 was a picnic compared to what the revolutionaries of today would like to do."*)
- Beck has falsely claimed that there has been "zero warming for over a decade," that Arctic ice "has returned," and that "*carbon dioxide [cannot] be a poison, when it's naturally occurring and the trees use it to grow.*"
- According to Beck, the entire deficit for Fiscal Year 2009 is attributable to the Obama Administration. This, despite the fact that the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities study which concluded that "tax cuts enacted under President George W. Bush, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the economic downturn together explain virtually the *entire* deficit over the next ten years."
- Beck's take on music is also a bit strange: According to the former rodeo roustabout, Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the USA" is "anti-American," "Communist" Woodie Guthrie's "This Land is Your Land" is "secretly about a progressive utopia where there are no owners of anything," and the Beatles' "Revolution" is, no surprisingly, a paean to Marxism.

And on and on. So much false information. So much to fear.

Once in a great while guys like Beck will actually admit that at base, they are entertainers doing, saying and proclaiming whatever it takes to make a fistful of dollars. That's once in a great while. The majority of the time they try to appear or sound like Moses descending from Mount Sinai; God's chosen who bears the awesome

burden of knowing -- and thus instructing humanity in the ways of -- Divine Truth. When guys like Beck say "JUMP!" they don't anticipate their followers to ask "WHY?" If anything, they expect to hear "HOW HIGH SIR?" The "truths" that Beck airs and/or broadcasts on a daily basis tell people that they have so much to fear. And, in a sense, Beck has greatly added to our list of phobias:

- *Prosophobia*: fear of progress;
- *Demiophobia*: fear of Democrats;
- *Gynophobia*: fear of feminists;
- *Paciphobia*: fear of peace;
- *Liberphobia*: fear of liberals;
- *Dendrophobia*: fear of trees in particular, the environment in general.
- *Veriphobia*: fear of the truth.

I for one hope that "Beck U" is a bust. Education is meant to enlighten, uplift, and help people learn the art of critical thinking. It is not meant to create a cadre of robots who are taught that they and they alone know the truth the past, understand the reality of the present, and are ready to make to make the future in the image of their master . . .

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**July 16, 2010**

## **All That Money Can Buy**

The way things are going these days, it would seem that in the minds of many, complex problems demand simple solutions. Why else would so many suggest that the solution to the problem of illegal immigration is simply "Deport every last one of 'em regardless of whether they've been here twenty-five minutes or twenty-five years." Or those who are dead certain that there is an utterly simple solution to the problem of Iran and Ahmadinajad: "Drop an H-bomb on Tehran and send 'em all back to the Stone Age." Or how about those Tea Party folks who claim that the solution to all our political problems is to simply, "Vote out every last incumbent and start over with real people, not career politicians."

The problem with simple solutions is that they are frequently wrong -- and even more frequently mindless. Case in point: "voting out every last incumbent . . . ." There are a couple of huge problems with this "solution." First, if the House and Senate were suddenly to be made up of newcomers and neophytes, there would be neither institutional memory nor the knowledge of how the place works; all power and influence on The Hill would devolve to the staffers, not one of whom was elected by We the people. As someone who has worked on Capitol Hill, I can vouch for the fact that while the lion's share of behind-the-scenes work is done by assistants, the art of political compromise -- that which permits legislation to be enacted -- is done by those who must face the voters ever two or six years. A Congress of political neophytes would wind up being even less responsive than a Congress filled with political veterans.

A second problem inherent in this "throw the bums out" scenario deals with precisely who would run for office. Let's face it: running for the House, Senate or the governor's mansion as a non-incumbent is a full time job. It takes millions of dollars and a large, finely-tuned, politically adroit staff. The first

challenge for any political newcomer is to introduce him/herself to the public - and that takes tons of money . . . or already being a celebrity. Neither Arnold Schwarzenegger, nor Al Franken and but two examples, had to introduce themselves to the voters of California or Minnesota; people obviously knew who they were. They did however have to spend untold millions convincing voters that they were not the characters they portrayed on the screen; that they were neither "Conan the Barbarian" nor "Stuart Smalley;" that they had a handle on the major issues of the day, and wished to be taken seriously. Being public celebrities, they had a relatively easy time raising the required bucks. But imagine if the two were total unknowns. How -- and from whom -- would they have raised the money? Increasingly, the answer has become self financing.

Florida and California provide obvious examples of the self-financed candidate.

Here in the Sunshine State, one multi-centimillionaire and one billionaire have thrown their hats into the ring as first-time political candidates. Former Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) head Rick Scott is running for the Republican nomination for governor against Attorney General (and former Congressman) Bill McCollum. Despite having been an announced candidate only since April 9 of this year (as opposed to McCollum who had been running for more than a year), Scott, who lists his net worth at a minimum of \$219 million, became the front-runner for nomination by June 10. How did he do it? By spending more than \$20 million of his own money on television commercials and print ads. *(As of this weekend, he will have spent more than \$24 million, thus granting McCollum automatic access to public financing dollars. For every dollar Rick Scott spends above \$23.9 million, the State of Florida will contribute a dollar into McCollum's campaign coffer. Scott went to court seeking to overturn this law, arguing that to penalize him for having bottomless pockets is essentially abridging his right of free speech. The circuit court in Tallahassee found against Scott; he has filed an appeal with the 11th Circuit in Atlanta, and has promised to take it all the way to the United States Supreme Court if necessary.)*

Then there is Democratic senate candidate Jeff Greene. Greene, a billionaire investor who made much of his fortune trading credit default swaps (Defined as: "*A financial instrument similar to an insurance policy to protect buyers in the event of a default on, say, a mortgage security*") announced that he was running for the U.S. Senate on April 30, 2010. Miami-Dade area Congressman Kendrick Meek had already been in the race -- and had basically been ceded the nomination -- for nearly a year. Within weeks, Greene had pulled even with Meek. How did he

do it, despite the fact that no one knew who he was? By spending more than \$4 million on television ads in key media markets, that's how.

Both Scott and Greene have said that they will "spend whatever it takes" to win their respective races. Both are urging voters to see and understand that as highly successful businessmen, they obviously know how to create jobs and get things done; that as political newcomers (as opposed to "career politicians" as they have labeled both McCollum and Meek) they are beholden to no one but the voters of Florida. Both are long on flash, short on facts.

Without their millions, neither Scott nor Greene would be in the running. In matter of plain fact, without their millions, it is likely that neither Scott nor Green would be running in the first place.

Then there is California, where former E-Bay head Meg Whitman and former Hewlett-Packard chief executive Carly Fiorina have captured the Republican nomination for, respectively, Governor and United States Senate. According to the latest [Forbes Magazine estimate](#), Ms. Whitman has a net worth of \$1.3 billion; Ms. Fiorina more than \$100 million. In winning the Republican primary Ms. Whitman spent a staggering \$71 million her own money; Ms. Fiorina gave her campaign loans totaling more than \$5.5 million. Both have stated that they, like Floridians Scott and Greene, will spend "whatever it takes" to win their races against, respectively, former Governor Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown and incumbent Senator Barbara Boxer. Both have run amazingly negative campaigns. I for one still don't know what their positions or solutions are to most of the major issues or problems of the day. *(It should be noted that in neither California and Florida, is there an incumbent governor; likewise the Florida senate race is for an open seat; California does have an incumbent senator, Barbara Boxer.)*

All it takes is money. To be sure, there are plenty of über-wealthy politicians in America; always have been, always will be. On Capitol Hill, there are such masters of millions as Representatives Darryl Issa (net worth: \$337,400,000), Jane Harman (\$377,275,000), Jared Polis (\$265,609,998) and Alan Grayson (\$77,963,998) Senator Dianne Feinstein (\$101,849,000); and Senators John Kerry (\$258,959,050), Mark Warner (\$346,085,992) and Herb Kohl (\$265,629,996) to name just a few. (These figures are furnished by the [Center for Responsive Politics](#).) Unlike candidates Scott, Greene, Whitman and Fiorina, none of the above -- with the sole exception of Herb Kohl in his first race back in 1988 -- has ever put money into their own political races. A world in which all incumbents were chased from office would become a world made up of multimillionaire newcomers, few of whom would have any feel for the real needs, the real fears, of real people. In far too many instances, their positions on issues would come either from their unelected staff members or

from those with whom they associate most frequently: the well-heeled who believe that "lower taxes, less regulation, less government" is the answer to everything.

Yes, incumbents do have the equivalent of a 660-yard head start in a mile race. They can send out government-franked brochures that are little more than free campaign literature; they can get their faces and names in the media at the drop of a hat; they rarely have to spend money introducing themselves to the public. Not so challengers; they must spend, spend, spend.

So what is to be done? In two words: PUBLIC FINANCING. Unless and until we enact comprehensive campaign finance legislation that takes private money out of politics, we will be saddled with a choice between incumbents who are rarely defeated and neophytes who can pay for their own campaigns.

Not an enviable choice, but it *is* a rather simple solution to a complex problem.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



July 23, 2010

## **Facts Be Damned**

The great Irish orator and political philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who at one time occupied a lofty perch in the pantheon of conservative gods, once noted that, "*Facts are to the mind what food is to the body.*" And, for at least ten generations, Burke's *bon mot* was as obvious, as unquestionable, as the law of gravity or the superiority of Johnny Bench over Joe Pignatano. Moreover, Burke's truism found favor in the sight of people across the entire political and intellectual spectrum.

But this is no longer the case -- at least for some people.

For far too many of those who identify themselves as "conservative" -- and for whom Edmund Burke is as unknown as Roger Connor (he's the fellow who held the home run record *before* Babe Ruth) -- the word "fact" is frequently preceded by either "so-called" or "alleged." For many, Burke's dictum has been replaced with the words of the late Indiana Representative Earl Landgrebe who, during the Watergate debacle uttered the famous line, "*Don't confuse me with facts, I have a closed mind.*"

Landgrebe (1916-1986), the only Republican to continue believing in Richard Nixon's innocence even *after* the latter's resignation, had no way of knowing that he was, in a sense, rewriting the rulebook for future generations of neocons, radcons and Tea Party enthusiasts. For by today's standards, facts, far from being akin to food for the body, have become more like stumbling blocks on the paths to redemption.

Three examples should suffice:



- **Death Panels:** During the prolonged health care debate, Sarah Palin and others of her political stripe warned that the proposed legislation included a provision for so-called "death panels." If enacted, they warned time and time again, the government would be able to mandate - - and even terminate -- the lives of elderly and infirm Americans as a means of saving money. This was and is, of course, utter twaddle. What Palin and the chatterboxes used as their point of departure, was a provision in the legislation which would permit physicians -- who regularly do discuss end-of-life options with patients and families of patients *in extremis* (which is, after all, part of a compassionate physician's job) -- to charge Medicare for their time and expertise. Period. Somehow, this became transmuted into the neocon's fear-inducing rant over "death panels." Time and time again, experts -- including actual Republican members of the United States Congress and fact checking websites like [Snopes.com](http://Snopes.com) and [FactCheck.org](http://FactCheck.org) -- explained the truth about the proposal; about its inherent benignity. In a rational world, this should have taken care of things. After all, "Facts are to the mind what food is to the body." But no, it did not "take care of things." As recently as July 8 of this year, Rush Limbaugh, in discussing his opposition President Obama's decision to bypass the Senate in appointing Dr. Donald Berwick as head of Medicare and Medicaid services, said confirmation hearings would "lead to the country knowing that death panels are back." Check out the Internet: there are still lots and lots of people warning us about [death panels](#).
- **Headless Corpses in Arizona:** Throughout the entire "illegal immigrant" debate, Arizona Governor Jan Brewer has made some pretty outrageous statements -- not the least of which is claiming that Phoenix is now the world's number two kidnapping capital. Recently, she upped the stakes by announcing on a local television newscast, "Our law enforcement agencies have found bodies in the desert either buried or just lying out there that have been beheaded." The *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank investigated Brewer's claims for a recent article going so far as to check with medical examiners and state police officials in all of Arizona's border counties. His findings? "There's not a follicle of evidence to support Brewer's claim." In [his article](#), Milbank went into exhaustive detail, proving that far from being a haven for violence, Arizona has actually seen a diminution in the number of murders, robberies and assaults over the past 20 years. This should have cleared things up, right? Wrong. Among those [commenting](#) on Milbank's exemplary reporting, we find: "Still no proven facts; only lies for Dana Milbank and his lackey handlers"; "Over 2,000 comments and none have

proven that anything Dana Milbank has spouted is truth;" and "Dana Milbank lies!"

- **L'Affair Sherrod**: The past couple of days, all eyes have been on "L'Affaire Sherrod," the harrowing tale of Shirley Sherrod, the USDA official who was asked to resign her post after it was "revealed" that she was a "reverse racist." Because the facts of this story are both well-known and recent, we will not go into them again. Suffice it to say, it all began with an article/video on über-conservative blogger Andrew Breitbart's Blog, "[BigGovernment.com](http://BigGovernment.com)," in which he ran a highly-edited video clip purporting to show Sherrod admitting to being a racist. Despite the fact that the full video has now been released and the facts known; despite the fact that the white folks she supposedly mistreated have publicly come to her defense; despite the fact the president has personally apologized, and Sherrod has been offered a new (and better) job with USDA; there are still a lot of people who believe with every fiber of their being that she -- along with the administration she serves -- is a dyed-in-the-wool white-hating racist. (Please recall that it was Breitbart who also began the entire stink over ACORN by running a highly-edited video purporting to show a pimp and prostitute being granted assistance by the community group. It was later proven beyond a shadow of a doubt that the video was doctored and that the entire situation was a put-up job. Nonetheless, people continued to bring up the event as proof that Barack Obama supports prostitution . . . )

In other words, for many people nowadays, facts have little -- if indeed, any -- impact upon beliefs. It is a kind of disconnect that I for one find hard to understand. But this disconnect is real, and well documented . . . and now the subject of academic inquiry. In a forthcoming edition of *The Journal of Political Behavior*, Brendan Nyhan, the Robert Wood Johnson Scholar in Public Health Policy at the University of Michigan and Jason Reifler, Assistant Professor of Political Science at Georgia State University, will release their long-anticipated paper, [\*When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions\*](#). Nyhan and Reifler conducted four experiments in which subjects read "mock news articles that included either a misleading claim from a politician or a misleading claim and a correction." Although their research methodology is about what one would expect -- dry as dust -- their conclusions are utterly fascinating. To wit, "Results indicate that corrections frequently fail to reduce misperceptions among the target group." They also documented "several instances" of what they term a "backfire effect," in which "corrections actually *increase* misperceptions among the group in question."

Among the issues Nyhan and Reifler used in their study was the matter of the Bush Administration's misleading claim that Iraq possessed "Weapons of Mass Destruction," (WMDs), thus necessitating the U.S.-led invasion. When members of the control group -- most of whom believed the Bush Administration's initial claim -- was given incontrovertible proof that no such weapons existed, a high percentage, rather than change their mind about the invasion, attacked the source of the facts as being either wrong or politically motivated.

Nyhan and Reifler conclude "*. . . authoritative statements of fact are not reflective of how citizens typically receive information. Instead, people typically receive corrective information within "objective" news reporting pitting two sides of an argument against each another, which is significantly more ambiguous than receiving a correct answer from an omniscient source. In such cases, citizens are likely to resist arguments and evidence contradicting their opinions . . .*"

We see this sort of thing on an almost daily basis. When a Rachel Maddow, Keith Olbermann, Paul Krugman or Barney Frank -- to name but four -- attempt to clarify a misperception or misconception by offering provable facts, their messages will be frequently drowned out in a cacophony of condemnation; the argument will be made that their "so-called facts" should not be heeded because they are either "gay," "liberal," anti-American," or whatever *ad hominem* the other side can come up with. In other words, if you can't *disprove* the fact, denigrate he or she who *delivers* the fact.

Does this mean that we should stop trying to enlighten people by providing them with facts? Certainly not. But what it does mean is that the road is far steeper and pot-hole afflicted than it used to be. Perhaps better than spending our days attempting to teach facts to those who find no inconsistency believing the unbelievable and demonstrably disprovable, we would be wiser working with those who like Mr. Burke, still believe that facts are to the mind what a great meal is to the body.

*Bon appetit!*

*Buen provecho!*

*B'tay avon!*

*Es gezunterheit!*

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**July 30, 2010**

## **Chalk Talk**

On July 18, an ex-felon named Byron Williams was pulled over by the CHP (California Highway Patrol) while driving on I-580 in Northern California. Apparently intoxicated, heavily armed, attired in body armor and wielding "a high powered hunting rifle, a pistol and a shotgun," Williams opened fire at the officers as they approached his vehicle. Within minutes, eight more officers arrived. What then ensued was a five to eight-minute shootout in which an estimated 60 rounds were fired and at least two officers were injured by flying glass. Suffering multiple gunshot wounds himself, Williams was eventually subdued, arrested and then hospitalized.

Williams reportedly told investigators that *"his intention was to start a revolution by traveling to San Francisco and killing people of importance at the **Tides Foundation** and the **ACLU**."* According to Williams' mother, her son *"watched the news on television and was upset by the way Congress was railroading through all these left-wing agenda items."*

Not surprisingly, this story did not make it into the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* or *Ft. Laud. Sun Sentinel*. It was obviously deemed a story of only passing local interest for folks in the Bay Area. I learned about it in an email I received from

Drummond Pike an old and dear college friend, who is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Tides Foundation. Drummond and I were thick as thieves back in the late '60s at the University of California's Adlai Stevenson College, where we engaged in a lot of campus (read: *anti-war*) politics. Drummond is, without question, the most engaged idealist I've ever

known. At the same time, he is a total political animal; he knows how to get things done.

Drummond graduated a year before me, became a Fellow at the Eagleton Institute of Politics (Rutgers University), went to work for a Washington, D.C. advocacy group called the "Center for Community Change," (yes Drummond, I do remember Ralph Caprio!) and eventually went back home to "The City" (S.F.) and created the Tides Foundation. (I became an Eagleton Fellow the year after Drummond, then went to work for Westinghouse Broadcasting, and eventually went off to rabbinic school.)

Few people are aware of the [Tides Foundation](#), despite the fact that its has been engaged in truly important work for a long time. For more than 30 years, its mission has been *"Working with people . . . to make the world a better place."* Over the years, Tides has *"partner[ed] with philanthropists, foundations, activists and organizations across the country and across the globe to promote economic justice, robust democratic processes, and the opportunity to live in a healthy and sustainable environment where human rights are preserved and protected."* For those of us who were privileged to know and work with Drummond back in college, it comes as no surprise what he has been doing all these years; he has always been the sort of person who could not sit idly by without doing everything in his power to make the world a better, most just and equitable place. In creating the Tides Foundation, Drummond found a way of making his ideals real.

So how did it happen that Bryon Williams -- an obviously unstable ex-con -- came to be aware of the Tides Foundation in the first place? And what in the world made him believe it was essential to "kill people of importance" at Tides (and the ACLU) if America was to be delivered from the hands of the far-left?

In two words: "Glenn Beck."

According to a Nexis search undertaken by Media Matters for America, since his television program premiered on Fox back on January 19, 2009, Beck -- and Beck alone -- has brought up the Tides Foundation no fewer than **31 times**. Moreover, the same Nexis search showed that during this same year-and-a-half period, Tides was not mentioned even once on any ABC, NBC, CBS, MSNBC or PBS newscast.

And precisely what is it that Beck had to say about Tides and Drummond Pike while working his by now infamous chalk board? Why that Tides and its subsidiary groups are at the epicenter of the left-wing revolution against America; that it is peopled with members of the "Weather Underground" and are indoctrinating children to believe all sorts of wicked things, including that Capitalism is evil. In this latter case, Beck told his viewers, *"Our Children are being indoctrinated and it must be exposed. It must end because history has shown us where it can lead. Kids in elementary schools are being taught about cross-dressing, that they shouldn't listen to their parents all the time because their parents don't always know what's best. They're taught that capitalism is evil."* (2/5/10). During another broadcast (2/20/09), Beck demanded of his viewers, *"How could you possibly sit on the sidelines when we keep seeing the indoctrination attempts on our children? The anti-Capitalist 'Story of Stuff' that we showed you this video [sic]. Its made by Tides. This audience knows who Tides is."* (N.B. **"The Story of Stuff"** is a delightful series hosted by Allegheny College that teaches and sensitizes children about things like recycling, clean air, clean water and . . . peace. Its videos are currently available in 11 languages ranging from English, French and German to Arabic, Hebrew, Mandarin and Thai.) Moreover, Beck has described Tides as "A major source of revenue for some of the the most extreme groups on the left." [5/21/09; 5/13/09]

([Media Matters for America](#) has the full listing of all 31 times that Beck has discussed the Tides Foundation on his television program.

Should it then come as a total surprise when a fellow like Bryon Williams -- disturbed though he may be -- decides that he must personally do something about Tides and its leadership? After all, hasn't he been told time and again that it/they are largely responsible for much of what ails America? That they are a malevolent cancer infecting our very society? What do chatterboxes like Beck expect devotees like Williams to do? To sit back and say, "Boy, that was entertaining!" Or, "Gee, that fellow Pike's another Joe Stalin; I hope to G-d that the Lord will take care of him while I go get a beer!"

Beck and his colleagues will tell you that they bear virtually no responsibility for the actions of their devotees; that their words and "news stories" should not be viewed as provocations. They are nothing more, nothing less than the exercise of their First Amendment right to free speech.

Indeed, on his July 29 program, Beck stated in mock disbelief, "*So I expose the Tides Foundation and show you what it is, and I am now responsible for terrorist attacks.*" At the same time, Beck has been finding it increasingly necessary to balance his violent rhetoric with warnings against violence. The question then becomes, if, as he claims, he bears no responsibility for the possible violent actions of his viewers/listeners, why then does he feel the need to tell them not to engage in violence?

There are an awful lot of chatterboxes walking the same path as Glenn Beck; men and women who attach disclaimers to all the violent rhetoric they spew. Perhaps they should consider the following:

If you have to *disclaim*, perhaps you shouldn't *declaim*.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



**August 06, 2010**

## **REPEAL THE LAW OF GRAVITY!**

Now that federal Judge Vaughn Walker has found California's controversial Proposition 8 to be unconstitutional, the guardians of morality are gearing up for the next battle. Towards that end, they are back to the sharpening of knives and polishing of brass knuckles. They are bound and determined that opposition to gay marriage remains as much of a ballot-box motivator as Roe-v-Wade or Terri Schiavo in elections of the past. They have responded to Judge Walker's comprehensive -- and quite frankly, masterful -- rejection of their case with both opprobrium and paranoia. They are already suggesting that Walker -- a libertarian-leaning G.W. Bush appointee who has long been out of the closet himself -- of being "*a stalking-horse for gay rights*," a sort of "*Manchurian candidate from beyond the pale of heterosexuality who has been activated by this case to assassinate traditional family values*."

Responding to Judge Walker's decision, the **National Research Council's Tony Perkins** spumed, "It's time for the Far Left to stop insisting that judges redefine our most fundamental institution and using liberal courts to obtain a political goal they cannot obtain by a ballot box."

**Maggie Gallagher**, chair of the **National Organization for Marriage** (MOM) warned that, "*If this ruling is upheld, millions of Americans will face for the first time a legal system that is committed to the view that our deeply held moral views on sex and marriage are unacceptable in the public square . . . . Parents will find that, almost Soviet-style, their own children will be re-educated using their own tax dollars to disrespect their parents' views and values.*"



Even **former Speaker Newt Gingrich** -- hardly a poster-child for family values -- weighed in, defending heterosexual marriage while taking a swipe at Elena Kagan: "*Congress now has the responsibility to act immediately to reaffirm marriage as a union of one man and one woman as our national policy. Today's notorious decision also underscores the importance of the Senate vote tomorrow on the nomination of Elena Kagan to the Supreme Court because judges who oppose the American people are a growing threat to our society.*"

What has these guardians of morality so fraught with anger is not just judge Walker's ruling, but the overwhelming decisiveness of that ruling. In rejecting their arguments in favor of Prop. 8's constitutionality, Judge Walker found their reasoning to be both specious and without legal merit. Part of their case was based on what is called *argumentum de consensu gentium* -- which is basically, "Hey a majority of the people who voted agreed that gay marriage is immoral, so obviously we are right, and that's the law!" This is about as naive as the "proof" of God's existence favored by the Stoics of old, who held, "We know that God exists because so many people worship him . . ." Walker's ruling was a victory of law over sentiment; permitting discrimination based upon popular opinion is, without question, unconstitutional.

Imagine for the moment that Judge Walker had found *against* the plaintiffs, and had permitted Prop. 8 to stand. What is to say that another group of citizens -- backed by their own brand of moral certainty and bankrolled by ultraconservative multimillionaires -- couldn't convince millions of people to go to the polls and endorse a measure making the teaching of evolution illegal? Or declaring that discrimination against, "inferior people" like Hispanics, African Americans, Jews, Muslims or Hindus is legal? Or even one that repealed the Law of Gravity? According to their *argumentum de consensu gentium*, If they could get 50% of the people going to the polls to vote their way, everything would be on the up and up. The Law of Gravity would be a chimera.

Frightening, no?

The legal team arguing for Proposition 8 also relied on a fallacious bit of reasoning called *argumentum ad verecundiam* -- ("argument to respect") which essentially states, "Hey, our argument is binding because it is made by people we know to be authoritative!" One of the two "authorities" used by the defense was David Blankenhorn, president of the Institute of American

Values. During the trial, the defense had Blankenhorn quote from his book, *The Future of Marriage*, attempting to show that he was an expert on the dire consequences of making gay marriage legal. Much of what Blankenhorn testified to came by way of the notorious George Rekers, who, until he was discovered to have taken a European holiday with a lad from "Rentboy.com," had been the head of NARTH, ("National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality"). In his ruling, Judge Walker stated flatly that, *"The Court now determines that Mr. Blankenhorn's testimony constitutes inadmissible opinion testimony that should be given essentially no weight."* And again, *"Blankenhorn lacks the qualifications to offer opinion testimony and, in any event, failed to provide cogent testimony in support of proponents' factual assertions."*

Unbelievably, the other witness, Hak-Shing William Tam, secretary of the "[American Return to God Movement](#)," took the stand at the behest of those who wished to see Proposition 8 overturned. Why? To make a joke out of the defense's *argumentum ad verecundiam*. Tam, whose organization operates the website "[1man1women.net](#)," testified that his group encouraged voters to support Proposition 8 on grounds that "homosexuals are 12 times more likely to molest children," and that "Proposition 8 will cause states one by one to fall into Satan's hands." When asked upon what on what authority he based his information, Tam -- like Blankenhorn -- cited the discredited George Rekers and NARTH, stating that he "believed what they say." Period.

So much for *argumentum de consensu gentium* and *argumentum ad verecundiam*.

The case now will make its way up the legal food chain until one day it reaches the Supreme Court. Speculation at this point has it that because of the thorough, exhaustive and erudite manner in which Judge Walker's decision was written, it will be difficult for any higher court to overturn his ruling. I certainly hope this will be the case and that Judge Walker's ruling will stand. For a reversal would be a gigantic step backwards both in terms of personal liberty and government involvement in the private lives of its citizens.

And if nothing else, I have no desire to live in a country which might repeal the Law of Gravity. . .

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*(For everyone here in Florida -- early voting begins this coming Monday. For those in Broward County, I strongly urge you to vote for [Debra Steinsaltz](#) for Broward County Court Judge, Group 3. Debra will make a spectacular Judge!)*

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**August 13, 2010**

## **AN ILLUSION WORTHY OF DAVID COPPERFIELD**

Without question, David Copperfield (David Seth Kotkin) is the greatest illusionist of our time -- indeed, perhaps of all time. Among his most breathtaking tricks are:

- **The "Laser Illusion,"** in which he or his assistant is cut by a "laser" into two or more parts and then starts walking;
- **The "Flying Illusion,"** in which Copperfield flies about the stage, and then appears to have spinning hoops passed around him in order to prove that he is not suspended by wires, and, my personal favorite,
- **The "Statue of Liberty Illusion,"** in which he makes Lady Liberty "disappear."

Like most, I haven't the slightest idea of how he does any of these illusions -- nor do I really care to know. The one thing I do know is that Copperfield -- like any good illusionist or con-man, is a master of **misdirection**, namely, drawing attention away from the reality at hand. In magic, misdirection takes advantage of the limits of the human mind in order to give the wrong picture and memory. If done by an expert, the illusion succeeds; the human mind can concentrate on only one thing at a time. The magician begins rolling up his sleeves and proclaims "nothing up my sleeve," only to indeed produce an object that never could have been "up his sleeve." Here he succeeds precisely because we, the audience, instinctively scrutinize the magician's arms, but ignore the actual location where the object-to-be-produced is hidden.

Misdirection -- call it deception if you will -- is one of the most important arrows in any prestidigitator's quiver. The same goes for politicians and political parties, whose slight-of-hand feats of illusion, misdirection and deception are often worthy of even Mr. Copperfield.

To my way of thinking, one of the all-time greatest feats of illusion involves the GOP and its neoconservative strategists, who have managed to convince a sizable portion of the American public to endorse economic policies that are clearly *not* in their best interest. And how did they do it? The same way Copperfield made the Statue of Liberty disappear: by shooting off all the most important arrows in their quiver.

Consider the following:

- Over the past several years, GOP strategists convinced a lot of middle-class and lower-middle class Americans to agree that the estate tax should be repealed. Now mind you, the estate tax -- which Republicans repeatedly referred to as a "death tax" -- is applicable to only the richest 2% of the American taxpaying public. And yet, neo- and Radcon strategists misled the public over and over again -- through letters to the editor and opinion pieces, on web sites and through e-mail "trees" -- into believing that almost everyone had to pay it at death. A clear case of misdirection.
- Going in to the Fall elections, Republicans and their Tea Party allies are arguing that *the single-best -- indeed the only -- way to get America out of the Great Recession is by cutting taxes and easing up on regulations. Under Obama and the liberals, they argue, taxes will only get higher and regulations more stringent. And this lethal one-two punch is what got us into our economic doldrums in the first place. Tax cuts, they insist, will put more money into the hands of businesses, which will then be able to use those funds to hire more workers, thus lowering unemployment.* The fact of the matter is that more than 95% of all Americans are currently -- and will continue to be -- receiving a net tax decrease under Obama and the Democrats. Those making more than \$250,000 a year would be "paying more" only in the sense that the tax cuts they received under the George W. Bush Administration (\$1.7 trillion from 2001 to 2003) would be not be renewed. And yet, there are millions and millions of Americans making far, far less than \$250,000 a year who are in favor or renewing these tax cuts. It doesn't make sense.

- According to the tenets of "Supply-Side Economics," after tax cuts "average" income rises, "average" taxes fall, and tax revenues increase. This isn't precisely true. Yes, "average" income does rise, but only because those at the very top are making an awful lot more, thus raising the so-called "average." And, because the wealthiest 1 or 2% are paying quite a bit less in taxes, that drives down the "average" tax rate. To put it another way, I am 6' tall and weigh 155 pounds; Shaquille O'Neal is 7'1" and weighs about 325. That makes our *average* height is 6' 6-1/2"; our *average* weight 240 lbs. And so far as tax cuts causing revenues to rise . . . that is an illusion. And yet, there are millions upon millions of struggling wage-earners who have become convinced that lowering taxes will somehow make everything alright.

So just how have the neo- and radical conservatives managed to get so many Americans to support economic policies that are truly not in their best interests? Wherein is the misdirection? One need look no further than such "Oldie but Goody" emotional social issues as abortion, the teaching of creationism-vs-Darwinism, prayer in the public schools, and gun control, and the newest ones like "illegal aliens," "notch-babies," "repeal of the 14th Amendment" and "creeping socialism." The GOP and their conservative strategists have been masters at identifying these issues, politicizing them, putting together masses of adherents, and then convincing them that *"Those who agree that abortion -- or Darwinism or gun control or notch babies -- goes against both God and the intent of the Founding Fathers, are the truly moral members of American society. And furthermore, truly moral people are also against the Death Tax, in favor of tax cuts for the wealthy, and the repeal of most, if not all, corporate taxes."*

This strategy, which has resulted in so many Americans supporting policies that cannot help them, is absolutely brilliant; an illusion worthy of David Copperfield. But it's also cynical, deceptive, venal, and just plain wrong-headed.

Sort of makes you wish that Mr. Copperfield had an illusion to make the radical conservatives vanish!

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*Last week I urged those of you living in Broward County to vote for Debra Steinsaltz, an outstanding candidate for County Judge, Group 3.*

*This week, I would additionally urge you to vote for two other top-flight candidates for County Judge: Kenneth "Ken" Gottlieb in Group 20, and Nathaniel "Nate" Klitsberg in Group 26. I know both of these gentlemen quite well, have followed their careers for a long time, and believe that they are destined to become distinguished jurists.*



August 20, 2010

## THE MORE THINGS CHANGE

This week's essay marks the 300th I've written and posted since February 4, 2005. I am proud to say that February 4, 2005 was precisely 300 weeks ago, which means that I have kept a promise I made in that first essay (entitled *As Dad Used to Say*): to turn out a column-a-week without fail. Looking back, it's amazing how many things have changed in just 300 weeks. Consider that on February 4, 2005:

- This Blog was called *Beating the Bushes*.
- *Barack Obama* had been a U.S. senator for only four weeks.
- Outside of a few political junkies and the folks up in Alaska, no one had ever heard of Sarah Palin.
- The letters *B.P.* didn't stand for anything in particular.
- *Tweeting* was something that parakeets did.
- The White House and both Houses of Congress were controlled by the GOP.
- *Arnold Schwarzenegger* was nominated for a "Razzie" as "Worst Supporting Actor" for his role in Jackie Chan's "Around the World in Eighty Days."
- *Glenn Beck* was still a year away from becoming a television celebrity.
- *Tea Party* had nothing to do with politics.
- No one was calling for the dismemberment of the 14th Amendment.
- *John McCain* was leading the charge for sensible immigration reform.

But despite all the above, it is nonetheless true that "The more things change, the more they remain the same." Take America's penchant for conspiracies, scapegoating and intolerance. Today -- this week, this month -- the big story swirls around the proposed Islamic "Cordoba House" to be built a couple of blocks from





Ground Zero in Manhattan. Without question, this is the hottest issue in America, capturing the attention -- and fears, suspicions and vehement debate -- of a huge segment of the American public. Everywhere one goes, whichever cable or radio talk station one tunes in, arguments about whether or not Muslims should be "permitted" to tear down the former -- and long abandoned -- Burlington Coat factory at 45-51 Park Place in Lower Manhattan abound. A majority of those polled firmly believe that building a "mosque" on "Ground Zero" is a provocative, deliberately insensitive act. on the part of Muslims extremists. (Although the proposed Cordoba House will contain a prayer space for 1,000-2,000 people, it is primarily *"a community center complete with a 500-seat auditorium, performing arts center, swimming pool, fitness center, basketball court, childcare area, bookstores, culinary school and food court serving halal dishes."* Also, it is not at Ground Zero, but rather about 2 blocks away. It should also be noted that Islam's roots in NYC are in the very area around the site of the World Trade Center, and predate the Twin Towers. In the late 19th century, a portion of lower Manhattan was known as "Little Syria" and was inhabited by Arab immigrants -- both Muslims and Christians -- from the Ottoman Empire.)

Many see in the very name "Cordoba House" a none-too veiled illusion to "Islamic triumphalism, . . . a history of conquest and reconquest that, from the perspective of of Islamists, is at an unfinished stage as of today," as [one writer described it](#). Newt Gingrich -- the expert on everything -- explained to his untutored, unquestioning minyans that "Codoba" was a "deliberately insulting term" on the grounds that it referred to the capital of the Caliphate of Cordoba during the period of Muslim rule in Spain. To Gingrich and many other instant experts, "Cordoba in Islamic terms means Islamic rule of the West." As a student of world history -- especially Jewish history -- I can tell you that the period of Muslim rule in Spain (Al-Andalus) was a "Golden Age" in which science,

mathematics, medicine and literature flourished. It was the time of such Jewish luminaries as Moses Maimonides, Hasdai Ibn Shaprut (physician to Abd al-Rahman's court), Moses ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabirol and Judah Halevi. It was a time in which al-Andalus became a center for Talmudic study, and the Jews were considered *dhimmis* -- "protected non-Muslims."

And yet, for those who up until a few weeks ago thought "Cordoba" was a model put out by Chrysler, and whose spokesman, Ricardo Montalban spoke of the cars "soft Corinthian leather interior," they now believe they know everything about the connection between Cordoba and terrorism. Far too many are convinced that Islam means terrorism; that there is no such thing as a "good Muslim."

Moreover, many now claim that Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, the man spearheading the construction of Cordoba House, is an Islamic extremist. (Even as I write this, Imam Rauf is traveling in the Middle East at the behest of the Obama Administration and Secretary of State Clinton, " . . . assisting with the government's diplomatic agenda in the region. Specifically, Rauf [is] talk[ing] about the ways in which Muslim Americans enjoy the same rights and respect that other Americans enjoy.") Many prominent Republicans, including Florida's own Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen are going before the cameras [proclaiming](#) that "It is unacceptable that US taxpayers are being forced to fund Feisal Abdul Rauf's trip to the Middle East . . . This radical is a terrible choice to be one of the faces of our country overseas." It should be kept in mind that this same "radical Islamic extremist" was also a favorite of the Bush-Cheney Administration, and likewise traveled to the Middle East at their behest as an ambassador of understanding. How tragic that so many of the same Republicans who applauded this Columbia-educated, Kuwaiti-born Sufi then, portray him as but one step removed from the terrorists of 9/11 now. It makes one wonder just how long Imam Rauf is going to remain a moderate . . .

This is not to say that all Republicans are in lock-step with Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin and Ros-Lehtinen. Several prominent conservatives, including Grover Norquist -- who is married to a Muslim -- think that this whole mosque-Islamist-fear business is sending the wrong message to the American people; is taking attention away from such issues as repealing "Obamacare," and the need for tax cuts.

We now hear that many, many Americans are calling for a ban on the construction of any and all new mosques anywhere in the United States. We now read that an increasing percentage (about 20%) believe that President Obama is a

Muslim. More and more Americans believe that it is both the destiny and religious obligation of all Muslims to be terrorists; that regardless of whether or not they are American citizens, they are suspect. This is assigning collective guilt to an entire people; something which at one time or another Jews, Japanese-Americans, Irish Catholics and Mormons have experienced here in America. And mind you, just recently, Glenn Beck actually spoke of the Jewish people's collective guilt in the death of Jesus.

Oy vey!

As maddening as all this is, it is nothing new. Remember, the more things change, the more they remain the same. Despite our First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion, press, speech and assembly; despite the codification of tolerance in our founding documents, America has, I regret to say, a long, long history of xenophobia and intolerance.

- In the Dutch-settled colony of New Amsterdam its Calvinist Governor, Peter Stuyvesant, refused to accept a ship of refugee Jews. Once they finally were permitted in to the settlement, Stuyvesant refused to permit them to walk the walls of the community -- the *sin-qua-non* of citizenship. He did so because "these Jews are heathens." In Anglican Virginia, colonial officials made Sunday church attendance mandatory for all whether one was Anglican (or even Christian) or not.
- As our earliest colonists began pushing West, they met up with the native inhabitants of the land, who they mistakenly referred to as "Indians." They proceeded to round them up, reduced their population by 90-95% and then deported survivors to undeveloped places ironically referred to as "reservations." Colonists believed they were justified in their harsh treatment of these people because, they told themselves, "They have no religions, no government, and are practiced savages."
- In the years leading up to the American Revolution, Britain began to be perceived as a villainous empire; first-generation English immigrants began being viewed with hostility and suspicion. Anti-English sentiment reached such a frenzied height that it became a significant factor in the anti-English, pro-French Thomas Jefferson's defeat of the pro-English John Adams in the 1800 presidential election.
- The Chinese began coming to America in droves beginning in the 1840s. They would play a significant part in building American railroads. By 1880, there were more than 100,000 Chinese living in America. Convinced that these "heathens" posed both a moral and an economic threat to the country,

Congress passed the "Chinese Exclusion Act" in 1882, which stated that Chinese immigration "endangers the good order of certain localities" and would no longer be tolerated. Other responses ranged from bizarre local laws (such as California's tax on the hiring of Chinese-American laborers) to outright violence (such as Oregon's "Chinese Massacre of 1887," in which 31 Chinese Americans were murdered by an angry mob).

- During the 19th century, Mormons came under repeated attack for being an anti-Christian sect which practiced polygamy. They were forced to uproot themselves time and time again, until at last, they wound up settling in the wilds of Utah. Anti-Mormon feeling was so great that when Reed Smoot -- a church elder -- was elected to the United States Senate in 1902, that august body refused to seat him. He was unable to take his official oath of office for nearly 4 years.
- During the years leading up to America's entry into the "Great War" as World War I was known, American hatred and fear of the Germans -- "Huns" they were called" -- was so great that many states passed laws making it illegal to speak German.
- Many readers will remember the incredible fear and hatred of all things Japanese in the 1940s; of how beginning shortly after Pearl Harbor, an estimated 110,000 Japanese Americans, who were considered to be "enemy aliens," were rounded up and sent to detention camps. Sadly, the United States Supreme Court upheld these detentions in both *Hirabayashi v. United States* (1943) and *Korematsu v. United States* (1944).
- In both 1928 and 1960, fear and hatred of Catholics was a major issue in the presidential election. In 1928, it certainly played a major role in then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover's defeat of New York Governor Al Smith. In 1960, it almost derailed the presidential aspirations of John F. Kennedy, who defeated Richard Nixon by a mere eyelash -- and only after he had forthrightly informed the American electorate that he would not be dictated to by the Vatican.
- In New York, Los Angeles and other major American urban centers, Hispanics have been savagely beaten -- either because they were mistaken for Arabs, or were believed to be illegal aliens.

Indeed, it is a sad history. And now we have this orgy of suspicion, fear and hatred toward Muslims. Yes, it is true that the 9/11 terrorists were Muslims. But that does not make all Muslims terrorists or agents of a malevolent worldwide conspiracy. So why don't all the moderate Muslims come out and condemn or distance themselves from their murderous co-coreligionists? Because they secretly support them? Because they are fearful of what their protests might bring about? I

do not have an answer, but do understand that it is far easier to contemplate bravery for others than for oneself.

Do the Muslims of Manhattan have a legal right to build Cordoba House on private property? Yes, they most certainly do. The government has no legal standing when a religious organization wishes to build a structure on private property. That's the law, and there's nothing Newt Gingrich, Sarah Palin or Rush Limbaugh can do about it. Governor Patterson's offer to give them a piece of land the state owns is likely unconstitutional. Should they build on that precise spot? Perhaps not, although that is not my call. I do know that many moderate Muslims are now suggesting that their brethren choose a different parcel on which to build. I also know that this situation has been on the drawing for many, many months, and that it only of late has been made into a civic football for obvious partisan political purposes . . .

I would hope that when we look back on this essay 300 weeks from today -- which will be May 27, 2016 -- we will be amazed at all the *sturm und drang* that was raised about Cordoba House; of how our fear of Muslims kept us from communicating with our neighbors who, it turned out, weren't really all that much different from the rest of us.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



August 27, 2010

## WITH THE NEW YEAR COMES HOPE

In a little less than two weeks, Jews the world over will usher in the New Year 5771 with prayer, song and contemplation. It is the time of year when, we are told, God wipes both our individual and collective slates clean so that we may begin anew, armed with moral energy, spiritual strength and, perhaps most important of all, hope. A few days before *Rosh Hashana*, representatives of Israel and the Palestinians will begin face-to-face negotiations with Secretary of State Clinton in Washington, D.C.; negotiations which one can hope and pray might -- just might -- one day lead to the resolution of a conflict which has been both the bedevilment and the rallying cry of two implacable foes for more than three generations. The Obama Administration's goal is to reach a comprehensive deal within a single year. To be certain this is a tall, tall order.

But it is the beginning of a new year, in which, despite long odds, there is always hope.

Already, pundits, commentators and experts are streaming out of the woodwork, proclaiming that these negotiations -- like all negotiations past -- are doomed to failure; that the issues which have so long divided the two sides -- settlements, reparations, the status of Jerusalem, the right of return -- are so case-hardened as to be unbridgeable. In an August 20 article, the *New York Times'* Ethan Bronner characterized the upcoming talks as a " . . . pairing [of] the unwilling with the unable." Bonner quotes Zakaria al-Qaq, vice president of Al Quds University who, despite being a well-respected Palestinian moderate, views the upcoming negotiations as " . . . the option of the crippled and the helpless . . . an act of self-deception that will lead nowhere." And according Nahum Barnea, Israel's best-known, most respected political columnist: "Most Israelis have decided that

*nothing is going to come out of it, that it will have no bearing on their lives. So why should they care?"*

Nonetheless, it is the beginning of a new year, in which, despite long odds, there is always hope.

Martin Indyk, President Clinton's Ambassador to Israel, believes that many of the issues dividing Jews and Palestinians have already been ironed out in previous negotiations. In a well-reasoned article in today's *New York Times*, Ambassador Indyk expresses why he feels cautiously optimistic about the upcoming negotiations. It is an article well worth reading.

To be certain, there are many who fail to find any comfort in Ambassador Indyk's telling of the story.

For many American Jews, peace between Israel and the Palestinians is something to be wished and prayed for, just so long as it conforms to the Zionist ideal. For many Jews, the very thought of sitting down and negotiating with representatives of a people who refuse to recognize the State of Israel is both pointless and absurd. For many, being a Zionist means never having to see the other side's point of view, because it lacks both truth and moral clarity. In certain circles those who publicly question or have even slight misgivings about Israel's actions are considered disloyal; as those who give "aid and comfort to the enemy."

For more than 50 years, A.I.P.A.C., the American Israel Public Affairs Committee has been *the* unflinching political voice of American Jewry when it comes to Israel. They have long been one of the most respected, most effective lobbying organizations on Capitol Hill, providing information, insight and a distinctly pro-Israel point of view. Their annual Washington dinner (which I have attended twice) is a "must" for the denizens of Capitol Hill; it seemingly brings out more political "stars" -- both Democrat and Republican -- than Hollywood's Academy Awards. To *not* show up is a political *faux pas* of the first order. Where once A.I.P.A.C. was a refreshing young upstart in the world of lobbying, today it has joined the Establishment. This is not to say anything bad or negative about it or its mission; rather merely to state a truism.

Today, however, just in time for the next stage in negotiations, there is an upstart on the block: "J. Street." Founded a mere two years ago, J Street has grown like Topsy. Today, it has a paid staff of more than three dozen, plus regional grassroots organizations throughout the country. J. Street describes its mission as "*Giving political voice to mainstream American Jews and other supporters of Israel who,*

*informed by their progressive and Jewish values, believe that a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is essential to Israel's survival. . ."* Like A.I.P.A.C., J Street provides members of the Administration and the folks on Capitol Hill with information, insight and tangible (read: financial) support. Unlike A.I.P.A.C. however, J Street contends that those who attempt to understand the Palestinian point of view; those who see the need for a two-state solution are still good Zionists; that there is nothing antithetical to being both pro-Israel and pro-peace.

For many, this last statement is far from a given. Just the other night, here in Broward County, we had our first organizational meeting for the South Florida chapter of J Street. About 60 people came, including at least 5 rabbis, several well-known political activists, a local judge, a gentleman who traveled all the way from Port St. Lucie, and a local Palestinian peace activist. As we pulled on to the campus of the Soref Jewish Community Center where the meeting was held, we were greeted by about a dozen protesters holding signs proclaiming "*No Negotiations With Murderers!*" "*J Street Will Spell the Death of Israel!*" and "*Shame On You!*"

Once our meeting began it became clear that several of the people in the auditorium weren't there because of their interest in the J Street agenda or lobbying for a two-state solution. Rather, they were there to disrupt the gathering by challenging virtually everything that was said, and repeatedly reminding us of things like, "It was the Arab leadership who told their brethren to leave Jerusalem in '48," "Prior to 1967 there was no such thing as the 'Palestinian people,'" and "Representative X is an anti-Semite who hates the State of Israel." (This latter assertion, made about a congressman currently running for the United States Senate, was particularly confusing, considering that the man has a near perfect voting record when it comes to Israel. Turns out, their enmity toward this gentleman stemmed from the fact that he had defeated a Jewish incumbent.)

The arguments raised by those intent on disrupting the meeting were nothing new. They are the sort of arguments -- many based on historic animosities and antipathies -- which have long doomed any hope for a peaceful resolution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. These arguments essentially tell the Palestinians "We won't give an inch until you give at least a mile-and-a-half and admit that you are **wrong, wrong, wrong!**"

Once the disruptors were convinced to act like ladies and gentlemen and our conversation was able to proceed, it became clear that all of us were *ohavei tzion*,



namely, "lovers of Israel." It also became clear that a love of Israel *can* be coupled with a desire for real, tangible peace without the fear of being branded a traitor.

From where I sit and write, J Street has come into existence at precisely the right time.

For this is the beginning of a new year, in which, despite long odds there is always hope.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



September 03, 2010

## **SARAH PALIN: THE DEMOCRATS' SECRET WEAPON?**

Increasingly, it seems that one of the favorite non-contact sports among progressive Democrats is the denigration and dismissal of Sarah Palin. One need only watch Keith Olbermann conclude a story/video clip on the former Alaska Governor with the words "This woman is an idiot!" to see how the game is played. Or how Jon Stewart, at the very mention of Mrs. Palin, looks straight into the camera, and gives a withering roll of the eyes. Or how just about anyone writing for *The Huffington Post*, *Media Matters for America* or a hundred-and-one other likeminded blogs must stifle a literary guffaw before tapping out the word **P-a-l-i-n**. For many, Governor (or, as Olbermann would have it "Half Governor") Palin has become a snarky punch line; an anti-intellectual goddess sporting a beehive hairdo; an avatar of narrow-minded intolerance.

Yes it is true: Sarah Palin is no Rhodes Scholar. And truth to tell, she is neither terribly literate nor worldly, and keeps astounding folks by how much she does *not* know. I mean, this is the woman who, when asked about Margaret Thatcher during the 2008 presidential campaign, had no idea who the former British Prime Minister was! Later on, a seemingly chastened Palin made up for this *faux pas* by adopting Thatcher as her "political heroine." (Recently during a television interview on FOX, she proclaimed a deep-seated desire to meet Mrs. Thatcher who, regrettably, is no longer meeting with anyone; she's in the throes of dementia -- a sad truth about her "heroine" of which Governor Palin is apparently unaware.

Then too, this is the woman who when asked by Katie Couric to give her foreign policy experience said, "*As Putin rears his head and comes into the air space of the United States of America, where— where do they go? It's Alaska. It's just right over the border.*" (Watch video clip) On another

occasion, when asked to name the sources from which she gets her news, she became tongue-tied and was unable to name a single magazine or newspaper. What she did manage to get out was simply, "*All of 'em that have been in front of me over all these years.*" (Watch video clip) And once, when asked by a third grader named Brandon what the vice president does, she responded, "*[T]hey're in charge of the U.S. Senate so if they want to they can really get in there with the senators and make a lot of good policy changes that will make life better for Brandon and his family and his classroom.*" (Watch video clip)

Prince Phillip once coined a term for what ails Mrs. Palin: *Dontopedalogy* -- which he defined as "*The science of opening your mouth and putting your foot in it.*"

Of late, columnists, chatterboxes and pundits have taken to commenting on the effect that a Palin endorsement has on political races. So far, "her" candidates have won Republican primaries for either senator or governor in, among other states, Kentucky, Colorado, Arizona, Nevada and Alaska. Then again Palin-backed candidates have also lost primary battles in Washington, Wyoming, Georgia, Tennessee and Kansas. Some have opined that a victory by a Palin-backed candidate is actually good for the Democrats; that in essence, she could turn out to be the Democrats' secret weapon. How so? Because, they reason, when it comes to a general election, Palin/Tea Party-backed Republican candidates will have one of two choices:

- To modify their more radical positions on issues like Social Security, Global Warming and maintaining tax cuts for wealthy Americans by moving closer toward the political center -- which might easily alienate their conservative, Tea Party base or,
- To keep to their conservative anti-government, anti-tax script -- which would tend to make them look far to the right of the mainstream, and thus unacceptable to more moderate voters.

According to this scenario, Democrats could benefit in either case. I have my doubts: recent polling indicates that voters are just as angry with Republicans incumbents as they are with Democratic office holders. Indeed, in a Gallup poll released just today, nearly 40% of those polled said that in their opinion, the best Congress would be one made up of Republicans who had never served in office.

Regardless of what one thinks of Sarah Palin -- her demeanor, her understanding of issues, her quaintness and "aw shucks" anti-intellectualism -- one would do well not to in her word "misunderestimate" her. For the Momma-Grizzly-in-Chief -- or her political handlers -- possess enough instinctual native intelligence to recognize that she is an extraordinarily accurate reflection of where much of contemporary American society is in 2010. For there is out in the hinterland the shuddering, palpable fear that America is no longer the country of our ancestors; that this is no longer a land of white Anglo-Saxon Protestants. One response, of course, is to access blame for all the change. Another -- and here Palin and her Tea Party allies are brilliant -- is to preach a return to an earlier, more ideal time; out with "Ugly Betty" and "The Real Housewives of Beverly Hills" and back in with "Gidget" and "The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet."

Sarah Palin has managed to tap in to what writer Michael Kazan has called "the yearning for a society run by and for ordinary people who lead virtuous lives." And even if Governor Palin is not really as virtuous as her publicity makes her seem, it really is not an issue for her supporters, acolytes and prayer warriors. She is an accurate reflection of a wide swath of contemporary America; a woman who speaks their language, gives voice to their fears, and sees the world through their eyes.

So, make fun of her if you will and mock her if you must.

But do remember one thing: don't ever "misunderestimate" Sarah Palin . . . just in case. For there is far, far more to this Momma Grizzly than meets the eye.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



September 11, 2010

## SHAME ON ALL OF US

Trying to keep up with -- let alone write about -- the various twists and turns in the saga of the Reverend Terry Jones and his on-again-off-again burning of the Quran hasn't been easy. It's been akin to writing about a tennis or boxing match while it's still in progress. Starting with a July 12 Tweet the Reverend Jones began proclaiming September 11th, as "International Burn a Koran (*sic*) Day." Further, he announced that he and the 50 or so members of his Gainesville, Florida-based "Dove World Outreach Center" would burn 200 copies of the Quran and reported, the Talmud as well, on church grounds. And for months, this proclamation drew scant attention from any media outside of perhaps, the *Gainesville Sun*.

That all changed about two weeks ago, when the media -- led by the *New York Times* and MSNBC's Keith Olbermann -- finally began shining a 50,000,000 watt spotlight on the Reverend, his life story, his lunacy and his apocalyptic vision. Suddenly his name, face, and white "Village People" mustache were everywhere. With but a few grains of magic media dust being sprinkled on him, Jones suddenly became as well-known as the U.S.D.A.'s Shirley Sherrod had been in July or the "New Black Panthers" and B.P.'s Tony ("I want my life back") Hayward had been way back in June.

And now, after just barely two weeks under the electron microscope, we know more about Terry Jones than we do our next door neighbor:

- He is a 58-year old former hotel manager who was a classmate of Rush Limbaugh's at Cape Central high school. (I for one see in this factoid proof positive that the good Lord has a *phenemonal* sense of humor.)
- Jones has been using his church as a front for a for-profit furniture company, and has actually had parishioners working upwards of 70 hours a week for no pay.
- He was canned from a church he founded in Cologne, Germany for being too radical.
- Just five weeks ago, Jones published a book entitled *Islam Is of the Devil*, which as of a couple of hours ago, was #5,929 on Amazon's Bestseller Rank (not bad for a 176-page screed published by "Creation House," whose all-time best seller is singer Pat Boone's *A New Song*.)
- Over the past several days, Jones has been personally contacted by General David Petraeus and Secretary of Defense Gates, both of whom urged him not to go through with "International Burn A Koran Day." Both men stressed what a deleterious effect Jones' planned book burning would likely have on American troops in Afghanistan.
- In addition to Petraeus and Gates, Jones has been publicly mentioned and admonished by President Obama, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, former Governor Sarah Palin, Glenn Beck, Pope Benedict, Angelina Jolie, NATO, Interpol, every country in the European Union as well as most every religious group in the civilized world.
- The foreign ministries of Pakistan and Bahrain issued official denunciations, with Bahrain calling it a "shameful act which is incompatible with the principles of tolerance and coexistence." The president of Indonesia, the world's most popularious Muslim nation, also sent a letter to President Obama asking him to stop the bonfire. In Pakistan, about 200 lawyers and civil society members marched and burned a U.S. flag in the central Pakistani city of Multan, demanding that Washington halt the burning of the Muslim holy book.

As of this morning, the Reverend Jones and his flock will not be burning the Quran -- "today or any other day." At first, he claimed to have reached "an understanding" with both Florida-based Imam Muhammed Masri and New York-based Imam Feisal Abdel Rauf, the leader of what Jones and his followers have dubbed the "Ground Zero Mosque." According to Jones, both Masri and Rauf had agreed to move the proposed mosque away

from "Ground Zero." Both men quickly denied that they had made any such promise. Finally, Jones, accompanied by Texas-based evangelist Kilari Anand Paul gave unequivocal assurances that he would not set any Qurans on fire.

All of the above has played out on the front pages of the nation's -- indeed the world's -- press, and has been the lead story on both network and cable news broadcasts for at least the past week. No wonder the Reverend's book sales are soaring. We've debated whether or not Jones has the legal right to burn the Quran in public (yes), but if so, does this mean he should do it. We've wondered aloud what sort of a face Jones and his followers are giving Christianity in the eyes of the non-Christian world. Won't his actions, many argue, provide fodder for people around the world to claim that *all Christians* are anti-Muslim bigots, in much the same way that many claim that the horror of 9-11 proves that *all Muslims* are terrorists?

All this over one intolerant, bigoted religious fanatic with a book to sell and the utter certainty that he has been anointed to do battle against the forces of evil. When we -- the media, and media-addicted public -- put someone like Terry Jones under our 24-hour a day electron microscope, an anonymous nobody is turned into an international celebrity; the flea becomes a Tyrannosaurus Rex; the scribbler becomes a best-selling author.

How utterly amazing.

How utterly depressing.

Shame on all of us, for as sure as God made little green apples, we are all to blame.

A year from today -- on the 10th anniversary of 9/11 -- there will undoubtedly be sidebar pieces about Terry Jones; articles which ask "Whatever Became of Him?" "Where is he now?" and "Do You Remember . . .?" By then, he will likely have sold his church's 20 acre plot for a lot of money, sold a ton of books, and returned to being a deservedly anonymous bigot. And we -- the public and the press -- we will yet be creating new instant celebrities -- people who a generation or two ago would have lived what Thoreau called "lives of quiet desperation."

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



September 16, 2010

## *"The Pianists: A Parable"*

*This week, instead of the normal political op-ed piece, I've written a short story entitled "The Pianists: A Parable." In addition to being this week's piece, it is also going to be my sermon for Erev Rosh Hashanah. In its own way, its plenty political.*

*(Note: The following was discovered on a papyrus scroll in a cave. Due to its extreme age, estimated at not less than 1,800 years old, there were many gaps (or lacunae) which made the text difficult to render . . .)*

Once upon a time long ago, a group of weary wanderers received a Divine Commandment from on high. It forever changed their lives. The resonating basso voice of the Nameless Muse said: "Thou has been chosen for greatness. Hear now this commandment that I command thee this day: Thou shalt become Piano Players and lovers of music. Throughout all thy generations, thou shalt diligently teach thy children to study and to practice, to play and to love, the music of the Piano. For Piano is thy life and the length of thy days. It shall add glory, meaning and contentment to thy lives. Piano shall fulfill thy souls. I am thy Muse."



To facilitate their lives, Co\* [***This pronoun means "he/she"***] gave them a manuscript with explicit step-by-step instructions on how to build a proper piano. To further guide them along their path, the Muse also provided the Piano Players (or “Pianists”) with The Holy Score, which contained Sonatas, Fantasies, and Concertos, Partitas, Trios and Quartets. Needless to say, those hearing the Muse’s Divine Directive were moved beyond compare; slowly they began seeking the means to fulfill Co’s awesome decree. This they did throughout their generations, as they continued wandering the wilderness, ever searching for their place in the sun.

After many years of meandering, the nascent Pianists did find a permanent home in a land they called “Pastoral.” Once settled, they began devoting their lives to Piano and its attendant joys. Over many generations, they became renowned for the skill and artistry, the dedication and single-mindedness with which they fulfilled their Prime Command. They endlessly studied the Holy Score, adding variations and brilliantly original compositions of their own. They were a happy people living happy, creative lives. But there were dark clouds on the horizon. . .

Other peoples and cultures (whom they simply referred to as “Outsiders”) mocked them and scorned them. They seemed so different. In a sense, they were. For owing to the extreme discipline required in order to become players of Piano and lovers of music, the Pianists generally lived by apart from all others. They even developed their own language with which to speak amongst themselves; they called it “P’santayr.” Not having been witness to the original Command on High, Outsiders could not understand the commitment and devotion with which the Pianists lived their lives. They kept strange hours and seemed to do nothing but practice, practice, practice.

They played pieces from the Holy Score religiously three times each day. One day in seven they rested, doing nothing but attending the Odeon – their place of musical devotion. They dressed alike and all ate high protein diets. They rarely participated in activities that the Outsiders considered “important” or “necessary.” How, the Outsider’s wondered, could any people devote so much of their lives to something as frivolous and nonproductive as Piano playing and music?

Because of their uniqueness, they were often persecuted. In fact, many Outsider cultures tried to eliminate them. Many believed that the Piano Players were an powerful, monolithic force bent upon taking over the entire world. Strangely, others saw in the Piano Players an inherent weakness that made them susceptible to the will of the devil. Against all reason, the Outsiders became convinced that the Piano Players believed themselves to be better than everyone else, although this certainly was not the case. True, the Muse had long ago informed the Pianists that they were Co’s “Chosen People.” But that did not make them better – only chosen. But Chosen for what? Why to be Players of Piano and devotees of music – not an easy task when you think about it. No, they were not better, but they were different and unique. Unfortunately, many people could not (and still cannot) understand that people who are “different” or “unique” need not be feared.

After generations of living extraordinary lives in Pastoral, the Pianists were conquered by Outsiders and forced to leave their homeland. Before long, they were dispersed to the four corners of the earth. As the generations came and went, the Piano Players contributed greatly to the countries and cultures in which they found themselves living. They continued to be persecuted and scorned for their uniqueness. To the Outsider way of

thinking, they just didn't fit in. Nonetheless, they did continue to provide both themselves and the entire world with sonatas, concertos and symphonies of dazzling brilliance and profundity. They created a body of musical literature that covered virtually every emotional aspect of life. No matter where they found themselves in the wide world, they continued to study, to play, and to luxuriate in the heavenly music they had been commanded to create. It gave their lives meaning and purpose, just as the Muse had predicted. And, despite the fact that they were grossly misunderstood and even harmed, music continued to be the central focus of their lives – the driving force that kept them together as a people.

After 2,000 or more years, the Pianists lived in almost every country in the world. Never vast in number, they were nonetheless believed by the Outsiders to be an enormous monolithic congregation. In a sense, one can readily understand how the Outsiders might reach this unwarranted conclusion. Because of their unique culture and common purpose, they felt themselves to be a single family. Theirs was a singular global connection. Since all Piano Players adhered to roughly the same daily ritual of practice and study, they understood each other's lifestyles, needs and expectations. And since they all spoke "P'santayr," they could communicate with one another whenever the need arose.

For countless generations, Pianists would only marry amongst themselves. This they felt to be their sacred obligation. Whenever or wherever a community of Pianists might suffer, their fellows could always be counted on to come to their aid. Additionally, when finally permitted to enter mainstream professions – law, medicine, banking and academics – the Pianists tended to become rather successful. This was due in great part to the

tremendous discipline and love of learning that had been instilled in them throughout all their generations. Simply stated, they approached each and every challenge as if it were part of the Holy Score. The Outsiders – perhaps through jealousy, envy, or sheer ignorance – had a tendency to look upon their success as positive proof that the Pianists were international conspirators – evil people bent upon taking over the entire world. Nothing could have been further from the truth.

With the arrival of modern times, many strange things began to occur amongst the Piano Players. They found the pull of Outsider society to be increasingly strong and alluring. The time they devoted to playing Piano and studying music became less and less. While most considered themselves devoted Pianists in the cultural sense, many turned from age-old forms of study and practice. They no longer trained their children for a lifetime of playing and love of music. Why? Many said that they were deeply concerned lest their children feel “odd” or “strange” around their Outsider neighbors. No longer did they play Piano three times a day, as had their ancestors. Rarely did they attend the Odeon on the Seventh Day. No longer did they steep their children in the musical culture of their grandfathers and grandmothers.

Rather, now they began sending them to twice-weekly lessons for three or four years in order to learn to play but a single piece of Piano music – and largely by rote at that. The parents rarely, if ever, took their children to the Odeon on the Seventh Day. In far too many homes, the children were unable to practice, for the parents did not even have a Piano. The message these children often received was: “Piano must be important to you for the next several years.”

“Why?” their children would ask.

“Because we say so,” the parents would answer.

Often they would add: “But, if after you have completed your lessons, you do not want to continue, that will be your decision.” The children questioned why something that should be important to them was rarely seen or heard within their own homes. It was a very good question, a very good question indeed.

It eventually became the custom that at the age of thirteen, each child would play his or her single piece of music at a glorious recital that would be attended by family and friends. Plans for the recital (and the banquet that would follow) began years before the child knew how to locate Middle C, or had ever heard of Bach, Beethoven or Brahms. The day of the recital was filled with tension and anxiety, lest the child not “perform” up to capacity. It became increasingly obvious that many of those who attended these recitals did not have the slightest idea of how to act or what to expect. They had become, in short, a musically illiterate folk.

Many of those in attendance would recall their own recitals, and realize that it was really the last time they had ever played Piano, attended the Odeon, or devoted themselves to music. Some would remember their parents and grandparents, and how they devoted their lives to the pursuit of Piano and music. But these children – the ones who played the single recital piece – were different. Despite the fact that they might play their single piece with ability and skill, they were incapable of reading the musical score or recognizing its worth. Moreover, few, if any, had the true love of music,

which the Muse had long ago commanded. True to form, few would ever play Piano after their recital. This new generation merely went through the motions without much feeling or understanding. What they did understand, was that after the recital, they would receive gifts of money. After the performance, the family would throw a magnificent banquet that would last until all hours of the night. Quite often these festivities cost far more than the family could truly afford.

The elders grew fearful. “How silly it is to spent all that time and money just to teach our children a single piece of music,” they said. “And for what? For the sake of a single recital and a great feast? It is a tragedy. Our children no long truly know how to play Piano, speak ‘P’santayr,” or have that great love and devotion to music which has always been our heritage. Where will it all end?”

But the elders came to realize that they were, at least in part, to blame. They were the ones who took to speaking “P’santayr” only when they did not wish their children to understand. Then too, they were the ones who let the very culture of Piano slowly slip through their fingers, preferring instead the ways of their non-Pianist neighbors.

Fortunately, the elders, working in consonance with their children and grandchildren, came up with a solution that not only solved their growing problem, but actually caused a musical renaissance among the Pianists. In short, they . . .

*(At this point, the manuscript suddenly ended, leaving posterity to ponder just what the solution was).*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



September 24, 2010

## **YOU CAN'T TEACH AN OLD DOGMA NEW TRICKS**

While reading through the Republican's 48-page "A Pledge to America" yesterday, I found myself recalling a wisecrack from the pen of Dorothy Parker, the fabled "Mouth that Roared." For in her review of Benito Mussolini's 1910 novel, *The Cardinal's Mistress*, (Yes, Mussolini *did* write a cheesy novel!) Miss Parker quipped: "*This is not a novel to be tossed aside lightly. It should be thrown with great force!*" These 17 words pretty much sum up my response to that which Boehner, Cantor and the gang unveiled before the press at the Tart Lumber Yard near Dulles International Airport. Besides casting themselves as the reincarnation of the Founding Fathers, offering such banalities as "Support the Troops! Fight the terrorists!" "Create jobs, end economic uncertainty and make America more competitive!" and promising to "cut taxes and spending," "downsize government," "cut out fraud, waste and abuse," "get rid of the Obama health care plan" and "shore up America's missile defense," the putative Speaker-in-Waiting and his minions offered nothing new, nothing compelling, nothing even remotely useful.

Truth to tell, despite what most polls tell us about the upcoming midterm elections, the Republicans are still threading a needle between the Scylla of their more moderate, rational acolytes (about a half dozen of 'em) and the Charybdis of all those Tea Partiers demanding a return to the unregulated 1920s. To have put anything more concrete, more challenging or definitive into their "Pledge" would likely have drawn the ire of one side or the other. But if, as some say, you can measure the relative success of a proposal by the number of people who hate it, then Boehner & Company are already



succeeding beyond their wildest expectations. For shortly after their press conference (in which all the representatives shed their suit coats and ties in an effort to look like 'one of the guys') a coalition of conservative groups announced they had allied to push for a constitutional amendment requiring a balanced budget -- a policy left out of the pledge. Then too, a host of Tea Party activists expressed their frustration and disappointment over a lack of specifics. "The first time you read it, it's like 'Yeah, this is all right,'" said Andrew Ian Dodge, a coordinator for the Tea Party Patriots in Maine. "Every time you read it, it gets less satisfying. It's full of platitudes . . . . There are all these words that tea party people like, but there's nothing concrete in it."

It has long been axiomatic among Republicans and other fiscal hawks that cutting taxes during a recession is the one sure-fire method of curing what ails the economy. Hells bells! According to Republicans and other fiscal hawks, cutting taxes is a sure fire cure for mumps, measles, Dengue fever and the Yaws! As we have recounted in previous articles, according to this theory, when taxes are cut -- and especially for the wealthy -- more money is freed up to expand business and thus create jobs. Of this, fiscal hawks and Supply Side enthusiasts are absolutely, positively certain. And yet, there is a ton of anecdotal evidence to the contrary. Consider the fact that during the eight years Ronald Reagan was president there was a horrible recession in progress. So what did he do? He enacted what at the time was *the largest tax increase* in American history -- \$100 billion. And what did he have to show for it? The creation of approximately 17 million new jobs.

Likewise during Bill Clinton's eight presidential years, he went Reagan one better and enacted an even larger tax increase. The result? The creation of an additional 23 million new jobs. In other words, during their sixteen years in office, Reagan and Clinton both faced stiff recessions. Both raised taxes against the wishes and perceived wisdom of all the fiscal conservatives. And between them, they created better than 40 million new jobs. (That works out to 2.5 million new jobs a year for 16 years.) Compare and contrast this to the eight years of George W. Bush, who instituted the single-largest tax cut in American history. During his eight years, he created just a shade over 3 million new jobs -- about 375,000 a year for eight years.

Then too, Boehner & Company's "Pledge to America" promises to "restore fiscal sanity" by cutting the federal deficit -- a noble idea to be certain.

However, making all the Bush tax cuts permanent would have the precisely opposite effect; it would add an estimated \$4 trillion to the federal deficit over the next decade. When asked how the Republicans could square their plan to cut the deficit with making all the tax cuts permanent, Speaker-in-Waiting Boehner talked up cutting the federal budget; focusing on that old bugbear, "discretionary spending," which, Boehner promised, Republicans would cut by "at least \$100 billion in the first year alone." For all those who truly believe this, put your money on the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Seattle Mariners for the 2011 baseball season. In all honesty, sucking \$100 billion out of discretionary programs would, in the words of the *Washington Post's* Eugene Robinson, "require draconian cuts in programs, such as education grants, that both red states and blue states have come to depend on."

"But," the Republicans argue, "if we make all the tax cuts permanent, it will result in a net reduction of the federal deficit; it will pay for itself." Just like all those oil revenues would pay for the war in Iraq . . .

In their "pledge," the Republicans also promote a hiring freeze for federal employees -- "exempting the defense and security sectors." This makes about as much sense as raking leaves in the midst of a windstorm. Since the private sector is currently creating no more than, say, 85,000 jobs a month, a public-sector job freeze would only ensure that unemployment remains higher than it otherwise would have been. Unbelievably, the "pledge" also proposes embargoing any funds from last year's stimulus bill that have not already been spent -- money that is meant to keep construction workers, teachers, firefighters and others on the job.

Let's face facts: if Americans who might have been hired by the federal government or paid with stimulus funds are out of work, they won't have any money to spend on goods and services -- and businesses, facing lower demand for their goods and services, won't hire workers or invest in new facilities. And that would only deepen the recession.

This doesn't even get into the Republican's proposal to "fully fund missile defense" against the Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) that Iran and North Korea may or may not one day come to possess. What the Republicans are proposing here is a program that will cost a minimum of \$1 trillion; just try adding that to a dangerously out-of-whack federal budget.

I urge you to read their "Pledge to America" for yourself. It just might put in mind yet another one of Dorothy Parker's great barbs:

"You can't teach an old dogma new tricks!"

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**October 01, 2010**

## **AMERICANS DON'T KNOW JACK**

In December of last year, the prestigious Bertlesmann Foundation's "Religion Monitor" released results of an international survey which concluded that "With 89% of the population religious and 62% highly so, the United States is the most religious nation in the industrialized world." "In comparison," the survey concluded, "faith plays a far less significant role in developed European countries such as Britain, France and Germany."

Hallelujah!

Compare and contrast this to the results of a hot-off-the-press Pew Research Survey. It concludes that "Although America is the most religious country among industrialized nations, we know little about our religion -- our own and even less about other religions."

According to Stephen Prothero, professor of Religion at Boston University, we are a nation of "religious illiterates," people who, while embracing the "feel good" aspects of faith, know next to nothing about the history or implications of those "good feelings."

In other words, when it comes to religion, Americans don't know Jack.

On June 6 of this year, the good folks at Pew Research asked 3,412 "randomly sampled" adults thirty-two questions about religion. (If you are interested in seeing how you do on an abridged, 15-question version of Pew's "*Religious Knowledge Quiz*" please follow this [link](#).)

Amazingly, they concluded that when it comes to overall religious knowledge, "Atheists, and agnostics, Jews and Mormons are among the highest-scoring groups . . . outperforming evangelical Protestants, mainline Protestants and Catholics." While the 3,412 "randomly sampled" adults averaged 16 correct answers (out of 32), Atheist/Agnostics averaged 20.9; Jews 20.5, and Mormons 20.3. Compare this to Evangelical Protestants who averaged 17.6; Catholics 16.0, and Mainline Protestants 15.8. Trailing the pack were Hispanic Catholics with a woeful 11.6.

About half of those surveyed (55%) knew that the "Golden Rule" is not one of the Ten Commandments; less than half (45%) could name the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Less than a third of those polled (27%) knew that "Most people in Indonesia are Muslim." 16% were aware that "Only Protestants (not Catholics) traditionally teach that salvation comes through faith alone." And only a dismal 8% knew that Maimonides was Jewish.

On the positive side, 85% knew that an Atheist is "someone who does not believe in God," and 82% knew that Mother Teresa was a Catholic.

Now mind you, the questions weren't terribly difficult or searching; nothing about defining *transubstantiation*, discussing the synoptic qualities found in the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas or Hillel's take on the *Shema* with that of Shammai. No, the questions were as simple as:

**Which Biblical figure is most closely associated with the Exodus from Egypt?**

Job\_\_\_ Elijah\_\_\_ Moses\_\_\_ Abraham\_\_\_

**Is Ramadan . . . ?**

The Hindu festival of lights\_\_\_ A Jewish day of Atonement\_\_\_ The Islamic holy month\_\_\_

**What was Joseph Smith's religion?**

Catholic\_\_\_ Jewish\_\_\_ Buddhist\_\_\_ Mormon\_\_\_ Hindu\_\_\_ **and**

**According to rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court, is a public school teacher permitted to read from the Bible as an example of literature or not?**

Yes, permitted\_\_ No, not permitted\_\_

(The answers to the above, by the way are 'Moses,' 'The Islamic holy month,' 'Mormon,' and 'Yes, permitted.')

Why it is that Atheists and Agnostics score so relatively high should come as little surprise: for one to be highly dubious of -- if not militantly against -- religion, it likely takes a combination of knowledge, experience searching, and contemplation. For Jews and Mormons to come in basically tied for second is fascinating, and at first somewhat anomalous; the former is the West's oldest religion tradition, while the later among its newest. And yet, both place great emphasis on learning and genealogy.

That the industrialized world's "most religious nation" should contain so many "religious illiterates" is inconsistent at best, deplorable at worst. And yet, without question, its reification is being made manifest in the positions and platforms of many candidates and chatterboxes who endlessly drone on about a "return to traditional values." For the religiously literate, "traditional values" include caring for the sick, the halt, the lame, the elderly and the "stranger in our gate." These values -- garnered largely from our common Biblical heritage, teach us that yes, we are our brother's (and sister's) keeper. So how is it that many of those who are loudest when it comes to testifying about their close, personal relationship with God, are at the same time against any and all programs that might aid the poorest in our midst? It would seem that for many of these religious illiterates -- people who blithely pick and choose what it is and is not that the Lord expects from us -- that life begins at conception . . . but ends at birth.

There is in modern parlance an idiom about "talking the talk and walking the walk." It would seem that folks like Christine O'Donnell, Sharron Angle, Rand Paul, Joe Miller and a host of others are far more expert at the former than the latter. They endlessly tell us of their piety, their morality, their strict adherence and devotion to "traditional values" but then lie about their education, take money from their

campaign coffers for personal use, talk about doing violence against those who are their perceived enemies, and consider the opposition to be evil incarnate. For so-called religious folks, they are, to my way of thinking, morally challenged.

As Antonio informed Bassanio, *"The devil can cite scripture for his purpose. An evil soul producing holy witness is like a villain with a smiling cheek, a goodly apple rotten at the heart . . ."*

Don't be fooled. There's a world of difference between proclaiming one's religiosity and living by religious precepts.

To all those whose proclamations are at odds with their actions, who say they are religious but don't know Jack, I would beg them to remember the words of Matthew (6:6):

*"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door, and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



October 08, 2010

## **A LETTER TO M. AROUET**

Good Afternoon M. Arouet:

In light of a case that was heard by the Supreme Court this week, I found myself thinking about you and something you wrote a long time ago. In case you weren't aware, the Court heard arguments in a lawsuit filed by the father of a Marine killed in Iraq in 2006, whose funeral was picketed by the Reverend Fred Phelps and a handful of protesters from his Westboro Baptist Church out in Topeka. These so-called "Christians" turned compassion on its head by carrying signs saying things like "Thank God for Dead Soldiers," "Death to Fags," and "Thank God for IEDs." (Since you've been gone for nearly 225 years, there is no way you'd know what "IED" stands for; it's "Improvised Explosive Device." You may wish to consult Emma Goldman or Alexander Berkman for a more complete understanding.)

Now mind you, this was no isolated event. The Reverend Phelps and his missionaries of miscreance have shown up at lots of funerals for dead soldiers. Somehow the Reverend Phelps got it into his head that the good Lord is punishing America and its soldiers because of its tolerance for homosexuality.



In any event, the father of the dead soldier sued the Reverend Phelps and his church for a ton of money -- \$5 million to be precise -- and won. Then the award was thrown out on the grounds that when Phelps and his followers were accusing the dead soldier's father of having raised his son "to defy the Creator" and "serve the devil," they were merely exercising their right of free-speech.

That's when I started thinking about something you wrote a long, long time ago. If I remember correctly, you once wrote -- not as "M. Arouet," but rather as "Voltaire" -- *I may disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it.* Have I got it correct? OK, well let me tell you something. For years and years -- ever since I first read your words -- I thought that you were right on the money; no one agreed with you more. But now, I've got to tell you, I'm beginning to wonder -- wonder if you were 100% correct; wonder if perhaps there are times when we, as a supposedly civilized society, have the both the moral *and the legal right* to tell people like Fred Phelps to "shut the hell up"; wonder if some kinds of speech are not free, not protected.

Oh yes, I'm well aware of Holmes' observation that one is not permitted to "Yell fire in a crowded theatre." And I know that there are instances and circumstances when hate speech is not free. But what about this case? Is it merely a matter of a bunch of loony-tunes exercising their constitutionally guaranteed right to speak freely -- regardless of what anyone may think of it -- or is this beyond the pale? Do good taste and human decency have a role to play in all this? For if they do, then the Reverend Phelps *et al* are guilty as sin and should be made to fork over a *minimum* of \$5 million. (Personally, I think \$500 million would be more like it.)

Now mind you, I am no Pangloss; I am neither an "optimistic metaphysician" nor a fool. I am, however, a staunch progressive who is feeling more and more troubled by the cascading swirl of ignorance, intolerance, and imbalance that is pervading modern American society. Case in point, yet another "free speech" case: *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission* 558 US 50 (2010), in

which our Supreme Court held that "corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections cannot be limited by the First Amendment." Unbelievably, 5 of the 9 justices held that corporations are people, and as such, cannot be deprived of "life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness." What this has come to mean is that very, very, very wealthy people can now pump unlimited tens -- or even hundreds -- of millions of dollars -- ANONYMOUSLY -- into what we call "501(c)(4)" organizations in order to get the folks *they* want elected to office. Is it any wonder that so many political Neanderthals are on the verge of entering Congress?

Ironically, it would seem that the same five justices who sided with Citizens United -- determining that placing limits on campaign contributions is an abridgement of free speech -- will likely rule that what the Reverend Phelps and his followers have done is *not* free speech, and therefore actionable. Is this nuts or what?

I've got to tell you M. Arouet: I'm really confused and upset. My progressive instincts tell me that you are correct -- that we *should* "defend to the death" one's right to spew utter nonsense. For "The only way to make sure people you agree with can speak," to borrow a quote from an anonymous source, ". . . is to support the rights of people you don't agree with." Yeah, on paper and on some ideal plain, it makes a lot of sense. But neither *Snyder v Phelps* nor *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission* is on some "ideal plain." It is part of a real, increasingly nonsensical world where even Candide, Cacambo and Pangloss would throw up their hands in disgust.

I wish to God I knew what the answer was -- how to balance the Constitution and compassion -- that which is legally protected and that which is utterly boorish. Perhaps you could do me a favor and consult with President Jefferson. If you can't locate him, just ask your good friend Mr. Franklin; I'm sure he will know. And if you can't get back to me with an answer, I guess I'll just have to settle for something else you once wrote:

*"Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd."*

Thanks for your time,

KFS

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October 15, 2010

## **ALAN GRAYSON: THE SECOND COMING OF VITO MARCANTONIO**

*(Due to a very heavy editing schedule, this week's essay is taken from my new book, "The Jews of Capitol Hill" Alan Grayson, the Democratic representative from Florida's 8th District (Orlando) is a firebrand with a tendency to shoot from the hip . . . and the lip. In a recent article in "The Nation" magazine, writer Mark Pinsky wrote of Grayson that "Congress has not seen his like since firebrand Vito Marcantonio represented Harlem during the cold war." Grayson has become one of the Republicans' -- and the Tea Party's -- number one targets in the upcoming election, and believe he is -- literally -- insane. His supporters believe he is a breath of fresh air blowing at the speed of a category 5 hurricane . . . .)*

In 1968 Pop Art icon Andy Warhol prophesied, "In the future, everyone will be world famous for fifteen minutes. At the time -- long before the creation of the Internet, Google, Face Book, Twitter and untold dozens of cable outlets -- Warhol's declaration was taken to be "just another peculiar statement from an outrageous artist." Turns out, Warhol was more than prophetic. What the "Pope of Pop" could not have predicted, however, was that a person could also go from anonymity to notoriety in fifteen minutes.

Consider the case of Florida Representative Alan Mark Grayson.

On the evening of September 29, 2009, in the midst of the highly partisan, highly contentious debate on national health care, Grayson gave a brief speech on the House floor. His speech was, to put it mildly, a doozey. So much so that *within 24 hours*, he was no longer an anonymous freshman from Florida's Eighth District; he had become "the darling of the liberal blogosphere." Moreover, was the topic of a brief, spirited debate on both CNN and Fox News; his speech had received more than one million hits on You Tube; he was the recipient of more than \$100,000 in campaign contributions from around the country.

In the tongue-in-cheek speech that took him from utter anonymity to total notoriety, Grayson said:

*It's my duty and pride tonight to be able to announce exactly what the Republicans plan to do for health care in America . . . It's a very simple plan. Here it is. The Republican health care plan for America: 'don't get sick.' If you have insurance don't get sick, if you don't have insurance, don't get sick; if you're sick, don't get sick. Just don't get sick . . . If you do get sick America, the Republican health care plan is this: 'die quickly.'"*

Grayson quickly became a "rock star" and totally identified with this one speech. Not long after "the speech," he attended the Florida Democratic Party's annual convention, where, "People stood in line to take pictures with him and gush over him, and a room where he was later part of a panel discussion had to be doubled in size because turnout was twice what was expected." When Grayson began talking about health care, people in the panel discussion audience began shouting, "Say it! Say it!" Grayson complied, "*Don't get sick. And if you do get sick, die quickly.*" The crowd cheered.

Not surprisingly, immediately after giving the speech on the House floor, Republicans demanded that Grayson apologize. The next day, Grayson did issue an apology – sort of: Instead of saying he was sorry about accusing Republicans of wanting people to "die quickly," Grayson gave an apology "to the dead." "I would like to apologize," he said, ". . . to the dead and their families that we haven't voted sooner to end this holocaust in America." Grayson, who actually launched a website "to honor and name those who died from a lack of health insurance" (<http://namesofthedead.com>) did eventually apologize to the Jewish community for using the term "holocaust." A spokesman for the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee called Grayson ". . . an unstable man who has come unhinged." The Chair of Florida's Republican Party called Grayson "The laughing stock of the House of Representatives, and a complete embarrassment to his constituents."

The blogosphere, according to *New Republic* assistant editor Marin Cogan is "the medium of the outsider-the self-consciously rambunctious truth-teller holding the dissembling establishment to account." "That," Cogan notes, "is the very essence of Alan Grayson."

Less than a week after his "Republicans want you to die" speech, while being interviewed on a radio talk show, Grayson referred to one of Federal Reserve Bank Chairman Ben Bernanke's advisors as a "K Street whore." In this case, Grayson did issue an immediate apology: "I did not intend to use a term that is often, and correctly, seen as disrespectful to women." This time around however, the Florida freshman was even pilloried by fellow Democrats. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer called Grayson's comment "inappropriate." *Debbie Wasserman Schultz* called him "A quirky individualist." Upon initially meeting the 6'4" Grayson – who was wearing a pinstripe suit with an orange and pink shirt and tie, *Barney Frank* chimed, "I thought he was trying out for the road company of 'Guys and Dolls!'" *Anthony Weiner* called Grayson was "one fry short of a Happy Meal." When Chairman Ben Bernanke himself came up to Capitol Hill to testify before the House Financial Services Committee – of which Grayson is one of the junior-

most members – he him about the destination of more than a half-trillion dollars the Fed was lending to foreign bankers. When Bernanke responded, “I don’t know,” Grayson took the former Princeton Economics professor to school: “I find it hard to believe that the power to hand over the half-a-trillion dollars to foreigners was part of Congressional intent in 1913 when the Federal Reserve Act was written.” By evening, the Grayson/Bernanke colloquy had already received hundreds of thousands of hits on You Tube. His grilling of Federal Reserve Inspector General Ruth Coleman has been watched more than one million times.

Grayson’s shoot-from-the-hip style of commentary also garners a lot of attention. Speaking of conservative radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, Grayson called him “. . . a has-been hypocrite loser, who craves attention.” “Limbaugh,” he added, “actually was more lucid when he was a drug addict. If America ever did one percent of what he wanted us to do, then we’d all need painkillers.” In an April 2009 *Huffington Post* editorial he quipped, Wall Street “is apparently the only place in the world where you can steal from the taxpayers and then bill them for services rendered.” While comments like this enhanced his standing with progressives and liberals, it also put a bull’s eye on his back. Before the end of his first year in Congress, Alan Grayson had become the number one target of the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee. By mid-Fall, there were already a minimum of five well-known Orlando-area Republicans considering challenging Grayson in 2010. By December 2009, political writers were sharpening their pencils, getting ready to write Alan Grayson’s political epitaph.

However, as one writer noted, “Don’t think that Alan Grayson is down and out; he has been overcoming long odds for virtually his entire life.”

Alan Mark Grayson, the son of Daniel Franklin and Dorothy Ann (Sabin) Grayson was born in New York City on March 13, 1958, where his father was a teacher and the principal at Public School 43 in the Bronx. His Canadian-born mother was also a teacher. It was not an easy life. Alan and his sister Joan (Cohen) “grew up in the projects in the Bronx” in a 21<sup>st</sup> floor apartment next to an elevated train. “Asthma-inflicted” from a young age, Alan’s mother took him “four times a week to the hospital for treatment.” “I had a lot of trouble breathing, and needed special injections four times a week,” he remembers. “Each time, she had to take me to the hospital.” “Without health coverage,” he notes on his Congressional web site, “I would not be alive today.” At age 8 a third-grader at his father’s school threatened him with a knife. At age 11, a bully threw Grayson “under a moving bus.” His website matter-of-factly notes, “He lived.” At age 12, he began taking the subway to school on his own; at age 13 he became *bar mitzvah* at Temple Israel in New Rochelle.

His mother, he notes, “made huge efforts to ensure I got a good education.” Her efforts paid off: after acing an entrance exam Alan, who was valedictorian of his junior high school, was admitted to the “highly selective” Bronx High School of Science. While in high school, Grayson, along with tens of thousands of other students, took standardized tests. Scoring the highest among 50,000 or so seniors, Grayson next went off to Harvard University. As noted in *The Almanac of American Politics*, “To help him get through

financially, he lived modestly and took odd jobs cleaning toilets and working as a night watchman. Despite this regime, Grayson graduated in the top two percent of his class, *Phi Beta Kappa*, in only three years. Following his 1978 graduation, Grayson spent the next two years working as an economist before deciding to enter Harvard Law School. Earning his J.D. – *cum laude* – in the standard three years, Grayson simultaneously earned an M.A. in public policy from the Kennedy School of Government, and completed exams for a PhD in government.

Grayson wrote Master's thesis on gerontology – specifically “how to improve the health of older people.” In the thesis, he called for the creation of “an organization to support research on the health of seniors.” Within two years of writing those words, Grayson formed an organization called “The Alliance for Aging Research.” He would go on to serve as an officer of the Alliance up until his election to Congress in 2008. According to his Congressional website, “In 22 years, (The) Alliance has increased federal support for aging research by 500%, leading to breakthroughs in the treatment of blindness, weak bones, Alzheimer's disease and other afflictions of the elderly.” A.R.R.'s motto is “Living to 100 – and Loving it.”

Although widely courted by prestigious Wall Street law firms, the 25-year old Harvard Law graduate went out west to Denver, where he became clerk to Colorado Supreme Court Justice George Lohr. While out in Colorado, Grayson went to a Halloween party in Boulder, costumed as a Catholic Priest. There, he met Shellie Ruston, the daughter of Harry Hadley Ruston a retired Federal Tax Court judge and Florence (nee Kessler) Ruston a doyen of Denver society, who long claimed that she had acted in the “Our Gang” comedies of the 1920s. under the name of “Baby Fleurette,” The two were married in April 1984. The marriage was short-lived and left Grayson so broke that at one time he “found himself locked out of the motel room where he'd been living.”

Rebounding and returning east in the Fall of 1984, Grayson landed a job as a clerk for the D.C. Federal Appeals Court, where he worked for future Supreme Court Justices Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In 1985, he joined Ginsburg's husband Marty at his “renown” law firm Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson, where, according to Grayson, “I learned the smallest details of the law that applies to government contracting.” Over the next several years, Alan Grayson applied himself almost exclusively to representing military contractors, which he once referred to as “the most heavily regulated business in existence anywhere in the world.” Speaking of those days for a 2007 *Vanity Fair* Article, Grayson recalled, “There was a tremendous bureaucracy that existed to make sure that contractors stuck to the rules, and also to punish those who did not stick to the rules very severely.”

In 1990 he took a temporary leave from suing on behalf of government contractors and launched a telecommunications/Internet company on the second floor of a funeral home. Called “IDT,” Grayson served as its first president. The company grew to become a “\$2 billion-a-year business on the Fortune 1000 . . . the world's largest calling-card corporation.” In 1998, half of IDT was sold to AT&T for \$1 billion. Grayson also became the third-largest shareholder in Kentucky Fried Chicken in Indonesia. Speaking of his wealth – estimated at anywhere between \$30.9 and \$78 million in 2008 – Grayson says with

a shrug, “I made all of this money in my spare time. I don’t quite know how it happens. I’m like Dustin Hoffman in ‘Rain Man.’”

While practicing law in Washington and living in Virginia, Alan Grayson met Philippine native Lolita Botado. They married in April 1990, and eventually headed south and moved into a “palm-fringed mansion” in Orlando, Florida. Grayson says they moved south “partly because the climate alleviates his chronic asthma, and partly because they wanted their five children – Skye, Star, Stage and the twins, Storm and Stone – to have access to the area’s many theme parks.” All five Grayson children attend Hebrew school at Chabad. As Grayson notes, “We belong to a local synagogue and observe all the Jewish holidays.” Interestingly, the first words on the biography page of Alan’s Congressional website come from the Torah: “Justice, justice, ye shall seek.” (Deut. 16:20), followed by the comment, “There is right and there is wrong.”

Once in Orlando, Alan Grayson started his own law firm – “Grayson & Kubli” – where for the next 16 years he would specialize in cases involving what he termed “. . . colossal frauds against American taxpayers by private contractors operating in Iraq. In other words, Grayson went from *defending* military contractors against the Department of Defense, to suing many of these same contractors on the behalf of his clients – mostly former employees of these firms – under terms of the “False Claims Act.” (Note: The False Claims Act – 31 U.S.C. § 3729-3733 – often called the “Lincoln Law,” is a statute which permits people who are not affiliated with the government to file actions against federal contractors claiming fraud against the government. Congress passed the “False Claims Act” in March 1863. It permitted a reward to be offered in what is called the *qui tam* provision, which permits “citizens to sue on behalf of the government and be paid a percentage of the recovery. *Qui tam* is short for the Latin phrase *qui tam pro domino rege quam pro se ipso in hac parte sequitur*, which means, “He who brings a case on behalf of our lord the King, as well as for himself.”)

Grayson estimates that the dozens of *qui tam* cases he has filed against contractors in Iraq over the years – the lion’s share against Halliburton and its former subsidiary Kellogg, Brown & Root, now known as “KBR” – have cost him upwards of \$10 million out of his own pocket. Grayson told a reporter, “When all is said and done on these cases I will have lost a substantial amount of money. I’m O.K. with that. Some things you do because they’re really worthwhile and important . . . . In my mind, one of the basic reasons, maybe even the basic reason, why the war has gone badly is war profiteering. You could say that the only people who have benefited from the invasion of Iraq are al-Qaeda, Iran, and Halliburton.” In one of his first victories, Grayson won a \$10 million claim against defense contractor Custer Battles which was found to have “supplied the military with trucks that didn’t work properly.”

By 2007, Alan Grayson had made enough of a name for himself that *Vanity Fair* sent writer David Rose to Orlando to do an in depth article. Rose’s piece, “The People vs. the Profiteers,” begins with a description of Grayson: “On first meeting him, one might not suspect Alan Grayson of being a crusader against government-contractor fraud. Six feet four in his socks, he likes to dress flamboyantly, on the theory that items such as pink



cowboy boots help retain a jury's attention.” Rose quickly dismisses whatever visual quirkiness may surround Grayson, noting that due to the very serious nature of what he does, “He can be forgiven a bit of frivolity.”

In 2006, Alan Grayson decided at almost the last moment to run for Congress. He entered the Democratic primary in Florida’s 8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District, and came within 2,000 votes of defeating Charlie Stuart, “a marketing consultant from a politically experienced Orlando family.” Stuart wound up losing 54%-46% to three-term incumbent Ric Keller, a staunch Republican conservative best known for the so-called “Cheeseburger Bill.” (Officially “The American Personal Responsibility in Food Consumption Act,” this measure sought to protect producers and retailers of foods – such as McDonalds – from an increasing number of suits and class actions on the part of obese consumers. The bill passed the House, but was never taken up by the Senate.)

Upon his election in 2000, Keller pledged to serve only four terms. However, two weeks after defeating Stuart in 2006, he said he had made a mistake. “As a rookie candidate I underestimated the value of experience and seniority.” He then announced his plan to seek a fifth term in 2008, but not spend “my entire career in Congress.” This angered both Democrats and Republicans, and convinced Alan Grayson that he should run again.

In 2008, Grayson, who would eventually pour nearly \$3 million of his own money into his campaign, overwhelmed Charlie Stuart in the Democratic primary, defeating him 48%-28%. For his part, Keller had an extremely tough primary battle against Orlando attorney and radio talk show host Todd Long, who repeatedly scored Keller for his broken term limits pledge. For his part, Keller sent out a direct-mail piece slamming Long for “a past drunk-driving arrest and a recent incident of public intoxication.” Despite being outspending his opponent by a better than three-to-one margin, Keller’s margin of victory ominously slim for an incumbent: 53%-47%.

In the general election, Keller attempted to paint Grayson as an “ultra liberal,” of “advocating cutting off funds to troops in Iraq,” and of being “allied with the Code Pink anti-war protest group.” For his part Grayson – who would spend \$3.21 million to \$1.77 million – accused his Republican opponent of “being the deciding ‘no’ vote on a bill that would have supplied returning war veterans with replacement limbs.” Grayson was greatly helped by a “surge in Democratic registration” and by the general popularity of presidential candidate Barack Obama in the 8<sup>th</sup> district. Obama wound up defeating John McCain 52%-47% in the 8<sup>th</sup> – which has a Cook Partisan Voting Index of R+2; Grayson defeated Keller by nearly the same margin, 52%-48%.

Grayson, who entered the House as the 6<sup>th</sup> richest member of that body, was given seats on Financial Services and Science & Technology. Along with Texas Representative Ron Paul – who calls his young colleague “very energetic and very bright” – Grayson rallied bipartisan support for a bill that would authorize “regular audits of the Federal Reserve.” Grayson continues to attack “contractor profiteering,” moving to cut off federal funds to all “government contractors who file fraudulent forms.” Grayson was one of the few Democrats – and the only member of the Florida congressional delegation – to vote against

further funding for the war in Iraq. When Grayson held up his vote for a global-warming bill until he was promised “a \$50 million hurricane research center,” for Orlando, more than one commentator noted that it was “a brazen move for any lawmaker, let alone a rookie.”

Many pundits are predicting that Alan Grayson – the man who used to drive around Orlando in a Cadillac with a bumper sticker proclaiming “Bush Lied, People Died!” will only be a one-term member of Congress. They believe Grayson is far too liberal for the Orlando-area district and note that before his defeat of Ric Keller, conservative Republicans had held the seat for the past quarter-century. But even with that “#1 Republican target in 2010” label, Grayson is undaunted. He has access to an almost unlimited campaign war chest – he does have hundreds of thousands of friends in cyberspace plus his own resources – and feels that he is motivated by that which is both right and just.

“I don’t need the job for income or satisfaction,” Grayson told a reporter shortly after the speech that took him from anonymity to notoriety. “The truth is, it’s really a hardship. I took an enormous pay cut to take the job. Every week, I leave five young children and my wife to come up here. I don’t owe anything to anyone here. I don’t owe anything to lobbyists. I don’t owe anything to leadership. The only thing I owe to anybody is the well-being of 800,000 people who depend on me.”

When asked what his motivation is, he unhesitatingly quotes the verse from Deuteronomy . . . and begins to weep.

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October 22, 2010

## **A WORD OR TWO ABOUT IRENE COEN'S SON**

*(Once again, I beg your indulgence . . . for just this one last week. I have now finished editing, but find myself utterly exhausted. Hence, I'm posting yet another article from my upcoming book "[The Jews of Capitol Hill.](#)" This one is on Fiorello H. LaGuardia -- the best big-city mayor in American history, and an even better member of Congress. I look forward to writing new articles beginning again next week . . .)*

It used to be that every schoolchild in America knew who first said, "The only two certainties in this world are death and taxes:" (Benjamin Franklin.) Or, that whenever one heard the words "The King," the reference was unquestionably to Clark Gable. Those coming of age in Depression-era New York City were aware of precisely three eternal verities: that Franklin D. Roosevelt was always President; that Joe McCarthy's Yankees were always in the World Series; that Fiorello H. LaGuardia was always mayor. Today, the name LaGuardia summons, at best, a vague recollection of a fellow reading the Sunday funnies on the radio during a newspaper strike. Perhaps one has the mental image of a swarthy little man in with "an outsized Stetson hat and old-world clothes" conducting an orchestra in Central Park. Fiorello H. LaGuardia was both of these – and far, far more. As good a mayor as he was ("he ran the best reform government in American municipal history"), LaGuardia was an even better member of Congress. Indeed, during his dozen years in the House of Representatives, LaGuardia was lionized by no less an observer than Heywood Broun as "the most powerful and persuasive member of the lower house." To biographer Lawrence Elliott, "he knew more about pending legislation than most House members, and affected more bills than any of them."

Through the haze of memory, LaGuardia seems to be the consummate New Yorker, the ultimate cosmopolite of that most cosmopolitan city. In truth, the

“Little Flower” – the literal translation of “Fiorello” – was far more than a mere New Yorker. Although born in New York City, LaGuardia was a “Western-bred, Balkan-plated Episcopalian of Italian-Jewish descent with the advantage of being a balanced ticket unto himself.” And despite the fact that he spoke a more than passable Yiddish (in addition to Italian, French, Croatian, German, and Spanish), LaGuardia rarely mentioned his Jewish background, for he did not want to be accused of using his lineage as a political prop. Despite all this, he was roundly jeered and pilloried by Nazi Germany, which labeled him “a dirty Talmud Jew . . . a shameless Jewish lout” with a “thieves-den mentality . . . a whoremonger.” In response to these kinds of slurs, LaGuardia would often launch his own verbal assault: “The only authority in New York competent to deal with German press accusations (is) the deputy sanitation commissioner in charge of sewage disposal.”

LaGuardia's father, Achille Luigi Carlo LaGuardia, was born in the southern Italian city of Foggia in 1851. Historically, the LaGuardias were civil servants – solid middle-class *cittadini*. Achille, a lapsed Catholic, was far more interested in music than municipality; by the time he came to America in 1880 as accompanist to the legendary singer Adelina Patti, he was an accomplished musician and linguist – and a married man. In June 1880, shortly before his departure from Italy, Achille married Irene Luzzato Coen, the scion of a Jewish family from Trieste, then a part of Austria. Achille was twenty-nine, Irene twenty-three. Though raised in a religious home, Irene was “thoroughly Italian in speech and culture,” the prevailing tendency among Jews in cosmopolitan Trieste. On their marriage certificate, Irene recorded her religion as *Israelita*; Achille, “carrying the memory of indignities heaped on him by his teachers, all priests,” jotted *nessuna*: “nothing.”

Shortly after their marriage, the LaGuardias immigrated to America, settling in the then-Italian enclave of Greenwich Village. Within a year of their arrival, their first child – a daughter they named Gemma – was born. Not quite two years later, on December 11, 1882, their first son entered the world. They named him Fiorello Enrico. A third child, whom they would give the much more Americanized name Richard Dodge, was born in 1887.

Unable to find steady employment as a musician, Achille enlisted in the United States Army, which made him a bandmaster. Beginning in 1885, the army sent the LaGuardia family out West: first to Fort Sully, South Dakota, then to Whipple Barracks near Prescott, Arizona. It was in Prescott that Fiorello LaGuardia “attended school, learned to make spaghetti sauce in his mother's kitchen, to play the cornet, (and) to love Italian opera.” With the coming of the Spanish-American War in 1898, Achille received orders for Cuba, and the LaGuardias left Prescott.

Traveling across country, the family stopped in St. Louis, where Fiorello, imbued with patriotic fervor, talked his way into an unpaid position on Joseph Pulitzer's *Post-Dispatch*. The cub reporter's first piece ran under the "slightly mangled" byline "F. LaGuardi."

Before Achille could ship out for Cuba however, he became gravely ill – a casualty of the "embalmed beef" that corrupt contractors had sold to the army. Discharged from the service, Achille moved his family back to Trieste, where they lived for a while with Irene's widowed mother Fiorina, for whom Fiorello had been named. His energy sapped, Achille eventually leased "a neglected seaside hotel at nearby Capodistria." Before too long, the hotel began to prosper. In 1900, Fiorello, not quite eighteen years old, accepted a post as clerk at the American consulate in Budapest. He would spend the next six years of his life working at diplomatic posts in Budapest, Trieste, and finally Fiume (modern-day Croatia), where he served as United States consular agent.

LaGuardia's official consular duties consisted mainly of "processing visa and passport applications and gathering information for the consul's periodic reports." LaGuardia, who stood five feet two inches and barely looked his age, "reveled in the most tangled consular cases and wound up with the practical equivalent of advanced degrees in sociology, politics, and applied economics, and at least conversational command of seven languages." During his three years in Fiume (1903-06), he caused a stir by demanding that emigrants receive medical checkups *before* they sailed, rather than upon their arrival at Ellis Island. In this way, the young consular agent reasoned, fewer of the dispossessed would face the trauma of rejection. On more than one occasion, LaGuardia used the implied powers of his post to hold ships in port until medical checks had been completed. His strategy worked: "During his three years as consular agent, Fiume had far fewer health rejections at Ellis Island than any other port embarking emigrants for the United States, a total of only forty-five for trachoma, for example, against an average of twenty-five on every ship docking in New York."

In 1904, Achille LaGuardia died, never having gotten over the effects of the tainted beef. Despite a lengthy battle with the American government, Fiorello LaGuardia would never get the War Department to admit that his father's death had been service-related. To add insult to injury, his mother was denied a military widow's pension. As a result, LaGuardia began harboring that intense aversion to bureaucratic corruption that would carry over to his political career. As a freshman member of the 65<sup>th</sup> Congress, his first piece of legislation was a bill providing the death penalty for "the scavengers of history who (supply) tainted food or defective

supplies and equipment in wartime.” Not surprisingly, it died in committee. It also put the political world on notice that LaGuardia was a man motivated not by ideology, but by moral indignation.

LaGuardia's superior in Fiume was a Boston Brahmin named Frank Dyer Chester. Although Chester (1870-1938), who had a Harvard PhD in Philology, “admired Fiorello's fire and ambition,” he nonetheless felt constrained to tell the young agent that he would never advance too far in the consular corps. To Chester's way of thinking, LaGuardia's ethnicity – and lack of a Harvard degree – stood in the way of future success. Fed up, LaGuardia left the consular corps and made his way back to the United States. He arrived in New York in 1906, far more a Westerner or a European than a New Yorker.

Once in New York, LaGuardia found temporary employment with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. His job was to “translate the juvenile sections of the French penal code into English.” In 1907, convinced that his future lay in politics, LaGuardia was admitted to the New York University School of Law. While taking classes at night, he spent his days working as an interpreter for the Immigration Service. His salary was \$1,200 (roughly \$27,000 in 2008 dollars). LaGuardia was assigned to the “White Slave Division.” Receiving his LL.B. in 1910, he joined the firm of Weil, LaGuardia & Espen. As an attorney, LaGuardia specialized in issues concerning the garment industry, especially protecting the rights of immigrant workers. For LaGuardia, “the practice of law was never meant to be an end in itself. . . . It was a tool, like his knowledge of languages, a stepping-stone toward what he really wanted; a career in public service.”

While practicing law, LaGuardia became politically active in the Twenty-fifth Assembly District, “a mile-square tangle of neighborhoods in the center of Manhattan.” It was also the home base of Tammany leader Charlie Murphy. Before too long, LaGuardia, for reasons unknown, threw in his lot with the Republicans. He began making a name for himself as a rebel with a following. Through his impoverished law practice, LaGuardia made friends “among the housewives, workingmen, poor immigrants” – precisely the people who would become his most rabid constituents within a matter of a few years. With the election of Charles S. Whitman (1868-1947) as New York governor in 1914, local Republican leaders, wishing “to do something for their young rebel,” managed to secure LaGuardia a position as a New York State deputy attorney general.

LaGuardia took his work in the A.G.'s office seriously, but kept his eye on a congressional race in New York's Fourteenth District. His chance came in 1916.

Declaring his candidacy for the seat held by Tammany stalwart (and local bartender) Mike Farley, LaGuardia was the clear underdog. Having “neither jobs nor buckets of free coal” at his disposal, LaGuardia decided that the one thing he could hand out was free legal advice. Soon it became known throughout the district that “any poor man or woman who needed advice or a lawyer to take his case to court could come to LaGuardia.” As one admirer said at the time, “. . . the greatest favor you can do this man is to come to him with a tale of injustice and ask him to fight your battle for nothing.”

LaGuardia campaigned on two fronts. First, he went to the East Side, campaigning in Italian, Yiddish, and Serbo-Croatian, “dismember(ing) the Hapsburg Empire and liberat(ing) all the subjugated countries almost every night.” Second, he took every chance at his disposal to ridicule and belittle Farley. On one occasion, LaGuardia parked his Model T in front of Farley's saloon, daring the saloon keeper-cum-congressman to step outside for a debate. When nothing happened, LaGuardia cattily told the gathering crowd that the reason for Farley's demurral was obvious: he did not know anything about the issues. Finally goaded into doing something, the hapless Farley issued a ten-point platform. LaGuardia “fell on it with glee.” “Eight of the ten proposals,” he gleefully told the street corner crowd, “have already been dealt with in one legislature or another. When the other two were brought in Congress, Farley was back home tending bar.” On Election Day, LaGuardia won by a mere 357 votes, thereby becoming the first Italian-American ever elected to Congress. Moreover, voters from the Lower East Side had not elected a Republican to Congress since the Civil War.

LaGuardia was a uniquely positioned member of the Sixty-fifth Congress. He found himself being assiduously courted by both the Republicans and the Democrats, for each parties had precisely 215 members. The matter of which party would organize the House rested with five independents, of whom LaGuardia was one. LaGuardia, “in one of his infrequent spasms of party loyalty,” voted with the Republicans. The Democrats won, thereby placing him in the minority – a position he would occupy throughout his entire Congressional career.

As war clouds began darkening the horizon, LaGuardia introduced an amendment to Representative Julius Kahn's proposed draft law that would nullify all exemptions; “conscientious objectors were to be given non-combat duties, and the physically unfit less strenuous work.” His measure was easily defeated. When it came time to vote on the Selective Service Act bill LaGuardia was one of but five voting in opposition. Fearing that the pending war would make the rich richer, LaGuardia “urged government controls on the price and distribution of food,

clothing and shelter.” His plan was buried in committee. When war came, along with soaring prices and alarming shortages, LaGuardia began looking like a prophet – and not for the last time.

The day after war was declared, LaGuardia enlisted. Already a skilled pilot, LaGuardia was assigned to the Italian Royal Flying School near Foggia. In January 1918, he became a member of the Joint Army-Navy Aircraft Committee. Following the disastrous Battle of Caporetto, which resulted in the loss of 300,000 men, a third of Italy’s war materiel, and the almost total dismemberment of the Italian army, rumors began flying that the government would seek a separate peace. Horrified by this prospect, Ambassador Thomas Page Nelson (1853-1922) summoned LaGuardia to Rome. Nelson assigned LaGuardia the task of “reassuring the Italians that they had America’s support, and would have American troops as soon as possible.” Nelson believed that LaGuardia was “the only man capable of delivering the proper propaganda” to the disheartened citizens of Italy. So, in addition to his almost daily bombing missions, “the flying Congressman” was sent the length and breadth of Italy as spokesman for America. Addressing crowds of up to 300,000, LaGuardia, speaking in “colloquial Italian,” told the throngs “the Americans were here, and he was one of them!” By all accounts, wherever LaGuardia spoke, the results were spectacular. LaGuardia was promoted to Major.

While he was off fighting the war, an alliance of pacifists and suffragettes in his New York district petitioned Congress to vacate his seat, so that they could be “properly represented.” Suddenly, the Little Flower was a national hero, receiving support from all over the country. The editorial writers of the *Philadelphia Record* noted that “Congressman LaGuardia, absent to fight for his country, is absent little more than some congressmen during the baseball season. Why raise a fuss over him?” When informed by a reporter of what was going on at home, LaGuardia told him: “You might say that if any signers of the petition will take my seat in a Caproni bi-plane, I shall be glad to resume my upholstered seat in the House.” In truth, LaGuardia need not have worried. As noted by LaGuardia biographer Alyn Brodsky, “Precedent militated against a man holding a Congressional seat and an army commission simultaneously.” With the support of Speaker Champ Clark, a bill was introduced granting LaGuardia a leave of absence and letting him retain his Congressional seat “so long as he was in uniform.” While away fighting the war in Europe, LaGuardia remained in constant contact with his East Harlem colleague, Representative Isaac Siegel, who cast his votes on any issues before the House. Although he could vote, he could not continue receiving his \$5,500



Congressional salary. As a first lieutenant, LaGuardia was paid \$2,200. The petition for removal was “filed away” by Speaker Clark.

Following his much-heralded return from the war, LaGuardia introduced an amendment to an appropriations bill providing that “federal civil-service employees who had been drafted or enlisted be reinstated in their former jobs.” The measure was sidetracked by parliamentary maneuver and died. On the surface, it would seem that LaGuardia lost the lion’s share of his legislative battles. This was not the case – if only because of the law of averages. One of LaGuardia's first legislative victories came when Congress approved his measure to feed postwar Europe.

In 1920, Fiorello LaGuardia voluntarily gave up his seat in Congress in order to run for president of the New York City Board of Aldermen. The board's previous president, Alfred E. Smith, had just been elected Governor. LaGuardia won the election by appealing to the city's Democratic minority voters – many of whom were outraged by President Wilson's Versailles Treaty. After serving less than a year as president, LaGuardia ran for mayor in the Republican primary against Manhattan Borough President Henry Curran. LaGuardia, vilified as a “red,” a “dago,” and “radical,” got only 37,000 votes to Curran's 103,000. He failed to carry a single borough. When LaGuardia was attacked for being outside the “Republican mainstream,” he caustically replied, “Some men who claim to be exponents of Republican principles know as much about the teachings of Abraham Lincoln as Henry Ford knows about the Talmud.”

Life had hit rock bottom for Fiorello LaGuardia. In addition to losing the primary, both his wife – the former Thea Almerigotti, whom he had married in 1917 – and his baby daughter – also named Thea – had died one right after the other. He was now without family, job, or prospects. In June 1922, a new law firm, LaGuardia, Sapinsky & Amster was formed so that the Little Flower might have an income. Throughout his life, LaGuardia was always on the verge of bankruptcy. When he became mayor in 1933, he owned “neither an automobile nor an overcoat.” When he died, all he had to his name was a small house in the Riverdale section of the Bronx and \$8,000 in U.S. War Bonds.

LaGuardia wasn't down for long. Suddenly, in the spring of 1922, William Randolph Hearst was booming “the Major” (as he was called by everyone but relatives and strangers) for New York Governor. On June 29 of that year, LaGuardia issued a forty-two-point platform calling for such basic social reforms

as “equal rights for women, old-age pensions, workmen's compensation, a minimum wage, an eight-hour day, and the abolition of child labor.” The Republicans were aghast. In exchange for his dropping out of the gubernatorial race, the party offered him the nomination for Congress from the Twentieth District – East Harlem. Next to Manhattan's Lower East Side, the Twentieth was “the most congested slum in the United States,” a perfect constituency for the Major.

LaGuardia's race for this seat is the basis for one of the truly unforgettable stories in American political history.

Having easily secured the Republican nomination, he faced two strong opponents: William Karlin, “a Socialist endorsed by important trade unions and running on a something-for-everybody platform,” and Democrat Henry Frank, “a pedestrian and politically untested lawyer (who) had the advantage of Tammany Hall's very considerable support.” LaGuardia campaigned from early morning until late at night, running on his typically progressive platform.

As Election Day neared, the Democrats were becoming increasingly concerned. Party strategists concluded that the only way for Frank (who was Jewish) to win the race was to go all out for the Jewish vote. A few days before the election, Tammany distributed tens of thousands of leaflets with the following message:

*The most important office in this country for Judaism is the Congressman. Our flesh and blood are . . . on the other side of the ocean. Only through your Congressman can we go to their rescue.*

*There are three candidates who are seeking your vote: One is Karlin, the atheist. The second is the Italian LaGuardia, who is a pronounced anti-Semite and a Jew-hater.*

*Be careful how you vote.*

*Our candidate is Henry Frank, who is a Jew with a Jewish heart, and who does good for us. Therefore, it is up to you and your friends to vote for our friend and beloved one, Henry Frank, for Congressman.*

LaGuardia was livid. One of his aides advised him to make a speech about his Jewish mother. LaGuardia refused. He had always considered himself Italian, “and to imply otherwise now would be too transparently self-serving.” Instead,

LaGuardia delivered a brilliant *coup de grâce*. He issued “an open letter to Henry Frank” that read in part:

*At the beginning of the campaign, I announced that I would not indulge in personalities nor in abuse of my opponents. I have kept this pledge. . .*

*You have seen fit, however, to resort to the kind of campaigning which was discredited in American politics over 25 years ago. You . . . are making a radical-religious appeal for sympathy votes (and) I regret exceedingly that this has happened. However, I always met a fight on any issue openly. . . .*

*Very well, then . . . I hereby challenge you to publicly and openly debate the issues of the campaign, the debate to be conducted by you and me entirely in the Yiddish language. We will suit your convenience in every respect.*

LaGuardia then proceeded to translate his “open letter” into Yiddish and released it to all the Jewish dailies. Frank (whom LaGuardia discovered did not speak a word of Yiddish) was made to look ridiculous. The next day, LaGuardia was endorsed by the Yiddish-language *Forward*, which touted him as “one who speaks Yiddish like a true Jew and who over the years has been a good friend to the Jewish people.”

LaGuardia managed to pull off a razor-thin 168-vote victory. The Major was back as a member of the Sixty-eighth Congress. LaGuardia's second congressional “tour of duty” continued until the Roosevelt landslide of 1932.

Although reelected several times, his margins of victory were never outstanding. In 1924, his best year, he bested his opponent by a mere 3,500 votes. By comparison, in 1926, he won by just 55 votes. Nonetheless, during the years between 1923 and 1933, LaGuardia became a focal point in the House – a lightning rod for innumerable issues. Although he would never chair a congressional committee, he was perhaps the nearest thing to a Congressman-at-large the United States had ever had.

LaGuardia relished his role as a congressional goad or gadfly. “The function of a progressive,” he once said, “is to keep on protesting until things get so bad that a reactionary demands reform.” And protest he did: against Prohibition, the “money class,” the “interests,” and the inequities of the tax code, and on behalf of the poor, the disenfranchised – even the Eskimos of the frozen north. During the 1920s, LaGuardia pushed such “radical” ideas as a minimum wage, old-age pensions,

child-labor laws, social security, government regulation of utilities and the stock market – every one of which would eventually become the law of the land.

Despite the fact that LaGuardia was a teetotaler, he proved to be a forceful and bitter opponent against Prohibition:

*“I disagree with those who say that if this law (the Volstead Act) is enforced, we shall have trouble because of its enforcement! I maintain that this law will be almost impossible of enforcement. And if this law fails to be enforced – as it certainly will be, as it is drawn – it will create contempt and disregard for law all over the country.*

Strangely, LaGuardia counted among his closest friends Minnesota Representative Ole J. Kvale (1869-1929), the man who had billed himself as “Drier than Volstead.” To LaGuardia, the Volstead Act was a case of “them against us,” the “them” being the “money-class.” The rich, LaGuardia reasoned, could still buy the best liquor and drink it undisturbed. He set himself to do something for “the little guy.”

In June 1926, he did just that. He announced that “in the very precincts of the torpid House Committee on Alcoholic Liquor Traffic,” of which he was the only “wet” member, he was going to brew beer right before their eyes! The next day, he entered the committee chamber accompanied by a former brewer. Most of the committee members ran off in alarm. LaGuardia was left with an “audience” of fifty reporters. He then proceeded to show the reporters how to “brew” beer, ale, and pilsner. Then he dared anyone to arrest him. His little demonstration brought national headlines.

On February 28, 1929, LaGuardia married for a second time. His bride, Marie Fischer, had been his secretary for more than fifteen years. “I lost a great secretary,” LaGuardia quipped, “and gained a lousy cook.” The marriage ceremony was performed by Congressman Kvale, who was also a Lutheran minister.

In 1929, LaGuardia challenged Democrat Jimmy Walker for mayor of New York City. LaGuardia vainly tried to get the voters to understand that Walker (1881-1946) was running a miserably corrupt administration; that the bosses of Tammany Hall were deeply involved with elements of organized crime. Again, LaGuardia was a man before his time. The mayoral race of 1929 took place during an “endless summer of paper prosperity.” People were simply having too good a time to listen to the voice of doom and gloom. Even the collapse of the stock market one week before the election could not help LaGuardia. Dapper Jimmy

Walker crushed the Little Flower by nearly a half-million votes, even carrying East Harlem. LaGuardia's defeat was the worst any major-party candidate had suffered in the history of Greater New York.

With the onset of the Depression, LaGuardia was back in Congress, playing his accustomed role of moral absolutist. Early in 1932, faced with the prospect of an unbalanced budget, President Hoover proposed a national sales tax of 2.25 percent on manufactured goods. It was meant to raise \$600 million. Hoover's ill-conceived proposal "set the stage for the most spectacular victory of LaGuardia's legislative career." In response to Hoover's tax increase, the Major proposed taxes on safe-deposit boxes and stock transfers, and a surtax on incomes over \$100,000. The battle lines had been drawn.

In the beginning, LaGuardia was almost alone in his opposition to the tax hike. Hoover's bill made it out of the House Ways and Means Committee by a vote of twenty-four to one. An irate LaGuardia asked his House colleagues, "What is this – a kissing bee?" The Major wound up turning what was supposed to be a two-day debate into a two-week "carnival." Moments before one colloquy, a LaGuardia aide asked: "What are you going to do, Major?" to which he uttered the immortal words "Soak the rich!"

LaGuardia's "soak the rich" speech caused a sensation: "As the second week (of the debate) opened, the leaders could no longer hold their people in line. There was turbulence on the floor . . . members shouting, jeering, (and) coming close to fistfights. Then the lines broke all together." In the end, almost single-handedly, LaGuardia turned the tide. When the House finally got around to voting on the Hoover surtax on March 24, 1932, it was rejected by a vote of 211 to 178.

That same week, President Hoover signed the Norris-LaGuardia Anti-Injunction Act into law. This landmark legislation outlawed the yellow-dog contract, under which workers, as a condition of employment, had to agree not to join a union. It also forbade the federal courts from issuing an injunction against legal strikes unless they turned violent or caused "irreparable harm."

In 1932, Fiorello LaGuardia was voted out of office by the people of the Twentieth District. He had originally wanted to run on both the Republican and the Democratic ticket, but the effort "foundered on the refusal of West Side Tammany boss James J. Hines." It proved to be a costly error on Hines's part: had LaGuardia been given the Democratic nomination, he likely would have remained in Congress. As things turned out, once the Major was out of Washington, he ran for

mayor, thus setting in motion the process that would eventually put men like Hines out of business and behind bars. Had Hines not been so obtuse, the history of the era might have turned out differently.

Editorializing on LaGuardia's behalf, the New York *Daily Mirror* noted, "*It will be a tragic thing for the people of New York if Mr. LaGuardia is defeated. He is the only real liberal in the delegation . . . one of the few in the whole House . . . . He is incorruptible . . . . Citizens, do not let this worthy public servant be destroyed!*"

Positive editorials notwithstanding, LaGuardia lost his seat by some 1,200 votes to James J. Lanzetta, a young Tammany alderman. There was plenty of evidence of voter fraud: "In some precincts there were more votes than residents. Men claiming to be election inspectors later disappeared and were found to have given fake addresses – but the votes they had certified were already counted."

Newly-elected President Franklin Roosevelt offered LaGuardia the post of Assistant Secretary of Labor. LaGuardia respectfully turned him down, saying he was "too old to start taking orders from anyone." Down again, but not out, LaGuardia approached the 67<sup>th</sup> Congress' lame-duck session with a renewed sense of purpose. Between the time of his defeat and the end of his term, LaGuardia played a pivotal role in formulating what was to become FDR's Hundred Days. LaGuardia drafted two critical pieces of legislation. One, aimed at "stanching the flood of foreclosures," would have provided some \$200 million in government capital for a federal credit bank. Bottled up in committee, it eventually passed during the Hundred Days. The second bill, an amendment to the National Bankruptcy Act of 1898, empowered courts to give "credit extensions to farmers and individuals, staving off forced liquidations by their creditors." This bill became law on the last day of the Hoover administration.

During this frenzy of activity, a reporter for the Washington *Daily News*, watching LaGuardia at work on the House floor, reported, "In debate . . . he suggests a fighting cock more than a flower. He talks rapidly, his right arm working like a piston to emphasize every statement."

Upon LaGuardia's return to New York City, the Seabury Commission hearings were in full swing. Under the leadership of Judge Samuel Seabury (1873-1958), a descendant of John and Priscilla Alden, the commission investigated all of Tammany Hall's nefarious dealings. LaGuardia's charges from 1929 proved to be true; Tammany was rife with corruption. The commission "sifted a mountain of

evidence and eventually questioned four thousand witnesses, producing enough transcribed testimony to fill ninety-five thousand pages.” The final report showed what one writer termed “the insolence of office.” It thoroughly exposed a spoils system that reached all the way to Mayor Walker himself. Shortly after Seabury's findings were made public, Walker resigned and took the first boat to Europe.

In the next mayoral election, Fiorello LaGuardia ran as the candidate of the newly created Fusion Party. At first, the Fusionists did not want the Major; they were looking for a “respectable” candidate. When virtually everyone else turned them down, LaGuardia became their man. He swept to victory, running with a slate of minority candidates. His swearing-in took place in the library of Judge Seabury's home. His task complete, the old aristocrat spoke precisely seven words: “At last, New York has a mayor.”

The next morning, January 1, 1934, Fiorello LaGuardia went down to his new office. Upon entering for the first time, he was met by a group of reporters. As he was going through the door, he “threw a one-sentence, all-purpose answer at them over his shoulder: *finita la cuccagna*---“the party's over.”

As history records, LaGuardia was twice reelected as mayor of New York. During his twelve-year tenure, he became perhaps the second-best-known American in the world. LaGuardia was by no means perfect; he had a wide puritanical streak and could be cynical, churlish, hot-headed, petty, and just plain wrong. To his enemies, he suffered from *sacro egoismo* – “consecrated selfishness.” One detractor called him “egotistical, strutting and power hungry, a demagogue and a rascal.” To his many admirers, the Little Flower was “colorful, dynamic, contagiously self-confident, progressive and the deadliest Tammany-killer of his day.”

LaGuardia involved himself in virtually every facet of the city. When the Democrat-controlled Board of Aldermen complained about his harsh tactics, he replied, “I am the majority in this city, and don't you forget it.” From the creation of parks and bridges to meat rationing and American foreign policy, LaGuardia was a whirlwind of activity. The people loved him.

LaGuardia was one of the first major American politicians to speak out openly against the Nazi menace. According to David M. and Jackie R. Esposito, “his implacable hostility toward the Nazis was based on his belief that they were the international equivalent of his domestic enemies.” As early as June 1933, LaGuardia was making statements like “Hitler is a perverted maniac.” While

giving the keynote address before the National Conference Against Racial Persecution in Germany, he made the “terrifyingly prophetic” statement that “Part of his (Hitler's) program is the complete annihilation of the Jews in Germany. When the internal affairs of one country affect the peace of the world, then it is time to protest.”

In March, 1937, speaking to the Women's Division of the American Jewish Congress, LaGuardia suggested that the upcoming New York World's Fair should include a “chamber of horrors” just for “that brown-shirted fanatic.” The comment brought an official protest on the part of the German government. Secretary of State Cordell Hull made a formal apology to the Nazis: “I very earnestly deprecate the utterances which have thus given offense to the German government.” LaGuardia's statements were page oneA news. *Time Magazine* cynically speculated that LaGuardia's attack on Hitler was his “opening gun” in the 1937 mayoral race. “In New York City, as any political nose counter knows, the hooked far outnumber the Aryan noses.”

Many believed that LaGuardia would be called on the carpet by President Roosevelt, whose Secretary of State, Hull, had gone “beyond the bounds of diplomatic courtesy by giving the Nazis expert advice on how to handle their American critics.” When LaGuardia finally went to Washington and entered the Oval Office, he was greeted by a smiling FDR, arm outstretched in a mock Nazi salute. “Heil, Fiorello!” he said with a grin. LaGuardia immediately snapped to attention and thrust out his own arm. “Heil Franklin!” he responded. The two men burst out laughing. Later, when LaGuardia left, Roosevelt reportedly told Secretary Hull “he wished he could pin a gold medal on LaGuardia for saying what everyone in the administration was thinking.”

With the coming of World War II, LaGuardia thought he might be named Secretary of War. Instead, the post went to another Republican, Henry Stimson. FDR did appoint the Major to head up the nation's civilian defense. LaGuardia was not happy in the post, and applied for an army general's commission. His application was rejected.

LaGuardia decided against running for a fourth term in 1944. By this point, he and Marie had adopted Thea's sister's two children. Life at home was good, and LaGuardia was just plain worn out. At the conclusion of his dozen years as mayor, LaGuardia had a brief radio program, and then fell victim to pancreatic cancer. He died on September 20, 1947, and was buried at Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.



As a member of Congress, LaGuardia was a “vital link” between the Progressive and New Deal eras. In the words of historian Howard Zinn, “He entered Congress as the Bull Moose uproar was quieting down and left with the arrival of the New Deal; in the intervening years, no man in national office waged the Progressive battle so long, so consistently, or so vigorously. In a decade marked by lusterless leadership, he generated an inexhaustible supply of excitement.”

LaGuardia was perhaps best summed up by the New Deal “braintruster” Adolf Berle, who called him, quite simply “a pint of liquid dynamite.”

With his passing, it was indeed the end of an era. Roosevelt was no longer President. LaGuardia was no longer mayor. All that remained were the New York Yankees.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



October 29, 2010

## **WORSE THAN DRED SCOTT**

In the recent Delaware Senate debate broadcast nationally by CNN, Republican Christine O'Donnell had a "Sarah Palin moment" when asked to name which recent Supreme Court opinion she most objected to. "Oh gosh, um, give me a specific one, I'm sorry," she responded to correspondent Nancy Karibjanian.

"Actually, I can't," Karibjanian explained, "because I need you to tell me which ones you object to." When prompted by Wolf Blitzer, who commented "We know that you disagree with *Roe v. Wade*," O'Donnell responded, "Yeah but she said a recent one." Gaining a bit of steam, O'Donnell went on "Oh, there are several when it comes to pornography, when it comes to court decisions -- not to Supreme Court, but federal court decisions to give terrorists *Mirandize* rights [sic]. There are a lot of things I believe . . ."

(O'Donnell promised that she would put her answer up on her website; as of October 29, 2010 she has yet to do so.)

Up until recently, I had always thought that the absolute nadir in Supreme Court history was its 1857 ruling in *Dred Scott v. Sanford*. (Just as a quick reminder the court, by a vote of 7-2, ruled that people of African descent who had been imported to the United States and held as slaves -- and this included their descendants, whether slave or not -- were *not* protected by the Constitution and therefore *could never* become U.S. citizens. It also ruled, among other things that because slaves were not citizens, they could not sue in court. This foul-spirited decision would ultimately lead to passage of the 14th Amendment which, ironically, Christine O'Donnell and many of her Tea Party supporters want to see overturned.

Indeed, for more years than I care to remember, the Dred Scott Decision was the worst, most horrendous decision in Court history. But then came January 2010: the landmark *Citizens United* case -- *Citizens United v Federal Election Commission*, 130 S. Ct. 876 (2010) -- in which the Court by a 5-4 margin, held that corporate funding of independent political broadcasts in candidate elections cannot be limited under the First Amendment, for the "simple" reason that corporations are like people, and thus covered by the same constitutional protections. It took the Civil War -- the bloodiest conflict in which we have ever participated -- to essentially nullify *Dred Scott*. (Legally, it has yet to be overturned). One wonders if there is any power on earth that might one day lead to the nullification of *Citizens United*, the single-worst and most dangerous decision the Court has ever made. For in giving corporations and anonymous "civic-minded" mega-billionaires the legal right to deluge the political system with dollars, they have hastened the transition of America from a capitalist to a corporatist state. And unless I have totally misunderstood my reading of history, corporate control of the state is a pillar of fascism . . .

If this were a time of greater sanity and less anger; of heightened enlightenment and diminished mulishness; if we could respond to the challenges of modernity more like lions and less like lemmings, then perhaps the 2010 election would lead to the dismemberment -- if not the outright nullification -- of *Citizens United*. For what have all those billions spent by a relative handful of corporations and mega-billionaires bought this election cycle? What is it that their chosen candidates support; what do they believe; what are these anonymous corporations and billionaires seeking?

First, what do these candidates support?

- **An end to legal abortion** in any and all cases -- even when the pregnancy is caused by rape or incest, or the health of the mother is at stake. "*I know good friends who are the product of rape*," proclaimed Glen Urquhart, a Republican/Tea Party candidate for the House from Delaware.
- **An end to estate taxes**, which do not kick in unless and until an estate is in excess of \$3.5 million. Statistically, this does not affect 99.8% of the people.
- **Abolishing the I.R.S. and federal income taxes** and replacing them with a national sales tax -- something which hits poor people far harder than those with millions.
- **An end to Social Security** ("*a gigantic Ponzi scheme*"), the minimum wage, Medicare, Medicaid, and unemployment insurance. Alaska Republican/Tea Party candidate Joe Miller claims that the latter is unconstitutional; Nevada Senate candidate Sharron Angle claims that it has "*caused a spoilage with our ability to go out and get a job.*"

- **Replacing public schools with charter schools**, and outlawing the teaching of Evolution. First on their educational agenda is the elimination of the federal Department of Education. Colorado Senate candidate Ken Buck tells voters on the campaign circuit that *"In the 1950s, we had the best schools in the world, and the United States government decided to get more involved in federal education . . . and ever since education has gotten worse."*
- **Eliminating all regulations** that impinge on the ability of corporations to make money.

What do they believe?

- **Americans are overtaxed** and over regulated.
- **The Federal Government should stay out** of our businesses, our schools and our pocketbooks . . . but not our bedrooms or operating rooms.
- **The two guiding principles** by which all decisions should be made are the Bible and the Constitution. In the latter case, one candidate, Republican Keith Rolfus (4th CD in PA) has flatly stated, *"Congress' ultimate weapon is funding. If the Supreme Court rules you have to do something, we'll just take away funding for it."* Or, as Christine O'Donnell (who actually wanted to know *"where in the Constitution does it say that church and state are separate?"*) has stated, "The Constitution is the solution."
- **"Real Americans" are becoming an endangered species** due to all of the illegal immigrants, many of whom come here just to have babies who, according to the 14th Amendment automatically become citizens. Texas Republican Louie Gohmert believes that many women come to this country with unborn babies who are "pre-programmed to blow things up in fifteen or twenty years from now."
- **The 17th Amendment** (which permits direct election of U.S. Senators) should be repealed, because it was, in the words of Utah Republican/Tea Party candidate Mike Lee, "a mistake."
- **America is on the verge** of being taken over by either the United Nations, China, the Illuminati, the Communists, or the Muslims -- take your pick.
- **According to the new health care law**, anyone who does not purchase insurance will be fined \$20,000 and sent to prison.
- **The Federal Government is about to take away everyone's guns.** The fact that in its first 22 months, the Obama Administration has done virtually nothing to limit or restrict gun ownership "only goes to prove that they are about to take them away."
- **Anti-bullying programs** are nothing more than another part of the pro-homosexual agenda which pervades the current administration.

And on and on and on. Because of all the money (more than \$4.2 billion this campaign season), we are being even more inundated with negative print ads,

commercials and robo calls. To read, hear or view these ads one cannot help but conclude that if even one-quarter of what they say is true, each and every candidate in America should be behind bars for the rest of their lives.

One would hope that with all this, we would come to our senses and demand that *Citizens United* be overturned -- either through rigorous campaign finance legislation, or through the more patient expedient of replacing the current court with one that will have the guts and sanity to do it for us. For unless or until the current situation is reversed, our politics -- along with our government and our very way of life -- is going to be governed by the very wealthy whose theme song is an updated version of "What's good for General Motors is good for the U.S.A."

I long for a return to the day when *Dred Scott* will once again be the worst decision the Supreme Court ever made.

You got all that down Ms. O'Donnell?

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**November 06, 2010**

## **WHEN LUNATICS TAKE OVER THE ASYLUM**

Some thoughts on this past week's midterm election . . .

Somewhere amidst the crowing of conservatives, the laughter of libertarians and the pouting of progressives lurk several truths one might well keep in mind:

- "You campaign in poetry, you govern in prose;"
- "It's hard to be a clown when you have to run the circus;" and,
- "Sanity is scarce whenever lunatics take over the asylum."

In other words, the results were neither as execrable as some fear nor as blest as others believe.

These above-referenced verities are meant to act as points of illumination for all those who are currently stumbling around in the political ether gingerly groping for a handhold. Yes, this week's vote *does* reveal a bit about the current mindset of the American public -- at least that portion which deigned to come out and vote. To wit, we are anxious, angry, fearful and flailing. We are impatient, impractical and fairly unrealistic in both our demands and our expectations. While we seem to have just enough political sophistication to sense that all those endless hours of backstabbing broadcasts are meant to entertain rather than illuminate, we nonetheless lack sufficient intelligence or mettle to demand that our candidates debate issues rather than talk trash. As a result, we demand simple solutions to incredibly complex, interconnected problems and have an ongoing need to assert a recoverable innocence.

It is indeed sad to contemplate a United States Senate without Russ Feingold; the upper chamber should always have at least one heir to the legacy of Bob LaFollette. It makes no sense that a political pro like South Carolinian John Spratt -- one of the wisest and most fiscally prudent Democrats in Congress -- should lose his seat to Mick Mulvaney, a Tea Party darling, while Minnesotan Michelle Bachmann -- she of the deer-in-the-headlights stare and Whig voting record -- should be returned by an overwhelming majority. It is unsettling -- to say the least -- that Hoosiers should express their distaste for "career politicians" and "beltway insiders" by electing Senator Dan Coates, a man who first went up to Capitol Hill in 1976. It should give one pause to realize that Henry Waxman's House Energy and Commerce Committee gavel is now going to be in the hands of Texas' Joe ("We Owe B.P. an Apology") Barton, or that California's Darrell Issa is now going to be chair of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, where he can make good on his dream of instituting impeachment proceedings against President Barack Obama. And here in Florida, we elected Rick Scott governor, despite the fact that he refused to sit down and discuss his candidacy or his future vision with one editorial board.

And yet, as was stated above, the 2010 election results are neither as frightful as some fear nor as blessed as others believe. The first half of the equation is borne out by the fact that:

- California voters turned back well-funded challenges by Carly Fiorina and Meg Whitman in favor of Barbara Boxer and my old boss, Jerry Brown.
- Harry Reid is still a United States Senator, and Sharron Angle is still a civilian.
- Delaware voters overwhelmingly rejected Christine O'Donnell who, like that state's eponymous river, turned out to be a mile wide at the mouth and six inches deep.
- Tea Party Darlings running for the United States Senate were sent packing by the voters of Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, Nevada and Washington State.

The second part of the equation -- that the results are not as blissful as many believe -- is borne out by the fact that:

- Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, putative House Speaker John Boehner and putative House Majority Leader Eric Cantor are going to have their hands full dealing with bunches of Tea Party Libertarians like Senators-elect Rand Paul (KY), Marco Rubio (FL), and Ron Johnson (WI), and Representatives-elect Daniel Webster (FL), Steve Southerland (FL) Scott Tipton (CO), and Jim Renacci (OH). In theory, the new Tea Party-backed winners are going to make life miserable for GOP leadership on the Hill because they are against anything that smacks of "business as usual."
- House Republicans are going to have to figure out whether it is better to coopt or merely ignore the most ideologically-pure, most conspiracy-minded of the Tea Party newcomers -- those who are on the record as favoring the repeal of the 14th, 16th and 17th Amendments, stand foursquarely against earmarks, demand the outright repeal of "Obamacare," seek the impeachment of the president and tend to take their marching orders from Limbaugh, Hannity and Beck. If they remain true to their campaign platforms, these men and women are going to become a gigantic political liability -- an albatross really -- heading in to the 2012 presidential election.
- It's going to quickly dawn on the Republican leadership that unless they accomplish something -- instead of merely screaming out "HELL NO" from the back benches -- they are going to come in for an equal share of the blame come 2012. Again, as noted above, it's hard to be a clown when you have to run the circus.

Will it finally dawn on the Obama Administration that bipartisanship is a pipedream -- that the Republicans are on the record as being far more interested in doing that which will benefit their party in 2012, rather than that which will benefit America in 2010? From what the president said at his post-election press conference, it would appear that he is going to continue reaching out across the political aisle in the vain hope that someone -- anyone -- will meet him part way. From where I sit, there are precisely two chances of this happening: absolutely none and even less than that. It is high time for the president to move from poetry to prose; to go from campaigning to governing. Just don't expect any helping hands from the "loyal opposition." For to the conservatives and libertarians of the incoming 112th Congress, Democrats aren't merely the opposition; they are the embodiment of evil.



Yes indeed, sanity *can* become scarce when lunatics take over the asylum. In the coming two years, it will be the continuing task of progressives to act sanely, speak in prose, and never, never give up or give in.

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Posted by Kurt Stone on November 06, 2010 in [All Politics All The Time](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



November 12, 2010

## **D-Y-S-F-U-N-C-T-I-O-N-A-L**

Let's see if we've got this straight:

- Common sense -- and a ton of polls -- strongly suggests that a majority of those who voted in the November 2 midterm election were chiefly concerned about jobs and the state of the economy.
- These same polls provide ample statistical evidence that nationally, Republicans are just as unpopular -- if not a tad more so -- as Democrats.
- That non-Democrats -- this would be Tea Partiers and Republicans trying to pass as Tea Partiers -- won largely because they stuck to their script and hit a resilient chord yelling and screaming about huge deficits and a dangerously out-of-whack federal budget, high taxes, an overpaid bloated federal bureaucracy and a general need to "take back government" from the hands of out-of-touch, latte-sipping elitists like Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi and \_\_\_\_\_ (the name of your local Democrat goes in here).
- That what Americans desperately crave are senators, representatives, governors and state legislators who won't spend money we don't have, will cut both spending and taxes while shrinking the deficit, and will abide by the literal word of the Constitution as intended by the Founders.

With me so far?

I hope so, because these, in a nutshell, are the scripted points upon which Republicans and Tea Partiers ran . . . or not. I say "or not," because in reality, all of those issues related above came across not in the positive, but rather in the negative, namely as "*Don't dare* vote for Democrat X, because that slimy spineless socialist favors huge deficits, unlimited earmarks, sky-high taxes and a vastly expanded federal government."

Backed by billions of bucks and tens of thousands of hours of negative, prevaricating campaign commercials, the moral albinos of the far right sold American voters an obvious bill of goods. How do we know this? Because within 12 hours of the polls closing, these supposed fiscal *uber*-hawks were already talking about what would become issue #1 in the days and weeks ahead: making damn sure that the Bush-era tax cuts for the wealthiest 2% be made permanent! - - *minimally adding \$700 billion* to an already out-of-whack federal budget. How's that for deficit reduction? How's that for spitting in the eye of all those angry fearful Americans who thought they were voting for fiscal sanity?

Where oh where are all the angry voices screaming out ARE YOU CRAZY? HAVE YOU TAKEN LEAVE OF YOUR SENSE? YOU'RE YELLING ABOUT DEFICITS AND YET ARE DELIGHTED TO ADD ANOTHER \$1 TRILLION? HOW CAN YOU LIVE WITH SUCH NAKED HYPOCRISY?

For his part, the President, grafting the heretofore sports' term *shellacking* onto the political dialogue, suggested that perhaps the White House would be amenable to discussing a temporary extension of the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy, just so long as tax cuts for the middle and lower-economic classes remain in place.

Ah yes, bipartisanship . . . compromise . . . a return to politics as "the art of the possible" and all that. For this blessed turn of events to occur, we would need a political system which is functional; one in which leaders and practitioners still understand the definition of

*commonweal* -- namely "the common good." But they don't; our political system has become totally dysfunctional; a puerile game of "gotcha!" in which both sides bow to the will -- and dance to the tune -- of the privileged few at the expense of the very many. Already, it is painfully clear that the 112th Congress -- that which doesn't get sworn in until January 3, 2011 -- is going to be 2 years of Nero-like fiddling while America continues to burn. It will likely accomplish nothing of note or importance, short of Democrats blaming Republicans and Republicans blaming Democrats for any and every onerous act since the Whiskey Tax.

I for one would urge the White House stiffen its spine, say "hell no" to extending tax cuts for the wealthy, and quite trying to be -- to reverse the old slogan -- "an echo, not a choice." As we said last week, there are two chances that the Republicans are going to work with the White House: absolutely none and less than that. As dear old Dad might have said:

*"What is the worst thing that could happen if you stand by your guns, attempt to live up to your original promises and fight the good fight based on what you believe rather than on what is expedient? That they call you pisher? Let them . . . the sting lasts but a moment; the sense of self-worth a lifetime."*

Historically, during times of grave political dysfunction, Americans turn to third- or independent political parties:

- In the 1840s it was the "Know Nothings"
- In the 1890s, the "Populists"
- In the 1930s, the "Union Party"
- In the 1940s, the "American Labor Party"
- In the 1960s-70s, the "Peace and Freedom Party" and
- In the 1980s-90s, the "Green Party."

While some would add the Tea Party Movement to this list, it is not, literally speaking, a "third party." Rather, it is an angry faction within the GOP. Nonetheless, during times of political dysfunction, people turn to those they consider outsiders, "visionaries," "folks who

are just like us." During our current era of dysfunction many believe that Sarah Palin is that person who could lead us through the maelstrom. They are certainly entitled to both their opinion and their delusion. If she ever runs for President of the United States, it will of course be as a Republican, not the leader of a new third party.

Many are beginning to look to New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg as that visionary -- as the one who can best deal with dysfunction. For two fascinating takes on Bloomberg and Palin, I call your attention to two recent articles:

John Heilmann's piece "[2012: How Sarah Barracuda Becomes President](#)" in the October 24, 2010 edition of *New York* magazine, and Ben McGrath's "[Bloomberg, 2012?](#)" in this week's *New Yorker*. Goodness knows Governor Palin is currently the most popular figure among American conservatives, and is a genius when it comes to working the media. She is a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week cable happening all by herself. And despite possessing many grave shortcomings, she could conceivably become the Republican nominee in 2012. As for Mayor Bloomberg, well, despite being short, divorced and Jewish, he can easily spent upwards of \$3 billion on a campaign without batting an eyelash, and has the one of the prime credentials people look for in time of economic uncertainty: fiscal credibility. He is both a fiscal conservative and a social/cultural moderate, and obviously bears no animosity towards Wall Street.

Although neither scenario is likely to occur, they do make fascinating reading, and do make one long for a political world that is more functional than fatuous, more patriotic than puerile. For unless and until we remedy the dysfunctional nature of American politics, the solution to our problems will become ever more daunting, the fulfillment of our dreams ever more distant.

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(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



November 20, 2010

## **IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS OBFUSCATION**

Among the literally hundreds of students who attend my courses at various South Florida universities, I have this one who could best be described as a world-class, refractory contrarian. Namely, one whose academic *raison d'être* -- at least *vis-à-vis* yours truly -- is challenging me on the veracity of virtually anything I care to impart. Let me say up front that this individual is more libertarian than liberal, thinks Glen Beck knows his beans and likes Sarah Palin because "she's not some sort of an elitist phony."

The other day, the issue at hand was the U.S. Constitution; specifically, the effect that *Citizens United v Federal Elections Commission* had on the 2010 election. In expanding the nature of our mini-debate (unlike me, he thought the decision was "right, proper and a boon to Democracy") we got to chit-chatting about the 1st Amendment in general. At one point he categorically averred that "Nowhere does the Constitution mention the 'separation of church and state,'" and that further, it fully protects and guarantees the right of 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.'

I responded to his second statement first, noting that the phrase 'life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness' is *not* found in the Constitution, but rather in the Declaration of Independence. I explained that the *5th Amendment* does offer protections to our 'life, liberty, or property,' noting we cannot be deprived of any of them without due process of law.

"Yeah, yeah, that may be" he retorted somewhat half-heartedly, "But you've got to admit that the Constitution doesn't say anything the 'separation of church and state.'" At this point I asked him "Who are you studying the Constitution with . . . Christine O'Donnell or Sarah Palin?"

"You can knock them as much as you want," he told me. "But it doesn't change the fact that the words 'separation of church and state' are not in the Constitution. Period. Am I not right?" he asked me. He concluded by breathlessly informing me -- and certainly not for the first time -- that "Any understanding of the Constitution must be based solely on the Founding Fathers' original intent . . . what is written in black-and-white."

"Technically," I replied, "you are correct; the 1st Amendment does *not* contain the words 'separation of church and state.' Nonetheless, from the writings of both Jefferson and Madison, it is clear that they were totally opposed to the federal government sticking its nose into religion." I found myself wishing that I had at my fingertips, a copy of [Jefferson's 1802 letter](#) to the Danbury Baptist Association, in which he wrote:

***Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his god, [the people in, the 1st Amendment] declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment, or the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.***

I am sorry to report that despite my best efforts to instruct, uplift and enlighten, my student remained -- to use a Dickensian term -- "adamantine" in his certain knowledge that the Constitution must only be understood in terms of its literal, objective words; that to place it under the subjective microscope of interpretation is just plain wrong.

Of course, this man is not alone; there are hundreds of thousands -- perhaps millions -- of folks out there in the hinterlands who firmly believe that "the Constitution means precisely what the Founders intended -- no more, no less." During the recently-concluded mid-term elections, we heard a lot of candidates proclaim that when they got to Congress, they would subject virtually every law, amendment or resolution to Constitutional scrutiny; to make sure that said law, amendment or resolution was not in violation of the Founders' "Original Intent." To say the least, this is virtually impossible, not to mention intellectually bankrupt. For it is impossible to know precisely what the Founders' "Original Intent" may or may not have been. Hell, even they weren't so certain. One merely need pour through the Federalist Papers and other assorted documents of the times to honestly conclude that these august gentlemen disagreed with one another on most issues of legal import. Moreover, the very brilliance of the document they hammered out -- both the Constitution and subsequent Bill of Rights -- is to be found in its haziness, in its very ability to be reread and reinterpreted by each succeeding generation.

Had not the very first Supreme Court given its blessing and imprimatur to the interpretation of the Federal Constitution way back in 1791 (*West v. Barnes*, 2 U.S. 401) that document would have stultified and become both fossilized and useless long, long ago. That we are still a nation of laws -- and under the same document -- is a testimony to the brilliance of haziness and obfuscation. As more than one sharp legal mind has proclaimed, "The Constitution is what the Supreme Court says it is." The Founders seem to have understood that for a document to be timeless, it must be interpreted and reinterpreted over time.

To proclaim -- as many, including my aforementioned student have -- that the Constitution is static and means precisely what the Founders wrote more than 220 years ago -- makes about as much sense as saying that the Bible must never be subjected to interpretation; that the word of God is clear, unerring and immutable. Without inquiry, debate and generation upon generation of commentary, the Bible is a static document that makes little sense. It can also be dangerous. Case in point, the case of the "stubborn and rebellious son" (*ben sora'yr u'moreh*) as found in Deuteronomy 21: 18-21. According to the literal wording of the passage, parents of a stubborn and rebellious child are commanded to take him before the elders (the court) of the community and testify to that child's recalcitrance. Then, the elders are to stone that child to death. Period. Without commentary, it is likely that every last one of us would be in big trouble. The text begs us to ask questions such as "what is the definition of 'stubborn' or 'rebellious?'" "How many warnings is the child to receive before such drastic measures are taken?" And, "How often was the sentence carried out?" Fortunately, it turns out that the dire punishment, though on the books and very real -- has long remained a threat and not a reality. Again, without interpretation, the literal words of the text would doom most of us to death by stoning.

To take the Bible -- or the Constitution -- literally consigns it to the dustbin of history. It is through the acts of inquiry and interpretation, of contemplation and debate, that both the Constitution -- and the Bible -- live, breath and continue to exercise an overarching presence in the lives of modern people.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



November 27, 2010

## **THE FINE ART OF LYING**

Hardly a day goes by without at least one email arriving in each of my inboxes which deathlessly, breathlessly informs me of an item of absolutely critical import that:

- a) I must not delete, and
- b) Simply must forward along to everyone on my mailing list, lest "they" take over the world as we know it.

Examples? Well, within the last 10 days, I have been vouchsafed the following "facts":

- That President Obama plans on honoring "Hanoi Jane" Fonda as one of the '100 Women of the Century.' This email, after exhaustively revisiting the "facts" of Ms. Fonda's ill-conceived 1968 trip to North Vietnam -- for which she has both publicly and profusely apologized over the past 4 decades -- concludes, in capital letters, "IF YOU NEVER FORWARDED ANYTHING IN YOUR LIFE, FORWARD THIS SO THAT EVERYONE WILL KNOW!!!! A TRAITOR IS ABOUT TO BE HONORED. KEEP THIS MOVING ACROSS AMERICA.
- That this very week, the University of Kentucky "removed the Holocaust from its curriculum because it 'offended' the Muslim population, which claims it never occurred. . . . This email is intended to reach 40 million people worldwide. Please don't just delete it. It will only take you a minute to pass it on!"
- That on pages 1000-1008 of "H.R. 3200 [Healthcare Bill]," one will discover that Obama and the Democrats have sneaked through a provision which

- "requires that patients be implanted with microchips," to be part of a "National Medical Device Registry."
- That President Obama's recent trip to India cost taxpayers \$200 million a day; moreover, that the administration used more than 40 airplanes, and took over "Five hundred seventy rooms at the Taj Mahal," and that
  - Cell phone users must register their numbers with a national "Do Not Call" directory by a given deadline to prevent their cell phone numbers from being released to telemarketers.

First and foremost, all five of these "facts" are absolutely false. Without getting into tremendous detail, it *is* worth noting that:

- The Jane Fonda story has been circulating around the Internet since 2009. The email in question goes into close detail about how Ms. Fonda "humiliated various American POWs and actually handed over their Social Security numbers to their North Vietnamese captors." Recent interviews with POWs named in the email reveals that nothing of the sort occurred. In matter of fact, the "100 Women of the Century" was a project of the *Ladies Home Journal* and a TV special hosted by Barbara Walters that aired *April 30, 1999*. Jane Fonda *was* one of the 100.
- The original version of the "University of Kentucky to remove Holocaust from its school curriculum" has been hanging around the Internet since at least 2007. Moreover, in the original email, "UK" meant "United Kingdom," not "University of Kentucky." As early as November 2007, the University of Kentucky issued a press release strongly denouncing the rumor. Moreover, nothing of the sort occurred in the United Kingdom. The BBC quoted an official of the Department of Education and Skills (DES) who maintained that "Teaching of the Holocaust is already compulsory in schools at Key State 3 (ages 11-14) and it will remain so . . ."
- The "implanted microchip" canard references "Section 2521, page 1000 . . . of HR 3200." In matter of fact, HR 3200 was an earlier House version of health care reform legislation that was never passed by Congress. The bill which Congress did enact, HR 3590, in no way mandated that anyone be implanted with any type of microchip device, for any reason. What the bill *does* call for is the creation of a registry which allows the Department of Health and Human Services to collect data about medical devices "used in or on a patient" -- including devices which patients consent to have implanted in them during surgery, such as pacemakers.
- Although no one knows precisely how much the president's trip to India and the G-20 Summit in Japan cost, \$200 million a day is preposterous. This story goes back to an unsubstantiated rumor published by one Indian news agency quoting an "anonymous source." Moreover, the Obama party did not take over "Five hundred seventy rooms" at the Taj Mahal."

The Taj Mahal is a museum, not a hotel. The Obama party did stay at the Taj Mahal Hotel, which though undeniably 5-star, is decidedly not the museum.

- The cell-phone op-out registry is a demonstrable falsity which has been circulating for more than 7 years. It apparently grew out of a misunderstanding about the proposed creation of a wireless directory assistance service -- a service which has never seen the light of day.

It is often said that once something makes it on to the Internet, it remains there in perpetuity. How fascinating. How frightening! Especially in light of how many people tend to believe much of what appears on their computer screens. Why would so many people perpetrate -- and perpetuate -- so many obvious misstatements, exaggerations and downright lies? Indeed, what is there about the human psyche that leads many otherwise bright, creative, technically-savvy people to create worms, viruses and other malevolencies with which to wreak cyber havoc? Those chapters in the gigantic text of abnormal psychology, I fear, have yet to be written.

Historically, ethics, legalism and human psychology have always lagged behind technology. Daimler, Benz, Ford *et al* produced horseless carriages years before municipalities found the need for speed laws or drivers even considered the need for automotive etiquette. Lumière and Edison were screening "flickers" and "moving pictures" years before anyone thought about the necessity of copyrighting their material.

We've all heard the expression, "Any country that can land a man on the moon can end . . ." And whether that which can be accomplished is the end of hunger, war, discrimination or inequality, the first part of the equation is purely technical or scientific; the second mostly ethical with a dollop of politics. Today, we are faced with a relatively new world of technology -- cyberspace -- that is far, far out in front of ethics and etiquette.

Many of the lies, fabrications and exaggerations on the Internet, have a political basis; the ability to do damage to one's enemies (or prop up one's allies) via virtual assault. Others likely stem from the fact that there are many people who cannot resist placing stumbling blocks in front of those who are -- metaphorically speaking -- blind, deaf, halt or lame. Then too, I guess some folks just get their kicks out of scaring the living daylights out of the unsuspecting.

Until the time comes when cyber bullies and Internet prevaricators fade into oblivion, I would recommend that everyone keep two live links handy on their toolbars: "[Snopes](#)" and "[Factcheck.Org](#)." These two sites, better than most (and

there are certainly others) research the relative truth or falsity of all those fantastic emails that keep appearing in our inboxes.

Remember, "A lie gets halfway around the world before the truth gets a chance to put its pants on . . ." (Sir Winston Churchill)

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



December 03, 2010

## LONGA MEMORIA PUBLICA

Last night, while watching a video clip of Minority Leader John Boehner speaking to the press after a House vote on extending Bush-era tax cuts for the lower and middle classes (which passed 234-188), I was reminded of one of Grandpa Doc's favorite jokes:

After not seeing each other for many years, Mrs. Katz and Mrs. Gold happen to run into one another. Mrs. Katz asks Mrs. Gold how everyone in her family is faring, and what she's been up to.

**Mrs. Katz:** "My daughter Rachael is now married to a doctor -- a surgeon. He earns more than a million dollars a year."

**Mrs. Gold:** "*Fantastic!*"

**Mrs. Katz:** "My son Morris has a clothing factory that is going to be bought out by a famous French designer for millions and millions of dollars!"

**Mrs. Gold:** "*Fantastic!*"

**Mrs. Katz:** "Three of my grandchildren will be heading off to college within the next two years; all of them will be going to either Harvard or Yale."

**Mrs. Gold:** "*Fantastic!*"

**Mrs. Katz:** "So tell me Mrs. Gold, what have you been up to?"

**Mrs. Gold:** "I went to charm school and took lessons in etiquette. I learned to say '*fantastic*' instead of '*bullsh. . .t!*'"

Those who are aware of what term Minority Leader Boehner used in describing that vote will readily understand why grandpa's old rib tickler came to mind: for Boehner referred to the exercise as "*chicken crap*." As Boehner explained things, the bill before the House was nothing more, nothing less, than the Democrats' "opening salvo" in the 2012 election.

"*Chicken crap*?" Is it "*foutaise*" to find greater urgency in lending assistance to more than 2 million jobless Americans -- especially at this time of the year -- than enriching the already well-heeled? On the other hand, isn't it "*connerie*" to claim that once the already wealthy have their tax cuts made permanent, they will suddenly become champions of the oppressed and start creating millions of new jobs? Just who's "*cagando*" whom?

As Boehner Cantor, McConnell, Pence and the rest of their tribe have explained, without cutting taxes for the wealthiest 2%, the economy will never turn around, for jobs simply won't be created. Incessantly, these guys, along with their media mouthpieces, have preached that catechism which states "When the wealthy get wealthier, we all benefit."

Even as I write these words, I can hear the fictional Mrs. Gold: "*Fantastic!*"

Clearly, none of the 231 Democrats and 3 Republicans who voted in favor of extending middle class tax cuts expected the bill to become law; that would be a ridiculous pipe dream. For as certain it is that God made little green apples, the GOP will make certain it is buried in the Senate. No, what the Democratic strategy entailed in bringing the issue to a vote was based not on pipe dreams, but on a hope -- for some a belief -- that *memoria publica* -- public memory -- is long; that come 2012, the great unwashed masses will recall how Boehner, Cantor, McConnell *et al* refused to pass an extension of Bush's middle class tax cuts -- or an extension of unemployment benefits, or the START Treaty, or the repeal of "Don't Ask Don't Tell," or virtually anything of importance -- unless and until the Democrats cave in and extend tax cuts for the very wealthy. In other words, if the Democrats won't grant the wealthiest even greater wealth, then the unemployed can, as Mrs. Gold might have put it, "*Gai kaken oif'n yam*" -- which we will very, very politely translate as "Take a hike!"

Moreover, if indeed *longa memoria publica* -- public memory is long -- then we will also recall -- so the Democrats hope -- that while the GOP screamed long and hard about how they wouldn't support the extension of jobless benefits -- at a cost of roughly \$18 billion -- unless offsetting spending cuts could be found, they saw no need whatsoever for similar cuts to offset the tax cut extension for the wealthiest 2%, which cost roughly \$700 billion.

In other words, what the Democrats are banking on is that next time around, people will remember that it was the GOP that placed tax cuts for the truly wealthy ahead of virtually anything and everything else. They are betting that the public will remember that while Boehner, Cantor *et al* kept screaming about our "fatally out-of-balance budget "and "the desperate need for extraordinary fiscal prudence" and "across-the-board shared sacrifice," the Republicans proved once again that they are little more than lapdogs and lackeys for their plutocratic masters.

To again quote Mrs. Gold, "*fantastic!*"

The GOP, on the other hand, are of the belief that *memoria publica brevis*, namely that public opinion is brief; that come 2012 the public will have forgotten whatever culpability the Republicans may have had, and will once again blame Democrats for all their problems. And you had better believe that the Republicans will do everything in their power to be the great reminders.

Those who bank on *memoria publica* -- whether *longa or brevis* -- are living in a fool's paradise.

Now, to be perfectly honest, President Obama, the Administration and Congressional Democrats are far from innocent in all this. We can fault them for not being true to their sworn ideals or promises. We can point fingers at them for being fearful that were they to stand foursquarely with and for the middle class -- the Democrats' traditional bread-and-butter -- that somehow they would upset their base and lose support. We can stand amazed that they haven't been shouting from the rafters that TAX CUTS FOR THE WEALTHY DON'T STIMULATE ANYTHING BUT GREED! We can also fault them for not being honest; for not explaining in simple straightforward terms precisely what is going to be required if we're ever to right our sinking economic ship of state. It is one thing to unite people in their dreams and aspirations; it is something totally different to unite them -- or in this case, us -- in their/our shared responsibilities

If America is to avoid becoming like Greece or Ireland -- economic disaster areas -- we are going to have to do one whole hell of a lot more than mere nibbling at the problem; freezing federal wages, cutting out "waste, fraud and abuse," and curtailing earmarks (which has already failed in a Senate vote) simply aren't going to cut it. Everyone is going to have to sacrifice if we are to once again sail the high seas. Whether it is raising the retirement age, taking a scalpel to the federal budget, increasing the amount that is taxed for Social Security or instituting some sort of "Value Added Tax" (VAT) the American people are just going to have to be made to understand that there's a reason why we are called the UNITED States of America. All of the above requires leaders

who are strong, courageous, fearless and purposive; something which has been in rather short supply for a long time. It will additionally require something else: the daunting realization that we are all of us -- rich and poor, gay and straight, progressive and conservative, urban and rural -- in the same boat. And if one part of the boat sinks, the entire craft goes under.

For all those who believe that the only horizon which matters is the next election, remember the wisdom, and hear the voice of Mrs. Gold:

*"FANTASTIC!"*

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



December 10, 2010

## **BEWITCHED, BOTHERED AND BEWILDERED**

This week's most important development -- President Obama's compromise/capitulation with the G.O.P. over the issue of tax-cuts for the wealthiest 2% -- has me, in the titular words of that great Rogers and Hart show tune, "Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered." And in this, I'm certainly not alone. I polled the members of my "All Politics All the Time" class this past Wednesday. After a spirited discussion, I asked them what they thought of the president's decision: "Yeah," "Nay," or "I'm really not sure." The results?

- Of nearly 70 students, about 10% thought the president had done the right thing;
- Another 10-12% thought he had taken the pipe;
- The remainder -- more than three-quarters of the class -- weren't really sure.

As the lyric from Rogers and Hart's witty tune goes, *He's a fool and I don't know it/But a fool can have his charms. I'm in love and I don't show it/Like a babe in arms.*

In announcing terms of the agreement -- one he made without any significant input from his own party's Congressional leadership -- the president argued that although he was still opposed to the extension of tax cuts for the wealthiest 2%, he nonetheless felt he was doing what in the long run was in the best interest of the American people. He refused, so he said, to have the needs of 2 million unemployed Americans "held hostage" to the desires of the wealthy few. On the plus side, he informed us, in exchange for adding two additional years to the tax cuts for the well-heeled, he had secured a 13 month extension of benefits for the chronically unemployed. And, in exchange for significant tinkering with the estate tax (a 35% rate on estates of \$5 million or more), he was going to lower

payroll taxes by 2 points, and keep a few tax write-offs for businesses and middle-class families.

The president argued that without this compromise, the nation's economy was headed for a double-dip recession; that without his willingness to give in, *everyone's* taxes would go up dramatically on January 1. Without question, this latter point is true; everyone's taxes would go up . . . including those making millions per annum. This is bothersome.

One could argue, "He's the president of all the people, and as such, must put policy over politics." And perhaps that is what he has done. But then again, isn't everything political? While the president has been engaged in what he presumes to be a game of political chess, Boehner, Cantor, McConnell *et al* have been playing no holds barred "Texas Hold 'em." Sure, the White House spin masters would have it that the middle class has gained more than their wealthiest neighbors; that at least those who are unemployed aren't losing their stipends; that this Christmas won't be so bleak and Dickensian. And yet, 13 months at a cost of \$18 billion (unemployment benefits) just doesn't seem to be an equitable balance against 24 months at a cost of \$700 billion (tax cuts for the wealthy). Poll after poll has shown that a clear majority of the American public is against the latter giveaway; those polled feel strongly that the G.O.P. should not be permitted to hold up the nation's business for the benefit of a relative handful of wealthy Americans. And yet, that is precisely what they have done -- and continue to do. This is bewildering.

One might think that at least President Obama could have extracted something more from G.O.P. leaders. How's about a commitment that in exchange for the tax cut extension, they would support the repeal of DADT ("Don't Ask, Don't Tell"); or ratification the START Treaty. But no! They've all but put a spike into the heart of the former, and are continuing to drag their feet on the latter -- as if Nikita Khrushchev was still alive, still banging his shoe on the dais and threatening "We will bury you." One might think that President Obama might have bought a bit of good cheer from his most vocal critics on the right. But no! Rush Limbaugh has accused him of duplicity -- of actually *raising* taxes during a double-dip recession. Glenn Beck has noted that in cutting payroll taxes by 2 points, Obama is merely setting the stage for raising the retirement age to 70 or 75. This is bewitching.

The poor guy can't get a break.

Then again, he's also been taking it in the shorts from his own party. And who can blame them? For just who did the president go after in his "day after" press conference? Why members of the Democratic Caucus, that's who. Is it any

wonder that they have vehemently, overwhelmingly, rejected the president's deal and are now spoiling for a fight? To their way of thinking, in what little time remains of the lame duck 111th Congress, they must repair the damage the president has wrought, turn back his capitulation and force the Republicans to take responsibility for raising everyone's taxes. It is a long shot bet at best, but then who said Texas Hold 'em was a game for wimps?

The more I think about events of the past several days, the more convinced I am that the president has blown it; has once again failed to use his "Bully Pulpit" to stellar -- if indeed, any -- advantage. He has given the nation's wealthy few hundreds of billions in exchange for mere crumbs. He has indeed done that which he claims he would not: permit Republicans to hold the country hostage. In a sense, Barack Obama has finally united the country -- against him.

Bewitched, bothered and bewildered . . . no more.

If I were able to advise him one-on-one, I would strongly urge him to cancel this so-called compromise. I would advise him to heed the call of his better angels and stop being so damnably cowed by the Republicans. He has alienated a lot of his Democratic base while not understanding that independents are just as furious with Republican cupidity and intransigence as are progressives. I would urge him to call the Republican's bluff and make them show their hold card. I would make him realize that America is spoiling for a fight against the entrenched elite. All it needs is a leader who will lead.

*Burned a lot, but learned a lot/And now you are broke, so you've earned a lot/  
Bewitched, bothered and bewildered -- no more.*

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December 18, 2010

## ANDY HARDY GETS A HICKEY

This month, Turner Classic Movies has been showing a ton of Andy Hardy movies. Starring the ever-young Mickey Rooney, the series deals with the lives of the Andy, his father, the gruff but wise Judge Hardy (Lewis Stone -- no relative), mother (Fay Holden), older sister Marian (Cecilia Parker), and girlfriend Polly Benedict (Ann Rutherford), who all live in the fictional, All-American town of Carvel, Idaho. (N.B. Throughout the 20-odd films in the series -- which finally ended in 1958 -- Andy was paired with such relative unknowns as Judy Garland, Lana Turner, Kathleen Grayson and Esther Williams.)

Generally understood to be movie mogul Louis B. Mayer's idealized vision of his adopted country, the series centers around the relationship between Andy and his father, as the teenager goes through such angst-filled issues as dating, making the team and facing the most basic realities of life. As with most MGM movies of the day, everything turns out just fine; Andy heeds his father's sage counsel and is thereby able to look to the future with optimism and understanding.

In comparison to modern times, Andy Hardy's America is wonderfully benign. The kids of Carvel, Idaho didn't need to worry about Global Warming, AIDS, "gangstas," or a society that places greedy consumerism ahead of good citizenship. Andy and his friends never have to concern themselves with the possibility of being iced or outed; hell, they never even get a hickey.

Viewed from a distance of 70 years -- and understanding that Andy, Judge Hardy, Polly and Carvel, Idaho are all fictional -- things just seem to

have worked a lot better then than they do now. Andy and his friends were all reasonably literate and engaged; they had social consciences and seemed capable of heeding the voice of experience. And the local high school they attended, although supporting a world of sports, hijinks and petty romance, was nonetheless a place where learning and inculcation *were* going on in abundance.

Yes, "Andy Hardy" is both fictional and idealized; but then again, fiction - even at its treacly best -- is at least a pale shadow of reality. Compare the schoolboy world of Andy and his friends in Carvel with the educational reality made public just this week. In its "[Program for International Student Assessment](#)" (PISA) the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development assessed the knowledge and skills of an average 15-year old in the 34 principal industrialized countries of the world. Among PISA's findings we learn that American youngsters rank:

- 14th in reading (Shanghai, Korea, Finland, and Hong Kong are ranked 1-4).
- 17th in science (Shanghai, Finland, Hong Kong and Japan are ranked 1-4).
- 25th in math (Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea are ranked 1-4).

In asking the obvious question -- "Why do American students lag so far behind places like Poland, Thailand and New Zealand?" -- no two people seem to have the same answer, point fingers at the same target, or suggest the same possible remedies: Some claim that the test is unfairly balanced, because unlike the United States, which has a heterogeneous population, places like Shanghai, Hong Kong, Finland and Japan are, largely speaking, culturally homogeneous.

- Some aver that the problem is with the school calendar; that America has a far shorter school year than most industrialized countries. (This is true; our school year is still based upon the needs of a largely late-19th, earl -20th century agricultural society in which families needed their children available over the summer months for farming).
- Many see teachers' unions as the basic culprit, for they make it impossible to remove "unqualified teachers" out of the classroom.

They embrace market-oriented reform strategies - -performance pay and retention based not upon tenure but strictly upon the results of standardized tests like Florida's "FCAT."

- Then again, when questioned, many feel that students in countries like China and Korea score so high precisely because they have gotten *rid* of standardized tests and rote learning, and have dramatically raised the pay of classroom teachers.
- "Nonsense," others respond. "American teachers receive the highest pay in the world -- and it's only for working ten months a year!"
- The "solution," some proclaim is to provide vouchers so that parents can choose to send their children to either charter or private schools -- thereby gutting the very system of American public education that served us so well for so long.
- Many Republicans and Tea Party acolytes believe that the first issue on the agenda is abolishing the federal Department of Education and replacing it with local, parental control of local schools.
- Others, like former Washington, D.C. schools Chief Michelle Rhee contend that reducing the number of highly paid administrators and holding principals accountable will go a long way towards solving the problem.
- Still others stress the absolute need to dismantle "No Child Left Behind" -- which the Obama Administration supports -- and replacing it with a new, bolder approach to education. What these folks have in mind is an approach which would combine universal child access to healthcare, early childhood education and the extension of learning opportunities into the summer with what they call an "[opportunity to learn](#)" agenda, defined as one which "reduces inequities in funding among schools and helping schools create conditions conducive to learning and healthy child development."

There is no telling what will happen to educational policy come January, when Republicans find themselves in charge of the House and in much greater numbers in the Senate. There is no such thing as a single GOP strategy for dealing with the problems and issues besetting American public education. Some want to abolish "No Child Left Behind," which they regard as an overreach of federal authority. Others want to gut public education by providing vouchers. And then there are those who simply

bewail the fact that "Johnny can't read" because we've strayed too far from Carvel, Idaho.

In the final analysis, the reasons why "Johnny" -- not to mention "Sarah," "Pedro," and "Solange" -- can't read, write, do math or understand science, but that "Ahmed," "Soon-Li," and "Lars" can, has as much to do with parents and social values as it does with the schools themselves. Unlike the good folks of Carvel, Idaho -- or Helsinki, Nanking, Seoul or Osaka for that matter -- we don't hold teachers in terribly high regard. We tend to pay them occasional lip service rather than a substantial wage. Consider that it takes an average classroom teacher here in Broward County, Florida *an entire year* to earn what Miami Heat forward LeBron James earns *every 12 minutes*. And, I can tell you that as a teacher/professor who is married to a teacher who is in turn the sister, sister-in-law and aunt of teachers/professors, what we do in the classroom is one heck of a lot more far-reaching and consequential than what Mr. James does on the basketball court.

If America is ever to get back to the level of economic and inspirational leadership we once proudly occupied, it will require far, far more than stimulus packages, tax-cuts for the wealthy or fervent prayers for a return to innocent days of Andy Hardy and Carvel, Idaho. It will require a top-to-bottom reassessment and revamping of an America that has lost its way; one which gladly offers all the "Andys" and "Pollys" products to consume even as it fails to teach them how to tabulate the charges.

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# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



**December 23, 2010**

## **GET A LIFE!**

Believe it or not, there are more than 250 congressional caucuses -- semi-formal panels with which members may or may not wish to affiliate. Formally known as "Congressional Member Organizations" (CMOs), these groups, broadly speaking, meet to pursue common legislative objectives. They range from such well-known, self-explanatory panels as The Congressional "Black," "Hispanic," "Women's Issues" and "National Public Broadcasting" Caucuses, and those which support a particular region or product, like the "Appalachian Caucus," "Democratic Israel Working Group," and "House Beef Caucus," to the truly bizarre, such as the "House Bicycle Caucus" (made up of those members who bike to the Capitol), the "Congressional Bourbon Caucus" (your guess is as good as mine!) and the "Minor League Baseball Caucus."

Indeed, when it comes to caucuses, Congress provides something for everyone. There is even a 68-member "[Congressional Prayer Caucus](#)" (CPC). Founded in 2005 by Virginia Republican Randy Forbes, CPC members -- of whom 64 are Republican and 4 Democrat, 67 Christian and 1 Jewish -- believe that "*There is a concerted effort to expunge every vestige of God from government and the influence that the Christian faith had on establishing the principles upon which our liberties are secured.*" In turn, the CPC is supported by the "[Congressional Prayer Caucus Foundation](#)," whose stated mission is



to do whatever they can to help ". . . *formally acknowledge the important role that faith in God and prayer plays in American life and history and to stand as a sentinel to guard the right of individuals in America to publicly pray and express faith in God.*"

One might think that the members of the CPC would be concerned with such classic religious issues as "Feeding the poor, clothing the naked, freeing the captive, and caring for the homeless, the widow and the orphan."

One might think.

Instead, the CPC seems far more interested in such issues as [H.Res397](#), better known as "America's Spiritual Heritage Resolution," which "*Affirms the rich spiritual and diverse religious history of our national's founding,*" and [H.Con.Res131](#), which "*Directs the Architect of the Capitol to engrave our national motto , 'In God We Trust.' and the Pledge of Allegiance in a permanent and prominent location in the Capitol Visitor Center.*"

Whatever happened to feeding the hungry or tending to the needs of the sick, the homeless or the orphaned?

Earlier this month, CPC Founder Randy Forbes (R-VA) sent Barack Obama a heart-felt [letter](#) -- signed by 41 of members of his group -- taking the president to task for a speech he had given at the University of Indonesia, in which he stated, "*But I believe that the history of both America and Indonesia should give us hope. It is a story written into our national mottoes. In the United States our motto is E Pluribus Unum . . . out of many, one . . . our nations show that hundreds of millions who hold different beliefs can be united in freedom under one flag.*"

Seems pretty unexceptional no? So what precisely were Forbes and his colleagues so worked up about as to send a rather lengthy missive of misgiving to President Obama? Why the fact that "*E Pluribus Unum* is not our national motto," but rather "In God We Trust" which, Forbes pointed out, is not only our national motto, but "Is also

referenced in our national anthem, and is engraved on our national coins and currency." Moreover, Forbes noted, *"During three separate events this Fall, when quoting from the Declaration of Independence, you mentioned that we have inalienable rights, but consistently failed to mention the source of those rights. The Declaration of Independence definitively recognizes God, our Creator, as the source of our rights. Omitting the word 'Creator' once was a mistake; but twice establishes a pattern."*

Let me get this straight: we're engaged in two wars, are running a multi-trillion dollar deficit, have an unemployment rate hovering around 10%, have just given a \$800 billion gift to the nation's wealthiest 2% and only got around to lending much-needed assistance to our heroic First Responders in the waning hours of Congress -- and you guys are all worked up over President Obama opting for *E Pluribus Unum* over "In God We Trust" when speaking to a university group on the other side of the globe?

Get a life!

One might think that being so obviously God-intoxicated, the five dozen-plus members of the CPC would be at the forefront of those pushing to assist folks who are in need, or defenseless, or otherwise trodden upon -- in other words, the widow, the orphan, the stranger in our gates.

One might think.

In doing a little old-fashioned leg work, I discovered something utterly fascinating about the 43 CPC members who affixed their signature to the letter criticizing President Obama's message in Indonesia. To wit:

- Only one of them -- Republican Vern Ehlers of Michigan -- voted in favor of the Dream Act. One, Georgia Republican Phil Gingrey, was absent. The other 41 voted against act, thereby making the children of illegal immigrants just as guilty as their parents. Anyone who knows their Bible will recognize that such callousness goes against that which we find in the book of

Ezekiel: *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."* (Ezek. 28:30)

- Only 2 of the Rep. Forbes' cosigners voted in favor of repealing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell." Does this mean that the other 41 believe that only straights are "created in the image of God?"
- 40 of Forbes' 42 cosigners voted against passage of the Food Safety Act -- a measure designed to protect consumers from the dangers of eating tainted or contaminated food by beefing up federal inspection. In voting against this measure -- which passed the House by a final vote of 215-144 -- Forbes' filthy forty were in violation of the Biblical dictum of "Not putting a stumbling block before the blind."
- Lastly, of those who even cared to stick around Washington, D.C. long enough to attend Congress' last day, CPC members represented nearly a quarter of the votes cast against the measure granting financial assistance to our heroic 9/11 first responders. This bill passed 206-60, meaning that 170 members of the House had already gone home to begin celebrating Christmas. (It should be noted that of 31 Jewish members of the House, 9 were absent, one -- Virginia's Eric Cantor -- voted against passage, and the remaining 21 voted in favor of tougher food inspection regulations.) From time immemorial, it has been a moral imperative to assist in any way possible, those who have put their lives on the line in our behalf. By voting against this measure, 60 members of the House -- at least 20 of whom are part of the CPC -- have traduced that imperative.

I firmly believe that history will look upon the 111th Congress as one of the most productive, most singularly impressive in the history of the republic. That it was able to accomplish as much as it did in terms of health care, business regulation, food safety and the new START treaty, is really quite remarkable -- especially in light of Republican intransigence. What will be in the 112th Congress is anyone's guess. But know of a certainty that those who -- like the men and women of the Congressional Prayer Caucus -- who become

exorcised when the president fails to mention God as often as they would like, should, in the words of only God knows who, "Get a life."

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Posted by Kurt Stone on December 23, 2010 in [Lunacy and Outrages](#) | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(6\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*



(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")

December 31, 2010

## AND YOU THOUGHT TOMORROW BEGINS 2011 . . .

According to a discussion in the *Mishnah* -- the early 3rd century redaction of Jewish law -- there are actually four new years:

1. The first day of *Nisan* is the New Year for kings and festivals;
2. The first day of *Elul* is the New Year for tithing cattle;
3. The first day of *Tishre* is the New Year for the reckoning of years, for Sabbatical years, and for Jubilees, for planting trees and for vegetables.
4. The first day of *Shevat* is the New Year for trees, in accordance with the ruling of *Beit* ("the House of") *Shammai*. However, *Beit Hillel* reckons the fifteenth of *Shevat* as the New Year for trees. (Source: *Tractate Rosh Hashanah* 1:1)

(Today, those of us who are practicing Jews observe only two of the four original new years -- *Rosh Hashanah*, the "new year of years," and *Tu b'Shevat*, the "new year of trees.")

Now, for those who are unfamiliar with Mishnaic debate -- or have never even heard of such a thing as "rabbinic law" -- this might sound pretty strange: *four* new years instead of *one*. However, if one pauses and ponders for just a second, we have more than one New Year in America as well:

1. January 1, the new year of years.
2. July 4, the new year for America
3. October 1, the new fiscal year for the federal government.
4. Aries 1, the new year of for astrologers.

And, lest we forget, January 1 of each odd-numbered year (such as 2011) is actually the beginning of the following year's presidential election.

Yes, you read the above correctly; as of tomorrow -- or "today" or "yesterday" depending on when you read this essay -- the presidential election of 2012 is in full swing.

And you thought tomorrow -- or today or yesterday -- begins (or began) 2011!

Already, we have our first "declared" Republican presidential candidate:. He is Andy Martin, professional political gadfly (he ran for Barack Obama's former senate seat in 2010) and self-proclaimed "King of the Birthers." Declaring on a radio talk show that he would be running on what he called a "birther platform," Martin said, "I'm going to have a tremendous impact on the presidential election, not because I'm the frontrunner. Clearly I'm not," he told the radio audience. "But I'll be driving the agenda in the Republican Party."

Interestingly, Martin -- who during the 2010 Illinois senate primary accused now-Senator Mark Kirk of being a homosexual -- avers that Barack Obama was likely born in Hawaii. And yet, he is still running on a so-called "birther agenda." "My campaign doesn't say he was born here or he was born there; it says 'produce the facts.' Tell the truth to the American people. If you want our confidence, if you want our sons and daughters . . . to die for your policies, we have to trust you."

And you thought Sarah Palin was weird!

Lining up behind -- or in front of or alongside of -- Andy Martin are a slate of other, less cartoonish men and women whose names are being bandied about as potential Republican candidates. The most prominent of these include:

- **Former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney:** On paper, Romney would seem to have what it takes to become the G.O.P. standard bearer in '12. He's both tall and rich, has a most photogenic family, has been a successful executive, and is clean as a hound's tooth. Nonetheless, he's also a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints (Mormon), which won't sit well with the party's evangelical wing, and presided over a state which instituted his own version of "Obama Care." In order to have even a slight chance at the nomination, Romney will have to somehow prove that he was always against his signature program.

- **Mississippi Governor Haley Barbour:** Barbour is the ultimate insider. A high successful lawyer/lobbyist, he served four years (1993-1997) as chairman of the Republican National Committee, during which time the G.O.P captured both the House and Senate for the first time in nearly two generations. White-haired, pugnacious and endowed with a strong "good ole boy" Southern accent, Barbour, in talking about growing up during the Civil Rights era said, "I just don't remember it being that bad," and credited the "White Citizens Council" for "keeping the KKK out of Yazoo City." Barbour has also been accused of profiting handsomely off of Hurricane Katrina.
- **Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich:** Gingrich has a reputation for being a thinker; he has a PhD and was largely responsible for the Republican's "Contract With America" in the 1990s. Professorial by nature and with many books to his credit the former speaker currently serves a Fox News commentator. His personal history does not sit well with the "family values" wing of the G.O.P.; Gingrich has been married three times and divorced twice. He reportedly served his first wife -- who had been his high school geometry teacher -- with divorce papers while she was in the hospital recovering from surgery for uterine cancer. His former staffers were quoted as saying, "He's a sociopath, but he's our sociopath." Gingrich resigned from Congress after the House Ethics Committee charged his GOPAC political action committee with financial irregularities, for which he was \$300,000 and formally reprimanded for violating House rules.
- **Former Alaska Governor Sarah Palin:** A lightning rod for conservatives and Tea Party acolytes, it is hard to believe that Palin has been a public figure for just slightly over 2 years. Prone to verbal gaffs, writing notes on her hand and speaking without first thinking, Palin has national name recognition -- the first thing required for anyone to become a successful nominee. In fact, this national name recognition could be her downfall; when everyone knows who a person is -- and a majority have a negative view -- it's almost impossible to reintroduce oneself to the public. Palin's "just one of the boys" image is beginning to wear more than a bit thin with both Republican insiders and the public at large.
- **Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee:** Huckabee is well-respected by his party's evangelical wing -- he's a former Baptist preacher. who does not believe in Evolution. After running a surprisingly second to John McCain in many 2008 Republican primaries, the guitar-playing Huckabee - like both Sarah Palin and Newt Gingrich -- found a home at Fox News. To date, Huckabee has not had much traction with the Tea Party wing of

the Republican Party. However, in the past two weeks, he has begun speaking out on an issue originally raised by Palin: the so-called "Death Panels," which he -- like Palin before him -- claims are one of the chief mandates to be found within "Obama Care." If Huckabee is going to base his candidacy on the issue which much of the mainstream media named the "biggest political lie of 2010," he is in for a short run.

These five are by no means the only potential G.O.P. nominees for 2012. The list could easily include Governors Mitch Daniels (IN), Bobby Jindal (LA) and Tim Pawlenty (MN), representatives Tim Ryan (WI), Ron Paul (TX) and Mike Pence (IN), and one former governor who, although not as frequently mentioned as Romney, Palin, Gingrich, Barbour or Huckabee, is the fellow I would keep eye on:

Yes, I am speaking of Jeb Bush . . . and so are a lot of Republican Party insiders. He is, quite possibly, the one candidate who looks -- at least at the moment -- like he has a chance to go toe-to-toe with President Obama. Deeply conservative and PRO-BUSINESS, this Bush unlike his older brother, knows what he believes . . . and believes he knows best. If any of the other potentials grab the nomination, I think the president can look forward to a second term.

In any event, stay tuned, because it's going to be an utterly fascinating year.

To all my loyal readers, I wish you

- *Szczesliwego Nowego Roku*
- *Bonne Annee*
- *Kenourios Chronos*
- *Felice anno nuovo*
- *Kul 'am wa antum bikhair*
- *Prosit Neujahr*
- *S Novim Godom,*
- *A gutt und gezunt yor tsu alemenen,*
- *L'shana tovah* and of course,
- Happy New Year!

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