

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



January 07, 2011

THE ISSA MAN COMETH

On Wednesday evening October 9, 1946, Eugene O'Neil's *The Iceman Cometh* had its Broadway premiere at the Martin Beck Theatre. Undoubtedly O'Neil's most ambitious -- and most difficult -- masterwork, *The Iceman Cometh* is set in Harry Hope's sleazy Greenwich Village saloon and boarding house in the year 1912. With the exception of three women -- all of whom are prostitutes -- Harry's male patrons are all devoted alcoholics who spend virtually the entire 4-hour production seeking oblivion in each other's company while attempting to cadge free drinks from Harry and the bartenders. Written out of what was obviously a profound sense of despair, O'Neil's characters express the playwright's disillusionment with the American ideals of success and aspiration and, as one critic noted, "suggests that much of human behavior is driven by bitterness and revenge."

The original *Iceman*, which starred James Barton, Dudley Digges and the 36-year old E.G. Marshall, would have a run of 136 performances; it would not be mounted on Broadway again for nearly a quarter century. . .

Nonetheless, it represents a watershed event in the history of "The Great White Way."

On Tuesday January 4, 2011, the 112th Congress had its world premiere on Capitol Hill. Included in the Republican cast were dozens of new members whose victories hinged on both voter dissatisfaction with the nation's economy and candidate pledges to change the way business is done in Washington, D.C. Among those named to chair committees in the House were such consummate insiders as:

- Wisconsin's **Paul Ryan** (Budget -- replacing John Spratt who lost his seat)
- Kentucky's **Harold Rogers** (Appropriations -- replacing the retiring David Obey)
- Alabama's **Spencer Bachus** (Financial Services -- replacing Barney Frank)
- Michigan's **Fred Upton** (Energy and Commerce -- replacing Henry Waxman)
- Michigan's **Dave Camp** (Ways & Means -- replacing Charlie Rangel) and
- California's **Darrell Issa** (Government Oversight -- replacing Eudolphus Towns)

Darrell Issa, the new Government Oversight Committee Chair, is beginning his sixth term representing the people of California's 49th Congressional District -- Northern San Diego County. Issa is a native of Cleveland. The grandson of Lebanese Christian Immigrants (Issa is an Antiochan Orthodox Christian), the family name means "Jesus" in Arabic. Following college (Sienna Heights) and a stint in the United States Army where he served as a tank platoon leader, Issa headed out to California, where he made a fortune through his company, Directed Electronics, which became most famous for its flagship product, the "Viper" car alarm. (The "Viper" has a siren that is actually a recording of Issa's voice saying 'PLEASE STEP AWAY FROM THE CAR!'). Today, Issa, with a net worth in excess of \$300 million, is easily the wealthiest member of the United States Congress.

Issa made an unsuccessful bid for the United States Senate in 1998. Despite spending \$10 million of his own money, he lost the Republican primary to California State Treasurer Matt Fong; he then turned around and won his House seat two years later. Issa first came to national prominence in 2003 when he contributed more than \$1.6 million to help fund a signature-gathering petition for the recall of then-California Governor Gray Davis. (Davis was successfully recalled and eventually replaced by Arnold Schwarzenegger.)

In taking over the Government Oversight Committee, Representative Issa is now poised to become chief congressional watchdog over the Obama administration. Under Republican control, Issa's committee will be in a position to subpoena reams and reams of documents from an administration he recently told Rush Limbaugh was "one of the most corrupt in modern times."

(I'm sure the ghost Richard Nixon will be pleased as punch with Issa's characterization. When Issa was challenged by CNN's John King on the use of the word 'corrupt' the congressman went after the entire network, and, namely, their understanding of the word.)

Issa has pledged to identify and cut at least \$200 billion in waste "on such things as Medicare misspending." For years, politicians have promised, like Issa, that they can and will bring spending under control by cutting "waste, fraud and abuse" from the federal budget. Again, Issa is in good company in making this pledge. However, for years, politicians have been wrong; if every dime of "waste, fraud and abuse" were pared from the federal budget, it would still be horribly out of kilter. In this Issa is still in good company. The big difference is that even if he cannot identify \$200 billion in misspent money, he can make life absolutely miserable for the administration. As one Democratic staffer said of Issa "His only goal in life up there is to make trouble for the Obama administration and the Democrats."

The Issa Man Cometh!

Now admittedly, Issa is not unique. Whenever 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue and the House Oversight & Government Reform Committee

(its official name) are in the hands of opposing parties, subpoenas fly like swallows to Capistrano. During the Clinton years, when Indiana Republican Dan Burton (who referred to the president as a "scumbag") wielded the committee gavel, the panel spent more than \$35 million issuing more than 1,000 subpoenas. Likewise, when he was committee chair, Democrat Henry Waxman was the George W. Bush administration's worst enemy, hauling in everyone from Condoleezza Rice and Valerie Plame to Donald Rumsfeld and Roger Clemens. As writer Nick Baumann noted in a "[Mother Jones](#)" article, "Issa's got the potential to be the Republican Henry Waxman -- on steroids."

Following the 2010 election, Issa sent a letter to "more than 150 trade associations, companies and think tanks" including "the oil industry, drug manufacturers and other trade groups and companies" asking them "to tell me which Obama administration regulations to target" in the 112th Congress. In political/economic terms [Issa's letter](#) is an prime example of what is known as "regulatory capture," which occurs when a governmental regulatory agency -- created to act in the public interest -- instead advances the commercial or special interests of the very industry or sector it is charged with regulating. If indeed Issa's motive in sending out the 150+ letters is for him to determine how various industries and interests wish to be regulated (or not), then we are in for at least two years of unbridled, unfettered non-regulation of industry and big business, and a couple of years of administration brow beating.

Yes, the Issa Man Cometh. And with him comes an agenda, a gavel, and a big committee budget. He's going to do everything in his power to make the sins of the administration look worse than Teapot Dome. Keep your eyes peeled on CSPAN, for I predict that Darrell Issa, his subpoenas and committee hearings, are going to become a cable staple. Sadly, the more we see of -- and hear from -- the *Issa Man* in the next couple of years, the more the acerbic words from the O'Neil's *Iceman* are going to resonate:

"To hell with truth! As the history of the world proves, the truth has no bearing on anything. It's irrelevant and immaterial, as the lawyers say. The lie of a pipe dream is what gives life to the whole misbegotten made lot of us, drunk of sober."

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ABOUT REP. GABRIELLE GIFFORDS

We are all shocked, saddened and angered over the attempted assassination of Arizona Representative Gabrielle Giffords, which resulted in the deaths of at least a half-dozen people, including a Federal judge and a 9-year old girl. Prior to the shooting, few people outside of her Congressional District had ever heard of Representative Giffords. I am one of the few who have written extensively about her. What follows is my essay on Gabrielle Giffords which appears in "The Jews of Capitol Hill: A Compendium of Jewish Members of Congress" which, ironically, was published 72-hours before the shooting.

Unbeknownst to all but the more fervent "Capitol Hill junkie," the official term for a caucus is "Congressional Membership Organization." In the 110th Congress there were more than 300 of them registered with the Committee on House Administration—almost twice the number of caucuses that existed at the end of President George W. Bush's first term in 2004. By the beginning of the 111th Congress in January 2009, the number had fallen back to a slightly more manageable 250. Less than a handful of these House caucus groups ever have face-to-face meetings. Almost all lack private office space or financing; only a select few have Web sites. In addition to the handful of caucuses that will from time to time get mentioned by name in the press—"Congressional Black Caucus," "BlueDog Coalition," "Republican Study Committee," and "New Democratic Coalition" are examples—there are dozens upon dozens that anyone away from Capitol Hill has never heard of. Some have names that easily indicate their cause or area of concern, like "Biomedical Research Caucus," "Congressional Brain Injury Task Force," "Congressional Missing and Exploited Children's Caucus," or "Congressional Caucus on Qatari-American Economic Strategic Defense, Cultural and Educational Partnership," which has the honor of being the caucus with the longest name. (The Senate has only one recognized caucus—on International

Narcotics Control. On the Senate side formal caucuses must be established by legislation.)

Then, there are caucuses whose names can give one the wrong impression. The “Congressional Bourbon Caucus” (chaired by **John Yarmuth**) and the “Congressional Gaming Caucus” (chaired by **Shelley Berkley**) do not consist of members who gather to drink and gamble. Rather, Yarmuth represents bourbon-producing Kentucky, and Berkley represents Las Vegas, the gambling capital of the United States; their caucuses are “gatherings” of colleagues who agree on the need to help support these industries. The Bourbon Caucus “plans to advocate for the bourbon industry by fighting proposals like a tax increase on liquor.” Likewise, Berkley’s Gaming Caucus “deals with a range of issues, pushing to reinvigorate the tourism industry and making sure regulations for Internet gambling are fair.” Likewise, the “Congressional Songwriters Caucus” is *not* a group of politicians who compose songs. Rather, its three dozen members “focus on issues like intellectual property protection.”

One of the House’s largest congressional membership organizations is Oregon Representative Earl Blumenauer’s Congressional Bicycle Caucus (CBC). Consisting of nearly two hundred members from forty-three states and the District of Columbia, the CBC “aims to promote cycling by improving infrastructure and increasing awareness of cyclists.” One of the newest—and smallest—of these interest groups is the Congressional Motorcycle Caucus, cofounded and co-chaired by Arizona Representative—and longtime motorcyclist—Gabrielle Giffords. It is but one of sixty-eight caucuses she joined in her first two years in the House. Among these sixty eight are three that at first blush have next to nothing in common: the Congressional Arts Caucus, the NASA House Action Team, and the House Green Building Caucus. However, a little research into the family, life, and interests of Gabrielle Giffords makes it abundantly clear why she joined these three groups: her mother, Gloria Fraser Giffords is a noted painter, art historian, author, and conservator; both her husband Mark E. Kelly and his twin brother Scott J., are NASA astronauts; Representative Giffords and her husband are so committed to living “green” that at their wedding ceremony, “the bride wore recycled Vera Wang. . . . Everything was biodegradable,” including “the cups and plates (which) were made from sugar cane and cornstarch.”

Gabrielle Gifford's paternal grandfather, Giff Giffords (born Akiba Hornstein) was the son of a Lithuanian rabbi. Akiba (1900–1985) was born and raised in New York. Somehow he acquired the nickname "Gifford" when he was in elementary school. While still living in New York, he married Ruth Paltrowitz, the daughter of Myer and Ida Paltrowitz. Myer ("Meyer Palterewitch") the son of Rabbi Simon and Sophia Paltrowitch, was born in Boston in July 1876. He enlisted for service at the beginning of the Spanish-American War. The longtime president of a plumbing supply concern, Myer was installed as "commander of the Hebrew Veterans of the War with Spain" eleven days before his death in January 1957. In addition to Ruth—the future Mrs. Giff Giffords—he and Ida had two sons and two daughters. One of their sons, Arnold ("Buster"), shortened the family name to "Paltrow." He married Dorothy S. Weigert. Their son, Bruce Paltrow (1943–2002) would grow up to become a nine-time Emmy-nominated producer, director, and writer (TV's *St. Elsewhere*), the husband of Emmy-winning actress Blythe Danner, and the father of Oscar-winning actress (*Shakespeare in Love*) Gwyneth Paltrow. (This means that although they have reportedly never met, Representative Giffords and Gwyneth Paltrow are first cousins once removed.)

Akiba, Ruth, and their son Spencer moved out to Arizona after World War II. Settling in the Tucson area, Akiba began to feel the sting of anti-Semitism; as a response, he started calling himself "Gifford" Hornstein. When that moniker "failed to give the desired effect"; he merely doubled his alias, thus becoming "Gifford Giffords." In 1949, Giff started El Campo Tire. The business began to prosper; in the 1950s, Giff, who did his own commercials, became a fixture on local television. Giff was a natural-born character. All Tucsonians who watched TV in the 1950s and 1960s remember Giff for "the late night equivalent of infomercials," which featured his "escapades throughout the world." Each program would invariably end with an invitation to "visit El Campo Tire and purchase some retreads."

Giff and Ruth were committed Jews, and were instrumental in establishing a Hillel Foundation chapter at the University of Arizona. Spencer eventually took over El Campo from his father and greatly expanded the business; by the time of its sale to Goodyear in 2000, it was officially "El Campo Tire and Warehouses, Inc.," had more than a dozen locations, and was Tucson's exclusive Cooper tire dealer and a Firestone associate. Spencer Giffords became a presence in the local community,

serving for many years on the Governing Board of the Tanque Verde School District.

Spencer Giffords married Gloria Fraser, a local artist with both a B.F.A. and M.A. in art history from the University of Arizona. Ever the businessman, Giff made sure that a tire formed the base of Spencer and Gloria's wedding cake. Like his first cousin Bruce Paltrow, Spencer married outside the faith; Gloria was and is a practicing Christian Scientist. Their first child, daughter Gabrielle, was born on June 8, 1970. She would be followed shortly thereafter by a second daughter whom they named Melissa. Despite having a non-Jewish mother, Gabrielle has always considered herself Jewish. The Giffords decided early on that they would "encourage their children to learn about other religions." "We were kind of neutral," Spencer Giffords remarked in a 2007 interview. "We let them decide for themselves. That's what Gabby did."

"Gabby" would go to Israel for the first time in 2001 as part of an in-depth tour for legislators (at the time she was a state senator) sponsored by the American Jewish Committee. The trip turned out to be "life-changing." Speaking of that journey she recalled, "It just cemented the fact that I wanted to spend more time with my own personal, spiritual growth. I feel very committed to Judaism." Upon returning to Tucson, Giffords sought out Stephanie Aaron, rabbi of the Reform congregation Chaverim, and began "a deeper exploration of her faith and her heritage." Rabbi Aaron and the congregation considered Giffords to be "technically" Jewish; in the Reform movement a child need have only one Jewish parent—whether mother or father—to be considered Jewish.

Gabrielle began her education at two small schools on Tucson's "tight knit rural Northeast side"—Tanque Verde Elementary and Emily Gray Junior High. She then attended University High School. Remembering the teenaged Gabrielle Giffords, one teacher remarked, "We called her 'Gabby,' and not because it was short for her name. She was pretty much a social animal. She was the type of person you would expect to grow up to become a newspaper reporter or something." Ironically, for nine of her twelve precollege years, she attended classes with Tim Bee, who would, like Giffords go on to become a state senator. (In 2008, Bee challenged Giffords in her congressional reelection; she defeated him 56 percent to 41 percent.)

Gabrielle Giffords went on to earn a B.A. in sociology and Latin American history from Scripps College in 1993, and a Masters of Regional Planning from Cornell in 1996. Giffords, already fluent in Spanish, focused academic attention during her Cornell years on Mexico- U.S. relations. She spent one year as a Fulbright Scholar in Chihuahua, Mexico, and was a fellow at Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government. While at the latter, she came under the wing of Clinton-era labor secretary Robert Reich who became her friend and mentor, and even helped officiate at her wedding. Moreover, Reich was quoted in an October 2008 article in the *Arizona Republic* as saying, "I wouldn't be surprised if she's the first or second female president of the United States. She's of that caliber."

Despite her Ivy League degree, Giffords is a true daughter of Arizona. She likes to talk about "the accoutrements of Western life: her gun, her truck, and her love of motorcycling." Indeed, one of her first actions after getting elected to Congress was to sponsor a resolution in support of "National Day of the Cowboy." (Gifford's resolution— H. Res. 984—garnered fifty-two cosponsors. These included two other members of the Congressional Minyan: Californian **Bob Filner** and Kentuckian **John Yarmuth**.)

Following Cornell, Gabrielle Giffords spent less than a year working in capital management for Price Waterhouse in New York. Before that year was out, "duty called," and she returned to Arizona to take over the reins of El Campo Tire from her father, who was ill. At age twenty-six, she was CEO and president of a company with one hundred employees and \$10 million in annual revenues. Like her father and her grandfather before her, Gabrielle became known for her television spots—her "Buck Stretcher" commercials. As noted above, she sold El Campo Tire to Goodyear in 2000.

Before the year was out, she had run for and won a seat in the Arizona House of Representatives. It was during her one term (2000–2002) in the lower chamber that she took her first trip to Israel. Immediately upon her return she introduced legislation, which became law, to help protect "Arizonans seeking unpaid benefits under Holocaust-era insurance policies." (One of the thirteen state legislators to vote against Gifford's bill was Representative Randy Graf. He would be Gifford's Republican opponent in her 2006 campaign for Congress.)

In 2002, at age thirty-two, she became the youngest woman ever elected to the state senate. While serving in the state legislature she was also managing partner for a commercial property management company. In November 2005, eleven-term moderate Republican Congressman Jim Kolbe announced his retirement. Giffords immediately became a serious contender for the 8th District seat, which includes Pima County (Tucson), historic Tombstone, Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, and a long, long border with Mexico.

Resigning her seat in the state senate, she entered the Democratic primary, defeating Patty Weiss, a “well-known Tucson news anchor” and four other candidates by a margin of 54 percent to 31 percent. She then turned her attention to her Republican opponent, Randy Graf, who had challenged Kolbe in the 2004 primary. Graf had attacked Kolbe—the House’s only openly gay Republican—for his support of an immigrant guest worker program. And although Kolbe won, it was only by a margin of 57 percent to 43 percent, a danger sign for any incumbent. Randy Graf ran once again in the Republican primary, relying as he had two years earlier on his “hard line on immigration.” Jim Kolbe refused to endorse him. Both Gabrielle Giffords and the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee (NRCC) understood that no single-issue candidate could hope to win the seat. Giffords had the issues, the campaign war chest and “a natural flair for attracting attention.” Her campaign featured photos of her with her motorcycle and her fiancé, shuttle *Discovery* astronaut Mark E. Kelly. In October, the NRCC stopped running television ads, effectively ceding the race to Gabrielle Giffords. She wound up winning 54 percent to 42 percent.

As an incoming freshman, Giffords was seated on three prime committees: Armed Services, Foreign Affairs, and Science and Technology. As a member of the House, Giffords has voted with her party nearly 90 percent of the time. She has shown a particular interest in solar energy—Arizona has more than three hundred sunny days annually—and has sponsored legislation for research and development of solar technology. It passed in the omnibus energy bill of 2007. She has also passed legislation extending tax credits to “manufacturers of solar technology.”

In 2008, Giffords was challenged by State Senate President Tim Bee, “a childhood classmate” and former colleague in the state senate. Giffords handily defeated him by more than forty thousand votes, 54.7 percent to

42.8 percent. In that 111th Congress, she was named—perhaps not at all surprisingly for the wife of a NASA astronaut—chair of the Subcommittee on Space and Aeronautics. From this post she will be a key player in the crucial decision on whether or not to retire the space-shuttle fleet in October 2010—“as President George W. Bush had commanded—or to authorize more shuttle flights.”

In the 2010 midterm elections, Giffords faced off against Jesse Kelly, who was listed as a “top ten Tea Party candidate to watch.” During the campaign, the gun-toting Kelly held a campaign fundraiser at a local shooting range, urging donors to “come on out and shoot an M-16.” He also urged voters to “take out” Representative Giffords in the coming election. Giffords managed to eke out a 3,500-vote victory, and was sworn in for her third two-year term on January 4, 2011.

Representative Giffords married Mark Kelly on November 10, 2007. Typical of their schedules, she was in Iraq up until a few days before the wedding. When her then-husband-to-be blasted off on July 4, 2006, Giffords participated in a NASA tradition: selecting one of the wakeup calls for the STS-121 crew. She chose “Beautiful Day” by U-2. When, on May 31, 2008, Kelly rocketed toward the heavens for the third time as commander of the STS-121, it marked the first time that an astronaut was married to a sitting member of Congress—and a Jewish one at that.

From: *The Jews of Capitol Hill: A Compendium of Jewish Members of Congress*. (The Scarecrow Press, ©2011 Kurt F. Stone)

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January 14, 2011

A MEMO TO SARAH PALIN

To: Gov. Sarah Palin

From: Rabbi Kurt F. Stone

Re: You, Menachem Mendel Beilis, and Your Political Future

Like many, I am both troubled and mystified by your recent YouTube video. That you chose to release the video on the very day that the eyes and hearts of the nation were directed towards Tucson where President Obama was speaking at the University of Arizona memorial service is, perhaps, forgivable. After all, striking while the iron is hot is one of the top-five rules in bare knuckles politics. However, turning yourself into a victim at a time when a nation mourns the dead and prays for the wounded is, decidedly, not forgivable. It betrays both a stunning lack of sensitivity and a wide swath of self-centeredness.

Governor, you were neither killed nor wounded, let alone targeted by a madman. You are, thank God, healthy, wealthy and in one piece. Again, you were not a victim. Oh sure, there has been a lot of idle chatter about you and the "role" you supposedly played in this horrific tragedy. But as you or one of your followers might say, "I reject their charges, but support their right to speak freely."

While I do *not* agree with those who say you are to blame for the carnage, I am nonetheless dumbfounded by your response to that horror; specifically, your narcissitic "woe is poor pitiful me" approach, and your tone deaf use of the term "blood libel." You should know that as a Jew, as an educated man who knows a thing or two about his people's history, these two words -- "blood libel" -- send

a 50 terawatt chill up my spine. I'm going to give you, your handlers and your speech writer(s) the benefit of the doubt and conclude that you do not understand what kind of memories, images or fears the words "blood libel" conjure up for Jews and other people with a sensitivity and knowledge of human history. You see, if not for this "benefit of the doubt," I would be left with no choice but to conclude that you are a bigot sending a out a "dog whistle message" to your supporters. Stated this way, it's not really a great choice; you and your people are either ignorant or bigoted. If it's the former, then perhaps you can be educated; if it be the latter, then you must be condemned.

Then again, perhaps you are neither ignorant nor a bigot; perhaps you are a craven political opportunist with an absolute tin ear -- which would be worst of all. Again, giving you the benefit of the doubt, I will conclude that you know as much -- or as little -- about Western (let alone Jewish) history as you do about international relations, diplomacy, economics, or the *Federalist Papers*. To your ardent followers, this lack of knowledge is a badge of distinction; sure-fire proof that far from being some sort of elitist snob, you are a "one of the guys." Sorry governor, but I want my leaders to be one heck of a lot smarter than I . . .

At a time when we are attempting to be more civil in our public discourse, giving you the benefit of the doubt is both fitting and proper. Let me clue you in on the meaning and history of "blood libel," thereby giving you an understanding of why your use of those two polarizing words has likely put an end to your presidential aspirations.

In brief, "blood libel" refers to the preposterous claim or accusation that Jews murder Christian children and then use their blood in the preparation of the Passover *matzah*. And you should know, Governor, that whenever and wherever this moronic canard has reared its ugly head, death, destruction and dismemberment of Jews and Jewish communities have generally followed. This lunacy -- the "blood libel" -- has been around for hundreds and hundreds of years. It is likely that the "blood libel" originated in the 12th century -- the time of the First Crusade -- when Christians discovered that Jews, rather than be subjected to forced conversion, committed suicide and killed their own children. (This is a religiously-sanctioned ritual known as *kidush ha-Shem* -- the "Sanctification of the name of God.") Apparently, these early Christians added two-plus-two and came up with nine; namely, that if Jews could kill their own children, they could also kill Christian children.

(You should know, governor, that Jewish dietary law -- kashrut -- strictly prohibits the use of blood (human or otherwise) in cooking. Blood from slaughtered animals may not be consumed, and must be drained out of the animal and covered with earth. Consequently,

the idea that Jews would use the blood of a Christian child in the making of matza is not only absurd; it goes against holy law.)

Over the course of more than 900 years, governor, there have been innumerable "blood libels." Generally speaking, they have occurred either during times of incredible stress and panic, or as a result of an unsolved murder. Such libels have destroyed entire Jewish communities in such varied places as:

- York, England (1090);
- Blois, France (1171);
- Trento, Italy (1475);
- Damacus, Syria (1840);
- Kishniev, Bessarabia (1903);
- Shiraz, Iran (1910);
- Massena, New York (1928) and
- Kiev, Ukraine (1913).

This latter case, Governor Palin, involves the infamous trial of a Jew named Menachem Mendel Beilis, who was accused of murdering a Christian child and using his blood to make *matza*. And although Beilis was eventually acquitted by an all-Christian jury, it took a terrible toll on the Jews of that city. It also gave rise to a famous novel by Bernard Malamud -- *The Fixer* -- which I would urge you to read. In fact Governor, I think you would benefit from reading a book by Professor Alan Dundes entitled *The Blood Libel Legend: A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore* (Univ. of Wisc. Press, 1991).

And lest you think this insanity faded away after the Holocaust, there was a notorious "blood libel" in Krasnoyarsk Russia in 2005, and in 2007, the leader of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel accused Jews of using children's blood to bake bread.

Are you beginning to get a glimmer of understanding governor? Can you see why rational, moral people would question the intelligence -- if not the motives or beliefs -- of anyone using the words "blood libel?" And especially someone who is giving serious thought to running for President of the United States of America?

My suggestion to you, Governor Palin, in all sincerity, is that you take your newly-made millions and fade from the public scene. Stay in Alaska; buy property in Carmel; get a winter retreat in Palm Beach, -- I don't care. Just leave politics and leadership to those who understand that its their job to unify, not to polarize; to those who who are genuinely sensitive, and not so damnably

umbrageous; to those who have a more fully-developed understanding and knowledge of the world, its people and its history. If you will do this -- fade away -- you will have performed an utterly invaluable service for both the people of America and indeed, the entire planet.

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COUPON CLIPPERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!



Last Wednesday in my "All Politics All the Time" course at Florida International University, we spent a few minutes discussing Mitt Romney's tax return, which he had released just the day before. Not surprisingly, most of students were well versed on how much

Romney's Home in Deer Valley, UT

Governor Romney earned per year (roughly \$20 million), the percentage he paid in taxes (approximately 15%) and the various sources of his vast wealth.

In the midst of our conversation -- for which I had originally allotted no more than ten minutes -- one student asked, "If Romney gets elected, will he be the richest president in American history?"

"That's a fascinating question," I answered slowly, doing a quick "Google search" in my head. "Although I'm not sure," I answered after a few seconds of silence, "*al regel achat* (Hebrew for *while standing on one foot*) I would have to say the answer is 'no' -- Mitt Romney would *not* be our wealthiest president. I think that distinction goes to George Washington, who in addition to being one of the

tallest men in the nation (nearly 6'2"), was likely its richest as well." My answer drew a few skeptical head

wags -- about both his height and wealth. I promised the class that I would do some serious research and hopefully have an answer for them by our next class session.

Another student challenged the class with a comment/question: "What does it all mean in the long-run? Just because the man's super-rich does that mean he can't understand people who aren't? Are we going to hold his wealth against him?"

The student was bringing up an intriguing point which, in a time of gross economic disparity, will likely be a major issue lurking just beneath the surface should Governor Romney get the Republican nomination.

As a society, our fascination with the "lifestyles of the rich and famous" is somewhere between widespread and universal. A quick survey of which magazines and tabloids are hawked at virtually every supermarket checkout line in America amply proves the point. How many people who don't even know the name of the family living across the street can give you line and verse about how



Romney's Home in La Jolla, CA

much famous people earn . . . or the price of their mansions or the "toys" they play? We know so much about people we don't truly know as to become inured to real life. We read or hear so much about other people's wealth that we can actually say of an athlete making \$2 million a season that "he's a real bargain." \$2 million a bargain? That's \$38,461.53 a week!

Sounds pretty outrageous when you break it down by the week -- or the game, at bat or even hour. Consider the following:

- Kobe Bryant makes \$307,853.66 per game -- if he plays all 82 games in a season.
- A-Rod makes \$50,000 per at bat -- if he comes to the plate 600 per season.

- Tom Brady earns \$825,507.50 per game, 16 games a season.
- In 2011, Lady Gaga earned \$1,730,770 a week.
- Mitt Romney earns \$2,285.00 an hour, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Don't get me wrong, I am *not* denigrating anyone making a king's ransom; God bless 'em all I say. But at the same time, you have to wonder if all that money might not create a wall of separation between *some* seriously wealthy people and the rest of us who *don't* have a 7 or 8 figure income. Yes indeed, there certainly *are* very wealthy people who never forgot where they came from; who still have a deep and thorough understanding of what it means to be living on the edge. Take former Representative Alan Grayson who, despite possessing a net worth somewhere north of \$30,000,000.00 is one of the wild and woolliest progressives in America. (Check out the essay on Alan in my book, [*The Jews of Capitol Hill*](#)) Then there are Senators Frank Lautenberg and Herb Kohl, two multi-multi millionaires who are at the forefront of those arguing for higher taxes for the wealthy and against cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

And then there's Mitt Romney. The son of former Michigan Governor -- and American Motors CEO -- George Romney, Mitt wasn't exactly born into the middle class. His father earned, on average, more than \$300,000 a year during his peak years.



Romney's Home in Belmont, MA

As such, Mitt and his 4 siblings were raised first in the upscale Detroit Palmer Woods neighborhood and then the even more tony Bloomfield Hills, where he prepped at the Cranbrook School. And although Mitt Romney is, without question, a good, decent and charitable man -- he tithes his church -- he acts and sounds like a man who hasn't the slightest idea what it is like to worry over whether one will have enough money to pay the mortgage, health insurance and utility bill, or is barely able to cover the monthly minimum on their credit cards - - despite working two jobs.

A person who is truly in touch with the challenges of daily life would not say -- even as a joke -- "I should tell my story . . . I'm also unemployed," despite earning 54,795.00 *a day* off of his investments. Who in the real world can blithely afford to

challenge someone to a \$10,000.00 bet -- as he did with Texas Governor Rick Perry? Then there's Romney's off-the-cuff comment, "I get speakers fees from time to time, but not very much." (In this case, the "not very much" amounted to more than \$350,000!)

When a candidate like Mitt Romney -- who in his lifetime has gone from being privileged to richer-than-Croesus -- or Newt Gingrich -- who has gone from lower-middle-class to multimillionaire -- argues for lower taxes for the rich and against, say, collective bargaining rights for union workers, it smacks of being completely out of

touch. When a man like President Barack Obama -- the child of a mixed-race broken home -- who earned more than \$5 million writing books -- argues in favor of the rich (which now includes him) paying "their fair share," one gets the sense of a person still in touch with real people living real lives, facing real challenges.



With economic disparity looming as the subtext for the 2012 presidential election, one can't help but believe that Mitt Romney is going to be at a decided disadvantage.

Romney's Home in Wolfboro, NH

Now, as to the question of our wealthiest president: turns out I was correct. According to a fascinating story published on the acclaimed website [24/7 Wall Street.com](http://247WallStreet.com) George Washington was, far and away, our wealthiest Commander in Chief. The editors of 24/7 Wall Street estimate that Washington was worth -- in 2010 dollars -- somewhere in the neighborhood of \$525 million. Additionally, he made far, far more than subsequent presidents; his salary was 2% of the total U.S. budget in 1789! Other truly wealthy chief executives include Thomas Jefferson (\$212 million), James Madison (\$100 million), Andrew Jackson (\$119 million), Theodore Roosevelt (\$125 million), Herbert Hoover (\$70 million), and Lyndon Johnson (\$98 million). (Those wondering about JFK should know that had he lived, he stood to inherit more than \$1 billion from his father. Such, however, was not to be his fate . . .)

As a society of voyeurs, we are, without question, addicted to the "lifestyles of the rich and famous." One hopes that when it comes to being a society of citizens and voters, we seek out those who, despite having earned -- or not -- great wealth, still have their fingers on the pulse of real people living real lives, facing real challenges.

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Posted by Kurt F. Stone on January 28, 2012 in [On the Media](#), [The 2012 Presidential Election](#), [The American Scene](#) | [Permalink](#) [Comments \(0\)](#) [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

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January 28, 2011

THE BEST THING IN THE WORLD

In a medieval fable, a feudal baron tells one of his serfs that if he can successfully provide the correct answers to three rather simple questions, he will be rewarded with his own plot of land. But before posing the questions, the baron informs the simple soul of three things:

- That he -- the baron -- will have no rest until he gets the correct answers;
- That in matter of fact, he does not know what the correct answers are, and
- That if he -- the serf -- does not provide the correct answers, he will be summarily banished from the estate -- essentially a sentence of death.

With the serf standing in frightened anticipation, the baron proceeds to ask three his questions:

- "What is the *biggest* thing in the world?"
- "What is the *fastest* thing in the world?" and
- "What is the *best* thing in the world?"

Before revealing the serf's answers (which will turn out to please the baron) let us digress and direct our attention to the Island of Hispaniola, specifically, the country of Haiti.

What's the connection?

Like the baron, the people of Haiti are capable of asking questions for which they do not know the answers. Like the baron, they will have no rest until the correct answers are provided. And like the serf, providing the correct answers are a matter of life-and-death.

Without question, Haiti has the most tortured history of any country in the Western Hemisphere. The world's first black republic, Haiti emerged as the result of a slave

revolution against a French plantation society. Their right to exist was challenged by Napoleon who, in 1802, sent a military force to retake power from the ex-slaves. Stalemated, Napoleon's troops had to accept a peace treaty. Their national pride deeply wounded, the French eventually imposed crippling reparations on the fledgling nation which would hobble it for generations. Eventually the country would divide along racial lines, with a black north and a mostly mulatto south. This in turn would create built-in political instability in the island republic.

By 1915, that instability became a threat to American economic and political interests; so much so that U.S. troops invaded Haiti, and did not fully leave until after the end of World War II. For a short period of time during the post-war years, Haiti began to get its act together. Few people know -- or recall -- that in the 1950s, Haiti actually had an elite educational system which attracted students from all over the Caribbean and had developed a tourist industry replete with casinos, nightclubs and celebrity visitors.

Then came "Papa Doc" Duvalier, who -- with a generous assist from the Haitian military -- got himself elected president in 1957, and then declared himself "president for life." Papa Doc maintained his hold on power with the notorious *Tontons Macoutes* - - murderous enforcers who terrorized, tortured and murdered tens of thousands during a nearly 15-year reign of terror.

Then came "Baby Doc" Duvalier, his son, who was likewise made "president for life" in 1971. Although Baby Doc may not have been as bloodthirsty as his father, he was even more corrupt, and wound up robbing the impoverished nation blind. He was driven into French exile in 1986, and was replaced by a series of corrupt, ineffective leaders -- Namphy, Manigat, Cédras, Aristide and Préval among others -- who presided over a thoroughly corrupt, ineffective government incapable of providing even basic services like clean water, health care or education. Increasingly, Haiti's middle- and upper-middle class fled until today, more than a half-million of these largely college-educated expatriates reside in the United States -- mostly in Florida and New York. 60% of those remaining in Haiti were, by 2010, living on less than \$2 a day.

Then came January 12, 2010 -- a 7.0 magnitude earthquake that killed more than 315,000 Haitians, displaced more than 1.3 million, devastated Port-au-Prince, leveled most government buildings, destroyed more than 60% of the hospitals, and killed more than 100 United Nations workers.

Then came the first cholera outbreak in a half a century.

Then came Hurricane Tomas.

Responding to the crisis, governments from around the world pledged \$5.3 billion over the next two years for reconstruction. Additional contributions began pouring in

from NGOs (Non Governmental Organizations) and charitable groups. An Interim Haiti Recovery Commission (IHRC) led, in part by President Bill Clinton, was created to monitor the spending of these billions. More than 1,300 displaced persons camps were established where hundreds of thousands of the dispossessed continue to live and are given basic support. As one writer has noted, *"The tragedy of Haiti is that poverty levels here were so deep before the quake that even the basic support offered to those living in the camps is more than many had before."*

So what is it that Haiti needs . . . besides virtually everything?

Asking this is akin to the feudal land baron's questions: he does not know the answers at the time of the asking, but believes that there are correct answers to be had.

In terms of Haiti, there is a growing consensus that this time around, money, foreign intervention, donor-driven recovery plans -- although absolutely essential -- are not the most critical core necessities. Rather, most experts are focused on two things:

- An effective Haitian political leadership, and
- Sound institutions built by Haitians, who, according to one expert from the Foreign Policy Association, ". . . must feel they have a stake in their nation's future."

In other words, this Haitian crisis -- unlike all the others -- must be met not so much with one-way donor aid and paternal assistance programs as with a concerted international effort aimed at helping the Haitians help themselves. At this point, there is no home-grown leadership in Haiti. There is no trust in the government for indeed, there is no government. Mistrust is so widespread that in an ironic sense, it is the one tie that binds this impoverished people together.

One contributing factor to Haiti's long term reconstruction should involve the expatriates, a majority of whom are college education, many of whom are quite successful and few of whom are living in poverty. A creative program under which they would agree to return to their native land -- temporarily or for the long term could be a positive factor in rebuilding the country. Then too, the international community, acting together, must provide not just the tools, but the knowledge of how to use those tools -- of how to build and create, how to administer and oversee, how to govern with benevolence and humanity.

So what's in it for the rest of this big round world? Historically, countries have lent long term support to other countries when their own economic interests are involved. In the case of Haiti, there are few -- if any -- economic interests involved. In the case of Haiti, helping them to help themselves; planting the seeds of leadership and

governance through which a brighter future can be harvested will have to be motivated by something other than economic self interest.

And here we return to our story . . .

The poor frightened serf closed his eyes and tried to think. All he could come up with was the sound of his own voice yelling out "You are a simple-minded fool; there is no way you can answer his questions . . ."

Finally, swallowing hard, the serf uttered what he knew would be the last three sentences he would ever say before banishment:

"The biggest thing in the world is . . . the earth."

"The fastest thing in the world is . . . an idea."

"The best thing in the world is . . . a good night's sleep."

His answers may have not been profound, but they were definitely correct.

Let the idea of helping Haiti help itself grow quickly . . . and for no other reason than rewarding ourselves with a good night's sleep.

For that is the reward that comes from doing the right thing.

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(My wife Anna, who teaches English as a Second Language to Haitian refugees, asked me to include a link to a unique website -- "[Teach the World Online](#)" -- which offers people the opportunity to volunteer their time teaching people in Haiti -- from the comfort of their own home computer. Check it out!

The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 04, 2011

THE EASTERN WORLD, IT IS EXPLODING

Writing about the incredibly fluid, hour-by-hour, minute-by-minute situation on the streets of Cairo is as daunting and frustrating a task as attempting to write a piece about the championship match at Wimbledon -- as it is in play. With the latter, pace, speed and strategy can cause one to lose, regain and once again lose their advantage within the blink of an eye. With the former, although not so quick-paced, the edge or advantage between pro- and anti-government groups can appear to change from one news cycle to the next; so much so that one wishes for just another couple of hours before committing thoughts to paper . . . or fingers to keyboard.

During the years of its far-flung empire, there was an expression which went, "When England n, much of the world catches cold." 2011's version might easily be "When Tunisia sneezes, the rest of North Africa and the Middle East reach for a thermometer." Make no mistake about it: what began late last month on the streets of Tunis has spread to the streets of Cairo, Sana'a, Algiers and, to a lesser extent, Amman, Damascus and Riyadh. Likewise, the successful ouster of Tunisian President Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali has started the clock ticking on the presidencies of Egypt's Hosni Mubarak -- who may or may not be the ex-president by tomorrow -- Yemen's Ali Abdullah Saleh, and Algeria's Abdelaziz Bouteflika, who has agreed to end that country's 19-year-old "state of emergency" and provide more political freedoms. In Jordan, King Abdullah II, attempting to

head off any popular uprising against his government (though not him personally) fired his entire cabinet and installed Marouf Bakhit as the new prime minister. Despite this move, hundreds of Jordanians have taken to the streets of Amman, protesting, among other things, the new p.m., political corruption and the lack of jobs.

In Egypt, President Mubarak dissolved his cabinet, announced that he would not stand for reelection in September. He then said that his son -- and heir apparent -- Gamal would likewise not stand for office, and appointed Omar Suleiman vice president. Not surprisingly, none of these moves have mollified anti-government forces. The suave, sophisticated Suleiman is well-known to the Egyptian public; he is the longtime head of the feared Egyptian general intelligence service. In her 2008 book *The Dark Side: The Inside Story of How the War on Terror Turned into a War On American Ideals*, author Jane Mayer describes Suleiman as ". . . the C.I.A. point man in Egypt for renditions -- the covert program in which the C.I.A. snatched terror suspects from around the world and returned them to Egypt . . . for interrogation, often under brutal circumstances."

Within the past 72 hours the world has watched as pro-government forces flexed their collective muscles, turning what was a relatively peaceful, almost festive, protest into a bloody clash. Within the past 72 hours, the world has seen journalists hounded, harassed, detained and, in some cases, beaten. And, it is highly likely that much of the pro-Mubarak contingent -- those on horse- and camel-back -- are paid governmental stooges. The Obama administration, caught between the Scylla of supporting a longtime ally and the Charybdis of turning its back on what may well be the will of the Egyptian people -- has now urged Mubarak to vacate office ASAP and hand over the reigns of authority to a transitional government headed by the aforementioned Suleiman.

If writing about this fluid, ever-changing situation is difficult, predicting how it will play out -- and what domino effect it will have on Israel, the Middle East, and indeed the world -- is downright impossible. Some are taking the road well-traveled and, instead of

attempting to understand the underlying cause or causes of these popular uprisings, are in the business of assessing blame. Among the "usual suspects" are Hamas, al Qaeda, Iran, and the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as "progressives, liberals and god-hating secularists." Among the more eye-popping are "CODEPINK" a woman's peace group originally formed to protest the War in Iraq, and "remnants of the Weather Underground."

One fascinating byproduct of these uprisings is the changing tune of most neocons and many conservatives. Where during the Bush years they -- along with the president -- sung out loud and clear on behalf of democratic revolution in the Muslim world, they now engage in a halting recitative which attempts to distinguish between "authoritarian" and "totalitarian" governments, with the former being acceptable, the latter unforgivable. Funny, isn't it? Less than 5 or 6 years ago, Mubarak, Ben Ali, and Bouteflika were horrific despots sorely in need of replacement; today they are the descendants of Thomas Jefferson.

Depending on who one talks or listens to, the outlawed Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood is either a bloodthirsty terrorist organization whose main objectives are the total annihilation of Israel and "the restoration of a Muslim caliphate that controls the Middle East and parts of Europe" or "a populist political organization that speaks for a wide segment of the Egyptian lower middle class." Essam el-Eryan, leader of the group, has publicly agreed to back former IAEA (and Noble Peace Prize winner) Mohamed ElBaradei to negotiate with the Egyptian government. Some, ascribing to what writer Robert Naiman calls the "cooties school" of diplomacy, object to any endorsement of a process that involves either ElBaradei (he's Iranian) or the Muslim Brotherhood. Others believe that to "throw the baby out with the bathwater" so to speak, would be shortsighted.

Who is right? Who is wrong? Whose crystal ball offers the clearest, most sharply-focused view of the future?

At this point, only God knows. What we do -- or should -- know is that much of the basis for the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen,

Jordan and elsewhere is as much economic as it is political: high unemployment, high prices, along with government corruption and a huge, huge differential between the haves and have-nots. It is an old story: revolutions thrive where hunger and hopelessness abides. Rarely do well-fed people with decent jobs take to the streets demanding the overthrow of government.

That I have neither taken sides nor predicted the outcome of what is currently transpiring in the streets of Cairo, Sana'a and Algiers should come as no surprise. It is, as noted at the outset, a thoroughly fluid situation. My main concerns are what effect all this will have on the future in general, and on both Iran and Israel (which is of course being blamed by pro-government forces in Egypt) in particular. I of course have no wish to see Egypt go the way of Iran and come under the thumb of oppressive 9th-century mullahs. Then too, I can appreciate that the Mubarak government -- along with those of Ben Ali, Bouteflika, and Saleh have done little to alleviate the hunger, hopelessness, joblessness or fear of the people they rule. Their governments should ultimately get what they deserve. The big question is whether the people will get what they crave.

In the end, it is good to keep an old truism in mind:

It is both lamentable and terribly easy to turn free people into slaves; it is both laudable and terribly difficult to turn slaves into free people . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 11, 2011

GREAT SCOTT? NOT!

From a political point of view, Florida is what the Romans would have called *sui generis*, namely, "one of a kind."

How so?

Well, it is, to the best of my knowledge, the only state in which the farther north one travels, the more southern it becomes (remember, we're speaking in political terms). To wit, while the voters of, say, Miami-Dade, Broward (Ft. Lauderdale), and Palm Beach Counties are largely ethnic, Democratic and progressive, voters in Okaloosa (Fort Walton Beach), Manatee (Bradenton) and Marion (Ocala) Counties are far more likely to be white, Republican and quite conservative.

Witness Florida's recent gubernatorial election, in which Democrat Alex Sink handily defeated Republican Rick Scott in Miami-Dade, Broward and Palm Beach by, respectively, 56%-42%, 65%-33% and 58%-39%, while in Okaloosa, Manatee and Marion, Scott defeated Sink, again respectively, 54%-42%, 69%-24% and 54%-41%. Nonetheless, statewide, the conservative Scott's margin of victory was a razor-thin 61,550 votes out of more than 5.17 million cast (48.87%-47.72%). It should also be noted that Scott, the former CEO of Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) spent close to \$78 million of

his own money on the campaign. Like most candidates, he was long on slogans, short on substance. Unlike most candidates however, he refused to sit down and submit to questioning from a single newspaper editorial board and, if memory serves correctly, did not hold a single press conference.

During the campaign Scott, running on the slogan "Let's Get to Work," declared that as governor, he would create 700,000 new jobs, largely by cutting both spending and taxes and getting rid of what he termed "job-killing regulations." Further, he pledged to privatize at least a portion of the Florida prison system, shift state educational dollars away from public schools, raise college tuition fees, and cut out what he referred to as "frivolous law suits." Like many conservatives, Scott claims that the sky-high cost of medical care and coverage is due in large part to the excessive settlements and attorneys' fees being awarded in personal injury and medical malpractice cases. By placing severe caps on these awards and fees, he has repeatedly said, the price of medical care and coverage will fall. Many wondered how Scott would be able to cut both spending and taxes and still expect to create 700,000 new jobs. . .

This past week Scott presented his first budget. Uniquely, he chose to unveil his proposal not in the state capital before a gathering of legislators and journalists, but rather before a large group of Tea Party enthusiasts in Eustis, a town of less than 20,000 people, in Lake County, which is central Florida. Scott's budget proposal -- filled with cuts in spending and taxes as he had promised -- has something for everyone to hate:

- Scott has proposed spending \$66 billion -- some \$4.6 billion less than this year's budget.
- He wants to eliminate 7% of the state's government jobs -- a reduction of about 6,700 positions.
- He proposes cutting \$3.3 billion from the state education budget, and wants to reduce per-pupil K-12 spending by slightly over \$700 -- a roughly 10% reduction from current spending.

- Scott has proposed that all public employees -- teachers, police and fire fighters, municipal workers -- contribute 5% of their salaries to the state pension system.
- Scott wants to cut property taxes by \$1 billion over the next two years.
- Scott wants to cut the state corporate tax rate from 5.5% to 3% in 2001-12, and see it totally eliminated by 2018.
- He proposes eliminating nearly 1,700 employees -- more than 5% of the workforce -- from the Department of Corrections by closing two prisons. Florida currently houses more than 100,000 inmates in 146 facilities employing 18,200 people.
- He proposed saving more than \$70 million by gutting the state's growth management agency. He seeks to cut all but 40 of the 360 positions currently existing in the Department of Community Affairs which Scott has repeatedly called a "job killing" department. (Interestingly, this agency has routinely over the years approved nearly 90% of all developments it reviews -- developments which actually create jobs.)

At the same time, there are two areas where the governor wants to *increase* spending:

- Scott proposes increasing the amount spent on private-school vouchers by \$250 million;
- He seeks to double the budget for the executive (read: governor's) office and increase the number of employees directly under him from 329 to 420 -- an increase of nearly 30%.

As we said above: the governor's budget has something for everyone to hate.

Responding to the governor's proposed budget both Senate President Mike Haridopolus and House Speaker Dean Cannon issued tepid statements that fell far, far short of endorsements. (One should keep in mind that Haridopolus is going to be running against Florida's senior senator, Bill Nelson, in 2012, so needs to preserve a bit of independence from Scott.) And,

despite the fact that the legislature will not begin its annual session until next month, they've already begun holding hearings, and are in the process of tearing apart the governor's budget line-by-line. . .

Politics is, among other things, a game of numbers -- numbers that don't always add up. I mean, where but in politics can a bare plurality be treated like a vast majority, and a vast majority be considered nothing short of unanimity? How many times do politicians back up their proposals by claiming that "this is why the people elected us." As an example, since the November election, Messrs Boehner, Cantor, Pence and Ryan have repeatedly claimed that the fact that voters voted for a Republican majority in the House is proof positive that "the American people" is behind them in their efforts to, among other things:

- Dismantle "Obamacare;"
- Cut taxes for the wealthy;
Abolish the so-called "death tax;"
- Balance the federal budget, and
- Cut federal funding for Planned Parenthood.

What is more likely, of course, is that the American voting public voted for a Republican majority in the House because of a lousy economy, high unemployment, and a multi-billion dollar campaign of vilification against the Democrats. But this is the world of politics, where victory imbues the victor with the right to claim overwhelming public support for their every whim and fancy.

The same goes for Governor Rick Scott. From almost the moment Alex Sink conceded the race, Scott has treated his tiny plurality like a Rooseveltian majority. He has decided to centralize all decision-making and much authority within his office, and has unilaterally decided that the will of the people -- as expressed at the ballot box -- is not necessarily sacrosanct. (Do pay attention in the coming weeks and months to what

happens with the two constitutional amendments we passed here in Florida dealing with an end to gerrymandered districts. Scott doesn't feel he has to accept it as law!)

And while it is true that Governor Scott does have a super-sized, veto-proof majority within walking distance of his office, he does not have a public mandate to dismantle the government or treat it like his latest business venture. There is a vast difference between being the head of a huge corporation and the chief executive of a sovereign state. In the case of the former, the chief aim is profit for the benefit of one's shareholders; in the latter, it is something known as the "common weal." Whether or not Rick Scott can ever shed the magnate's autocratic garment and don the mantle of democratic leader remains to be seen.

A good first step might be for him to paste a copy of the 2010 election return on the door to his clothes closet . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 18, 2011

SARAH PALIN'S TAKE ON EGYPT

This is a direct quote from the former Governor of Alaska:

"And nobody yet has, nobody yet has explained to the American public what they know, and surely they know more than the rest of us know who it is who will be taking the place of Mubarak and no, not, not real enthused about what it is that that's being done on a national level and from DC in regards to understanding all the situation there in Egypt. And, in these areas that are so volatile right now, because obviously it's not just Egypt but the other countries too where we are seeing uprisings, we know that now more than ever, we need strength and sound mind there in the White House. We need to know what it is that America stands for so we know who it is that America will stand with. And, we do not have all that information yet . . ."

Anyone care to translate . . . ?



Posted by [Kurt F. Stone](#) on February 18, 2011 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(5\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

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WHO SAID THIS?

"We have seen tax-and-tax spend-and-spend reach a fantastic total greater than in all the previous 170 years of our Republic.

Behind this plush curtain of tax and spend, three sinister spooks or ghosts are mixing poison for the American people. They are the shades of Mussolini, with his bureaucratic fascism; of Karl Marx, and his socialism; and of Lord Keynes, with his perpetual government spending, deficits, and inflation. And we added a new ideology of our own. That is government give-away programs....

If you want to see pure socialism mixed with give-away programs, take a look at socialized medicine. . ."

So . . . just who was the speaker?

Newt Gingrich? Tim Pawlenty? Mitt Romney? Eric Cantor? Michelle Bachmann?

In matter of fact, it was (a drum roll please)

Herbert Hoover, speaking at the 1952 Republican National Convention.

Indeed, the more things change, the more they remain the same . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



February 24, 2011

HIZZONER THE MAYOR

This week, former White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel was elected the 55th mayor of America's third largest city, Chicago. Ironically, he won the five-way race by capturing precisely 55% of the vote. Without question, Mayor-elect Emanuel has his work cut out for him; Chicago, like many American cities, is faced with both a growing budget deficit and a shrinking tax base.

Although he has been on the national political scene for nearly a generation, the now 51-year old Emanuel is not all that well known. What follows is his entry in my new book "[The Jews of Capitol Hill](#)," which is now available in hardback, as well as [Kindle](#) and [Nook](#). His entry ends at the point where he announced that he was leaving the Obama White House and returning to Chicago . . .

2006 was a heady, historic year for congressional Democrats. Not only did they wrest both the House and Senate from Republican control; it was the first time since 1922 that a party did not lose a single congressional seat. Every Democrat running for reelection in 2006 won; every retiring Democrat was replaced by another. Prior to the election, House Republicans had held a 232-203 edge; once the votes were tabulated, Democrats had a 233-202 majority.

Democrats would continue to build on this number well into 2008, winning special elections in Louisiana and Mississippi. And, in one of the most stunning upsets in modern American political history, Democrat Bill Foster, a physicist with a Harvard PhD won a March 8, 2008 special election to fill the seat of retiring Republican Speaker Dennis Hastert. The Republican's 1994 "revolution" had been dealt a mortal blow.

When the House convened in early January 2007, it was poised to add yet another chapter to the history books: electing the first woman Speaker of the House. The honor of placing outgoing House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi's name in nomination was given to the man most agreed was largely responsible for giving Democrats their majority: Illinois Representative Rahm Emanuel. Traditionally, this singular honor would be given to a far more senior member of the House. That Emanuel was entering only his third term was singularly unique. Then again, few people have ever entered the House of Representatives



with more high-octane political experience than the man fellow Democrats often refer to as "Rahmbo," and describe as a "pit bull, a shark, a barracuda and a host of unprintable names."

Congressman Rahm Emanuel is well known for welcoming guests to his office with a friendly, "Scumbag! Come in." He has long referred to Washington as "Fucknutsville," and once sent a pollster who displeased him a decomposing two-and-a-half-foot fish. And yet, despite the profanity, sharp temper and eccentricity, his colleagues stand in awe of his energy, tenacity and political smarts. Former President Bill Clinton perhaps described Emanuel best when he referred to him as "a breath of fresh air blowing at gale force speed."

Benjamin Auerbach, the future Congressman's father, was born in Jerusalem where he served in the pre-state Jewish underground. Benjamin joined the radical *Irgun*, (whose commanders would include Menachem Begin, a future Israeli Prime Minister) rather than the "more mainstream *Haganah*," because, as writer Naftali Bendavid notes, ". . . his relatives had joined it, not because he subscribed to its ideology." When Benjamin's elder brother Emanuel was killed in the Arab insurrection of 1936, he changed the family name to honor his memory. One of Benjamin Emanuel's jobs in the underground was "putting up anti-British posters." One day, a British soldier caught him, and smashed him on the head with a baton, leaving a dent in his skull that would remain for the rest of his life.

Benjamin eventually migrated to Chicago, where he attended medical school. While completing his medical residency, Dr. Emanuel met Marsha Smulvitz, a nurse working in the same hospital. The couple married in 1955, and moved to Chicago's North Side, where Dr. Emanuel became a successful pediatrician.

Marsha Emanuel is described as a “proud leftist and impassioned civil rights activist.” Speaking about his parents on the House floor on the occasion of their 50th anniversary, Rahm Emanuel recounted his mother’s “remarkable history of serving the greater good,” and told of her serving “4 years on the Congress of Racial Equality . . . and (participating) in Freedom Marches in the South.” Mrs. Emanuel earned an advanced degree in Social Work from Northwestern Illinois University, and “for more than 20 years maintained her commitment to public service by working as a social worker and counselor to local adults and children.” As a child, Rahm and his brothers, Ezekiel and Ari would accompany their mother to civil rights marches “if she judged there would be no violence.”

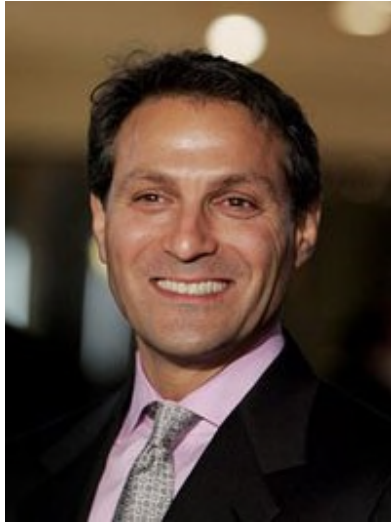
Rahm (Hebrew for *high, lofty*), the second of Benjamin and Marsha Emanuel’s three sons was born in Chicago on November 29, 1959. (In 1972, the Emanuels adopted a daughter named Shoshana.) As the middle son, Rahm often acted as the peacemaker between brothers Ezekiel and Ari. All three boys would grow up to become highly successful. In a June 1997 article entitled “The Brothers Emanuel,” *New York Times* writer Elisabeth Bushmiller referred to the three as “tank commanders.”

Older brother Ezekiel earned both an M.D. and a Ph.D. in political philosophy from Harvard. He is a highly respected Oncologist and bioethicist at the National Institutes of Health, a leading proponent of assisted-suicide, and author of a book on medical ethics entitled *The Ends of Human Life*.



Younger brother Ari is a “multimillionaire Hollywood agent,” who left talent powerhouse International Creative Management “under cover of dark” to form a rival agency. His clients include Larry David, Michael Moore, Sacha Baron Cohen and Mark Wahlberg. In November 2007, *Entertainment Weekly* recognized Ari as “One of the 50 smartest people in Hollywood.” (Ari, founder of the high-powered “Endeavor Agency” was ranked number 4. Those considered “smarter” than he were director James “Titanic” Cameron, Steven Spielberg, and director/writer/producer Judd “The Larry Sanders’ Show” Apatow.) In July 2006 Ari Emanuel gained widespread media attention when he called on Hollywood to blacklist actor Mel Gibson because of the actor’s anti-Semitic remarks following his DUI arrest. In an article Ari wrote for the widely-read online *Huffington Post*, he noted, “People in the entertainment community, whether Jew or Gentile, need to demonstrate that they understand how much is

at stake in this by professionally shunning Mel Gibson and refusing to work with him, even if it means a sacrifice to their bottom line.”



Both Rahm and Ari have served as inspirations for fictional TV characters: Rahm for presidential aide “Josh Lyman” (played by actor Bradley Whitfield) on *The West Wing*; Ari, for the foul-mouthed agent “Ari Gold” (played by actor Jeremy Piven) on the HBO show *Entourage*.

As a youngster growing up Chicago, Rahm attended the Bernard Zell Anshe Emet Jewish Day School. Upon moving to Wilmette, Ari began attending public school. Even as a young student, Emanuel was politically active; he spent many hours stuffing mailboxes with campaign literature on behalf of his local congressional representative, Abner Mikva. While a student at New Trier High School, Rahm, a popular B+ student, worked afternoons at a local Arbys. One day a meat slicer cut all the way down to the bone of the middle finger on his right hand. This happened on prom weekend. Not wishing to miss the weekend’s festivities, he wrapped his injured hand in a bandage and attended the prom, winding up with a night swim in Lake Michigan. The ensuing infection made Emanuel critically ill; his temperature climbed to 106°. Special antibiotics were flown in from Japan in order to save his life. Doctors were forced to amputate the middle finger above the knuckle. As biographer Bendavid noted, “That partial finger became part of his image. He joked on occasion that giving someone half a finger was the sentiment he was aiming for.” More importantly, this brush with death made the young Emanuel more focused, more serious.

Sensing that her middle son had talent, Marsha Emanuel sent Rahm to take ballet lessons. Emanuel flourished, eventually graduating from the Evanston School of Ballet and winning a scholarship to the prestigious Joffrey Ballet. Instead, Rahm opted to head off to the formerly women’s college Sarah Lawrence, which had a strong dance program. Emanuel graduated in 1981, and earned an M.A. in Speech and Communications from Northwestern University in 1985. While still an undergraduate, Emanuel spent weekends back in Chicago, working on behalf of David Robinson, a Democrat attempting to unseat Republican Representative Paul Findley, who was “notorious in the Jewish community for his criticism of Israel.” Upon returning to the Windy City for good, he was hired to raise cash for Paul Simon’s 1984 Senate race; in 1988, he became national campaign director of

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC); the next year he became senior advisor and chief fundraiser for William M. Dailey's successful campaign for Mayor of Chicago. As a fundraiser, Emanuel was "ferocious." Bendavid relates how Emanuel, "told contributors who usually gave \$1,000 that this time they were expected to give \$5,000. Those who usually gave \$5,000 were expected to provide \$25,000." As a result of Rahm Emanuel's "ferocity," the Daly campaign raised an astonishing \$13 million in seven weeks, and coasted to victory. Rahm Emanuel's political prowess, energy and fundraising prowess were already becoming a legend.

Emanuel took a break from politics when, in 1991, he went to Israel during the First Gulf War. There, working as a civilian volunteer, he spent his time rust-proofing tanks at an army base in Northern Israel. Years later, when Rahm Emanuel had already come to national prominence, anti-Israel polemicists, citing both the congressman's "activities" in Israel during the Gulf War and his father's former participation in the Irgun, would claim that he was and is, part of an "International Zionist Conspiracy." Among the more ludicrous claims made on various websites are that Emanuel "is the son of an Israeli terrorist," an "Israeli citizen who hid his passport in his underwear drawer," and "went to Israel and reportedly joined the Israeli army to defend Zion from Saddam's Scuds." [One site](#) went so far as to claim that while a youthful member of the Irgun, Benjamin Emanuel had been "part of the Israeli assassin team that murdered Sweden's Count (Folke) Bernadotte in 1948."

Upon returning from Israel Emanuel joined Bill Clinton's fledgling presidential campaign, eventually becoming its Director of Finance. Emanuel was able to convince the then-Arkansas governor that he should spend the lion's share of his time fundraising— an activity which Clinton hated like the plague. Emanuel's fundraising efforts – and style – proved to be one of the keys to Clinton's victory over George H.W. Bush in November 1992.

The story is told that after Clinton had secured his victory, a number of key aides met at the campaign's favorite hangout, "Does" (pronounced *doze*) in Little Rock. There, Emanuel, and key campaign aides George Stephanopolous and Mandy Grunwald gathered for a joyous campaign *post mortem*. As *New York Times* writer Bushmiller noted: "Revenge was heavy in the air as the group discussed the enemies - Democrats, Republicans, members of the press - who wronged them during the 1992 campaign. Clifford Jackson, the ex-friend of the President and peddler of the Clinton draft-dodging stories, was high on the list. So was William Donald Schaefer, then the Governor of Maryland and a Democrat who endorsed

George Bush. Nathan Landow, the fund-raiser who backed the candidacy of Paul Tsongas, made it, too." Suddenly Emanuel grabbed his steak knife and, as those who were there remember, shouted out the name of another enemy, lifted the knife, then brought it down with full force into the table. 'Dead!' he screamed. The group immediately joined in the cathartic release: 'Nat Landow! Dead!' 'Cliff Jackson!' Dead! 'Bill Schaefer! Dead!'"

All Washington was about to learn who Rahm Emanuel was.

Emanuel joined the Clinton White House as the new president's senior advisor. Early in his tenor, Emanuel "produced, directed and choreographed" the historic Rose Garden signing ceremony - and iconic handshake - between Israeli President Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat. It was an event "which touched Emanuel's political sensibilities and his personal ties to Israel."

Emanuel's brusque, blunt demeanor did not sit well with many Clinton insiders. One day Clinton Chief of Staff Thomas "Mack" MacLarty informed Emanuel that the president "wanted him out of the White House." Emanuel stood his ground, telling MacLarty he would not budge until he heard this directly from the president himself. Clinton, who was loathe to fire the man who, more than many, was responsible for his being president, instead demoted Emanuel; his new title was "Director of Special Programs." Emanuel's first assignment in this post was the "thankless task" of shepherding NAFTA through Congress. The day he was handed the assignment, only five Democrats were publicly in favor of its enactment. By the time Emanuel had finished a three-month all-out campaign - aided by Chicago Mayor Daley whom Clinton had asked in to help - 102 Democrats joined 132 Republicans in passing the historic bill.

Rahm Emanuel was also given the lion's share of credit for passing Clinton's \$30 billion Crime Bill. At first, the House defeated the measure 235-210; the *Washington Post* called it "the biggest legislative defeat" of Clinton's young presidency." Rahm Emanuel then went to work prodding, cajoling and threatening congressional Democrats. Ten days later, a second vote was taken; this time it passed 235-195. By this point, Rahm Emanuel was beginning to draw comparisons to "another tempestuous character in American politics" - Lyndon Johnson: "Both had an instinct for politics that was almost animalistic, an encyclopedic knowledge of the political scene, a gift for hard-hitting and creative methods, and a raw, elemental energy." Political scientist Larry Sabato went so far as to claim that "He's got some of the LBJ genes . . . he's the Jewish LBJ."

In 1986, Rahm Emanuel met Amy Rule, a Wharton MBA who worked at the Art Institute of Chicago. At first glance the two were bipolar opposites: Amy was a non-Jew who came from an “actively Republican” family.” Nonetheless, the two hit it off, and married in 1990. Amy converted to Judaism during the time her husband was working in the Clinton White House. Rahm attending all of her conversion classes, “though he was exhausted and often fell asleep during a session.” The Emanuel’s have three children: Zachariah, Ilana and Leah.

Upon taking his leave from the Clinton Administration in 1998, the Emanuels returned to Chicago where Rahm had accepted a high-paying job in a field he ostensibly knew nothing about: investment banking. Shortly after being named a managing director of Wasserstein, Parella & Co., Emanuel was appointed to a two-year term on the board of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange Board of Directors. Ever the quick learner, Emanuel wound up making an astounding \$16.2 million dollars in less than three years. He was now ready to go on to the next stage of his career: a seat in the House of Representatives.

Illinois’ Fifth Congressional District “covers an oddly shaped swatch across Chicago’s North Side, running from the lakefront to the suburbs directly south of O’Hare Airport.” It includes the Windy City’s must glamorous, upscale lakefront apartments, the gentrified Old Town, and Wrigley Field, the home of the Chicago Cubs. It contains the lowest percentage of African American voters (2.2%), and one of the highest (23%) percentages of Hispanic voters of any district in the state. It goes without saying that it is a highly Democratic district. For 36 years (1959-1995) the people of the Fifth D.C. were represented by the legendary long-time chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, Democrat Dan Rostenkowski (1928-2010). After getting caught in the House Post Office scandal, “Rostie” was defeated for reelection by Republican Michael Patrick Flanagan, who in turn was defeated after serving only one term by Democrat Rod Blagojevich. Blagojevich (1956-) gave up his seat in 2002 in order to run for Governor; he defeated Republican Jim Ryan 52%-48%. Blagojevich was easily reelected in 2006, and eventually became embroiled in his own scandals . . .

Facing an 11-candidate primary and the pique of many who felt that he was an outsider, an interloper, Emanuel – not surprisingly – raised nearly \$3 million. Before too long, the field winnowed down to Emanuel and former state representative Nancy Kaszak, who had lost the 1996 primary to Blagojevich. Kaszak of course portrayed Emanuel as an “outsider.” Her campaign fell apart when one of her supporters – a local Polish-American leader – charged that Emanuel “served in the Israeli army . . . in 1991, and suggested he had dual

loyalties.” The charges were patently false; as noted above, Emanuel served as a civilian volunteer during the first Gulf War. Nonetheless, Kaszak’s campaign never recovered from this episode, and Emanuel coasted to a 50%-39% primary victory. He then defeated his Republican opponent by a better than 2-1 margin in the general election.

Although nominally at the bottom of the congressional totem pole, Rahm Emanuel entered the House with far more national political experience – and a greater network of contacts – than perhaps any freshman representative of the past 50 years. He also carried a reputation for being an “intense, high-energy personality with a legendary disregard for what others think of him.” His initial entry in *The Almanac of American Politics* (2004 edition) ended with the words “Emanuel has shown that he is a member to watch. By the beginning of his third term, the *Congressional Quarterly’s Politics in America* began its article with the words “Emanuel’s mix of political and policy smarts has made him one of the most important Democratic players on Capitol Hill.”

Upon entering the House, Rahm Emanuel sought a seat on Ways and Means; he was turned down. Undaunted, Emanuel was assigned to the House Budget Committee and worked hard to make himself an able legislator. He also showed himself highly capable of reaching across the political aisle. Among his bipartisan accomplishments was a measure (co-sponsored with Minnesota Republican Gil Gutknecht) allowing Americans to import prescription drugs from other countries, and another that greatly expanded the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (S-CHIP) to cover 6 million children “who are estimated to be eligible for public insurance but not enrolled.”

Reelected with 76% of the vote in 2004, Emanuel not only got his seat on Ways and Means; he entered the House leadership track. Then-Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi named him head of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee – the group for which he had once been a paid employee. As DCCC chair, Emanuel was charged with the task of “recruiting candidates for House races, raising money and vetting strategy for dozens of districts.” At the time of his appointment, experts suggested that the Democrats would be lucky to pick up 5 seats in the 2006 off-year elections. Under Emanuel’s relentless prodding, pushing and fundraising, Democrats wound up winning 28 new seats.

Working in tandem with his Senate counterpart, New York Senator Chuck Schumer, Emanuel was absolutely pivotal in restoring the Democratic majority in the House of Representatives. Under Emanuel’s leadership, the DCCC raised and

spent nearly \$65 million on the 2005-06 House races – a nearly 75% increase over what had been raised and spent in the previous two-year period. In addition to this fundraising, Emanuel enticed people to run who were themselves capable of raising vast sums of money. Moreover, he encouraged Iraq War veterans to run as Democrats.

Emanuel's encyclopedic knowledge of the 50 most competitive House districts gave him an edge. He also hit upon the strategy of "keeping the opposition uncomfortable." As Bendavid noted in a post-election article, "If a Republican congressman took a vote that he hoped no one in his district would notice, such as supporting a Bush budget cut, Emanuel immediately issued a press release and sent it to the Republican's hometown newspaper. He then sent it to the lawmaker's office to, as he said, "(mess) with their heads."

Emanuel also hit upon naming one House Republican "the rubber stamp of the week," and another "the crony of the week." House members who received money from drugmakers or oil companies were ridiculed as "lackeys of special interests." In seeking Democratic candidates who could successfully challenge entrenched Republicans, Emanuel often went "outside the political box." Case in point, former Washington Redskin quarterback Heath Schuler, an evangelical Christian who is opposed to abortion. Emanuel understood Schuler's main concern about being elected to the House: not being able to spend time with his two young children. In order to allay Schuler's fears, Emanuel took to calling him whenever he was with his children. According to Bendavid, "Schuler would pick up the phone and hear, 'It's Rahm. I'm at a soccer game with my kids. Just wanted you to know that.' Or 'It's Rahm. I'm at a kindergarten play now. Talk to you soon.'" Schuler received perhaps 10 such calls." "Of course," as Bendavid noted, "this also illustrated that whenever Emanuel was with his family, he was working." Schuler wound up defeating 8-term incumbent Charles Taylor by more than 17,000 votes – 54%-46%, despite being outspent by a better than \$2.5 million.

As a reward for all his hard work, Speaker Pelosi asked Emanuel what he leadership post he wanted. He felt pressured to make a quick decision. Many Emanuel allies urged him to run for Majority Whip – the number three position – "... a job for which he was well-suited because of its emphasis both on policy and arm-twisting." But South Carolina Representative James Clyburn, a former chair of the House Black Caucus, had already staked out the position. Emanuel was "reluctant to challenge the respected Clyburn," and instead decided to take over the post that the South Carolina Democrat was vacating: chair of the

Democratic Caucus. In this post, Rahm Emanuel was well positioned to be the party's "top strategist, spokesman and enforcer."

As the authors of *The Almanac of American Politics* (2008 edition) note, "With each of the top three Democratic leaders about 20 years older than him, Emanuel is well-positioned to become Speaker within the next decade if he is willing to be patient."

Less than 24 hours after his election, President Elect Barack Obama announced his first executive appointment: Rahm Emanuel as White House Chief of Staff. In accepting the appointment, Emanuel thereby became the third Jew to occupy that powerful position. (The first was President Ronald Reagan's chief, Ken Duberstein; the second, George W. Bush's Chief, Josh Bolten.) In announcing his selection, Obama said of his good friend: ". . . no one I know is better at getting things done than Rahm Emanuel." Emanuel immediately issued a statement in which he called himself humbled and honored. Emanuel's appointment immediately drew mixed reviews with Democrats largely praising and Republicans largely disparaging their colleague for being hyper-partisan. New York Representative Thomas McReynolds, who ran the Republican Party's House election committee at the time Emanuel chaired the Democratic version, said of his colleague, "He is competitive, hardworking, hard-charging, and street smart. At the end of the day, you send him to get a mission done, he'll get it done."

On December 10, 2009, *National Journal* released a "sneak peak" of a poll it had conducted among "Congressional and political insiders" on their "favorite members of Congress, the member they'd most like to shut up, the brightest thinkers and strategists in their party" and much more. Among the 68 Democratic Congressional insiders making up the *Journal's* polling group, Rahm Emmanuel was listed as his party's "Best political strategist" by a wide margin. Among the "political insiders" Emanuel came in second – after former President Bill Clinton.

In October 2010, Rahm Emanuel resigned his White House post in order to contemplate running for mayor of Chicago, following the retirement of Richard M. Daley. At the press conference announcing his resignation, President Barack Obama, while not endorsing Emanuel, did say he thought his about to become former chief of staff would make an excellent mayor. . . .

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March 04, 2011

MOUSELAND REVISITED

Tommy Douglas (1904-1986), the founder of Canada's New Democratic Party, served as Premier of Saskatchewan from 1944 to 1961. Called "the most influential politician never to be elected Prime Minister," Douglas was the fellow who introduced universal public healthcare to Canada. In 2004, he was voted number one in the Canadian Broadcast Corporation's "The Greatest Canadian" contest. And if all this were not enough to secure his position in the pantheon of immortals, he was also the maternal grandfather of actor Keifer Sutherland.

Not bad for a Scottish immigrant who started out life as a Baptist minister.

For many non-Canadians -- myself included -- Tommy Douglas is best known for a 578-word fable /parable called "Mouseland." Originally told by a member of the Canadian House of Commons named Clarence Gillis (1895-1960) [Mouseland](#) tells the tale of a society made up overwhelmingly of mice who, against all reason, vote for black cats to be their leaders. Needless to say, these cats do what is best for their species at the expense of the mice who, nonetheless, continue voting them into office. Inevitably, the mice become greatly dissatisfied with the black cats; they have mandated the speed at which mice may travel, and have ordained that all mouse holes must have round entrances sufficiently large to permit a cat's paw entry. So what do the mice do? In the very next election, they vote in a government made up of *white* cats who, once in power, decree that from now on, all mouse hole entryways shall be square, thus large enough to permit cats to put *both* paws inside. When finally it dawns on one mouse that mice -- not cats -- should run their government, he is accused of being a Bolshevik and imprisoned. However, the parable ends with the words, "You can lock up a mouse or a man, but you can't lock up an idea."

If ever a retelling of "Mouseland" were needed, that time would be now. For like Tommy Douglas' Canadian constituency some 70-odd years ago (he originally told the tale back in ca. 1940) America is a land of mice, far too many of whom willingly cede their destiny and future well-being to cats. In Douglas' parable, those shaping the murine world were black, white or spotted felines. In our present circumstance, the cats are all fat -- or at least serve those who are. How else to account for all those members of the middle- and lower-middle class who:

- Happily support an extension of tax cuts for the wealthiest 2%? or
- Go along with that bit of specious reasoning which contents that denying unions collective bargaining rights will somehow balance a budget or diminish a deficit? or
- Buy into the discredited economic theory that placing more pre-tax (or post-demise) dollars in the hands of the wealthy will ultimately benefit the poor? or
- That the answer to nearly every problem or challenge we face is a combination of lower taxes and fewer regulations? or
- That there is no inconsistency between clamoring for "jobs, jobs, jobs" and then defunding public education? or
- That the single-best way to face the challenges of the future is to arm ourselves with the solutions of the past?

Over the past couple of weeks, the "cats" have become increasingly brazen in their campaign against we, the "mice." We have seen this campaign at its worst and most obvious in Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana and now Rhode Island, where gubernatorial and legislative cats are feasting on the brittle bones of such public sector mice as teachers, firefighters, police officers and municipal employees. In response, tens of thousands have flocked to their respective state capitals demanding to have their rights respected and their voices heard. In Wisconsin, the 14 Democratic state senators have removed themselves to Illinois, where they are safely beyond the reach of Governor Walker. Without their presence in Madison, there can be no legislative quorum. And without a quorum, there can be no vote on the governor's proposal taking collective bargaining rights away from public employees' unions -- a hard-fought right which has been in place for the better part of a century.

Make no mistake about it: all sentient "mice" understand that we are in the throes of a fiscal crisis; that this crisis extends from Washington, D.C. to the various state capitals, county seats and city halls. We are all perfectly aware that our country, most of our states, counties and municipalities are running deficits, and that intelligent, high-mindedly courageous leadership, backing intelligent, high-mindedly courageous -- dare we say imaginative? -- proposals and programs must be the wave of the future. For many intelligent mice -- and some cats as well -- our current fiscal mess bespeaks the need to rethink, refashion and retool for a *practical* future that will not look much like the present and certainly nothing like the past.

For others -- both murine and feline alike -- the current state of affairs presents nothing so much as an opportunity to settle old scores; to rethink, refashion and retool for a *political* future that will look much like the past -- a past where unions were all but nonexistent, income, corporate and inheritance taxes were miniscule, the words "government" and "regulation" never appeared in the same sentence, and the entire federal bureaucracy could fit comfortably into Ebbets Field -- if it were still standing.

On a slightly more hopeful note, there appears to be a growing number of "mice" who are beginning to realize just what the "cats" are up to: settling old political scores. And it's not necessarily that we, the rodents, are becoming smarter or politically more savvy. Rather, it is likely due to the very brazenness with which the felines have been going about their business. Breaking unions has nothing -- we repeat, nothing -- to do with balancing budgets or decreasing debts. What it does have everything to do with is taking away both a source of funding and a vast cadre of volunteers from the Democrats. The cats have their Koch brothers; and up until now, the mice have had their unions.

Likewise, defunding Planned Parenthood, OSHA or National Public Radio (to name but three) has less to do with the nuts-and-bolts of fiscal austerity than it does with furthering a pro-life, pro-deregulation, and anti-progressive political platform. Still, one cannot blame them; cats have to do what cats have to do.

In Tommy Douglas' parable, one mouse has the vision, the courage, to ask "Why do we continue to elect a government of cats? Why don't we elect a government of mice?"

"Oh," they said, "he's a Bolshevik. Lock him up!"

Permit me to conclude with my own "cats-and-mice" suggestion:

If we are to fix a system which up until now has put the future welfare of "mice" into the hands of "cats" -- a species whose primary allegiance is to their financial backers and underwriters -- we must completely rethink, refashion and retool the manner in which we elect our leaders.

Repeat after me:

"PUBLIC FINANCING"

MEEEEOW!!

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March 12, 2011

LET THERE BE (FLORESCENT) LIGHT

Washington: Make no mistake about it: we are a nation of *kvetchers* -- of "groaners" and "complainers." Throughout our history, we Americans have, generally speaking, been quick when it comes to complaining and warning that someone -- frequently the government -- is abridging our God-given freedoms; of encroaching on our rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. And whether the slight or abridgement or encroachment is real or imagined, we *kvetch*. But it's not really our fault; we cannot help it. *Kvetching* is as much a part of our historic fabric or genetic makeup as mom, apple-pie, and the flag. Our earliest roots were firmly planted in the soil of complaint -- witness the early outcry over taxes and tea -- and lovingly nurtured in the loam of eternal vigilance. That is what you get when your country is created largely by lawyers -- folks whose ability to *kvetch* is both admired and measured in billable hours.

These councilors-at-law fashioned a system -- and purposefully so -- that provided just as many questions as answers. It's almost as if in creating a new nation, they were also creating a new sub-species of humanity -- *Quiritis Americani* -- herein defined as "Members of an eternal, mythological debating society." For nearly 235 years, we have been debating whether or not the government -- whether it be federal, state or municipal -- has the legal authority to delimit individual or collective rights. Frequently, the debate begins with segments of the public *kvetching* about:

- The rights of gun owners versus public safety;

- The right to privacy versus national security;
- The right to free speech versus truth, dignity and common sense;
- The government's right to mandate versus business's right to market;
- The literal words of The Constitution versus how various judges interpret them;
- The individual's right to unfettered freedom versus the government's concern for the common weal.

Frequently the *kvetch* -- and ensuing debate will involve the so-called "slippery slope" argument (*argumentum lubrica clivi*); namely, that if "A" is permitted to occur, then certainly "B through Z" cannot be far behind. Two examples will suffice:

- In the wake of January's mass-killing in Tucson, many calls went out for legislation reinstituting a ban on the sort of high-capacity (33-round) magazines employed by the alleged shooter. (**n.b.** *Such magazines were illegal under terms of the 1994 assault weapons ban; that the law was permitted to expire during the first year of the George W. Bush administration.*) The National Rifle Association (NRA) came out flatly and firmly against reinstituting the magazine ban, arguing that "If the government can limit the sort of ammunition we purchase today, they can just as easily take away our weapons tomorrow."
- In 2007, Congress overwhelmingly passed -- and then-President George W. Bush signed -- the "Energy Independence and Security Act," a bill that would subject incandescent light bulbs to strict efficiency standards beginning in 2012. (**n.b.** *What this means in practical terms is that within the next several years, the 100-watt incandescent bulb will become obsolete, replaced by far higher-efficient florescent or halogen bulbs.*) During hearings on the then-proposed piece of legislation, a spokesman for the Natural Resources Defense Council testified that once the bill was fully enacted, it would "save homeowners \$100 to \$200 a year in energy costs and cut power-plant pollution by 100 million tons, the equivalent of taking 17 million cars off the road." Nonetheless, in late March 2008 then-Freshman Representative Michelle Bachmann (R-MN) introduced what she called (I kid you not) the "Light Bulb Freedom of Choice Act." In introducing her legislation, Bachmann said "the government

has no business telling consumers what kind of light bulbs they can buy." Further, Bachmann argued, "If the Democrats can hose up a light bulb bill, don't trust them with the country."

Welcome to the slippery slope, a gentling-cresting hill in the land of *kvetch* where one is compelled to ask, "How many members of Congress does it take to screw in a light bulb?"

Bachmann's legislation mandated a study of the health risks associated with the newer spiral shaped energy-efficient florescent bulbs that many of us are already using in our homes. At the time, Bachmann argued that the florescent bulbs were far more polluting than their incandescent cousins, due to what she termed their "dangerously high levels of mercury." (n.b. When asked how her stand squared with those who claimed that phasing out 100-watt incandescent bulbs could have a positive effect on global warming, Bachmann called such concerns "voodoo, nonsense, hokum, a hoax.")

Not to be outdone, Senator Mike Enzi (R-WY) and Texas Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX) just introduced S 395 and H.R. 921, known as the "Better Use of Light Bulbs Act (BULB), which would effectively cancel the earlier (2007) act. In addition to employing Bachmann's argument that florescent bulbs release dangerous amounts of mercury, Enzi contended that "Government doesn't need to be in the business of telling people what light bulb they have to use. If left alone, the best bulb will win its rightful standing in the marketplace." (n.b. *The 2007 law does not ban traditional incandescent light bulbs. Instead it requires new bulbs to use 25 to 30 percent less energy beginning in 2012. The rules call for further improvements in efficiency by 2014. The new standards have already taken effect in California.*)

One is simply amazed that at a time when our attention should be riveted on such topics as revolution in the Middle East, deficits at home and an ever-increasing number of creatures facing extinction every week, there are those who can still find time to *kvetch* that the government's supposed mandate on the future of incandescent light bulbs is yet another nail in the coffin of American liberty. To listen to the carping and *kvetching* of Bachman, Enzi, Bachmann *et al*, one would that saving some energy, reducing our dependence on foreign energy sources and even eliminating

some pollution in the air (all of which this change in light bulbs will potentially do) is the equivalent of Uncle Joe Stalin regulating what crops were grown back in the 1930s and 1940s.

I think I can understand how and why libertarians are be concerned about the federal government's involvement in energy policy vis-a-vis light bulbs. They simply view -- and are deeply chary of -- the federal government's encroaching on any area of daily life as a diminution of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." But on the other hand, does not the government have the right and the power to safeguard the economic -- not alone the physical -- wellbeing of the nation? Time and again throughout our history, the government has stepped in to do the latter -- whether it be in the area of food inspection, mine safety or clean air. That's its job; to leave food safety, mine safety, clean air -- or in this case, light bulbs -- in the hands of industry and industry alone, is akin to putting the foxes in charge of the henhouse . . .

Should we be surprised that folks are *kvetching* over light bulbs when there's also a lot of caterwauling over Mrs. Obama's campaign against childhood obesity?

What other choice does a nation of *kvetchers* have . . . ?

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March 19, 2011

JUNIOR MOMENTS

Unless I've gone dotty and am in the throes of what might be called a "junior moment," I think I recall the Republicans and their Tea Party acolytes campaigning just a few months ago on the issue of "jobs, jobs, jobs." As I recall -- and I believe the record will bear me out on this -- their Fall campaign was replete with calls for deficit and tax reduction, an easing up of governmental regulations, and the defunding -- if not the outright repeal -- of that which they cattily call "Obamacare." Furthermore, I seem to remember them accusing the entire Democratic establishment of being 'elistist,' 'uncaring,' and 'out of touch with the needs, wants and aspirations of the great American Middle Class.' And it is with this message, writ both large and loud by the Koch brothers and their anonymous allies, that the GOP managed to capture a sizeable majority in the House of Representatives, whittle down Democratic strength in the U.S. Senate, pick up twenty state legislative chambers and move an additional half-a-dozen of their political *lantzmen* into governor's mansions.

According to the pundits and political professionals, the Republicans' overwhelming victory was due in large part to their message that "Elitists like Obama, Pelosi and Reid have been fiddlin' while our economy burns." And again, unless I'm having a "junior moment," I don't recall the Fall campaign containing much Republican bloviation on such hot-button issues as abortion, same-sex marriage or the need to once and for all stick it

to labor unions by denying or severely abridging their collective bargaining rights. No, they kept those issues largely out of sight . . . until right after the moment of victory.

It seems that ever since the 112th Congress swore to uphold the Constitution, the GOP has been on a relentless quest not to create new jobs or bring the budget into balance, but rather to defund, defame and debunk every last vestige of the New Deal, Fair Deal and Great Society. According to the preachments emanating from the right side of the aisle, defunding OSHA (Occupational Safety & Health Administration), FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) Planned Parenthood and National Public Radio -- as but five examples -- will go a long way towards cutting deficits and balancing the budget. The same preachments can be heard in the various states where legislatures -- which must, by constitutional statute have balanced budgets -- are using the current economic crisis to take meat cleavers to public education, Medicaid, AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and unemployment insurance. Here in Florida, where House and Senate Democrats could easily caucus in my kitchen, the legislature has decided that in order for those who are unemployed to qualify for assistance, they will have to volunteer upwards of 4 hours of their a week to some cause. And, to add insult to injury, they are in the process of cutting the amount of time the unemployed can receive that assistance. Moreover, they have just overwhelmingly passed a measure which will henceforth turn a blind eye towards tenure or advanced degrees and tie teacher pay to how well their students do on a single standardized test. What in the name of John Dewey does this have to do with fiscal responsibility . . . let alone education?

And before you ask about the revenue side of the equation, the Florida legislature, with the blessing of our new Governor -- Rick "Let's Get to Work" Scott -- has decided that cutting both corporate and property taxes will go a long way towards lifting the Sunshine State out of its fiscal doldrums. "Cutting corporate and property taxes is an extremely effective way of inducing businesses to relocate to Florida," Governor Scott has said. "And these new businesses will of course bring with them plenty of new jobs."

I for one do not understand how gutting public education can help lure business to Florida. I would have thought that businesses are more likely to relocate to places where the quality and commitment to public education ranks high. Then again, perhaps I'm just having a junior moment and forgot an important part of the equation.

Just this week, the House of Representatives, by a vote of 228 to 192 passed a bill to defund National Public Radio. True to form, Republicans said their decision to deny NPR federal funding made good fiscal sense; Democrats termed the vote "an ideological attack" that would deprive local stations access to such programs as "Car Talk," "Morning Edition," "All Things Considered," and "Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me." For the most part, Republicans are being disingenuous; they consider National Public Radio to be a biased (read: leftist) news source with a largely elitist (read: Democratic) listening audience. The desire to defund NPR has been gaining steam for many years. It received a major boost with last October's firing of longtime news commentator Juan Williams, and peaked with the release of gonzo muckraker James O'Keefe III's video purportedly showing a major NPR fundraiser accepting bribe money from fake Muslims in order to secure favorable news coverage. As with O'Keefe's videos involving ACORN, Planned Parenthood and Shirley Sherrod, this one proved to be an atrociously-edited fake. And yet, despite incontrovertible proof that the fundraiser never said that NPR could get along better without federal funding (which amounts to all of \$5 million a year), and made it clear to the "Muslims" that NPR's coverage was not for sale, that was the final straw. People believe what they want to believe . . .

Although there is room for honest disagreement over whether we the people can afford (from a strictly financial point of view) to continue funding NPR, this is not, in truth, what the argument is about; any more than the Wisconsin legislature's move to deny collective bargaining rights to public employee unions has anything whatsoever to do with fiscal sanity. In the case of Congress, if it were truly about acting with a modicum of fiscal responsibility, House Republicans would not be so uniformly in favor of continuing federal funding for NASCAR. (Yes, you read that right: NASCAR. The Federal government provides NASCAR teams and track owners some \$45 million in tax breaks which, both House

Republicans and the Pentagon claim "helps military recruitment and could help save jobs . . .")

If there is any logic here, I don't get it.

Must be one of those junior moments . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



March 27, 2011

"WHAT NATURE DOESN'T DO TO US . . ."

I know it's going to seem a bit obtuse that with all the topics I could choose to write on this week -- airstrikes over Libya, deadly protests in Yemen and Jordan, a lethal bomb blast in Jerusalem and rising radiation levels in Japan -- that I should opt for pecking out a piece on the cutlery changes being made in the House cafeteria. After all, whether or not the main House eatery opts for plastic knives, forks, spoons and cups over the "compostable" sort first introduced by former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, hardly ranks up there as an event of earth-shattering proportions.

Or does it?

One of the first things the new Republican House majority did upon taking over the reins of authority was to bring back plastic utensils and plastic (polystyrene) cups, claiming that Speaker Pelosi's "Green the Capitol" initiative -- a \$475,000-a year composting program that introduced cutlery made from cornstarch -- was "neither cost-effective nor energy-efficient." According to Sally Wood, the Republican spokeswoman for House Administration Committee Chair Dan Lungren (R-CA), "I think you'd be hard-pressed to find taxpayers who consider blowing a half-million dollars on a failing program a 'small thing' in this economic environment." And yet, these same Republicans -- and quite a few Democrats up to and including President Obama, to be painfully honest --

consider "blowing" more than a half-*trillion* dollars on tax cuts for the wealthiest two percent "a 'small thing' in this economic environment."

Make no mistake about it: the Republicans have *not* ditched the eco-friendly plates, cups and cutlery of the Democratic era in order to save a half-million dollars during tough economic times; they have done so to send a political message. To wit, that commerce trumps conservation and that the issue of economy easily outstrips that of ecology. The GOP's "war on compostable cutlery" should come as no surprise; these are, after all, the folks who have lent wholehearted support to legislation:

- Thwarting the regulation of greenhouse gas emissions;
- Cutting the budget of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and
- Repealing a national mandate for more energy-efficient cars and light bulbs.

To my way of thinking, there is something maddeningly inconsistent about being "pro-life" and employing the rhetoric of religion on the one hand, while at the same time seemingly turning a hostile blind eye towards anything and everything we might do to save the greatest, most fundamental of all God's creations: the earth. Its about as inconsistent as proclaiming that "Life begins at conception but ends at birth."

To be religious, to believe the Biblical account of the Acts of Creation, means to be a protector of the earth. (**n.b.** This is not to say that the world was created in six 24-hour days. The Hebrew text -- Gen. 1:5 -- says *vy'yihi erev, vy'yihi voker, yom echad*, which means " . . . and it was evening, and it was morning, **one day**. How long was that one day? No one knows. It could have been 24 hours; it also could have been 800 million years . . .)

But regardless of precisely how long it took God to complete the "Works of Creation," there is brilliance, an undeniable logic to the order of that creation. Nothing God created depends or relies on anything created *after* it; rather, it depends on everything created *prior* to it. Simply stated, the waters preceded fish and trees preceded winged creatures. As such, the waters do not require anything which swims, flies, crawls or walks upright, but all things which swim, fly, crawl or walk upright require

water. Taken to its logical extension, this means that *nothing* depends on man (the last of God's creations), but man depends on virtually everything.

Moreover, God's very first commandment to humanity (Gen. 1:28) reads: *p'ru u'rvu u'milu et ha-arte'z v'kheebshuha* -- namely, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and preserve -- *kheebshua* -- it." When *kheebshua* ("preserve it") was translated into Greek, it came out *kataktisoun*, which actually means "conquer it." From Greek to Latin -- *vincere* -- to English and a host of other Romance Languages, people were taught that God had given us permission to essentially do whatever we wished with the earth and all its creatures.

WRONG!

What the Biblical text teaches -- at least in the original -- is that our sacred task is to preserve everything God has created . . . the earth and all its creatures. If this is the case, then we have been failing miserably. Over the past generation or so there has developed among many folks, a willful blindness to our destruction of the earth; to the despoliation of the land and water, the air and oh so many, many creatures. To me, it is incomprehensible that so many otherwise intelligent, reasonably well-educated people evince such intense hostility, mistrust and distrust towards science -- specifically in the matter of global warming and all the irreversible extinction it entails. How can so many people willfully blind themselves to the fact of rising temperatures, melting icecaps and species that disappear? To argue that those who insist on cutting America's carbon footprint are somehow subversive, unpatriotic or irreligious, is beyond the pale of reason. And yet, those who have decided that going back to plastic and polystyrene in the House cafeteria is both necessary and important because it will save \$475,000 a year (which works out to just under *six cents* for each of the 2.7 million meals it serves annually) somehow manage to do so with a straight face. If they truly believe the opening words of Psalm 24 ("The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof . . .") they would quit trying to make short term political capital out of an onrushing global catastrophe.

Way back in 1959, the Kingston Trio recorded a Sheldon Harnick ditty called [*The Merry Minuet*](#). It begins:

*They're rioting in Africa/They're starving in Spain
There's hurricanes in Florida/And Texas needs rain.
The whole world is festering with unhappy souls
The French hate the Germans, the German hate the Poles.
Italians hate Yugoslavs, South Africans hate the Dutch
AND I DON'T LIKE ANYBODY VERY MUCH!*

Keeping in mind all those who refuse to budge on the very real crisis facing our planet, Harnick's piece with:

*They're rioting in Africa
There's strife in Iran
What nature doesn't do to us
Will be done by our fellow man!*

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April 2, 2011

WHAT SOME PEOPLE WON'T BELIEVE

This week, billionaire media celebrity and presidential wannabe Donald Trump got back on the nightly news by proclaiming himself to be foursquarely within the "birther" camp -- namely, those who are convinced that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States, and thus, is constitutionally disqualified from serving. Does "The Donald" really, truly believe that President Obama was born in Kenya -- or Indonesia or Neptune? No, of course not; this is an obvious p.r. ploy. For although Trump is definitely *not* the second coming of Thomas Jefferson -- let alone Warren G. Harding -- he couldn't be that dense. Rather, he is dipping his well-pedicured toe into the font of right wing lunacy and letting the "true believers" know he is one of them. (**n.b.** Moments ago, Fox News revealed that they are giving Trump his own morning news slot. "*Bold, brash and never bashful. The Donald now makes his voice heard loud and clear every Monday on Fox,*" the network blurb put it.)

So The Donald has now joined the ranks of those who believe President Obama is an alien. I would hazard a guess that the overwhelming majority of those who read The K.F. Stone Weekly are not birther believers . . . thank God. And yet, believe it or not slightly more than half (51%) of those who say they are "likely to participate in a Republican primary next year" say they don't believe Barack Obama was born in the United States. By contrast, 11% of Democrats and 23% of Independents say the president was

not born in this country. From where I sit, even the 11% figure among Democrats is appalling.

Is there no end to what some people won't believe?

The answer, I'm sorry to report, is "No . . . there is no end to what some people won't believe."

Want proof?

In 1928, New York Governor Al Smith became the first Catholic to run for President of the United States. Anti-Catholic sentiment was so strong that people all over the country actually believed that if elected, Smith planned to extend the newly-built Holland Tunnel under the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Vatican so he could take orders from the Pope! Then too, less than a decade later, rock-ribbed conservatives expressed their overwhelming antipathy for FDR's New Deal by "uncovering" the fact that the president was really from a Jewish family likely named "Rosenfeld." (To this day, there are dozens of websites -- including "[Jew Watch](#)" which back this bit of inanity.)

In the 1950s, there were hundreds of thousands -- if not millions -- who bought in to the [John Birch Society](#)-sponsored canard that President Dwight Eisenhower -- the man who led American troops to victory in the European Theatre of Operations during World War II -- was a "conscious, dedicated agent of the Communist conspiracy." The Birch Society, which was created and funded by candy mogul Robert Welch (and Fred Koch, father of the Koch brothers who are today major, major underwriters of the Tea Party movement) also claimed that both Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and his brother Alan -- who headed the C.I.A. -- were part of the Communist conspiracy. They also spearheaded a movement to impeach Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren, claiming that he too was part of the vast conspiracy seeking to overthrow America. Hauntingly, hundreds of thousands -- if not millions -- bought into their conspiratorial lunacy.

Yes indeed, there doesn't seem to be any end to what people won't believe. Today, in addition to all those who believe that President Obama is foreign born, there are a host of new cesspools in which to wallow:

- Of those Republicans polled, 60% believe or at least are not yet sure as to whether ACORN will steal the election for Barack Obama in 2012. It should be noted that ACORN's board decided to shut down the operation on March 21, 2010, and filed for Chapter 7 less than eight months later. The organization has not existed for more than a year.
- A growing number of people have become convinced that William Ayers -- the community organizer described by most conservative pundits as "Obama's terrorist buddy" -- ghost wrote the president's best-selling book *Dreams of My Fathers*. Writer Jack Cashill (*Ron Brown's Body; What's the Matter With California*) has been making the rounds of Fox shows hawking his latest book, *Deconstructing Obama*, in which he claims that prior to *Dreams of My Fathers*, Barack Obama was "incapable of writing anything besides bad poetry." Donald Trump climbed onto this bandwagon, telling radio talk show host Laura Ingraham, "Obama is only president because he wrote a book that is supposed to be a genius book . . . but now it comes out that Bill Ayers wrote it." Cashill also claims that Obama has a second Social Security number which he filed with the Selective Service System . . .
- And now, the latest bit of nonsense that is finding a lot of currency: that the Obama White House is planning to launch a military attack against Israel in the near future! *Washington Times* columnist [Frank Gaffney, Jr.](#) claims that the Obama Administration will use what he calls "The Ghadafi precedent," ". . . to justify and threaten the use of U.S. military forces against an American ally: Israel." Moreover, Gaffney warns, this use of force will likely occur "in the not-too-distant future." Gaffney claims that shortly, the Palestinian Authority will come before the United Nations Security Council seeking a resolution that would recognize its unilateral declaration of statehood. Then, Gaffney explains, "three top female officials in the Obama administration [will] reprise roles they played in the council's recent action on Libya." The "three females" -- all vehemently anti-Israel and anti-Semitic according to Gaffney -- are Susan Rice, the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N.; Samantha Power, senior director for multilateral affairs at the National Security Council; and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton "whose unalloyed sympathy for the Palestinian cause dates back at least to her days as First Lady."

According to Gaffney, one thing leads to another and before you know it, the U.S. has launched a military strike against Israel.

Gaffney's delusion was then amplified by Glenn Beck, who claimed that the Obama administration is "Pushing the Responsibility to Protect Act" that may jeopardize the "survival of Israel." Pointing fingers at Powers, Rice, Clinton and George Soros, Beck claims that it is only a matter of time before the administration seeks to take out Israel!

Do people really, truly believe this?

I'm sorry to have to say "Yes . . . There are people who definitely do believe this." And sadly, a lot of these folks are otherwise intelligent, well-read, worldly people who are firmly convinced that the president is a not-so-closeted Muslim who has surrounded himself with a vast cadre of self-hating Jews. To them, anything less than 100% support for everything Israel does is tantamount to treason. They live in a world of absolutes where that which distinguishes the good guys from the bad is as obvious as the difference between night and day. One can be a Zionist, an *ohav yisrael* (lover of Israel) while supporting a two-state solution or suggesting that perhaps it would be smart for the Netanyahu government to reinstitute a construction moratorium in East Jerusalem or on the West Bank. The two are not mutually exclusive -- at least in the real world.

Don't be fooled by the likes of Gaffney, Beck and oh so many others who proclaim their undying love and support for Israel on the one hand, while seeking to restore a Gilded Age on the other. And please, don't be fooled by guys like The Donald, who reinvent themselves at will, in order to gain a bit of credibility among the truly zany.

Like those who still believe in a tunnel linking Hoboken to the Vatican . . .

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April 08, 2011

TICK TOCK, TICK TOCK . . .

As I begin writing this piece, it is **1:05 p.m.**, EDT on Friday, April 8, 2011. And unless Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Boehner and their respective caucuses can collectively pull a rabbit out a hat, the federal government will be shutting down in precisely 11 hours and 53 minutes (it is now **1:07 p.m.**). Over the past few days, Reid and Boehner have been trooping over to the White House to meet with the president and try working through those issues upon which they disagree. By this point (**1:11 p.m.**) anyone paying attention to the news knows that that which separates the two sides has next to nothing to do with money, and everything to do with ideology. For despite what Speaker Boehner has been claiming -- that the budget cuts offered by the Democrats don't go far enough -- the real issues are such politico-ideological matters as women's health and clean air. (**1:18 p.m.**)

Originally, the GOP proposed slightly more than \$30 billion in spending cuts for the remainder of Fiscal Year 2011. The Democrats countered with slightly less than \$11 billion in cuts. Over time, the Democratic caucus, holding its nose, agreed to raise the ante to just over \$30 billion in cuts. In a world based on logic and sanity -- one devoid of the politics of puerility -- this should have sealed the deal. But it didn't; far from it. For this is Capitol Hill, where logic and sanity are in short supply and political puerility as much a given as

oppressive heat in Death Valley (1:34 p.m.) Instead of thanking their Democratic colleagues for agreeing to the \$30 billion figure and taking "yes for an answer," the GOP, in the words of Majority Leader Reid, "moved the goal posts;" they upped their figure significantly, hoping against hope that voters, suffering from short-term memory lapse, would see the Democrats as agents of recalcitrance and evil.

To a great extent then, if the government shuts down in 11 hours, 15 minutes (1:45 p.m.) it will not be due to the inability of the two sides to agree to a figure, but rather to politics -- plain and simple. And although it may not be in the emotional makeup of most Democrats and progressives, one has to feel for John Boehner. He is the living embodiment of one "caught between a rock and a hard place."

On the one hand, as a longtime member of the Republican establishment, I am fairly certain Boehner doesn't want to see a repeat of 1995 -- the last time the GOP shut down the federal government. That shutdown, Boehner no doubt recalls, led to President Bill Clinton's overwhelming victory over Republican Bob Dole in the 1996 election. On the other hand, Boehner has to pay heed to his caucus's right flank -- the Tea Party -- which is salivating over the prospect of shutting down a federal government they understand to be "the enemy." And every time Boehner looks in his rear view mirror, he sees Majority Leader Eric Cantor -- the G.O.P.'s "Great Right Hope" -- whose basic political *weltanschauung* is more closely aligned with Tea Partiers like Michelle Bachmann, Daniel Webster and Alan West than with the speaker he serves under. (2:06)

The political dimensions of this so-called budget battle are crassly obvious. Holding the very lifeblood of the federal government -- not to mention the livelihood of millions upon millions of people -- hostage to partisan ideological concerns (defunding N.P.R., preventing the District of Columbia from using *locally-generated taxes* to provide financial help to poor women for abortions, and restricting the Environmental Protection Agency's authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions, to name but three) is both grossly insensitive and just plain wrong. Keep the government going; begin

the deadly serious process of working on next year's budget. And then -- and only then -- look into some of these ideological concerns. To do otherwise is akin to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic. (2:20 p.m.)

Now, the above is not meant to tar one party while white-washing the other. Both the Democrats and the Republicans are guilty of afixing ideological riders to budget bills and resolutions. In 2009, the then Democratic-controlled Congress passed the same sort of spending bill -- a "continuing resolution" -- containing a host of amendments designed to set policy. Included among them was one amendment which created a mechanism for the government to provide federal health benefits for same-sex partners of federal employees, and another easing restrictions on American travel to Cuba. The only difference between what the Democrats did in 2009 and the Republicans are doing today is that the Democrats never used their amendments and riders as a sword over the heads of Republicans during talks to keep the government from shutting down. (2:34 P.M.)

Then too, both parties are intensely concerned about how best to use this potential shutdown -- becoming less "potential" and more "real" with every tick of the clock -- to their own political advantage. Both sides are fully cognizant of the fact that in 1995, the American public tended to blame congressional Republicans far more than their Democratic colleagues for the shutdown, and that only President Clinton came out relatively unscathed. The latest polling indicates that the public -- by the slimmest of margins -- blames Republicans more than Democrats for the current impasse. Whether or not this will benefit one party over another in 2012 is both unknowable and -- to my way of thinking -- unimportant.

What *is* important is whether or not the federal government continues functioning beyond midnight -- not who is to blame. (3:01 p.m.)

That the budget is being held hostage to ideological and partisan political concerns shows just how far our priorities have devolved;

how peurile our politics and politicians -- indeed, our very culture and society -- have become.

Nine hours, fifty-five minutes and counting.

Tick tock, tick tock . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



April 14, 2011

THE CHAIRWOMAN WHO CARRIES CRAYONS

A couple of days ago, President Barack Obama announced his choice for new chair of the Democratic National Committee: Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz, who represents the 20th District here in South Florida (Broward County). For those who have followed Debbie's career, this appointment comes as no surprise; from day one, the folks on Capitol Hill recognized that she was that rare combination of brains, passion and inexhaustible energy. She has a huge responsibility in front of her: being the face of the Democratic Party during the next presidential election; representing the people of her district; raising money; and perhaps most importantly, raising three young children. Indeed, she is likely the first Chair of the Democratic National Committee who carries crayons in her purse.

What follows is Debbie Wasserman Schultz's entry in my book, "The Jews of Capitol Hill: A Compendium of Jewish Members of Congress." (pp. 584-588)

During the 2008 presidential election cycle, Florida representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz was all over the map. Whether introducing high-profile legislation, hosting fundraisers, or out on the national hustings campaigning – first for Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, then for Senator Barack Obama – Wasserman Schultz seemed to have discovered how to live a 26-hour day. As a vice chair

of the Democratic National Committee, Chief Deputy Whip in the House and a highly active legislator, the young mother with the amazing head of blond curls (she once spent five months at the pinnacle of the 'Top Ten Tresses' list on "Superhair.net") was seemingly in five places at once. For months on end, she "routinely worked the news-show circuit, waving the party flag." And then, at the Democratic National Convention, she was chosen to give one of the seconding speeches for Barack Obama. What made Wasserman Schultz's punishing pace all the more remarkable was a terrible secret she had kept from all but a handful of family and staff: that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Moreover, during this period she underwent seven surgical procedures, including a double mastectomy, removal of her ovaries and reconstructive surgery.

Indeed, nine days after one of those surgeries, the congresswoman hosted a major fundraiser for House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. Unbeknownst to all those attending the event, Wasserman Schultz was "receiving pain medication from a pump hidden in her purse." Her brother Steve Wasserman, an assistant U.S. Attorney in Washington, recounts how "she was only half out of anesthesia and she was on the BlackBerry."

As one of only two congressional mothers with children under the age of 10, Wasserman Schultz is also one of the few who regularly carries crayons in her purse. At one widely publicized event Wasserman Schultz, unable to find a pen, scribbled notes in crayon. Her political opponent seized upon this as evidence of what she termed Wasserman Schultz's "frazzledness" and unfitness for office. When questioned about it, Wasserman Schultz responded, "I may not always have a pen in my purse, but I always have crayons." To constituents in her South Florida district, the fact that Debbie Wasserman Schultz can be counted on to "always have crayons" is just one of the things they love about her; in two of her three reelection campaigns for the House, she was unopposed.

Debbie Wasserman, the daughter of Larry and Ann (Oberweger) Wasserman was born in Forest Hills, New York, on

September 27, 1966. The Wassermans had come to the United States from Russia and Poland in the early years of the 20th century; the Oberwegers from Austria. Growing up, Debbie and her younger brother Steve knew all four of their grandparents and both their great grandmothers. The family was not particularly observant, although Steve did become *bar mitzvah* in 1982. For more than 25 years Debbie's father, a CPA was chief financial officer of a children's clothing company. From age 2 to 12, Debbie and her family lived in Lido Beach, an unincorporated hamlet in the town of Hempstead, Nassau County. In 1978, the family moved to Melville in New York's Suffolk County, where Debbie graduated from High School in 1984. Remembering Debbie as a child, Larry Wasserman said "She spoke at a very early age. She was always out there and was never the shy, retiring type." Nonetheless, *The Almanac of American Politics* noted that while in school, "she ran for student council every year and always lost."

In September 1984, Debbie Wasserman entered the University of Florida (her father's *alma mater*). Originally intent upon becoming a veterinarian, Wasserman was soon "bitten by the political bug," and changed her major to political science. She also became involved in campus politics. Wasserman, the perennial also-ran in junior high and high school, was elected president of the student senate at U.F. Graduating with a B.A. in political science 1988, Wasserman joined the staff of then-State Representative *Peter Deutsch*, who represented a Broward County district. While working her way up to become Deutsch's chief of staff, Wasserman commuted between the state capitol and Gainesville, where she earned an M.A. in political campaigning in 1990. The following year, Debbie Wasserman met banker Steve Schultz at a softball game; they were soon married.

In 1992 Deutsch gave up his seat in the Florida House in order to make a run Congress. Wasserman Schultz - who was planning on managing Deutsch's campaign - was instead encouraged by her boss and mentor to run for his seat. Working with her husband "to figure out if they could afford a run for the state house," the 25-year old Wasserman Schultz entered what would grow to become a 6-

candidate Democratic primary. Making up in shoe leather what she lacked in cash she mounted an aggressive campaign, going door-to-door introducing herself to South Florida's vast voter-rich condominium community -a sizeable percentage of whom were retired New York Jews. Wasserman Schultz won the Democratic primary with 53% of the vote, thus avoiding a runoff. "It helped frankly," her brother Larry later recalled, "that the district she won in has a large Jewish population. A lot of the elderly Jewish people . . . in her district treat her like she's their granddaughter." At 26, Debbie Wasserman Schultz became the youngest woman ever elected to the Florida Legislature.

Debbie Wasserman Schultz went on to serve eight years in the state House, including a term as House Democratic Leader Pro Tempore, House Democratic Floor Leader and Chair of the Broward Legislative Delegation. From 1994-1996, she chaired the House Committee on Higher Education. Term-limited in 2000, she ran for and won a seat in the Florida State Senate. During her dozen years in Tallahassee, Wasserman Schultz was one of the legislature's most liberal members. Among her more notable legislative measures was one "requiring gender price parity for dry cleaning," and another ensuring that an equal number of men and women be appointed to state boards. Her most successful- best-publicized - legislative effort was the "Florida Residential Swimming Pool Safety Act, a measure mandating that all new pool construction include pool safety equipment. During her last year in Tallahassee, Senator Wasserman Schultz became embroiled with then-Governor Jeb Bush over the issue of Terri Schiavo - a brain-damaged woman whose feeding tube the governor and a majority of Republicans sought to reinsert. Wasserman Schultz argued forcefully that the issue was a matter for the courts, not the legislature. The matter of Terri Schiavo would reemerge during her first term in Congress.

In 2004, Peter Deutsch gave up his safe Congressional seat and declared his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for the seat being vacated by the retiring Democratic Senator Bob Graham. As she had a dozen years earlier, Wasserman Schultz quickly entered the

race to succeed Peter Deutsch – this time in Washington. (Deutsch, who would carry only three counties, lost the three-way Democratic primary to Florida Education Commissioner Betty Castor, who in turn wound up losing the November general election 49%-48% to Republican Mel Martinez.) Even prior to announcing her candidacy, Wasserman Schultz had been out soliciting campaign funds; more than a year before the 2004 primary, she had raised \$115,000. In all, she raised more than \$1 million for what turned out to be – most unusually for an open seat – an uncontested primary and a noncompetitive general election. In June 2004 she pledged \$100,000 from her campaign treasury to the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, a “staggering contribution from a non-incumbent.” In the general election, she called for “repeal of the Bush tax cuts, a reduction in the budget deficit, greater use of diplomacy, improved prescription drug coverage, and gay and abortion rights.” Running against local realtor Margaret Hostetter – who railed against the “homosexual agenda” in the public schools – Wasserman Schultz won a convincing margin of 70%-30%. Since that initial victory, she has been unbeatable; a situation not likely to change in the future. Two days after her victory, Steve and Debbie were “sitting in an Orlando hotel room, waiting to go to Walt Disney World with [their] young children.

Upon her arrival on Capitol Hill, Representative Wasserman Schultz made an immediate splash: When it came her time be photographed with Speaker Dennis Hastert, the freshman representative asked Hastert to use a copy of the *Tanach* – the Hebrew Bible, instead of a Christian Bible for her swearing in. Her request sent the Speaker’s staff scrambling to find a copy. They were unsuccessful. Finally, someone recalled that Representative *Gary Ackerman*, who has long hosted both a Torah study group and a *minyan* in his office, had innumerable copies. Ackerman quickly delivered a copy to Hastert’s office, which in the words of *The Hill*’s Albert Eisele, “convinced Wasserman Schultz that he’s a mensch and bubbala.” Two years later, this episode was recalled when Minnesota Representative Keith Ellison – the first Muslim elected to Congress – asked to be sworn in on a copy of the *Quran*. Ellison’s request drew

quite a bit of critical heat from conservative commentators. One, Jewish commentator Dennis Prager – a member of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council – argued that “This has nothing to do with the *Quran*. It has to do with the first break of a tradition of having a Bible present at a ceremony of installation of a public official since George Washington inaugurated the tradition.” It was quickly pointed out to Prager that John Quincy Adams took his presidential oath in 1825 on a law book; Theodore Roosevelt used no Bible, and that Governors Madeline Kunin (Vermont) and Linda Lingle (Hawaii) and Representative Debbie Wasserman Schultz had used copies of the *Tanach*. Despite a welter of evidence to the contrary, Ellison’s use of the *Quran* continued to be criticized.

One of the first issues greeting Wasserman Schultz upon her arrival on Capitol Hill was the continuing controversy over Terri Schiavo. It was no longer an issue for Florida Governor Jeb Bush; now it was in the hands of his brother the president, who insisted that Congress pass a measure requiring the woman’s feeding tube be reinserted. Wasserman Schultz – with just two months in the House – was wary of taking a lead on the issue. “I was concerned about how to approach my involvement,” she admits, although “there was no way I could let that go.” Firmly convinced that “Congress would set a dangerous precedent if it attempted to circumvent the courts,” she had “reams of information and arguments bolstering her case.” Turning these “reams” into “talk sheets,” she distributed them among her new colleagues, who eventually took her advice. She insists that she never encountered “one ounce of resentment” from any of her senior colleagues. “Quite the contrary,” she noted, “the case helped her relationships with her new colleagues.”

Wasserman Schultz, who had hoped to take Peter Deutsch’s slot on the powerful Energy and Commerce Committee – a near impossibility for a freshman – was instead given a seat on Financial Services. On that committee, she “called for a commission to examine the state of natural disaster insurance.” Then, after an insurance company denied her additional life insurance coverage because she “might travel to Israel at some time,” she filed a bill

making such a practice illegal. As of 2011, that bill has yet to make it out of the House. During her first term she also won unanimous approval of a resolution designating May “American Jewish History Month.” (The Senate version, which was also passed unanimously, was sponsored by Senator *Arlen Specter*. The annual observance was created to recognize “the accomplishments of American Jews and the important role that members of the Jewish community have played in the development of American culture.” At the ceremony in which President George W. Bush signed the proclamation Wasserman Schultz said, “This is an historic occasion. Generations to come will have the chance to live without anti-Semitism through greater understanding and awareness of the significant role that American Jews have played in U.S. history.”

Debbie Wasserman Schultz was the only freshman House member asked to join the Democratic whip team. She also “immediately took an active role” in the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) becoming co-chair of the Democratic Party’s “Red to Blue” campaign, which “highlights top Democratic campaigns across the country.” Its basic function is to turn “Red (Republican) congressional districts “Blue (Democratic). Working closely with DCCC chair (and future White House Chief of Staff) *Rahm Emanuel*, Wasserman Schultz “became a party spokesman and a mentor for Democratic recruits.”

When Democrats took control of the House following the 2006 election, Wasserman Schultz became “a prime beneficiary.” She traded in her seat on Financial Services for a position on Appropriations, where she “immediately and unexpectedly” became a “cardinal” as chair of the Legislative Branch Subcommittee. She was also named to House Judiciary. Additionally, Majority Whip James Clyburn tapped her as a “chief deputy majority whip.” As a member of House Judiciary she testified before Senate Judiciary against the nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court, “warning that his support of government intrusion could lead to more Schiavo cases.” While debating in committee a 2006 bill aimed at preserving the phrase “under God” in the Pledge of Allegiance

(which had been ruled unconstitutional by a federal court), Wasserman Schultz scolded Republican Judiciary Committee members for ignoring “the things that people actually have to deal with in their daily lives, like gas prices, health care costs, fiscal responsibility, a real debate on Iraq.”

During her three terms in the House, Representative Wasserman Schultz has been “a reliable liberal vote,” whose positions have brought her perfect ratings from such liberal groups as Americans for Democratic Action, the American Civil Liberties Union and the League of Conservation Voters, and very low ratings from such conservative groups as the American Conservative Union, Club for Growth and the Family Research Council.

Wasserman Schultz was an early and ardent supporter of Hillary Rodham Clinton’s campaign for president in 2008. She was one of approximately 30 “Hillraisers,” individuals who raised at least \$100,000 for the New York senator’s campaign. Once Clinton dropped out of the race, Wasserman Schultz became an effective messenger for the Obama campaign. In one memorable appearance on *Face the Nation*, host Bob Schieffer asked whether or not Republican Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin was being treated fairly by the media. Specifically, Schieffer asked, “Congresswoman Schultz, has [Sarah Palin] been asked to clear some bar that a male candidate wouldn’t have to clear?” To which Wasserman Schultz responded:

That's just utterly ridiculous. . . . I've been asked that question as a mom trying to juggle both things and, you know, typically a male -- a male candidate wouldn't get asked that. But all Sarah Palin is being asked to respond to is whether she's up to the task, and it is absolutely fair game. And all I've seen is her being asked about her background, her experience, what qualifies her to be vice president and whether she knows anything. So the tough questions that have been asked of Sarah Palin thus far just have been about the fact that she doesn't know anything and isn't ready to be vice president. That's fair game and it has nothing to do with her gender.

Schieffer responded, “You're saying she doesn't know anything, or you're saying that's what she's been asked about?” to which Wasserman Schultz replied:

Well, she's been asked what she knows. She's been asked to demonstrate her foreign policy knowledge, which she clearly has very little . . . I mean, she didn't know what the Bush Doctrine was, she really had almost no grasp of America's foreign policy. She really knew very little about domestic policy. Quite honestly, the interview that I saw and that Americans saw. . . were similar to when I didn't read a book in high school and had to read the Cliffs Notes and phone in my -- and phone in my report. She's Cliff-noted her performance so far, and all of that is fair game. The American people deserve better than that. They don't deserve more of the same, which is what they're getting from John McCain and Sarah Palin right now.

Debbie Wasserman Schultz seconded Barack Obama's nomination at the Democratic National Convention in August 2008 – the same month she had two surgeries for breast reconstruction.

Debbie and Steve Schultz have been married for 18 years. Steve long knew that with Debbie he was getting into politics; she was working as a legislative aide for Pete Deutsch when they first met at a softball game. When he showed up 90 minutes early for their first date, “she filled time talking about the death penalty.” In many ways, they are opposites: Steve, the vice president of the loan department at Community Bank of Broward is more conservative than his wife and quite comfortable in the background. As one of the very few women in Congress who has young school age children (in 2009, twins Jake and Rebecca were 9; Shelby 5) Debbie Wasserman Schultz still manages to play both a close and critical role in their lives. During the 3 ½ to 4 days she spends in Washington each week, Debbie “talks and texts with her kids daily.” When she's away, her local staff faxes review sheets so that she can quiz her kids for a test by phone.

Within 48 hours of disclosing her very private battle with cancer, Representative Wasserman Schultz put in a bill calling for the

expenditure of \$45 million over five years to “boost awareness of breast cancer among younger women.” “It is my hope that by sharing my story, we will pass the [bill] and further reduce the death rate of young women diagnosed with breast cancer,” she said at the press conference announcing the legislation.

On December 10, 2009, *National Journal* released a “sneak peak” of a poll it had conducted among “Congressional and political insiders” on their “favorite members of Congress, the member they’d most like to shut up, the brightest thinkers and strategists in their party” and much more. Among the Democratic 68 Congressional insiders making up the *Journal*’s, polling group, Debbie Wasserman Schultz was named most often as the House Democrat with the brightest future. This finding came on the heels of an announcement that Representative Wasserman Schultz would be “beefing up her national political operation,” and “hiring a director for her national political action committee.”

Although standing no more than 5 feet 2 and weighing just over 100 pounds, Debbie Wasserman Schultz is a human dynamo. A well-known face on Sunday political talk shows, she has also become a recognized leader among the nation’s Jews; starting in 2005 and continuing on to the present, *The Jewish Daily Forward* has annually named her one of its “50 most influential Jewish Americans.” *The Forwards* has long described her as “articulate with a trademark halo of curly blond locks.”

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April 24, 2011

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE . . .

Shortly after the announcement that Glenn Beck would be "transitioning off" the Fox News Network, my inbox began filling up with a ton of emails containing the jeers, tears, and fears of those who regularly read my articles. One writer proclaimed *"This is the best news I've had for a long time. The streak of insanity that Glenn Beck represents is truly frightening.* One wit asked *"From what is he 'transitioning?' From Australopithecus Robustus to Cro-Magnon?"* Yet a third opined, *"Beck's sin is that he lost money . . . not that he was crazy, which he admittedly is, nor that he offended intelligent people, which he did, but that he lost it . . ."*

While many saw the Beck-Fox divorce as nothing more than a business decision -- the show has, in reality been losing advertisers right and left -- and the *Washington Post's* Dana Milbank suggested that Beck had simply become too unhinged even for network Grand Poobah Roger Ailes, there were more than a few who -- unbelievably -- voiced the certain knowledge that Beck's demise was due to a Jewish-led conspiracy! Typical of those holding this view/fear was the chap who wrote, *"Does anyone find it strange that he accused Obama of racism and . . . no reaction? He speaks of Muslims in ugly terms. No reaction. But he makes comments about Jews and suddenly he's racist? Coincidence? I don't think so."*

It should be noted that ever since Beck made his Fox debut in January 2009, he loitered around the fringes of anti-Semitism and chose to hang out with those who view the world through the lens of a monolithic Jewish conspiracy. As time progressed and Beck's worldview became increasingly apocalyptic (not to mention paranoid), his support of anti-Jewish conspiracy theories and theorists likewise increased. Beck has long made a

punching bag out of George Soros, a Jewish billionaire and Holocaust survivor, calling him a "puppet master," and reading descriptions which characterize him as an "unscrupulous profiteer" who "sucks the blood from people." He also repeatedly -- and falsely -- accused Soros of being "a Nazi collaborator" who "saw people into the gas chambers." (It should be noted that Soros was all of 15 at the end of World War II; the tale of how he survived the Holocaust is well documented, and does not include him being a "collaborator.")

Last month, Beck devoted an entire program to a conspiracy theory about how various bankers -- including the Rothschilds -- created the Federal Reserve. To "prove" his claim, Beck hosted conspiracy theorist [G. Edward Griffin](#), who has publicly argued that the notorious anti-Semitic forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* "accurately describes much of what is happening in our world." Griffin has repeatedly claimed that "present-day political Zionists are promoting the New World Order." It should be noted that *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, whose popularity and mass dissemination owe much to auto magnate Henry Ford, was thoroughly discredited in the 1921 work *History of a Lie* (which can be [downloaded](#)) by the American journalist/diplomat Herman Bernstein. Regardless, millions still subscribe to the forgery's malevolent message of Jewish world domination . . . and it is likely that Beck is one of them.

Beck also developed a fond fascination for the theories of David Barton, the Founder and President of [WallBuilders](#), "a national pro-family organization that presents America's forgotten history and heroes, with an emphasis on our moral, religious and constitutional heritage." Barton, who has been variously described as a "Christian nationalist" "a Holocaust denier," and "one of the foremost Christian revisionist historians," has called for the death penalty for gays and lesbians, vigorously denies that the Founders supported a wall of separation between church and state, and firmly believes that America was founded as "an explicitly Christian nation." Furthermore, Beck's buddy -- who he once praised as "the Library of Congress in shoes," believes that biblical law should be instituted in the United States, and finds scriptural justification for everything from eliminating the capital gains tax, to the dismantling of the Environmental Protection Agency.

In light of Beck's obvious fascination with -- if not outright belief in -- anti-Semites and anti-Semitic conspiracy theories -- not to mention the Christian revisionism of David Barton -- I was dumbfounded by several other emails that came into my inbox. Hauntingly, these writers -- who for the most part are Jewish -- expressed their deep sadness and regret at Beck's "transitioning" because, as one woman explained, "he is one of the best friends Israel has." Her email, which was part of a multi-forwarded chain that must have ultimately reached thousands of people, contained a YouTube video of Beck proclaiming "I stand with Israel."

Here we come to an issue which, quite frankly, gives me pause: how to respond to "supporters of Israel" who, outside of their public protestations about the Jewish State, support issues and have opinions which are largely antithetical -- if not anathema -- to Jewish values. That Glenn Beck -- or Sarah Palin, Michelle Bachmann, Alan West, Jim DeMint or a thousand other right-wingers -- voice support for Israel is certainly to be preferred over them siding with Hamas, viewing Israel as THE impediment to peace in the Middle East. or seeing only the Palestinians as victims . . . as so many on the left now do. At the same time, I am highly distrustful of Beck's (or Palin's or Barton's) "support." Much of it has to do with Christian eschatology -- the Christian view of End Times and the Second Coming, which requires the ingathering of all the Jewish exiles. Again, I certainly encourage people of all faiths to support Israel despite her imperfections. All things considered, Israel has achieved more than anyone could have imagined, considering the odds, the times and the neighborhood. But at the same time, just because a person voices support for Israel does not mean we must forgive or ignore everything else they say or believe, espouse or propose.

In early January, I wrote a piece entitled [*A Memo to Sarah Palin*](#) in which I took the former governor to task for using the term "blood libel," explained the history behind this egregious term, and strongly urged her to take her newfound millions and get out of politics. The article wound up garnering more attention and commentary than anything I have ever published. Sadly, much of the commentary was highly negative; people taking me to task for having "the gall to attack a true friend of Israel." One writer actually referred to me as "A prevaricating sack of organic waste," declared

that I had no right to call myself 'rabbi' and urged me to "fade away forever so that there will be more room for decent people like Sarah Palin." Although I can't say that I enjoy reading comments like this, I do understand that people are quite passionate when it comes to Israel. And I fully expect to receive some pretty interesting responses to this article as well . . .

I have never agreed with those who proclaim that "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." Glenn Beck, Sarah Palin, and oh so many others may well be friends and supporters of the "Holy Land," which is not precisely the same thing as the "State of Israel. But, as the old saying goes, "With friends like these . . ."

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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AND NOW, THE NOISE . . . ER . . . THE NEWS

Most of us are familiar with the old philosophical poser, "If a tree falls in the forest and no one is around to hear it, does it make a sound?" The riddle poses the fascinating question "Can something exist without being perceived?" To a philosopher -- which I am not -- the overarching question becomes "If no one is around to hear, touch or smell the tree, can it truly be said to exist?" All those who took Philosophy 101 will likely recall Lord Berkeley's "subjective idealism," which posited that "To be is to be perceived" -- e.g. without my perception, the tree -- and indeed, all corporeal reality -- lacks existence. In other words, it is *my* perception that gives the tree its reality.

Great stuff -- provided one doesn't take it outside the classroom or the den. For those who do -- who put down their cuppa tea and continue the conversation in the so-called "real world" -- don't be surprised if people in white coats come chasing after you brandishing butterfly nets . . .

Along the same lines, one might wax philosophically and ask, "Does the media's wall-to-wall coverage of Donald Trump's claim that Bill Ayers -- and not Barack Obama -- wrote the president's bestselling *Dreams of My Fathers*, make it news?" Or, along the same lines, "If no media outlet reports on Ohio Congresswoman Jean

Schmidt's outrageous claim that 'For every 33 women who walk into a Planned Parenthood clinic, 32 receive an abortion,' is *that* news?"

As with the riddle about the falling tree, there is no hard, fast answer to the questions above; it all depends on one's philosophical - or in this case, political -- bent. Nonetheless, there *are* several serious questions being posed here; questions that are certainly more than mere pleasant philosophical diversions. To wit:

- Is there a line between reporting on -- as opposed to creating -- news?
- Is it the media's job to reflect -- or to help shape -- public opinion?
- Is there a difference between "news" and "noise?"

Prior to the advent of the Internet and the "implosion/explosion" of the Fourth Estate, American media -- largely radio and television -- conformed to guidelines set out in the Federal Communications Act of 1934. This act created the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which regulated the nation's media outlets and, after 1949, administered the "Fairness Doctrine." This FCC policy, required that holders of broadcast licenses "to both present controversial issues of public importance and to do so in a manner" that was, in the Commission's view, "honest, equitable and balanced." The FCC abolished this doctrine in 1987; the original Federal Communications Act was emasculated by the deregulatory Telecommunications Act of 1996.

Under the Fairness Doctrine -- and before deregulation and the creation of the Internet -- most cities had their own local news outlets. Radio and television stations from Caribou to Covina had people writing and reporting local news. Networks were pretty much limited to the big three -- NBC, CBS and ABC -- along with their weaker sister, PBS. On radio, Westinghouse Broadcasting operated 24-hour a day news radio stations in many major American cities, and had news bureaus in most international capitals. Then came the "implosion." Today, Westinghouse is a memory; NBC, CBS

and ABC have far fewer journalists stationed abroad; most American cities get their news from the same sources.

The "explosion," of course was in the sheer number of media outlets on cable, broadband and the Internet. This explosion has created far greater competition for advertising dollars, which has in turn, has forced the industry to ratchet up the volume of its so-called reportage; where once there was news, now there is noise.

Back in the early 1970s, I spent the better part of a year working for the Westinghouse Broadcasting affiliate (KFWB) in Hollywood, California. (*"You give us 22 minutes, we'll give you the world."*) In those days the newsroom staff easily numbered 35-40 -- writers, reporters, editors, engineers and on-air personalities. During my tenure, two news stories took up the lion's share of our time: Watergate and the Patty Hearst kidnapping. My desk was right outside the teletype room where the constant clackity-clack of automatic 75-words-a-minute typing emanated from the AP, UPI and Reuters "A-wire" and "B-wire" machines. (The former ran full-length newspaper-ready stories; the latter, a radio version commonly called "rip and read.") A couple of times a week a bell would go off in the teletype room, meaning that an "urgent" story was about to come through. And once in a blue moon (I think it may have occurred twice) lights would go off; this was a "flash" -- a story of epic proportion, such as the resignation of the President of the United States.

If KFWB were still in the 24-hour-a-day news business (it is now long gone), the bells and flashing lights would undoubtedly go off several times an hour. For in today's media, all stories are breaking stories; all headlines scream; every news item is of earth-shattering importance. In short, what once was "the news," has become "the noise."

Call me old-fashioned, but I believe that there is a vast difference between news and noise. The former -- News -- is meant to illuminate, stimulate and educate; it is a daily archive of human history. It is intended to inform; to increase awareness of the world in which we live; ultimately, to make of us better citizens. When

professionally well done, News does not require the microphone to be at pitched volume. Just think of Edward R. Murrow, Eric Sevareid and Walter Cronkite. Their relationship with viewers and listeners approached a sacred trust. And from time to time, they even turned in a bit of a profit for their corporate bosses.

Noise, on the other hand, transforms the microphone into a bullhorn. Unlike News, Noise is meant to sensationalize and to marginalize; to agitate and to create heroes and villains; to promote a partisan point of view. It is a bare-knuckle fight to the finish where "victory" means profit, and the notion of sacred trust as antiquated and outmoded as a pair of silk stockings.

In an ideal world, the modern masters (and mistresses) of the microphone -- like their forbears of yesteryear -- would understand the difference between "News" and "Noise." In an ideal world, they would recognize that not every crackpot deserves coverage, nor every zealot a headline. In an ideal world, they would know that their job is to report -- and not to create -- the News.

But alas, this is not an ideal world.

And that's the noise that's making news . . .

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(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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A WORLD WITHOUT BIN LADEN

The assassination of Osama bin Laden is unquestionably the biggest and most dramatic news stories of the past many years. It has galvanized people the world over and relegated virtually every other newsworthy (and not-so-newsworthy) item to the back pages of newspapers from Afghanistan to Zimbabwe. Moreover, bin Laden's death in Bilal Town, the wealthy suburban enclave in northeastern Abbottabad, has spawned an unprecedented torrent of journalistic sidebars and side issues, some critical, some purely political, others so crass and conspiratorial as to be almost comedic. Everyone -- and I do mean everyone -- in the media feels the need to weigh in with a response, whether it be an opinion, an insight, a dire warning or a prediction.

Why should I be any different?

Here at home, the death of the planet's most wanted and most notorious criminal has required everyone with a public persona to issue a press release. Predictably, Democrats are heaping praise upon President Obama, the intelligence community and the crack Navy SEAL team which carried out the mission . . . And deservedly so, for this was a micro-surgical strike that could just as easily have ended in disaster. It was a gutsy call, and proved once and for all -- at least for some of us -- that Barack Obama is indeed a leader who has "the right stuff."

Just as predictably, many Republicans are tripping over their tongues -- not to mention the facts at hand -- making damn sure to give credit to anyone and everyone *except* President Obama for the death of bin Laden. Sarah Palin issued a statement which read, in part, *"God bless all the brave men and women in our military and our intelligence services who contributed to carrying out the successful mission to bring bin Laden to justice and who laid the groundwork over the years to make this victory possible . . ."* Not to be outdone, Michelle Bachmann weighed in with, *"I want to express my deepest gratitude to the men and women of the U.S. military and intelligence community. Their persistence and dedicated service has yielded success in a mission that has gripped our nation since the terrible events of 9/11. . ."* And then there was Mike Huckabee, whose statement started out with the words *"Welcome to hell!"*

Among some of the other sidebars and side-issues being exposed to the light of day we find the serious, the frivolous and the crassly comedic.

Among the serious:

- An ongoing debate about the role that "enhanced interrogation" (a euphemism for "torture") may or may not have had in the success of the mission, and what role it should play in the future.
- The question of how in the world bin Laden could have been hiding in plain sight for five years without the Pakistani government knowing about it? What does the future hold for our relationship with the government of Asif Zardari?
- Considering that our original justification for going into Afghanistan was capturing Osama bin Laden, is there now any reason for remaining? Should not the U.S. declare "Mission Accomplished" and get out ASAP?
- Now that bin Laden is dead, what is the future of al-Qaeda?
- Will his death lead to increased acts of terrorism in the name of retaliation?

Among the frivolous we find:

- A debate over why bin Laden's remains were quickly buried at sea rather than returned to the earth, and whether this is an indication that he really isn't dead? (The decision to bury him at sea seems reasonable; there was a very real fear that anyplace he would have been buried would have become a memorial or a monument for future generations of terrorists.)
- The issue of whether or not the White House should release photos of bin Laden's corpse. (*"Show photo as a warning to others seeking America's destruction. No pussy-footing around, no politicking, no drama; it's part of our mission"* tweeted Sara Palin.)
- Why did Secretary of State Clinton have her hand in front of her face in the soon-to-be historic photo of the president and his team in the situation room? (Turns out, she informed the press that she was about to cough.)

And among the crassly comedic, my favorite is:

- The debate over the use of the name "Geronimo" as the code term for "Mission Accomplished." This, so we are told, trivializes and shows utter insensitivity to Native Americans, for whom the Apache warrior is a much-revered icon.

Putting these sidebars . . . well . . . aside for the nonce, permit me to deal with questions which are central and likely unanswerable:

- Does his death signal the death of al-Qaeda?
- Will he continue to exert an influence over future generations of terrorists?
- In short, what might the world be like without Osama bin Laden?

I would posit that by the time of his death, bin Laden was nearly irrelevant to the day-to-day operations of al-Qaeda. Although a philosophical lightning rod and provider of gelt, bin Laden was never a strategist or planner of missions. His was a political philosophy grounded in anger, hatred and nihilism. His stated aims were the bankrupting of the West -- most notably the U.S.A -- and the restoration of a medieval caliphate throughout the Muslim world.

He did not believe that either of these goals would necessarily be achieved during his lifetime.

It will be recalled that bin Laden originally went to Pakistan in the late 1970s where he joined up with the Mujahidin, then fighting against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Bin Laden saw how that war bankrupted the Soviets and led, in his opinion, to the collapse of the USSR. This became his template for the future; draw the USA into a war in Afghanistan by hook or by crook, which would in turn, force America to empty its coffers. Truth to tell, Afghanistan *has* been the a "Valley of Dry Bones" for empires from Alexander the Great to Great Britain to the Soviet Union and now the United States of America. (**n.b.** Alexander the Great spent two years -- 36-325 B.C.E. -- trying to quell riots in what was then his newest acquisition, but left with little more than a city with his Afghan name, "Kandahar.") In his desire to bankrupt the West, bin Laden has done a pretty good job.

Having said this, it should also be noted that due to the overwhelmingly nihilistic nature of his vision, bin Laden has been largely irrelevant to what history will long remember as the "Arab Spring" -- the wave of rebellion sweeping across the Muslim world. Think about it: nowhere have we seen amidst all those tens and hundreds of thousands of young protesting Egyptians, Tunisians, Syrians, Jordanians or Yemini, a single poster with the photo of Osama bin Laden. They are *not* interested in exchanging the authoritarian shackles of corrupt modern rulers for the dictatorial manacles of medieval Muslim caliphs. Their argument is not with modernity; it is with high unemployment, a lack of bread and leaders who enrich the few at the expense of the many. In all this, bin Laden is largely irrelevant. Truth to tell, the death of bin Laden was as much of a blessing to the Muslim world as it is to West. Those publicly bemoaning his assassination are in a distinct minority. . .

Now, this is not to say that bin Laden's death signals a death knell for al-Qaeda. Far from it. The group he founded and funded will continue convincing youths who lack hope that their future can best

be secured through acts of martyrdom. Al-Qaeda will continue operating in places like Somalia, Mumbai, Indonesia and the Philippines. They will continue attempting to export terror to the West. I shudder to think of what the coming weeks and months might bring. Not from al-Qaeda, however but from the garden-variety crazies who suddenly decide to put explosives in their shoes, or underwear and board an airplane or put TNT in their SUV and leave it parked in Times Square. The terrorist acts perpetrated by al-Qaeda are definitely not spontaneous; they are well-planned over months and years. We will do well to be hyper aware in the weeks and months to come, for there are many crazy people out there.

So, how much different will the world be now that Osama bin Laden resides with Davy Jones? Probably not that much, for the death of one evil man rarely changes the course of history. If his demise is to eventually make the world a better, safer, and saner place, it will be because *we* have made it so -- by doing everything within our power, our pride and our imagination, to learn the serious lessons of history and not permit ourselves to be sidetracked by the frivolous or the crassly comedic.

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 15, 2011

A BANQUET OF CONSEQUENCES

As with all fancy repasts, we begin with assorted *hors d'oeuvres* -- tasty tidbits meant to stimulate the palate and get the gastric juices flowing with gleeful anticipation:

- In the United States, the top 1% owns more wealth than the bottom 90%.
- 80% of all new income earned from 1980 to 2005 went to the top 1%.
- Between 1998 and 2005, two out of every three corporations in the U.S. (with combined sales of \$2.5 trillion) paid no Federal income tax.
- In 2009, the wealthiest 400 Americans earned, *on average* \$345 million *apiece*; their effective tax rate was a mere 16.6% -- the lowest tax rate for the super-wealthy ever recorded.
- During the eight G.W. Bush years, the 400 wealthiest Americans increased their wealth by more than \$380 billion.
- During the eight G.W. Bush years, America closed down more than 42,000 factories, for a net loss of more than 5 million manufacturing jobs.

Our appetites hopefully whetted, we now move on to the next course:

- In 2010, the top 25 hedge fund managers made a combined \$25 billion in income -- an average of \$1 billion per person.

- In 2009, a two-income family had less disposable after-tax income than a one-income family did thirty years ago.
- In December 2010, Congress lowered the inheritance tax from 55% to 35%, with an exemption on the first \$5 million on an individual's (or \$10 million for a couple's) estate. Research shows that this tax applies only to the top *three-tenths of one percent* of American families, and will reduce federal revenues by about \$200 billion a year.
- As of 2010, the Social Security Trust Fund has a \$2.6 trillion surplus; enough to pay out benefits for the next 27 years.
- As of March 2011, major American corporations have approximately \$2 trillion cash on hand.
- In the first quarter of 2011, the five major oil corporations booked profits of \$36 billion. Nonetheless, they receive approximately \$4 billion a year in federal tax subsidies. This past Thursday the CEOs of these five corporations went before a Senate committee and said that anyone who was in favor of ending these subsidies was "un-American."
- In 2010, these five oil corporations spent more than \$145 million on 800 lobbyists. (The \$4 billion they will likely continue to receive in 2011 thereby represents a 2,700% *return on investment*.)

And now for the main course:

- In May 2011, America is carrying a \$13.8 trillion national debt, a \$1.3 trillion trade deficit, and is sending \$1 billion a day, 365 days a year to the Saudis for oil.
- In December 2010, Congress extended a tax cut for all Americans for an additional two years.
- As a result of the tax cut extension, a family making between \$50,000 and \$75,000, will save just over \$2,000. By comparison, families making between \$500,000 and \$1 million gets an average \$25,000 tax break, and those making over \$1 million a year get more than \$130,000.
- Tax cuts for those making over \$200,000 a year will cost the treasury \$42 billion in fiscal year 2012. Compare this to \$38

billion in cuts -- mostly to education, health and other social services -- enacted by Congress just one month ago.

- According to the Center for American Progress, the tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans will cost \$120 billion over the next two years and will create or save approximately 290,000 jobs. Doing the math, this works out to roughly \$400,000 a job, although few, if any, will pay anywhere near that amount.
- Despite running on a platform calling for "jobs, jobs and more jobs" and "extreme fiscal discipline," Republicans -- on both the national and state level -- have instead used their newfound power to enact draconian cuts in social services, pensions and education, severely curb -- if not cancel -- collective bargaining rights for unions, and severely restrict to the point of impossibility abortion. (In Florida, the "Let's Get to Work" governor and legislature responded to the state's fiscal crisis by one bill against the wearing of saggy pants which permit one's underwear to show, a second requiring all those seeking public assistance to undergo mandatory drug testing, and a third requiring women seeking an abortion to first pay for an ultrasound. What all of this has to do with the creation of jobs or fiscal integrity is beyond me. . .)
- According to Speaker Boehner and members of the Tea Party Caucus, unless Congress agrees to trillions of dollars in budget cuts -- with virtually no increase in taxes except on women's centers that perform abortions -- they will not support an increase in the Federal Debt Ceiling. *(Please note that increasing the debt ceiling does not add a cent to the federal deficit; it merely gives the government the legal ability to meet its debt obligations. Without an increase in the ceiling the "Full Faith and Credit" of the United States would, for the first time in its history, be called into question, which in turn would likely trigger an international fiscal crisis of epic proportions.)*

I don't know about you, but I've pretty much lost my appetite. I think I'm going to skip desert and opt out for a postprandial brandy . . . perhaps a flask of [Frapin](#).

Although the cause(s) of America's "Great Recession" are rather clear -- a combination of Wall Street duplicity, untrammelled free trade leading to job exportation and putting the cost of war on the national credit card -- the road to recovery is shrouded with doubt. One thing though, is certain: the vast American Middle Class -- the historic economic backbone of the country -- has been dealt a mortal wound. At no time since the Gilded Age has the gap between the hyper wealthy and the rest of America been so great. Congress -- the so-called "People's House" -- cannot and will not do anything to upset those who underwrite their political careers.

Historically, Democrats have had a tendency to see government playing an enhanced role at times of economic crisis; acting as both a referee and a bank of last resort. Their understanding of economics posits that during times of economic crisis, the best investments are in people -- whether through unemployment checks, Social Security payments or public works programs that put people to work. When you invest in those who are falling behind, so this argument goes, they immediately spend their money -- on food, rent, clothing and other necessities. In turn, these purchases help the bottom line of the grocer, the landlord and the department store who, because of increased sales, may well seek additional employees who in turn will earn money for which they too will pay taxes. And on and on. And although this understanding of economics does have its limits, it can work.

Historically, Republicans have had a tendency to believe that the solution to economic hard times will come from the "haves," rather than the "have-nots." They believe that a combination of lower taxes and fewer regulations will put more money into the hands of corporations, who, so they believe, are the ones who will ultimately create the jobs that will ultimately right the economic ship of state. For the past generation or more, this approach has been known as "trickle-down economics." It has also been shown to not work.

The Republican mantra states "If you tax rich people and their corporations, it kills jobs." They have a tendency to see those whom

the Democrats would assist through government programs as "leeches" and "blood-suckers." Case in point, a recent article against President Obama's economic recovery plan by a senior fellow at the Cato Institute's "Institute for Economic Growth," in which he wrote:

Some people, in their pursuit of profit, benefit their fellow humans by creating new or better goods and services, and then by employing others. We call such people entrepreneurs and productive workers.

*Others are parasites who suck the blood and energy away from the productive. Such people are most often found in government. Perhaps the most vivid description of what happens to a society where the parasites become so numerous and powerful that they destroy their productive hosts is Ayn Rand's classic novel "Atlas Shrugged." (Please note that Ayn Rand, the goddess of "Objectivism," the woman who occupies a hallowed spot in the Libertarian/Tea Party Pantheon, was herself a recipient of both Social Security and Medicare. And, for those who can quote line and verse from *We the Living*, *Anthem*, *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, please note that Ms. Rand was a dyed-in-the-wool atheist who despised religion and was fully supportive of a woman's right to choose.)*

I'm here to tell you that the rich don't create jobs; Democracy creates jobs. Jobs are created when people walk in the door to buy whatever goods and services you have to offer. And people cannot walk in your door unless they have money to spend. Democracy is a shared experience; ideally we are supposed to share in both its costs and benefits; its savings and its sacrifices. Maddeningly, those at the top -- those who already have the most and are getting even more through the actions of a government they seem to view as their private piggy bank -- don't spend their extra millions or billions on job creation. They spend it on second or third private jets, four or fifth vacation homes or Cayman Island tax shelters. They don't create jobs; they export them.

Unless and until we hold every member of Congress or state legislature to account; unless and until we make our voices heard; unless or until we proclaim that Democracy requires shared sacrifice;

we, the middle class will continue to be nothing but beggars at a banquet . . . a banquet of dire consequences.

Some people, in their pursuit of profit, benefit their fellow humans by creating new or better goods and services, and then by employing others. We call such people entrepreneurs and productive workers.

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May 22, 2011

"IF I WERE A CANDLE MAKER . . ."

In sifting through tens of dozens of responses and comments on President Obama's recent speech on Israel and the Middle East, I found myself thinking about Abraham ibn Ezra, one of history's most distinguished and versatile men of letters. A man of staggering intellect and accomplishment, ibn Ezra (1089-1164), known variously as "The Wise," "The Great," and "The Admirable Doctor," excelled in the fields of philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and linguistics. As a writer, he published one of the earliest works on Hebrew grammar, a brilliant commentary on the Bible, and numerous volumes of poetry. So what was it about the president's speech and all those comments that brought ibn Ezra to mind? Precisely this: in one of his poems, "The Admirable Doctor" wrote:

"If I were a candle maker, the sun would never leave the sky.

If I were a maker of shrouds, not a single person would die."

So it goes with President Obama. The man rarely gets a break:

- The product of a broken home who graduated from two Ivy League institutions and became the first African American to serve as Editor-in-Chief of the *Harvard Law Review*, Obama, far from being seen as the epitome of the American Dream of Success, was -- and still is -- characterized in many circles as an effete intellectual snob.
- The third *sitting* U.S. President to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize (Jimmy Carter won his 22 years *after* leaving the White House), Obama's award was viewed by many as a badge of capitulation to the forces of international terror.

- The man who has provided more federal dollars to Wall Street and corporate America than any president in U.S. history, is branded as both "anti-business," and a "Socialist."

And now, with his May 19 "[Remarks on the Middle East and North Africa](#)" at the State Department, he is accused of "Throwing Israel under the bus," (Gov. Mitt Romney) of "Insulting Israel," (Rep. Michelle Bachmann) and of making "A mistaken and very dangerous demand" (Gov. Tim Pawlenty). Former Speaker Newt Gingrich called the president's speech a "disaster," and hastened to add, *"I understand he has already offered concessions to the Palestinians, in advance of anything the Israelis do, in a way that could be a significant security threat to the Israelis."*

Now obviously, Romney, Bachmann, Pawlenty and Gingrich have two things in common: all are Republicans, and are either declared or soon-to-be declared candidates for President of the United States. So they can, to a certain extent, be both forgiven and understood for their uniformly negative response to the president's remarks.

But what about the media? With a majority of the articles, stories, op-eds and commentary I read, they failed to report on the president's remarks in their totality. Instead, they honed in on precisely 15 words to be found in a [73-paragraph, 5,677-word speech](#): *We believe the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines . . .*" In most cases writers and commentators failed to include the words of this one sentence: *". . . with mutually agreed swaps, so that secure and recognized borders are established for both states."*

In the headlong rush to pillory President Obama and accuse him of having thrown Israel "under the bus," many fail to report on two very important aspects of the story:

1. That President Obama merely put into words that which Presidents Clinton and Bush and their administrations said somewhat differently. Indeed, on May 26, 2005, then-President George W. Bush held [a joint press conference](#) with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and similarly said that "prior armistice lines should be used as a basis for talks." Responsible journalists (like [The Atlantic's Jeffrey Goldberg](#)) have noted that the Administrations of Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama have all referred to the same

borders in the same way -- with "mutually agreed swaps," referring to accommodations and changes.

2. All the pro-Israel aspects of the President's speech. For those who read his remarks in their entirety -- instead of receiving a mere filtered distillation, they will note:

- An essential part of what the president proposed was that Israelis and Palestinians would have to agree to land swaps that would allow Israel to hold on to major Jewish settlements. This is a point which Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu failed to mention when he declared the 1967 lines to be militarily "undefensible."
- The President clearly stated that the Palestinian Authority (PA) should be talking to Israel, not seeking to bypass it at the UN: *"For the Palestinians, efforts to delegitimize Israel will end in failure. Symbolic actions to isolate Israel at the United Nations won't create an independent state."*
- The President made it clear that the inclusion of Hamas in the PA government is unacceptable: *"The recent announcement of an agreement between Fatah and Hamas raises profound and legitimate questions for Israel: How can one negotiate with a party that has shown itself unwilling to recognize your right to exist? And in the weeks and months to come, Palestinian leaders will have to provide a credible answer to that question."*
- The future Palestinian state will be non-militarized, and Israel's military supremacy in the region must be accepted: *"Israel must be able to defend itself — by itself — against any threat. Provisions must also be robust enough to prevent a resurgence of terrorism, to stop the infiltration of weapons, and to provide effective border security. The full and phased withdrawal of Israeli military forces should be coordinated with the assumption of Palestinian security responsibility in a sovereign, non-militarized state. And the duration of this transition period must be agreed, and the effectiveness of security arrangements must be demonstrated."*

Thankfully, there are those who paid attention to *all* of what the president said, and not just that which reached them through the murky filter of political bias. In an [interview](#) with the *Washington Post's* Greg Sargent, the ADL's Abe Foxman said, *"I don't see this as the president throwing Israel under the bus. He's saying 'with swaps.' It's not 1967 borders in the abstract. It's not an edict. It's a recommendation for of a structure for*

negotiations." Foxman further said, "The speech indicated to me that this administration has come a long way in better understanding and appreciating the difficulties facing both parties, but especially Israel making peace with the Palestinians."

Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak was told [Haaretz](#) *"I don't think the president's speech was such a bad thing. . . . I don't think that the president said it was necessary to return to the 1967 lines, but rather that we need to start the discussion based on the 1967 borders."*

Goodness knows there will be plenty of people who will continue to disagree -- and vehemently so -- with anything President Obama does or says, particularly on Israel. There are many who will continue to remind us that Obama is the first president to have Muslims in his family. This, they wish to not so subtly imply, colors his thinking when it comes to the Middle East. (It should also be noted that Barack Obama is the first president to have a rabbi in his family -- Rabbi Capers Funnye, chief rabbi of Chicago's Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation in southwest Chicago. Rabbi Funnye, who is First Lady Michelle Obama's first cousin once removed, is a member in good standing of the Chicago Board of Rabbis.

No one knows how to make peace between Israel and the Palestinians. There is so much history, hatred, distrust, mistrust and lies as to bury whatever that path may be -- presuming it exists. Hawks, who believe that President Obama is Israel's worst nightmare -- and the Palestinians' best friend -- haven't got any better idea of what to do than doves who still believe that peace is possible. To argue the facts of history won't budge either side.

Were Jews summarily kicked out of Arab countries? Yes.

Did the Jews kick the Arabs out of Palestine in 1948? No.

Did the Israelis accept the 1948 Partition Plan which gave the Arabs more land than Jews? Yes.

Did the Arabs accept the 1948 Partition Plan? No.

Are the only Muslims in the Middle East who can vote freely the ones living in Israel? Yes.

Does Hamas want to wipe Israel off the face of the earth? Yes.

Do the Israelis make heroes out of those who kill Arabs? No.

Do the Arabs make heroes out of those who kill Jews? Yes

And on and on. So what do the Hawks propose? How do they believe it will all turn out in the end? Is it fair that Israel -- one of the tiniest, yet wealthiest and brainiest nations on earth -- should always be the bad guys despite doing so much good? No, of course not. But since when has history been fair?

Those who are convinced that President Obama favors the Palestinians over the Israelis; that he wants to dismember the Jewish state because of some deep-seated Muslim sympathies, should begin learning to think for themselves, and stop permitting their news and views to be run through the filter of political bias.

Barack Obama is not the best friend Israel ever had; that designation likely goes to Moses, Theodore Hertzl or Ben Gurion. Then too, he is far from being the worst enemy Israel ever had. No, at this point, he is like ibn Ezra's candle maker . . . a fellow who, regardless of good intentions, just can't get a break.

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May 29, 2011

AFTER THE RAPTURE

Well, now that the Rapture has once again been put on hold, it's back to business. This means we all must resume life as we know it on this ever more tightly-wound mortal coil. For many, the tasks of life go well beyond family, finance and frolic; for many it also includes those special issues, causes or affiliations to which we devote a goodly portion of our time and passion. These can range from the fanatic allegiance to one's favorite sports team and the ethical treatment of animals, to raising of awareness and money for one's pet medical, political or social cause. Many people devote their time, talent and energy to saving the earth; others wile away their free time shopping at the mall.

The range of causes and issues to which people devote their time and passion is, quite simply, breathtaking. For every cause there is an organization -- or two or ten -- with their own website, mailing list and legion of supporters. There is, as an example, a sizable subculture of folks actively engaged in the ethical treatment of animals. Through groups like [PETA](#) (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) [ALDF](#) (Animal Legal Defense Fund) and [GAP](#) (The Great Ape Project) millions of people contribute tens -- even hundreds -- of millions of dollars for the purpose of saving seals, elephants and great apes from extinction to raising consciousness about the evils of dog fighting, mink coats and vivisection.

Santa Monica, California, is the headquarters of [The PAW Project](#), an organization whose mission it is " . . . to educate the public about the painful

and crippling effects of feline declawing, to promote animal welfare through the abolition of the practice of declaw surgery, and to rehabilitate cats that have been declawed." As a result of PAW's advocacy, anti declawing (Onychectomy) ordinances have been enacted in Los Angeles, San Francisco, Beverly Hills, Culver City, Santa Monica and Burbank. An absolute ban passed both houses of the California state Legislature (vetoed by then-Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger) and was recently introduced in the New York state Legislature. (It should be noted that declawing has long been illegal in Australia, Brazil, much of Europe and the United Kingdom. The ban applies to both domestic and exotic felines.)

While one *can* argue that making the declawing of tabby illegal is not the most pressing issue facing humanity, it is, nonetheless, worthy of attention. Who but a heartless brute would want to subject the family pet to a procedure that may cause pain and suffering? Then again, there are those who would argue that cats are cats and that we, their masters and mistresses, have the God-given right to declaw them in order to save our own skin -- not to mention our chairs, couches and draperies. Whichever side one takes in this minor debate, hopefully it is agreed that this is neither a matter of political correctness nor an abridgement of constitutional safeguards.

Unlike the pet issue of San Diego-based mgmbill.org: making the circumcision of any male under the age of 18 illegal.

This past week, the *Los Angeles Times* ran an article on MGM Bill's successful campaign to get their proposed ordinance placed on the ballot in San Francisco in November. The [article](#), written by the *Times*' Martha Groves, detailed MGM Bill's new campaign to place a similar ordinance on the ballot in Santa Monica. Their measure would make it a misdemeanor to circumcise a boy in Santa Monica (or San Francisco) before he turned 18. The maximum penalty would be a year in jail and a \$1,000.00 fine. According to terms of their proposal, circumcisions would be permitted "only for medical reasons, with no religious exemptions."

What's going on here?

According to [Matthew Hess](#) MGM Bill's founder and president:

"Currently, girls are protected from genital mutilation by U.S. federal law, but boys are not. Although legal protection of only girls from circumcision would seem to violate the equal protection clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the fact remains that it is still widely considered to be legal in this country to mutilate a boy's genitals in the name of social custom, hygiene, religion, or any other reason. This is true despite the well documented lifelong damage that male circumcision causes each of its victims. It's a practice we need to end now."

Hess' contention that there is "well documented" proof about the "lifelong damage that male circumcision causes each of its victims" is, to say the least, medically challengeable. In his 1891 treatise, "The History of Circumcision," Dr. Peter Charles Remondino (who, ironically, was city physician in San Diego -- Matthew Hess' hometown) urged his medical colleagues to use his text to ram the "four-and-a-half-foot gauge fact" of circumcision through a hesitant parent's "two-foot-gated understanding." He went so far as to argue that "The Jewish race lives better because its members ritually remove the tissue from baby boys." Dr. Remondino's ideas about circumcision lived on for several generations. According to federal statistics, circumcision among newborn males grew from around 30% in 1932 to approximately 70% in 1971. Starting in the 1970s however, the medical community began to question the medical benefits of circumcision. By 2011, infant circumcision rates dropped to about 50%. California is now among the states with the lowest: 21% of baby boys are circumcised in the Golden State.

Matthew Hess and his followers contend that circumcision is barbaric; that someone must stand up for the rights of the newborn and against parents who would willingly subject their sons to what they term "mutilation" ("MGM" stands for "Male Genital Mutilation"). They go so far as to claim that *"Many men who are circumcised suffer the same psychological effects found in rape victims. A sense of great loss and feelings of anger, distrust and grief . . ."* There are literally dozens and dozens of groups pushing for legislation outlawing infant circumcision in the United States. Already, MGM Bill has proposed federal legislation and drafted bill for [46 state legislatures](#). (The 4 states they have somehow missed are Mississippi, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wyoming.)

[Jews Against Circumcision](#), one of the groups supporting MGM Bill's legislation, tells its members and acolytes they "need not be afraid of divine punishment," because "*In the original version of the Torah, the book of J, circumcision is not even mentioned. Fallible men devised circumcision as a means to curb masturbation.*" (The reference to "the book of J" comes from the "Documentary Hypothesis," a 19th century theory which holds that the Torah was derived independently from 4 originally independent, parallel and complete narratives which were subsequently combined into the current form by a series of editors or redactors. This hypothesis, which is attributed to the German scholar Julius Wellhausen, is today considered far more a scholastic novelty than a serious theory.) Regardless of what "Jews Against Circumcision" claim, Genesis 17:10-12 is a clearly enunciated apodictic law . . .

I for one find it utterly fascinating that San Francisco and Santa Monica -- two of my native state's most liberal and progressive communities -- would be in the forefront of the movement to disallow circumcision. As progressives, the people of these two cities are, for the most part, strongly pro-choice; they rebel at the thought of government telling a woman what she may or may not do with her body. In this case, however, there may well be a groundswell of support for giving government a say what may be done to that body. To be certain, female circumcision should be outlawed; it has neither a religious nor a hygienic basis. Rather, it is done in the name of female chastity. In the case of males, there is both a 4,000 year religious history plus strong anecdotal evidence of medical advantage.

I have to believe that should either San Francisco or Santa Monica pass MGM Bill's proposed ordinance, it will be struck down by the California State Supreme Court.

I just hope they get to it before the next rapture . . .

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June 04, 2011

AN EVIL THAT WILL NOT DIE

Predictably, last week's piece on MGM Bill's attempt to make circumcision on any male under the age of 18 a misdemeanor (["After the Rapture"](#)) brought in a ton of comments -- both positive and negative. Not so predictably -- at least from my perhaps naive point of view -- much of the negative commentary came from fellow Jews who expressed the belief that circumcision is, in the words of one correspondent, ". . . utterly barbaric." Several writers opined that I was undoubtedly ". . . one of those close-minded rabbis who are bound by a bunch of medieval laws."

Far from it; I've always considered myself to be a fairly traditional Jew possessed of a wicked sense of humor. "Close-minded?" Anything but.

Nonetheless, there was something greatly unsettling about all these coreligionists marching in lockstep with Matthew Hess, MGM Bill, and their contention that circumcision is mutilation. I had the sense that they were blithely supporting a wolf in sheep's clothing. For as much as Hess might claim that his group's sole aim is "to be pro-human rights," I sensed a familiar pungency emanating from just beneath the surface. And so, I started doing a bit more research . . . and discovered Matthew Hess' comic book, ["Foreskin Man."](#)

Simply stated, "Foreskin Man" is a bald-faced anti-Semitic tract. [Check it out for yourself](#). As with all comic books, "Foreskin Man" has heroes and villains. In this case, the heroes are blond-haired and fair-skinned. The principal villains are all dark, hook-nosed and wearing Chasidic garb.

"Foreskin Man," is the alter-ego of Miles Hastwick, "a former corporate scientist who now heads the Museum of Genital Integrity on a small island surrounded by San Diego's famous beaches." Hastwick's arch enemy is "Monster Mohel." "Nothing," we are told, "excites Monster Mohel more than cutting into the penile flesh of an eight-day old infant boy. And after the glorified *brit milah* is complete, the delicious *metzizah b'peh* provides the icing on the cake." (*I will not go into a description of [metzizah b'peh](#), an ancient and rarely performed aspect of the bris. I myself have attended easily more than 250 britot, and have yet to see this done. In any event, whoever is ultimately responsible for this comic book, they have certainly done their homework, for 'metzizah b'peh' isn't the kind of ritual that a mere casual student of Jewish religious practice would know or have heard of.*)

You will forgive the comment, but *Foreskin Man* is straight out of Joseph Goebbels' most erotic dreams. It contains the kinds of disturbing, stereotypic images one would associate with Julius Streicher's *Der Stürmer* ...

No matter how long or hard Matthew Hess denies any anti-Semitic overtones in his MGM Bill campaign, *Foreskin Man* shows him and his campaign for what it truly is: an anti-Semitic wolf in sheep's clothing. Hess can proclaim his concern for "human rights" until all the seas turn to lemonade. That will not change the fact that he is promulgating and perpetuating some of history's most evil, wicked and execrable stereotypes -- that of the leering, rapacious, immoral Jew.

Any and all Jewish folks who support MGM Bill's contention that circumcision is mutilation and thus should be outlawed, would do well to consider just whose lead they are following. For they are unwittingly joining the ranks of those who have no problem stoking the flames of an evil that simply will not die.

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June 13, 2011

JUST BECAUSE SHE SMILES . . .

Most people know the Borsht-Belt definition of the word *chutzpah*: "A person murdering his/her parents and then pleading for mercy on the basis of being an orphan." A more concise -- though less entertaining -- definition can be found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*: "shameless audacity; impudence." Examples of "shameless audacity," "impudence" or *chutzpah* can be found in oh so many places these days. Not that people are murdering their parents and then begging for mercy because they're parentless . . . although this morning's paper did carry a story about a fellow named Stephen Coffeen, who admitted to killing his father but claimed that his over-indulgence in "Red Bull" (a highly caffeinated energy drink) led to temporary insanity! Unbelievably, the judge bought the defense, and instead of going before a jury, Coffeen will be sent to a mental hospital; he could go free in six months if found mentally healthy.

Over the past six or seven months, Republicans from Covina to Caribou have presented us with yet another descriptive definition of *chutzpah*. It consists of precisely nine words: "*That's what the American people elected us to do.*" We see this definition -- rationalization really - - being employed every time the Republicans use their newfound majorities and super majorities to enact legislation that has virtually nothing whatsoever to with the platform of "jobs, jobs, jobs" they ran on last November.

Although those of us of a more-or-less progressive bent were not at all happy with the outcome of last November's election, we can live with the fact that we were beaten (mostly) fair and square. High unemployment, coupled with massive deficits, a nationwide "throw the bums out" attitude, the successful vilification of people like Barack Obama, Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid, and hundreds of millions of corporate dollars being spent on convincing the average voter that the GOP was all that stands between America and a Marxist state, proved to be simply too alluring. Overnight, Republicans and Tea Partiers moved *en masse* from the back bench to the front row. And with their victories -- on both Capitol Hill and the various state legislatures and governor's mansions -- came the birth of their newfangled nine-word definition of *chutzpah*:

"That's what the American people elected us to do."

So far as I can tell, that segment of "the American people" which cast votes for this major shakeup in the House and various state legislatures were doing so in the belief -- or hope -- that in so doing, the new kids on the block would get us out of our economic doldrums, create millions and millions of new jobs, corral the deficit and keep taxes low. (*Parenthetically, this latter issue, quite simply, amazes me; the United States has one of the very lowest taxation rates in the industrialized world. Moreover, our average tax rate is the lowest its been in the past two generations.*) What "the American people" got in exchange for their votes was an anti-woman, anti-labor, anti-social network agenda that has nothing -- virtually nothing -- to do with the promise of "jobs, jobs, jobs." In short, the Republicans campaigned heavily on issues which, once elected, they quickly placed on the back burner, and rarely if ever brought up the issues which were closest to their hearts. And yet, despite this gross anomaly, the expression "That's what the American people elected us to do" rings through loud and clear.

Consider the following:

- In the first three months of 2011, legislators in **49 states** introduced **916 measures** related to reproductive issues,

according to the [Guttmacher Institute](#). More than half of the measures -- 56% -- seek to restrict abortion access. **In Florida**, the legislature passed -- and Governor Scott signed -- a measure requiring women seeking an abortion to first undergo an ultrasound (which they pay for themselves) while having a "counselor" explain to them what they are seeing. In March, **South Dakota** Governor Dennis Daugaard signed legislation requiring women seeking an abortion to first visit an anti-abortion counseling center, and then wait a minimum of three days before undergoing the abortion. In a state that has but one physician who performs abortions -- and only one day a week at that -- this means that women would have to plan on spending a minimum of one week away from home at a time of particular trauma. In **Nebraska**, the legislature passed a law outlawing abortion after 20 weeks of gestation. They based this law -- since passed by five other states -- on the disputed assertion that a fetus can feel pain after that time. **Question:** what do all these measures have to do with creating jobs or fixing the economy? Answer: *"This is what the American people elected us to do."*

- In **Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin and Florida**, legislatures have enacted legislation meant to effectively curtail -- if not eliminate -- the right of collective bargaining for all public service unions. In Florida, the legislature passed a measure which in effect eliminates all teacher tenure and bases their future salary increases to how well students do on an as yet unrealized standardized test. On Capitol Hill, Florida Republican John Mica -- a major recipient of campaign contributions from the airline industry (at least \$620,000 in his career) sponsored legislation that in effect would make "non-votes" null in all National Mediation Board-supervised disputes. Such a policy puts an extra burden on union organizers to round up all voters, rather than a simple majority, in order to get a union's take on any and all proposed dispute resolution made by the NMB. **Question:** what in the world does all this anti-union legislation have to do with creating jobs and fixing the

economy? Answer: *"This is what the American people elected us to do."*

- **Florida** now has a new law requiring anyone seeking state welfare assistance to first submit to -- and pay for -- a drug test, with the costs (as yet to be determined) reimbursed if the applicant passes the test. In another move, Governor Scott has unilaterally ordered that all people working in the state's executive division offices be drug tested four times a year. These two measures are nothing more than a solution in search of a problem. In 1998, Florida researched the issue of substance abuse among those receiving state assistance, and found no connection between financial need and drug use. It would appear that both the legislature and Governor Scott believe that being poor is somehow synonymous with lawlessness and moral weakness. "They're poor," so this argument seems to go, "thereby they must be out boozing and drugging." In yet a third measure, the legislature has severely restricted the ability for voters to make sure their votes actually count -- especially in the state's most liberal political pockets. All three of these issues are going to be challenged in court. And, earlier this year, Governor Scott refused a \$2+ billion federal high speed rail grant which would have created some 26,000 jobs in the Sunshine State. Question: what do all these measures have to do with the creation of jobs or fixing the economy? Answer: *"That's what the American people elected us to do."*
- Wisconsin Representative Paul Ryan submitted a budget proposal for FY 2012 which would transform Medicare from a direct-payment to a voucher system. Far from lowering the deficit, this proposal would, in effect, force seniors to spend far, far more out of pocket for basic medical coverage. Speaker Boehner and Majority Leader Cantor, bowing to the most conservative voices in their caucus, have stated that unless Congress can agree to budget cuts which will equal the raise in the federal debt ceiling, they will urge their members to vote "no." This would, according to most every economist in the known world, result in a massive, catastrophic upheaval in the world's financial markets . . . the first time in our history when

the words "Full Faith and Credit" were devoid of meaning. Question: what has all this to do with creating jobs or fixing the economy? Answer: "*This is what the American people elected us to do.*"

No, enacting anti-abortion, anti-union, anti-education, anti-senior, anti-poor people, anti-democracy legislation is *not* "what the American people elected us to do." This is a case of *chutzpah*, plain and simple. You are not repairing the economy; you are raping the people. Then again, if there is a definition of *chutzpah* involving murder, why not one dealing with rape? I guess it would go something like this:

A man rapes a woman. His justification? "Well, she *did* smile at me."

Yes, a majority of those who came out to vote last November did smile at you. But that is no justification for what you've been doing ever since.

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



June 19, 2011

GHOUL FOR SCANDAL

Forty-eight hours ago, shortly after Anthony Weiner's (presumably) final press conference, I received a rather snarky email from one of my most regressive readers. In part it read:

"Hey 'Rabbi' (He generally puts that word in quotes, as if somehow the title I earned a long time ago is a mark of reproof, denigration or just means that I should stick to the Bible and leave politics to people who live in the real world.) 'I guess you're all upset because one of your guys was caught with his pants down. I bet you won't write word one about Weiner because he's a liberal. But if he were a Republican . . . that would be a different story. You'd be all over it like flies on . . ."

Needless to say, his email bugged me just a bit. My initial thought: he was undoubtedly correct on his first point; I would definitely *not* be writing an essay about the sad, stupid and precipitous downfall of Anthony Weiner. And *not* because ". . . he's a liberal," but rather because it's simply not my style. I have never been a ghoul for scandal; have never felt that the peccadilloes of public people are truly worthy of comment. After all, those whose sins -- generally sexual -- are made public already have enough hell to pay with God, their spouses, constituents, and conscience -- presuming they have one -- without me putting in my two cents. Then too, although I did take several courses in abnormal psychology and pastoral counseling

a long time ago, I am certainly not qualified to analyze the underlying cause(s) of Anthony Weiner's (or anyone else's) psycho-sexual proclivities. Goodness knows there are tons of "instant shrinks" doing just that. Suffice it to say that it could just be that the man is sick and in need of therapy. Heck, if were an alcoholic, who had been caught driving while intoxicated, he would have kept his job -- even if he had at first lied and denied. we would have merely said "Gee, it's too bad that he's an alcoholic; what a terrible disease. Let's get him some help."

And, if all that were not reason enough to stay away from the issue of Anthony Weiner, there are enough members of the media acting as a collective ghoul for scandal, taking valuable time and attention away from issues that really, truly matter. Quite frankly, I was dumbfounded that Democrats, who have shown such a notable lack of spine when it comes to health care, tax cuts for the rich and the rights of union workers, should have acted so loudly, quickly and decisively when it came to calling for Representative Weiner to resign his House seat. For *this* they find the guts to act with dispatch . . .

Then there was the second part of my correspondent's accusation: "*But if he were a Republican . . . that would be a different story . . .*" Although I was 99% sure that he was dead wrong, I decided to do a word search through the 345 op-ed pieces I have published since *The K.F. Stone Weekly* first appeared back in February of 2005. (Longtime readers will recall that back then, it was called *Beating the Bushes*.) Using the names "Frank," "Gingrich," "Craig," "Vitter," "Ensign," "Spitzer," "Foley," "Schwarzenegger," "Sanford," "Edwards" "Lee," and "Weiner," as search parameters, I was able to reaffirm what I suspected: that I have never written a single word about any of these politicians, all of whom at one time or another have been spotlighted by the collective ghoul for scandal. (Oh yes, there *was* one reference to former Florida Representative Mark Foley: a piece about then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumfeld published on October 5, 2005 which carried the title *Eureka! Finally an Article That's Not About Mark Foley*. If I *had* joined in with the collective ghoul for scandal and written about many of the aforementioned sinners (Craig, Vitter,

Sanford, Ensign) it would likely have focused on the chasmic gap between their public protestations as to what is and is not moral ("family values") and their private peccadilloes. I likely would have noted that others (such as Frank, Spitzer, Edwards and Weiner) had steadfastly avoided the moralizing preachiness of their more sanctimonious colleagues. But again, I chose not to; I've just never had the stomach nor felt the need to be a part of the collective ghoul for scandal.

Predictably, when it is a Republican who gets caught between the cross-hairs (Vitter, Craig, Ensign or Sanford, *par example*) the talking heads at Fox are more or less mum while those at MSNBC form a backbiting clique even Sheridan's Lady Sneerwell might appreciate. (If this illusion draws a blank, check out [the following link](#).) Conversely, when it's a Democrat -- like Spitzer, Edwards, or Frank -- the opposite frequently occurs: conservatives sharpen their spears while the more progressive members of the Fourth Estate are the ones downplaying the scandal. In the case of Anthony Weiner, however, both camps have seen fit to comment and condemn -- but for different reasons. For conservatives, the Weiner scandal is worse than those of Foley, Craig, Vitter, Ensign Sanford or Lee: when caught, the former compounded his psychopathy by lying; the latter manfully confessed to their sins, thereby laying the groundwork for redemption. Progressives point out that while Weiner's sins -- unlike those of many of his colleagues -- involved only "sexting," as opposed to a real carnal act, he had become an embarrassment to his party, and thus had to go. In other words, the scandal surrounding him, unless nipped in the bud, would likely come back to haunt Democrats in the 2012 election. I wonder. The public's memory is short, its appetite for scandal great. I would venture a guess that there will be several more opportunities for the collective ghoul for scandal to rear its ugly head between now and November 2012.

Let's be clear about one thing: Anthony Weiner -- and Anthony Weiner alone -- is responsible for his actions. (Shakespeare's line "*None but Antony should conquer Antony*" comes to mind here.) Why a dynamic public man with a boatload of talent, a bright future and a

wife who could give Hedy Lamarr a run for her money should engage in such bizarre behavior is anyone's guess. Fascinatingly, despite his precipitous fall from grace, when polled, nearly two-thirds of the voters in his New York City district wanted him to remain their representative. So far as they were concerned, Weiner's actions -- although troubling -- couldn't erase all he'd done for them. Despite all that has been revealed about his private life, to them, he's still the same Anthony Weiner: the guy who can wolf down more hot dogs than any 145 pounder you've ever met; the guy who rants, raves and shouts for those things he believes; the guy who now must find another path. Don't be surprised if Anthony Weiner winds up with a spot on television one of these days. After all, in his salad days, he thought he'd become a sports reporter.

And as for us -- the collective ghoul for scandal -- we would be far better served if we focused our attention on issues that truly affect our destiny as opposed to those which are, in the long run, " . . . full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

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June 26, 2011

WHAT PRICE VICTORY?

Among the staples of second-rate melodrama, there is the one concerning the child caught up as a pawn of divorce. We all know the plot line; the louder and angrier the parents get in what appears on the surface to be a custody battle, the more obvious it becomes that said battle is mere camouflage for personal agendas. As the melodrama progresses we, the audience, become increasingly disgusted with both parties -- their cruel, empty-headed selfishness, their narcissism, their flaccid protestations of seeking only to do "what is in the best interests of the child." As the play progresses from Act I to Act II, we grasp that for the parties involved, doing "the right thing" is not nearly as important as victory. But at what price?

Generally, Act II of the melodrama ends with a tearful reconciliation, spurred on by a tough-yet-tender judge (think Lionel Barrymore) who brings the two warring individuals to their senses by making them see the big picture . . .

Over the past two months, the cast and crew up on Capitol Hill have been enacting their own version of this time-worn plot. Except in this case, the melodrama has been going on beyond closed doors, and the "pawn" stuck in the middle of the warring parents is not a child; it is the very future of the American economy. For the past two months, a handpicked group of Democratic and Republican legislators have

been meeting regularly with Vice President Joseph Biden in an attempt to come to a compromise which will permit Congress to pass an increase in the Federal Debt Ceiling. This is *the* most critical issue facing Congress today; America's ability to borrow money comes to an end on August 2. Without an increase in the Debt Ceiling, the government's ability to pay interest on our debt will be severely hamstrung, interest rates will soar, American bonds will be severely down-graded, and global financial markets are likely to plummet. Both sides agree that something must be done about America's enormous debt. Both sides agree that our economy is in dire straits, that spending must be cut and government streamlined.

These are their areas of agreement.

However, it is in dealing with the question of *how* precisely to proceed, that the two sides begin resembling the warring couple in our aforementioned melodrama. Moreover, not everyone on Capitol Hill agrees with the Doomsday predictions of economists who foresee catastrophic repercussions if America defaults on its obligations. Both sides have drawn their respective lines in the sand. For Democrats -- who apparently have already agreed to more than \$1 trillion in spending cuts -- their line involves the protection of both Medicare and Social Security, the elimination of various tax cuts, subsidies (notably for the oil industry and those multi-nationals which send jobs abroad) and -- horror of horrors -- the possibility of raising taxes on those couples making \$500,000 a year or more. For a clear majority of Democrats, any solution to our fiscal crises must involve a mixture of cuts and what are euphemistically called "revenue enhancements." To Democrats, all this represents what is in the best interests of the child -- er, the economy.

The Republicans' "line in the sand" is not nearly so complex. "No new taxes. Period." The GOP, heeding the wishes of its libertarian wing, have time and again stated that the solution to our fiscal calamity will only come through shrinking the size of government; by cutting spending, shutting down programs and bringing troops home from

Afghanistan. This then, is the Republican version of doing what is in the best interest of the economy.

(I for one find it utterly fascinating that after so many generations of being the more hawkish of our two parties, the GOP has of late become oh so terribly dovish. The question is, does this represent a true change of policy and of heart or merely a conscious decision to stand in opposition to President Obama on virtually anything and everything? Your guess is as good as mine).

For nearly two months, Democrats and Republicans negotiated behind closed doors. Remarkably, little inside information escaped from these sessions, although there were intimations that progress was being achieved. And then, this past Thursday, Majority Leader Cantor pulled out of the budget meetings, claiming that he could no longer in good faith negotiate with people who seek to raise taxes.

What we are witnessing in Act II of our tawdry melodrama is what might be termed "political brinkmanship." Republicans -- many of whom don't believe that America's defaulting on her obligations will be all that serious -- are playing with fire. By walking away from the budget talks, Majority Leader Cantor -- who is in lockstep with his party's "young Turk" faction -- has shown that he and his party are willing to court economic disaster in order to protect taxpayer giveaways for big oil companies and more tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires. And in so doing, Cantor has solidified his position as a champion of the conservative right. In general, Republicans seem to be saying, *"There is a ton of political advantage for us in voting against the Debt Ceiling. We can tell the American people that it is all the fault of the Democrats who, unlike us, wanted to raise taxes. We have been true to their wishes -- standing firmly against any and every attempt to raise taxes. That will make a great argument for the 2012 election."*

Democrats also see political advantage in holding fast to *their* position of a mixture of spending cuts and revenue enhancements. They can just as easily claim, *"We tried like the dickens to negotiate with the Republicans, but they refused to budge one inch. They were far more interested in preserving tax cuts for their wealthy friends and corporate*

sponsors than in doing what was right for the American economy. They were far more interested in politics than economy. We, on the other hand, did give in -- to many hundreds of billions of dollars of spending cuts. It is our position that we are all in this together -- both rich and poor, corporations and working-class families.

In terms of our melodrama, this should be the time for the tough-yet-tender judge to step in and affect a reconciliation between the warring parties.

That judge's name is President Barack Obama.

Beginning Monday, June 27, the president will meet with Senate Majority Leader Reid, Minority Leader McConnell and Speaker Boehner, in an attempt to hammer out a budget agreement which will permit Congress to pass Federal Debt Ceiling legislation. It is a daunting task. Both sides are posturing. Both sides are seemingly putting politics ahead of the commonweal. Both sides seem to be more interested in political victory in November 2012 than in economic salvation in August 2011.

The question is, What price victory?

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July 02, 2011

A MEMO TO MICHELE BACHMANN

To: Rep. Michelle Bachmann

From: Kurt Stone

Re: You, your presidential aspirations and your view of America's future

It seems that I have been putting off writing you this memo for nearly the past six months. "Why the delay?" you well may ask. A couple of reasons:

- **First**, I wanted to get to know you, your politics and your worldview better; more than might be gleaned from merely reading your entry in *The Almanac of American Politics*.
- **Second**, there was the obvious need to get a better handle on whether you are canny or coy, credible or crazy, serious or just plain certifiable.
- **Third**, I needed to figure out what tone this memo should take; Angry? Flippant? Condescending? Worried? Scared? Pedantic?

I think a combination of all six "tones" or approaches is required.

Let me state at the outset that while I believe you have precisely two chances of becoming the Republican nominee in 2012 -- absolutely none and less than that -- I still take your candidacy quite seriously. Why? Because by pulling the Republican primary process to the far-far right, you have guaranteed yourself both "a voice and a place at the table" at your

party's national convention. Regardless of which centrist becomes the GOP's standard bearer, he will be saddled with a platform that reads more like a missing chapter from the Book of Revelations than a serious political document. Oh sure, there are lots of Dems and progressives who are champing at the bit for you to become the Republican nominee. They believe your candidacy would not only guarantee the reelection of Barack Obama; they predict that it would also permit progressives to recapture the House and increase the Democratic majority in the Senate. While this may be true -- and as one who is already working for the reelection of Barack Obama despite whatever disagreements or disappointments I may have -- a Bachmann nomination would still be a disaster for the United States.

The question is "why?"

Let's face it Ms. Bachmann: over the past 30+ years, America has become an increasingly divided nation. Our bifurcation exists on many levels -- economic, cultural, educational and perhaps even intellectual. The gulf between the spectacularly rich and the rest of America is as wide as it's ever been. Our views on the role of government have become case-hardened: many believe that government has an important role to play in the lives of the people; many -- perhaps even more fervently -- believe that government is the source -- and not the solution -- of (or to) our problems. At the same time, there is a distinct line between the America that perceives reality in gradations of grey and the America that posits moral certainty. A large segment of the American public condemns and characterizes those with whom they disagree as Socialists, immoral sensualists, or even worse -- as conscious agents of some apocalyptic "New World Order." Tens of millions of Americans have had their world view shaped by the [*Left Behind*](#) series; apocalyptic works of Christian fiction that posit an elaborate fantasy in which all the "true believers" are whisked off to heaven at the outset of Armageddon while "the rest of us" are guilty of being in thrall to a marauding, smooth-talking, handsome, educated, pro-government Satan. And there are even greater numbers who have never heard of -- let alone read -- these books.

Your political career, Ms. Bachmann, has largely been shaped by this apocalyptic vision. Your moral certainty is so pronounced, so robust, that I

fear you are incapable of seeing any human worth in those who don't, won't or can't share your vision. Your church, Ms. Bachmann, is *not* our government . . .

Then too, your propensity for rhetorical bomb-throwing, wrong-headed analysis and what is euphemistically called "misstatement" has become legendary:

In 2001 you co-wrote a letter for the Minnesota-based Maple River Education Coalition, in which you warned that then-President George W. Bush's education policies were leading the country to Communism: *"Government is implementing policies that will lead to poverty, not prosperity, by adopting the failed ideas of a state-planned and managed economy similar to that of the former Soviet Union."*

In 2003, as a state senator, [you explained](#) why you do not agree with the theory of evolution: *"Where do we say that a cell became a blade of grass, which became a starfish, which became a cat, which became a donkey, which became a human being? There's a real lack of evidence from change from actual species to a different type of species. That's where it's difficult to prove."*

In 2004, with the country engaging in a heated debate over same-sex marriage, you found parallels in the Bible: *"We're in a state of crisis where our nation is literally ripping apart at the seams right now, and lawlessness is occurring from one ocean to the other. And we're seeing the fulfillment of the Book of Judges here in our own time, where every man doing that which is right in his own eyes -- in other words -- anarchy."*

In 2005, [you explained](#) your opposition to Minnesota's minimum wage as a form of job creation: *"Literally, if we took away the minimum wage -- if conceivably it was gone -- we could potentially virtually wipe out unemployment completely because we would be able to offer jobs at whatever level."*

In 2007, in an interview with the [St. Cloud Times](#), you "revealed" that Iran was planning on turning all of Northwest Iraq into a secret "terrorist safe-haven zone" called the "Iraq state of Islam."

In 2008, while appearing on the MSNBC news show "Hardball," you called for [an investigation](#) into the "anti-American ambitions" of Barack Obama and Congressional Democrats: *"What I would say is that the news media should do a penetrating expose and take a look. I wish they would. I wish the American media would take a great look at the views of the people in Congress and find out if they are pro-American or anti-American."*

In 2009, during the health care debate, [you warned](#) that the Affordable Care Act would include a loophole permitting grade-schoolers to go on abortion field trips: *"Does that mean that someone's 13-year old daughter could walk into a sex clinic, have a pregnancy test done, be taken away to the local Planned Parenthood abortion clinic, have their abortion, be back, and go home on the school bus that night? Mom and dad are never the wiser. They don't know any different."*

In 2010, while speaking on the House floor, you [alleged](#) that President Obama's upcoming trip to India would be more expensive than the entire war in Afghanistan: *"The president of the United States will be taking a trip over to India that is expected to cost the taxpayers \$200 million a day. He's taking 2,000 people with him. He will be renting out over 870 rooms in India. And these are five-star hotel rooms at the Taj Mahal Palace Hotel."*

In 2011 you have [suggested](#) that one sure-fire solution to the nation's long-term deficit would be turning the problem over to now-former FOX TV entertainer Glenn Beck: *"I think if we give [him] the numbers, he can solve this thing."*

Most recently, while on the campaign circuit, you have repeatedly asserted that "The Founding Fathers worked tirelessly to get rid of slavery in this country." When given the opportunity to retract this glaring historic inaccuracy, you compounded the inaccuracy by turning John Quincy Adams into a "Founding Father."

Just this week you said that you would support a federal constitutional amendment that would overturn New York State's new law legalizing gay marriage, as well as similar laws in other states and the District of Columbia. While claiming that the law signed by NY Governor Andrew Cuomo was "up to the people of New York," you also declared that "federal

law will trump state law on this issue." Your rationalization? The 10th Amendment, which according to you, gives states "the right to pass any law they like." When queried about this seeming inconsistency, you said that your support for states' rights as well as a federal amendment was "totally consistent." It should be noted, Ms. Bachmann, that your interpretation of the 10th Amendment is, to put it politely, erroneous. The States cannot do "anything" they want to do; only those matters that have not been directly or indirectly provided to the Federal Government subject to the constitutionality of such acts. If your contention were true, we would have fifty states with fifty different laws . . . which would lead to mass confusion. Please, go back and learn a bit more about the federal Constitution.

Ms. Bachman, the above are not the mark of a person fit for leadership. Heck, the above are not even the mark of a C-student. And were you to study a bit of American history, you would discover that in our long history, only one person has ever gone directly from the House of Representatives to the White House: James A. Garfield. And unlike you, Garfield was a distinguished 9-term member of the House who chaired both the Military Affairs and Appropriations Committee, as well as sitting on Ways and Means. In checking on your House record, I see that so far in this 112th Congress, you have sponsored precisely 7 bills, the most famous of which, H.R. 849, the "Light Bulb Freedom of Choice Act," has attracted precisely 10 cosponsors. By comparison, your Tea Party colleague, Florida Republican Alan West, has sponsored 129 bills, which have, on average, attracted 60 cosponsors. Heck, even Representative Gabrielle Giffords, who hasn't been around Capitol Hill in more than 6 months, has sponsored more than 5 times the legislation as you.

Ms. Bachman, your mix of shoot-from-the-lip rhetoric, dispensationalist End Times theology, extreme homo-phobia and thorough-going lack of knowledge mark you as a person who is way, way over her head. Getting out on the campaign trail and spewing time-worn bromides is not leadership. Raising tons of money only tells us that you can raise tons of money. "Revealing" conspiracies which underpin the problems besetting modern times is no solution. Declaring that one's every move, thought or action is done according to Divine Will is precisely what America and the

world do not need in an age of increasing fundamentalism. My suggestion is that you run for reelection from Minnesota's 6th District. Perhaps the good folks of Stillwater will decide that three terms have been enough, and that you should stay home . . .

Let me close by repeating something I wrote above:

Your church is *not* -- and never will be -- our government.

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July 10, 2011

LET 'EM CALL YOU FISHER . . .

Back in the 1950s when he was Senate Majority Leader -- serving under a Republican president -- Lyndon Johnson used to get things done by employing an intimidating technique known as "The Johnson Treatment." "The Treatment" consisted of LBJ summoning a senator to his office just after lunch -- a lunch at which he had eaten a hamburger smeared with onions, consumed a scotch or two, and topped it off with several cigarettes. LBJ would then approach the arriving senator, get "up close and personal," and, while blowing a bit of rancid air his direction, "explain" why he was going to vote a particular way. 9 times out of 10, Johnson got what he wanted. Another variation of "The Treatment" involved LBJ summoning a member of the Democratic caucus over to him on the floor, and showing the senator the "final outcome" of a vote that was going to be taking place the next day. In essence, what the Majority Leader was doing was informing the member how he was going to vote.

Period.

Did Lyndon Johnson care what anyone thought about him or what names he was called? Apparently not; LBJ's skin seems to have been made of 15-gauge steel. More importantly, the man definitely knew where he stood, what he believed in, and was a master of elevating politics to the level of principle -- even when he was dead wrong. And as history records, as president, Lyndon Johnson was easily able to go beyond mere arm-twisting. When necessary, he got what he wanted through artifice and outright dishonesty; witness his lethal slight-of-hand in getting the U.S. Senate (98-2) and the House (416-0)

to pass the infamous Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, thus handing him a blank check for Southeast Asia.

In comparison to our most recent presidents -- whose first instinct before embarking on a major project or issue is to check with their pollsters -- LBJ's "damn the torpedoes full steam ahead" style of leadership seems as incomprehensible as Chaucerian English ("*A good wif was ther of besid Bathe/But she was somedel deaf, and that was scathe*" -- namely, "There was a housewife come from Bath, or near/Who - sad to say - was deaf in either ear").

Which brings us to President Barack Obama, who, like Chaucer's Wife of Bath has become "*somedel deaf*" . . . or even worse, "*blynd*."

How so?

For nearly three years, Barack Obama's most ardent supporters have defended him against all comers, such as:

- Those who accuse him of being a foreign born Muslim with an anti-American agenda;
- Those who claim that he is the most dangerous left-wing Socialist ever to occupy the White House;
- Those who charge him with being anti-business, anti-gun, and anti-family values, and
- Those who rebuke him for being an anti-Semite who hates Israel, feels a close kinship with the Palestinians, and wants to destroy the Jewish State.

For nearly three years, we have defended President Obama; we have hoped and prayed that he would be a transformational leader. We managed to find progress in, applaud or rationalize:

- A bailout of Wall Street and the banks that did not include a mandate that they become partners in improving the nation's economy for everyone -- and not just themselves;
- The "Affordable Healthcare Act" -- which the GOP continues to derisively refer to as "socialized medicine" and "Obamacare" --

despite it not containing the public mandate he had spoken of time and again during the 2008 campaign;

- An end to "Don't Ask Don't Tell," in the American military even while he is "evolving" on the issue of gay marriage.
- The assassination of Osama bin Laden even though as of last month Guantanamo continues to hold more than 170 detainees.
- Keeping the government up and running by agreeing to extend the Bush-era tax cuts for the very wealthy -- tax cuts which he had pledged to eliminate.
- Continually seeking to find common ground with a Republican leadership that has stated for the record that their number one priority is making him a one-term president.

And now, President Obama is seeking to find a compromise -- some balance between spending cuts and revenue enhancements -- that will permit Congress to raise the federal debt ceiling. The Republican leadership has steadfastly refused to accept a single dime of increased revenue; they are more fearful of "Ayatollah" Grover Norquist and his "Americans for Tax Reform" than they are desirous of keeping the American economy up and running. Despite this -- and despite a long laundry list of issues on which the GOP has refused to budge even so much as a single centimeter -- the president is still seeking a compromise while urging both sides to "leave their ultimata outside the door."

Fat chance.

And now comes word that the president has suggested that entitlements like Social Security and Medicare need to be looked at as part of a compromise. From a Democratic point of view, this is rank heresy, for these are the two most lustrous jewels in the Democratic diadem. The president's initial proposal called for a mix of 85% spending cuts and a mere 15% in revenue enhancements. (This equation has a far higher percentage of spending cuts than found in the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform -- "Simpson-Bowles" -- Report of December 2010.) And yet, despite calling for a mere 15% in increased revenues, the Republicans have

dug in their heels and said NO NEW TAXES! As a result, it would appear that once again, President Obama is going seek to be the reasonable one in the room; the one who is going to do whatever is necessary to find common ground -- even if it means making society's most vulnerable pay for it.

How much longer can we, the president's progressive partisans, remain silent? How much more "reasonableness" can we abide before crying out *g'nug shoyn! Gnug p'shoresdik!* ("Enough already! Enough compromising!")? It's not that we're suddenly going to go turn our backs, go out and throw our support behind Romney, Pawlenty or Bachmann. Goodness knows, even though President Obama's "reasonableness" carries the hallmarks of one who is *somdel deaf and blynd*, the alternative is far, far worse. If nothing else, there are going to be two seats opening up on the Supreme Court (Ginsberg and Bryer) in the year or two; it would be even more of a disaster were a Republican were to be responsible for filling one or both of those positions.

As much as we may have disagreed with and disparaged President Lyndon Johnson back in the 60s, (*"Hey, Hey LBJ: How many kids did 'ya kill today?"*) we can perhaps appreciate his ability to get people to do what he wanted. Perhaps Barack Obama should take a page or two from the Johnson playbook. Admittedly, Johnson's was an era with a lot less hardcore partisanship than we face today. Nonetheless, sticking to one's guns, going over the heads of Congress directly to the public and not taking "no" for an answer can result in some pretty forward-looking achievements.

President Obama has already been called every name in the book, and been charged with just about every sin short of human sacrifice. From this point out, what should he care? As dear old Dad use to impart: "What's the worst they can say about you? That you're a pisher? Let 'em call you pisher . . . what do you care?"

Dear President Obama: you're never going to get the Republican vote. Many independents wouldn't cross the street for you. A lot of young folks are getting terminally turned off to politics. Please,

please be aware that you're in danger of putting out the fire amongst your progressive base. You need us -- and we need you. Quite being so damned reasonable! Use a bit of the "Johnson treatment!"

Let 'em call you pisher . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



July 17, 2011

THE MAN YOU LOVE TO HATE

Back in the 1910s and '20s, actor/director Erich Von Stroheim was billed as "The Man You Love to Hate." As Hollywood legend has it, it was Von Stroheim himself, and not some studio press agent who came up with this title. During the period of World War I, Von Stroheim (1885-1957) played a series of utterly nasty, blood-curdling "Huns," reaching the nadir of barbarity in 1918's *The Heart of Humanity*, where he tore the buttons off a virginal nurse with his teeth, and defenestrated a crying baby. In the late teens and twenties, he turned to directing, where he proved to be both a brilliant cineaste and one of Hollywood's all-time profligate spenders. And although "The Man You Love to Hate," may well have been nuttier than a fruitcake in real life, he was born Erich Oswald Stroheim, the middle-class son of a Viennese hat maker. Upon his arrival at Ellis Island in 1908, the Jewish-born and Jewish-reared Stroheim claimed to be "*Count Erich Oswald Hans Maria von Stroheim und Nordenwall*," a member of the Austrian nobility. The erstwhile "Count von Stroheim" had a hard time convincing people of his noble pedigree, for he spoke precious little German; his native language was Yiddish . . .

Nonetheless, by 1917 he had consciously turned himself into "The Man You Love to Hate" -- a persona he would carry throughout the rest of his life.

Today, there is another "Eric" who stands a good chance of becoming the new "Man You Love to Hate. But this Eric is not an actor -- at least not intentionally so. And unlike von Stroheim, this Eric has not consciously dreamed up the title as part of a bizarre p.r. campaign. Rather, he is earning the nickname through his actions; actions which threaten to thrust a dagger into the very heart of his political party and quite likely cause irreparable harm to international financial markets.

This new "Man You Love to Hate" is House Majority Leader Eric Cantor (R-VA).

Now 48 years old, The Richmond native has experienced what is likely the most meteoric rise in the history of Congress. So far as I know he is the only person who has ever gone from freshman minority-party back-bencher to Majority Leader in less than a decade. Deeply conservative -- he regularly receives perfect 100% ratings from both the Christian Coalition and the Family Research Council -- Cantor was described in a 2003 *Weekly Standard* article entitled "[The Chosen Republican](#)," as "An unflinching fiscal conservative [who is] pro-life, supports the Second Amendment, [guns] and backs voluntary school prayer. He's even a Rotarian." In 2005, *Richmond Style Weekly* writer Lisa Antonelli Bacon wrote an in-depth piece on Cantor in which she dubbed him "[The Great Right Hope](#)."

First elected from a Richmond-based district in 2000, by the beginning of his second term, Cantor had already achieved what one writer called a "political trifecta:" a seat on the prestigious House Ways and Means Committee, being named Chief Deputy Majority Whip, and having a sandwich (roast beef on *challah*) named after him at then-über-lobbyist Jack Abramoff's kosher deli "Stacks." (*Ironically, in Cantor's first run for Congress in 2000, district voters began receiving mysterious last-minute robo-calls informing them that state Senator Stephen Martin was "the only Christian in the race," and that Cantor "attended synagogue." It turns out that the calls were orchestrated by a group called the "Faith and Family Alliance," a front group that was funded by none other than his future B.F.F., Jack Abramoff! Nonetheless, Cantor wound up defeating Martin by precisely 263 votes.*)

In 2011, Majority Leader Cantor is the first person freshmen Tea Party Caucus and their Libertarian allies look to for leadership in Congress. And during the nation's current high-powered game of chicken known as the debt ceiling debate, Cantor has become the bipolar alternative to Speaker John Boehner, who, in the eyes of the "Capitol Hills' most rabid conservatives, is a weak-kneed capitulator. It is Cantor who has become both the most visible face and most audible voice of the "Under absolutely no circumstances will we accept even a penny in tax increases" crowd. It is Cantor who walked out on Vice President Biden's 8-person budget negotiations and later accused President Obama of "storming out in a huff" during a meeting at the White House. And it is Cantor who has most clearly articulated the "We prefer having the U.S. default on its obligations than raise taxes" point of view. In so doing, Cantor, who has upstaged his titular boss on many occasions, has become Speaker Boehner's worst nightmare. One can gauge the tenuousness of the Cantor/Boehner relationship by the number of times a day they feel the need to proclaim "We are essentially on the same page . . ."

But they aren't.

Really.

If, God forbid, the debt ceiling is not raised in time to stave off default, the lion's share of blame will belong to Majority Leader Cantor. If -- again God forbid -- seniors have to forego their monthly Social Security checks or their doctors aren't reimbursed by Medicare, it will Cantor's crime. And if -- once again God forbid -- interest rates soar as bonds and markets plummet, many will see Cantor's intransigence as a prime factor. What all this adds up to is the likelihood that Eric Cantor will become the new "Man You Love to Hate." Increasingly, Democrats are blaming Eric Cantor for "complicating negotiations." After Thursday session with President Obama, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid lashed out at Cantor, calling him "childish," and saying his inability to negotiate in good faith means "he shouldn't even be at the table."

If all this were not enough, we say, in the words of all those late-night TV ads, "But wait! There's more!"

It turns out that among his many investments (Cantor's reported net worth is between \$2.1 and \$7.5 million) one finds up to \$15,000 in shares of "[ProShares Trust Ultrashort 20+ Treasury ETF](#)." This exchange-traded fund takes a "short position" in long-dated government bonds. In effect, it is a bet *against* U.S. government bonds. If the debt ceiling is not raised and the U.S. defaults on its debt, the value of Cantor's share would likely increase -- dramatically so. As of a few days ago, House Democrats are circulating a resolution which specifically accuses Cantor of having a conflict of interest. The resolution argues that Cantor "may be sabotaging [debt ceiling] negotiations for his own personal gain." Defending his boss, Cantor's spokesman Brad Dayspring claimed that "*The Democrats have it backwards: The Majority Leader stands to lose much more money if Congress does not reach a deal on the debt ceiling . . .*" As of July 15, it is not yet known how many Democrats have signed on to this resolution.

Whatever the case with regards to the Majority Leader's ProShares investment, it is clear that should Congress fail to raise the debt ceiling, thereby leading to an economic catastrophe of unrivaled proportions, that Eric Cantor will very likely replace Erich von Stroheim as "The Man You Love to Hate." For unlike "Count Erich," whose barbarities were limited to the silver screen, Leader Eric is enacting his on a far larger, far more critical stage.

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July 23, 2011

WANTED: A FEW GOOD IDEAS

I really didn't want to write *another* article about the debt ceiling, deficit reduction and the inability of anyone in Washington to get even the tiniest thing done. Then again, you probably didn't want to read another article about the debt ceiling, deficit reduction, etc. Nonetheless, here we are: me writing -- and you reading -- yet another piece about what might turn out to be America's last gasp as the world's economic leader. Things are so bollixed up, so hyper-partisan in D.C., that Democrats and Republicans refuse to agree with one another about anything for fear that . . . for fear that what? That they'll offend Grover Norquist or the brothers Koch? That they'll lose votes in 2012? You tell me, because by now, I just don't know. (The vast majority of Republicans have at one time or another signed on to Mr. Norquist's "[Tax Protection Pledge](#)," in which one promises, under penalty of God knows what, to "*Oppose any and all efforts to increase marginal income tax rates for individuals and/or businesses; and oppose any net reduction or elimination of deductions and credits, unless matched dollar for dollar by further reducing tax rates.*")

As I write this, Speaker Boehner isn't answering the president's telephone calls. Rather, he is making damn sure everyone knows that if the debt ceiling isn't raised and all economic hell breaks loose, it's the president's fault. That's just peachy Mr. Speaker; maybe you and your party will be able to sleep better at night because of that knowledge. But just between you, me and the rest of the planet, your lack of culpability or blameworthiness isn't going to ease the economic catastrophe that is lurking just around the corner.

What scares, surprises and hurts the most, I believe, is how relatively complacent the American public has been throughout this entire nightmare. Where are the mass protests? Why haven't hundreds of thousands of American citizens massed on the Capitol Mall or made their way through the corridors of Congress, barking, begging, beseeching the paladins of power to quit posturing and actually do something positive -- come to an agreement that will preserve, protect and defend the United States of America? And where oh where are the ideas and proposals? Ideas and proposals about solving our long-term budgetary woes that won't place the lion's share of responsibility on the backs and shoulders of America's under- and middle-class. Up to this point, it seems that most everyone in D.C. is far more wary of upsetting the captains of industry than righting the economic ship of state. I thought we were supposed to be in this together . . .

Have we lost our minds? Where is the outrage? I mean, here we are, on the very brink of default, cutting Social Security and Medicare . . . and for what? So that Google can keep paying its current [2.4% effective tax rate](#)? So that GE, a company that received a \$140 billion bailout en route to worldwide 2010 profits of \$14 billion can not only [keep on paying no taxes at all, but receive a \\$3.2 billion tax credit?](#) (By the way, it should be noted that GE's CEO, Jeffrey R. Immelt, serves as the head of President Obama's "[Council on Jobs and Competitiveness](#).")

Back in the day, every Post Office in America had the James Montgomery Flagg poster of Uncle Sam pointing his finger and proclaiming "I Want YOU For the U.S. Army." Seems to me that what we need now, more than ever are not a "few good men," but a "few good ideas." To wit, permit me to present a handful of them; ideas as to how we might drastically cut spending, free up hundreds of billions for creating jobs, and thus save our economic backside:

- First and foremost, in order to save upwards of **\$2 trillion** over the next decade, declare victory in Iraq and Afghanistan, and bring our troops home.

- Let the Bush tax cuts for the wealthy expire -- regardless of how much it offends the hyper-rich. That's easily \$1 trillion over the next decade.
- Let Medicare negotiate the price of drugs the same way the VA and private insurance companies do. The savings here are even more than \$1 trillion over the next ten years.
- Require the rich to pay the same percentage of their income toward Social Security and Medicare as the poor and middle class. Not a higher percentage -- just the same as the rest of us.
- Impose the same alternative minimum tax on giant corporations that we mere mortals pay.
- Reduce military spending to, say 40% of the world's total (It is currently 48%), which would still leave us spending 4 times as much as any other country on the planet.
- Eliminate the long-term capital gains tax break -- that which permits someone like Warren Buffett to pay a lower rate than his secretary. This particular tax break benefits only a tiny percentage of people in America -- the hyper-rich.
- Legalize marijuana and then, as with alcohol, tax the daylight's out of sales. Not only would this raise an incredible amount of revenue; it would drastically cut the cost of keeping hundreds of thousands of non-violent offenders in prison as well as the ancillary state and local costs of policing, trying and convicting.
- Eliminate the corporate "tax repatriation," by which companies can bring back their profits back from overseas without having to pay tax on them. According to American tax law as presently constructed, companies can avoid paying taxes so long as they keep their profits overseas. In theory, whenever that money comes back home, they are liable for paying taxes on it. One writer called this a "gigantic global IRA." In 2004, with much corporate prodding -- and aided by lots of campaign contributions -- Congress gave corporations a "one-time" tax holiday, arguing that the money brought back home -- now tax-free -- would be used to create jobs. Instead of paying 35%-40% on their profits, corporations paid not quite 5%. Well, the money did come streaming back to America, but it wasn't used to create jobs as promised. Rather, it was turned mostly into

executive bonuses. It seems that part of the current debt ceiling debate involves a renewal of the corporate "tax holiday." By not renewing it, America could recoup nearly \$1 trillion over the next decade.

It seems to me that just as Uncle Sam needed a few good men during wartime, America needs a few good ideas right now -- ideas that can get the public charged up, involved and not taking the coming crisis sitting down. If you have any ideas as to where we could make cuts or increase revenues, please share them with me, with your representative, or your senators; write a letter to the editor of your local paper. Don't just sit there; don't permit a bunch of posturing political hacks to sell out America for the sake of placating their corporate underwriters.

Wake up America! Civilization Calls . . .

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July 31, 2011

THE U.S. OF ALEC

Back in December 1958, retired candy manufacturer Robert Welch, Jr. invited a small group of well-heeled, politically reactionary associates to join him in Indianapolis for a couple of days. Welch's gathering wound up creating the John Birch Society, which would quickly become a byword for hard-right "Communists-under-every-bed" hysteria. It was the Birch Society that first advanced the theory that water fluoridation was in fact, a Communist plot, and that both President Dwight Eisenhower and then-Secretary of State John Foster Dulles were "knowing and active agents" of the Soviet Union. The Birch Society also stood for limited government, mass privatization, a Constitutional Republic, and personal freedom.

One of Welch's chief financial backers was a man by the name of Fred Koch (pronounced "Coke"), founder of Koch Industries, which today is the second largest privately held corporation (after Cargill) in the United States. Fred Koch (1900-1967) who, despite being an unswerving anti-Communist earned his initial millions building the Soviet oil industry, firmly believed that the National Educational Association was a communist group and that public-school books were filled with "communist propaganda." His paranoia extended to all unions, Dwight Eisenhower and what he called the "pro-Communist" Supreme Court.

Although Fred Koch died 45 years ago, his ideas live on in his sons Charles and David; they frequently refer to President Barack Obama as a "hard-core Socialist" who is "scary." And, like their father before

them, they are firmly convinced that schools and prisons should be privatized; that all labor unions should be put out of business; that taxes should be somewhere between very, very low and non-existent; that government at any level has no business enacting regulations of any kind; that left to its own unfettered devices, the free market can solve virtually any problem; and that the Federal Government's only role is national defense -- underwritten by a robust private-sector, federally-subsidized defense industry.

Where Fred Koch merely *attempted* to actualize his paranoiac political *Weltanschauung* by underwriting the John Birch Society (which has experienced a bit of a renaissance in the past few years), his sons have found their vehicle in something called "ALEC" -- which stands for the [American Legislative Exchange Council](#)." ALEC's self-description is as innocent and innocuous as the Grange or Rotary International: "ALEC is the nation's largest, non-partisan, individual public-private membership organization of state legislators." However, lurking just a millimicron beneath the surface, ALEC is far, far more; it is likely the most formidable threat to Democracy and the *vox populi* in our nation's history. Now, before this last statement is dismissed as the paranoiac rantings of some far-left loony (which I can assure you I am not), please know that proof of this assertion comes from . . . ALEC itself.

Founded in 1973 by Paul Weyrich, who also founded the Heritage Foundation, ALECs members include more than 2,000 conservative state legislators from all 50 states. At its most recent "States and Nation Policy Summit," held shortly after the November 2010 elections, speakers included Texas Governor Rick Perry, Newt Gingrich, and House Majority Leader Eric Cantor. Far more important than the 2,000 legislators who claim membership, ALEC has a host of "elite task forces" made up of lawmakers and corporate representatives whose job it is to create legislative templates for the various state legislatures. These "legislative templates" cover issues ranging from education to health policy, and from the environment to union affairs. According to *The Nation's* John Nichols, "ALEC's model legislation reflects long-term goals: down-sizing government,

removing regulations on corporations and making it harder to hold the economically and politically powerful to account."

Without realizing it, most readers of this blog are already cognizant of some of ALEC's most egregious legislative proposals. Ever wonder where so many state senators and representatives got the idea that in order to address their state's economic doldrums they had to legislate against unions? Why is it that in every Republican-controlled legislature (which obviously includes the U.S. House of Representatives) that faced with shortfalls in revenues, these legislative bodies almost universally choose cuts to public employment or services over progressive tax increases as a solution? Or how about all the legislatures that enacted measures to privatize everything from the Department of Motor Vehicles and prisons to schools and environmental services? Or institute so-called "tort reform?" How about the hundreds of bills -- most with identical wording -- meant to eviscerate the Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare")? Then too, where did so many state legislatures come up with the idea to enact measures making it harder for college students, seniors and low-income citizens to vote?

The answer to all of these -- and many more -- questions is the same: ALEC. In the worldview of ALEC's corporate directors and benefactors, Government's single contribution to the public is security. Outside of this function, it should be demonized, starved or privatized. According to University of Wisconsin professor Joel Rogers, who is an expert on ALEC, *"Any force in civil society, especially labor, that contests the right of business to grab all social surplus for itself, and to treat people like roadkill and the earth like a sewer, should be crushed."*

For years, ALEC had been operating behind a vast curtain of anonymity. Consider that one of the first measures that then-Texas Governor George W. Bush signed was an ALEC model bill giving corporations immunity for penalties "if they tell regulators about their own violation of environmental rules." (This bill was specifically pushed by the Koch brothers, who make billions from oil, coal and

gas.) The link between ALEC and the Koch brothers goes well beyond money: Koch Industry's top lobbyist was once ALEC's chairman. As noted by Lisa Graves, executive director of the Center for Media and Democracy (and publisher of "[ALEC Exposed](#)"), *"ALEC and the Kochs often pursue parallel tracks. Just as ALEC 'educates' legislators, Koch funding has helped 'tutor' hundreds of judges with all-expenses-paid junkets at fancy resorts, where they learn about the 'free market' impact of their rulings. . . . Koch Industries sits as an 'equal' board member with state legislators, influencing bills that serve as a wish list for its financial or ideological interests."*

Up until very recently, the details of ALEC's model bills have been available only to the group's 2,000 legislative and approximately 300 corporate members. However, thanks to a leak emanating from ALEC's Spring Task Force meeting in Cincinnati, more than 800 documents "representing decades of model legislation" are now available online at alecexposed.org. These documents provide, in the haunting words of Bob Edgar of Common Cause, *" . . . proof positive of the depth and scope of the corporate reach into our democratic processes. [Of how] dozens of corporations are investing millions of dollars a year to write business-friendly legislation that is being made into law in statehouses coast to coast, with no regard for the public interest."*

I urge you to look at the [Center for Media and Democracy](#) website which contains proof of the shocking reality that is ALEC. The documents paint a picture, tell a story, that will hopefully make your blood boil, cause you to get off the couch, and take this country back from the Kochs, Weyrichs, and so-called "smart-ALECs" of the world.

For the last time I checked, this was still the United States of America, not the United States of ALEC.

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August 03, 2011

S. 365: HOW THE "MINYAN" VOTED

Here's the final breakdown of how the Jewish members of Congress voted on "S. 365," the Budget Control Act of 2011"



Senate

(Passed 74-26)

Yeas:

1. Michael Bennet (D-CO)
2. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)
3. Barbara Boxer (D-CA)
4. Benjamin Cardin (D-MD)
5. Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)
6. Al Franken (D-MN)
7. Herbert Kohl (D-WI)
8. Carl Levin (D-MI)
9. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT)

10.Charles Schumer (D-NY)

11.Ron Wyden (D-OR)

Nays:

1. Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ)

2. Bernard Sanders (I-VT)



House of Representatives

(Passed 269-161)

Yeas:

1. Shelly Berkley (D-NV)

2. Howard Berman (D-CA)

3. Eric Cantor (R-VA)

4. David Cicilline (D-RI)

5. Susan Davis (D-CA)

6. Ted Deutch (D-FL)

7. Gabrielle Giffords (D-AZ)

8. Steve Israel (D-NY)

9. Sander Levin (D-MI)

10.Nita Lowey (D-NY)

11.Jared Polis (D-CO)

12.Steve Rothman (D-NJ)

13.Adam Schiff (D-CA)

14. Allyson Schwartz (D-PA)
15. Brad Sherman (D-CA)
16. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)

Nays:

1. Gary Ackerman (D-NY)
2. Steve Cohen (D-TN)
3. Eliot Engel (D-NY)
4. Bob Filner (D-CA)
5. Barney Frank (D-MA)
6. Gerald Nadler (D-NY)
7. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)
8. Henry Waxman (D-CA)
9. John Yarmuth (D-KY)

It is my intent to begin a new website, tentatively to be called "Israel on the Potomac," which will provide regular updates on the activities, accomplishments and votes of the Jewish members of Congress. Today's piece is intended to serve as an example of the type of material that would be included, along with news, interviews and campaign updates.

In a sense, this proposed website is intended to serve as a continuing update of *The Jews of Capitol Hill*. I would interested in hearing from anyone who might be interested in subscribing to this website. It would likely cost no more than \$25.00 a year or, say \$15 for six months . . .

KFS



August 07, 2011

'A' RESPONSE TO 'THE' RESPONSE

Yesterday, August 6, 2011, Texas Governor Rick Perry led a group at Houston's Reliant Stadium in what he billed as "The Response" -- a day of prayer and fasting for the United States. Perry, who organized the event not as a private citizen but as Texas governor (using his office's prestige, official stationery and government website) called on Jesus to bless and guide the nation's military and political leaders and "those who cannot see the light in the midst of all the darkness."

Standing in front of an enormous televised image of himself on a Jumbotron that could be seen from one end of the air conditioned 71,000-seat stadium to the other, Perry began his comments by proclaiming, "Like all of you, I love this country deeply!" Interrupted by a roar of approval from the estimated 30,000 who had gathered -- many of whom had fallen to their knees in worshipful adoration -- Perry continued, "Indeed, the only thing you love more is the living Christ!" Addressing himself directly to God, the Texas governor then went on to say, "You are our only hope, and we stand before you today in awe of your power and in gratitude for your blessings, and humility for our sins. Father, our heart breaks for America . . ."

"The Response," whose \$1 million-plus tab was underwritten by the Rev. Donald Wilmon's "American Family Association," (which the Southern Poverty Law Center lists as an "anti-gay hate group") included exhortations from evangelical ministers, music by Christian rock groups, a scriptural reading by Kansas Governor Sam Brownback (whose office had previously said he was on vacation in Houston and thus attending as a private citizen), and a taped greeting by Florida Governor Rick Scott. Perry had actually issued invitations to all forty-nine of his fellow governors; of these, 48 were no-shows.

One of the speakers, controversial TV evangelist John Hagee, lauded Governor Perry for having "had the courage today to call this time of fasting and prayer,

just as Abraham Lincoln did in the darkest days of the Civil War." (Many will recall that in the 2008 presidential election, Republican nominee John McCain disavowed Hagee's endorsement after it became known that the San Antonio pastor had once said that Hitler was dispatched by God to force Jews "to come back to the land of Israel.") Although in the days and weeks leading up to "The Response" Governor Perry said he wanted "people of all faiths to attend," it was obvious that Christianity -- a fundamentalist brand of Christianity -- predominated the service. All prayers were given in the name of Jesus, and the musical performers sang of Christian themes of repentance and salvation.

Days prior to the event, a federal judge dismissed a lawsuit filed against Perry by a national group of atheists who argued that his participation in the rally in his official capacity as governor violated the First Amendment's requirement of separation of church and state. That did not stop various group from picketing outside the stadium.

Many -- myself included -- see Perry's gathering as a prelude to a presidential run. Perry and his political advisors are well aware that if he is to have any chance of capturing the Republican nomination -- or, short of that snagging the number two spot on the ticket -- he needs to maximize his Christian credentials; he must become *the* Christian values candidate, a position currently held by Michelle Bachmann. Well, as the old saw goes, "Be careful what you wish for, because it just may come true." With the Republican Party so deeply in thrall to its "Christian Values" wing, it is hard to imagine any but the most ardent, most vocal Christian receiving the nomination. But then, that nominee -- who would be viewed by millions as "God's candidate" -- would have to face tens of millions of voters who cannot and do not subscribe to a religious orthodoxy that seems to only embrace white evangelicals. Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, mainstream Protestants, social gospel Christians, Hispanics, African Americans and atheists aren't likely to support a candidate who gets up on the stump and speaks in the name of the Almighty. To tack to the political center -- away from some of the religious right's more intolerant stances -- would not only be difficult; it would, in the eyes of many, amount to religious heresy.

The U.S. Constitution (Article VI, paragraph 3) states:

*The senators and representatives before mentioned and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several states, shall be bound by an Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but **no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the United States.***"

And so, it is obvious that, *de jure* -- Constitutionally-speaking -- no governmental entity -- whether local, state or national -- can require a religious test for any office. However, what of the case when the "religious test" is *de facto*? When it is the *public*, and not the *polity* which is making the adherence to a set of religious scruples a requirement? This, I fear, is the reality that a large segment of the American public has willingly accepted. This reality is akin to taking a sacred, binding oath; a hand-on-the-Bible promise to only support candidates who publicly swear fealty to God, the Son of God, and God's "divinely revealed" political point of view.

For believers, such a reality would require one universally agreed-upon interpretation of Divine Will, of the very Word of God. This is incredibly dangerous, especially in a country that is home to virtually every religion on the face of earth. Just who, we must ask, is so cocksure of knowing precisely what God's Will entails as to hold it up as the standard for everyone else? Perry and people of his ilk are escorting America on the slippery slope that leads to religious intolerance -- a "God's Way or the Highway" mentality that tears at the very fabric of our society. One is reminded of Susan B. Anthony's statement: "I distrust those people who know so well what God wants them to do, because I notice it always coincides with their own desires." To listen to the likes of Rick Perry, Michelle Bachmann, Tim Pawlenty, Rick Santorum, *et al*, God is:

- *Against* all taxes and any form of gun control;
- *Against* government lending a helping hand to the downtrodden or impoverished;
- *Against* the vast majority of people inhabiting the planet -- i.e. those who are *not* born again in Christ, let alone not Christian;
- *Against* women having the option of choosing to have or not have an abortion;
- *Against* liberals, progressives, moderates and those who still question.
- *Against* gays, lesbians and anyone who refuses to give the past a veto.

I wonder if Governor Perry ever read the words of Thomas Jefferson who warned, "Christianity neither is, nor ever was, a part of the common law."

Make no mistake about it; these are perilous times. For anyone to claim that they have *the* answer -- or *The* Response -- is proof positive of just how dangerous our days have become.

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



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SKIN IN THE GAME

Of late, I've noticed what appears to be an increasing number of letters-to-the-editor in various papers written by members of the Baby Boom Generation. Many of them decry what they perceive as an almost total lack of energy, involvement -- even anger -- on the part of today's college students -- I call them "Generation Text".

"We were out there on the front lines protesting against the war in Vietnam, the killings at Kent State and American imperialism, and in support of things like the 18-year old vote and the Equal Rights Amendment," one writer noted. "What about the current crop of college students? Why aren't they out there protesting against this endless war in Afghanistan?"

"During the sixties," another letter writer stated, "we took over the administration buildings at Berkeley, Wisconsin and Columbia, and flocked to Washington D.C. by the hundreds of thousands. Today's college students just hang out in their dorm rooms tweeting one another . . ."

Indeed, why is this? Is it because the issues confronting us 40 years ago were so much more cut-and-dried, so relatively black-and-white? Is it because in those long gone pre-social networking days the only way we could express a commonality of concern was face-to-face? Or is it something else?

The answer, I believe, can best be understood by an expression many believe was first coined by mega-investor Warren Buffett: "*Skin in the game*." In Buffett's world, "skin in the game" refers to a situation in which high-ranking insiders use their own money to buy stock in the companies they run. The idea behind creating this situation was -- and is -- to ensure that corporations are managed by like-minded individuals who share a stake in the company. "*Executives can talk all they want,*" Buffett said, "*but the best vote of confidence is putting one's own money on the line just like outside investors.*" (Upon researching the expression, it is highly likely that Buffett was not its source. Back in September 2006, the late [William Safire devoted an entire column to it](#), and found it to be both quite old and ultimately untraceable.)

Regardless of its origin, "skin in the game" is synonymous with "stake" or "self-interest." A major reason why Baby Boomers protested the war in Vietnam was that they had a stake in it; a stake called the draft, for which a high percentage were eligible. For "Generation Text," the terms "Selective Service" and "the draft" are as antiquated and unknown as ditto machines and party lines. Again, because it was in our self interest, Baby Boomers came out *en masse* to support passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment; it was enacted in time to permit 18, 19, and 20 year olds to vote for the anti-war Senator George McGovern. (For all the good *that* did . . .) One wonders what sort of stake would get "Generation Text" to march, protest or volunteer.

Up until recently, a majority of Americans did not seem to see themselves as having any significant "skin in the game." We are a largely apolitical nation; witness our appallingly low voter turnout. Moreover, it has long been in the best interest of those who *do* have significant "skin in the game" -- i.e. multi-national corporations, their lobbyists and political puppets, a majority of millionaires and billionaires, much of the communications / entertainment industry -- to keep the public diverted, often by spoon-feeding us a diet of pap which although somewhat filling, lacks sufficient nourishment for what should be a robust citizenry. (*I wrote about this phenomena*

precisely one year ago today in a piece entitled "[An Illusion Worthy of David Copperfield](#)." It is just as true -- if not more so -- today as it was 52 articles ago.)

It would seem that perhaps -- just perhaps -- after witnessing that mind-numbing debt-ceiling-vs.-deficit-reduction-debacle on Capitol Hill, we -- average workaday Americans -- are beginning to figure out that we *do* have skin in the game; that it *is* in both our individual and collective (oy, such a term!) self interest to recognize how little respect we are being shown by our leaders, representatives and the folks who keep them in campaign *gelt*. When Standard & Poors downgrades our national credit rating and the financial markets rise and fall as precipitously as Six Flag's "Superman" roller coaster, it matters to each and every one of us -- not just to billionaire investors and titans of industry. When so many of our politicians put their partisan political interests way ahead of America's economic wellbeing, which is a nightmare that affects us all. When promises of "jobs, jobs, jobs" take a backseat to eviscerating labor unions, shutting down women's health centers, scuttling public education and turning a blind eye to America's crumbling infrastructure, that is a cynically orchestrated turn of events that calls for a united front; a front made up of everyday citizens who, for the first time in perhaps a generation, realize that we all have "skin in the game." When the 2012 presidential election looks like it's going to be a replay of the Christian Crusades -- i.e. the "Forces of Light" versus "The Forces of Evil" -- that should get our attention. When our children are transported across dangerously creaky bridges to attend physically substandard schools that are dangerously underfunded, understaffed and overcrowded, that should make us awaken us from our doldrums. When we are told time and again that the "real" causes of our joblessness and economic stagnation are deficits, entitlements, high taxes and too much regulation, it is time to throw off the shackles of "Foxification" and begin acting in our best interest.

Although America is currently teetering on a precipice of contraction, our problems are not insoluble. It doesn't take a genius to understand that the three most important ingredients that go into

any first-class recovery are courage, resolve and the ability to compromise. At present, we are lacking all three. But it is not just the fault of the people we elect, for after all, *we* are the ones who elected them in the first place! For too long, we have abnegated our responsibilities as citizens; given them over to men and women whose names, faces and agendas most Americans cannot identify. And then when they fail us, we complain. And we elect a new batch of men and women whose names, faces and agendas we cannot truly identify.

As if we did not have skin in the game.

But we all have a stake in this glorious compact called America . . . whether we know it or not.

When oh when will we start acting that way?

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THINGS THEY NEVER TAUGHT US IN GRAD SCHOOL

Not wishing to sound hubristic -- and keeping in mind King Solomon's admonition that "Pride goes before destruction and haughtiness before a fall" -- I want to say a word or two about my education. While I certainly make no claim whatsoever to being the smartest fellow on the block, I will proudly own up to having been afforded a truly marvelous, first-rate education. Thanks to a host of factors including family circumstance, I was able to attend some great colleges and universities and earn four degrees over a nearly eleven-year period. And unlike a college education today, mine was bereft of anything even remotely practical; I studied Greek, Latin, French, Hebrew, Aramaic and Yiddish and took courses in everything from Greek philosophy and Chinese history to the Phenomenology of Husserl and the string quartets of Beethoven. Along the way I had the chance to read much of the world's great literature, learn a lot of history, economics, political philosophy and natural science, and have my thought processes challenged and shaped by some truly brilliant mentors.

The more one learns, the more one wants to learn. The more one knows, the more one realizes how little they know. The more one studies, the more one understands that knowledge is both a process and a destination.

I well remember my father -- whose own college career came to a screeching halt with the Depression -- saying me time and time again,

"Kurt, tell me about this course: why are you taking it? What do you think it's going to lead to?" My answer, invariably, would be, "What's it going to lead to? Not much . . . except an increased thirst for knowledge." And although Dad never really came to grips with his only son's "air-headedness," he did continue to support my dream of becoming the best-educated kid on the block.

Hell, I couldn't hit a curve ball or nail a three-pointer . . .

Without question, the pursuit of knowledge can take a person down a lot of varied roads; some are paved and straight; others meandering and deeply potholed. Hopefully, they all headed to a destination called "truth."

Having written the above, it is with a certain amount of stupefaction that I report on some of the "facts" or "truths" they never taught us in grad school:

- That the "Shot heard 'round the world" occurred in Concord, New Hampshire, not Massachusetts. ([Michelle Bachmann](#), 8/28/11)
- That the purpose of Paul Revere's Midnight Ride was to ". . . warn the British that they weren't going to be taking away our arms . . ." ([Sarah Palin](#), 6/5/11)
- That it was the Constitution -- and not the Declaration of Independence -- which speaks of "Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." ([Herman Cain](#), 5/21/11)
- John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) was one of America's Founding Fathers, despite being a mere 9 years old in 1776. ([Michele Bachmann](#) 6/28/11)
- Not only were America's Founding Fathers all against the institution of slavery, they fought a War of Independence against Britain to bring it to an end. ([David Barton](#) 6/28/11)
- Looking ahead to 2012, America should be mindful of the threat posed by a rising U.S.S.R. ([Michele Bachmann](#), 8/19/11)
- That most people on public assistance use the money they receive from the government to purchase illegal drugs ([FL. Gov. Rick Scott](#), 6/5/11)

- One of the main causes of America's economic reverses is the [rapacity of labor unions](#).
- Both Social Security and Medicare violate the Constitution and are tantamount to slavery. ([Rep. Ron Paul](#), 5/15/11)
- Global Warming is a hoax perpetrated by Socialists and liberals. There isn't a shred of scientific proof that the earth is getting warmer or that man has caused it. ([Rush Limbaugh](#), 2/15/10)

These are merely a few of the more egregious "facts" that have found a believing audience these past few months. These are, of course, in addition to three classic "truths":

- Government, far from being a remedy, is the source of most of America's problems.
- The cure to nearly everything that ails modern American society is a combination of lower taxes and less regulation.
- The Second Amendment permits virtually unfettered possession of any and all kinds of weapons and ammunition; that even a single limitation upon this right is but the precursor to government confiscating all weapons.

Part of the price we pay for living in a society which guarantees the right of free speech is permitting the existence -- and global airing -- of such manufactured "facts" and "truths." That is not the problem. What *is* a problem is that for far too many, the mere appearance of a "fact" on radio, television or the Internet makes it true. What is an even bigger problem is that many of those who give voice to these "truths" know them to be baldfaced lies. For many, the knowing promulgation of falsity fuels notoriety, which in turn can lead to celebrity.

Far too many of our so-called leaders -- and those who seek to shape public opinion -- find no problem in displaying how much they don't know. When made aware of a misstatement of fact, one would hope and expect an errant pedant or prophet to listen and learn. One would hope. But today this is increasingly no longer the case. Recently, when George Stephanopolous challenged Michele

Bachmann's statements regarding the Founding Fathers (including the pre-teen J.Q. Adams) as working tirelessly to end slavery she [refused to back down](#) from what were obvious misstatements of historic truth. And far from admitting that perhaps -- just perhaps -- Ms. Bachmann had made a boo boo, many commentators took after Stephanopolous, calling the the former Clinton-era aide a "hack," and accusing him of "threatening" Bachmann.

To be "fair and balanced," during the 2008 campaign, then-Senator Obama did say, "Over the past 15 months, we've traveled to every corner of the United States. I've now been in 57 states? I think one left to go . . ." When asked about this misstatement, the Senator laughed, smacked his forehead, and said "You got me on that one!" Nonetheless, his detractors have continued to use this against him . . . some going so far as to say that the "57 states actually refer to the [57 Islamic states in the world](#)."

Nowadays, it would seem that what makes a fact a fact is not whether it is true or verifiable; it all depends on who is giving it voice . . .

Eerily, it's now been more than 30 years, since graduate school. I'm happy to report that my thirst for knowledge has yet to be slaked. In addition to preparing my High Holiday sermons, I'm rereading Victor Hugo's *L'Homme Qui Rit* ("The Man Who Laughs"), Phyllis Bottome's *The Mortal Storm*, and Victor Navasky's *Naming Names*, and getting ready for a new semester in which I'll be delivering six lectures a week.

But I still can't hit a curve ball or nail a three-pointer . . .

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September 04, 2011

THE SPEECH PRESIDENT OBAMA OUGHT TO DELIVER THIS WEEK

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, members of Congress and my fellow Americans:

I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you, the American people and your elected representatives. I come before you this evening, to speak plain words that tell some pretty harsh truths; to, in a sense, take each and every one of us -- myself included -- out to the political woodshed for what might be called "corrective action." I also mean to set forth a number of eminently doable proposals which deal directly with our great nation's number one challenge: creating jobs.

For far too long, the nation's unemployment rate has been right around 9%. When I took the oath of office on January 20, 2009, the rate stood at 7.7%, which was a 14-year high. That more than two-and-one-half years later the rate is even higher -- meaning that even more people are without jobs -- is a failure for which every one of us in this room here tonight must share the blame. Every one of us -- whether Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative, Keynesian or Supply-Sider -- have failed in our primary economic mission; to put more than 14 million unemployed Americans back to work and thus back on the road to economic recovery.



Let us be honest: for the past few years America has been at an historic economic crossroads. We no longer have an economy in which a single worker, working but a single job can hope to earn enough to buy a home, raise a family and send children to college. That used to be the goal -- if not the reality -- of the great American middle

class. The vast majority of all jobs that involve repetition -- i.e. factory line jobs -- have been exported, and likely never to return to our shores. Most of us are all too painfully aware of how much times have changed; those who are fortunate enough to be employed, do as best they can from paycheck-to-paycheck, use plastic to make up the difference, save next to nothing, and worry lest their job or jobs are about to be sent overseas. And, at the same time, our roads, bridges and schools are grossly substandard, our children's classrooms are overcrowded, and we are privatizing everything from prisons to public health facilities.

Without question, we have been presented with a challenge of historic proportion; to come together as one and repair a fractured economy, or to retreat to our various corners and hide behind the hedges of political rhetoric.

For far too many of us in this historic chamber, the pointing of fingers and scoring of political points has been a greater priority than job creation and the righting of our economic ship of state. For far too many of us, we stare into the looming maw of economic doldrums and neither see the challenge nor hear the call. Instead, for far too many of us -- Republican and Democrat, progressive and conservative, independent, Libertarian and Tea Partier -- we have chosen to hold America's destiny hostage to our political desire rather than to attack and affect a cure over that which is dragging us down as a nation. America -- indeed, the entire world -- looks at the three-ring circus our political process has become and wonders "Whatever became of the United States of America, that light unto the nations?"

Is it any wonder that we in this magnificent chamber are held in such low esteem? Our Congress is divided into so many factions; we have Democrats who want a return to the days of FDR; Plutocrats who want to drag us back to the Gilded Age, and Theocrats who would appear to favor a return to the days of the Salem witch trials. Instead of creating jobs -- which was the focus of our most recent election -- we have concentrated on anything but the creation of jobs. Many of our newest Congressional colleagues highlighted their love of the Constitution in their campaigns -- as if their opponents did not. It seems strange that for a group that evinces so much reverence for the Constitution, you spend so much time denigrating the very federal government that is the material expression of the principles embodied in that document.

We have recently come through a bruising battle which pitted the national debt against the debt ceiling -- a false dichotomy if ever there was one. Yes, it is absolutely true that America is reeling under a staggering debt. And yes, it is absolutely true that getting a handle on it is going to only come about through a combination of judicious spending cuts, enhanced revenues -- more taxes -- and an across-the-board program of shared national sacrifice. And yet, because so many of you on the Republican side of the aisle have a Manichaeian view of the universe -- seeing a black-and-white world in which there is nothing but absolute good and absolute evil -- compromise is a virtual no-no. In

the recent debt ceiling debate many of you were willing to shut down the government and deal world financial markets a fatal blow rather than submit to even a penny's-worth of increased revenue. This is no way to create jobs; this is no way to repair a fractured economy.

Shame on us all!

And so, what is it that I propose we all do about creating jobs and beginning to repair the economy?

First and foremost, I urge Congress to enact Representative Schakowsky's "Emergency Jobs to Restore the American Dream Act," a highly cost-effective plan to put over two million people to work over the next two years. Rep. Schakowsky's plan calls for spending \$100 billion to create

- 400,000 school construction and 250,000 maintenance jobs;
- 100,000 jobs for youths between the ages of 16 and 25 to staff a "Park Improvement Corps";
- 40,000 health care providers including physicians, nurses and physicians assistants to expand access in underserved rural and urban areas;
- 100,000 Child Care Corps jobs in early childhood and education through additional funding for Head Start.
- 750,000 Community Corps jobs which would provide needed work in our communities including housing rehab, weatherization, recycling and rural conservation.

An alternative version of this proposal would have the federal government spend approximately \$2.2 trillion over the next five years to upgrade our roads, highways, seaports, rail lines and bridges -- most of which have been ignored for more than a generation. This alone could provide upwards of 2 million new jobs.

Let's face it: with yields on 10-year treasury bonds at about 2%, borrowing costs are as low as they've ever been which makes this an opportune time to invest in the nation's infrastructure. And for those who, predictably, are going to start moaning about "those tax-and-spend Democrats," and proclaiming that this is far too ambitious in a time of stark fiscal austerity, let me state a single economic fact: each dollar spent generates a minimum of \$1.44 in economic output. As a result, about half of the money we propose spending would come back to the government through increased tax revenue.

I am neither as politically naive nor idealistic as to think that any proposal which involves increased spending -- or increased revenues -- is going to be met with open arms. A majority of the members of the 112th Congress have proven themselves to be

more concerned about placating their wealthy benefactors than in doing what is necessary to create as many jobs as quickly as possible.

Closing Planned Parenthood Centers does not create jobs.

Cutting funding for the Federal Aviation Administration does not create jobs.

Closing national parks does not create jobs.

Cutting spending alone does not create jobs.

I would remind the American people that during the recent Debt Ceiling/Deficit debate, the White House offered up a \$4 trillion deficit reduction package. I would further remind you that it was the Republicans, who have steadfastly beat the drum for reduced spending refused our offer because they could not abide as much as a one-tenth of one percent increase on tax rates for billionaires like the Walton family or the Koch brothers. You may recall that in the end, Republicans finally settled on a deal that had far less deficit reduction -- and even less spending reduction -- than our offer.

I ask this Congress and the voters who elect its members: what are we to do? Are we going to continue expecting middle- and lower-income Americans to carry a disproportionate share of the economic burden? Will we continue rewarding the hyper wealthy by extending their tax cuts while at the same time cutting back the social safety net which protects the most vulnerable? Will we continue sitting idly by as our schools, highways and bridges crumble, our ability to train and educate the next generation of scientists and engineers wanes and more and more people lose jobs, homes and hope?

The future is in the hands of the American public. It is up to us to make demands, and ask questions of our elected representatives:

- Whose side are you on? The rich and powerful or the middle class?
- How can you justify a "No New Taxes Ever!!" position when smart economics demands a combination of spending cuts and additional revenue?
- Why do you persist in trying to cut Social Security and Medicare as if they are programs we really don't deserve? The truth of the matter is that neither one is an "entitlement." Rather, they are both "earned benefits" -- we all contribute to payroll taxes to fund them.
- Are you so very much against any and all tax increases -- especially in light of the fact that taxes are at an historic low -- that you would prefer seeing this country default on its financial obligations? And lastly,
- What is the logic of holding office in a federal government you believe to be the cause -- and not even partly the solution -- to the nation's problems and challenges?

These are the sorts of questions that all of us, as concerned citizens, must direct to our elected officials -- via phone, surface and email, and at town hall gatherings. Make sure they know that unless and until they learn what it means to compromise -- to work together for the good of all and not just the good of their backers and benefactors -- that they will not, under any circumstances, be receiving your vote.

Period.

The time for action is now -- not after the next election. Our job as citizens is clear: to make sure our elected representatives do everything in their power to work together in order to put America back to work.

I know we are up to the task, for this is the United States of America; a country filled with people who have a long history of turning dreams into reality.

Thank you. . . . And may God bless us even as we bless ourselves by once again making our dreams come true.

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



September 11, 2011

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

Without question, for most American voters, the 2012 presidential election will hinge on the central, interlocking issues of jobs and the economy. Among the questions voters will asking are:

- Which candidate -- and which party -- comes across as being best tuned in to the plight of the more than 14 million unemployed Americans?
- Which candidate -- and which party -- appears to have the best/better handle on how to create jobs in the short-run while retooling the American economy for the future?
- Which candidate -- and which party -- seems to have a greater allegiance to the American Middle Class than to the country's elite?
- Which candidate -- and which party -- expresses the greater amount of seriousness and the lesser amount of mere finger-wagging?

The fact that all four of these questions are expressed conditionally is purely purposive; one simply never knows for certain which campaign promises stand a chance of becoming reality. As the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan sagely noted, "We campaign in poetry but govern in prose . . ."

For other, so-called "values voters," the 2012 election will hinge more specifically on moral issues such as abortion, gay marriage, evolution-vs.-creationism, and the role of religion in public life. Even at this early juncture, it is clear that most Republican candidates are both proud and comfortable being identified as members of "the party of God." What this means to imply about the Democrats by comparison, I will leave to the individual imagination . . .

For many American Jewish voters, the central issue is, quite understandably, Israel -- specifically, which candidate -- and which party -- is and will be that tiny nation-state's more steadfast friend and defender.

Almost from his first appearance on the national political stage back in 2004, Barack Obama has been accused of being anything but a "friend of Israel." He has been accused in many quarters of favoring Palestinians over Israelis and kowtowing to his "Muslim brothers," while being severely scored for visiting many Muslim capitals without having set foot in Jerusalem. And, according to Israel's legion of Christian Evangelical allies, if left to his "own devices," Barack Obama will be the death of the Jewish State. One hears these contentions from the likes of Glenn Beck, Sean Hannity, and Pastor John Hagee, the Founder and National Chair of "[Christians United For Israel](#)." (It should be noted that Hagee, who believes with every fibre of his being that supporting Israel -- "The Holy Land" -- is part and parcel of God's agenda leading to the Apocalypse, also believes that Hitler was a "[Half-Breed Jew](#)," that Nazi persecution was a "divine plan" to lead Jews to form the modern state of Israel, and historically, the Jews have brought persecution upon themselves by being disobedient to God. "*Their own rebellion had birthed the seed of antisemitism (sic) that would arise and bring destruction to them for centuries to come . . . [it rises from the judgment of God upon his rebellious chosen people.](#)")*

Contemplating all the above, I am reminded of a universal truth most of us learned as wee sprat: "Actions speak louder than words."

In the case of President Obama and Israel, yes, I would feel quite a bit better if he had flown Air Force One to Israel, taken a picture praying at the Western Wall, visited *Yad va-Shem* and eaten shawarma in Rechavia or St. Peter's Fish in Akko. However, for whatever reason, as president, he has yet to go. All he has to do is say the word and I will be delighted to pick up the tab for his flight and take him on a tour of my old haunts in and around the Hebrew University.

Despite his not having yet visited Israel during his presidency, the fact remains that Barack Obama is, despite what the naysayers loudly proclaim, a steadfast friend and defender of the Jewish State.

Has he agreed with every one of her actions since taking office? No.

Has he had occasion to disagree with Prime Minister Netanyahu? Absolutely.

Has he worked behind the scenes to assist the Jewish State? Yes.

Actions speak louder than words.

Need proof?

Just the other day, protesters attacked the Israeli embassy in Cairo, knocking down a 12-foot concrete wall that had been built several days earlier to protect the embassy, which is near the top floor of a 21-story residential building in the upscale Dokki area. As a result of the peril, Israel was forced to airlift the ambassador and nearly all the diplomatic staff. [Describing the step-by-step evacuation](#) to the Israeli people once the ambassador and his staff were safely home, Prime Minister Netanyahu had special words of thanks for President Obama, Defense Secretary Panetta and Dennis Ross, the president's Middle East advisor on the National Security Council:

I would like to express my gratitude to the President of the United States, Barack Obama. I asked for his help. This was a decisive and fateful moment. He said, 'I will do everything I can.' and so he did. He used every considerable means and influence of the United States to help us. We owe him a special measure of gratitude. This attests to the strong alliance between Israel and the United States. This alliance between Israel and the United States is especially important in these times of political storms and upheavals in the Middle East."

Actions speak louder than words.

- Almost immediately upon taking the oath of office in January 2009, the Obama Administration restored Israel's diminished Qualitative Military Edge ([QME](#)); on July 28, 2011, Defense Secretary Panetta and Secretary of State Clinton announced that the administration was prepared to further expand Israel's QME.
- President Obama led the funding effort for the Iron Dome missile defense system. Iron Dome, which is capable of defending against both long- and short-range missiles and rockets, has already paid dividends. P.M. Netanyahu has repeatedly expressed public thanks to the president for the role he played in funding this critical defense system.
- The president has consistently and vocally opposed the Palestinians' plans to unilaterally declare a state through the United Nations: "*No vote at the UN will ever create an independent Palestinian state, and the United States will stand up against efforts to single out Israel at the UN or in any international forum. Israel's legitimacy is not a matter for debate . . .*" (May 22, 2011)
- Alan Solow, former Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations President flatly stated, "*President Obama has worked hard to mobilize support for Israel, has led the movement to impose strong international sanctions against Iran and has continuously supported, in word and deed, Israel's rights as a Jewish state. There have been no policies actually implemented by the Administration, as opposed to those which have been rumored, that have been anything other than supportive of Israel.*" (July 22, 2011)

Despite this welter of demonstrable fact, there will still be those who firmly believe that President Barack Obama is the worst thing that ever happened to Israel. For those who will persist in this belief, I heartily recommend that they stop listening to the

words Rush, Glenn, Sean, Newt and Eric, and begin paying attention to the actions of President Obama.

You can challenge him on the economy.

You can question whether he is as theocratic as Perry, Bachmann or the rest of the GOP's amen corner.

Just don't question whether he's a friend or foe when it comes to Israel.

The record is clear.

Actions speak louder than words.

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September 19, 2011

WHY NOT LET WALL STREET PAY FOR THE RESTORATION OF MAIN STREET?

As most readers of this blog are painfully aware, the vast majority of Republicans -- and virtually every newly-elected Teapartier in the 112th Congress - is a signatory of Grover Norquist's "*I-will-never-ever-under-any-circumstances-even-at-the-point-of-an-AK-47-vote-for-any-tax-increase*" pledge. Likewise, most of us are also painfully aware that many members of Congress signed on to the Norquist pledge even *prior* to taking their official oath of office -- the one in which they swear to " . . . *support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic.* . . ."

I don't know about you, but I think there ought to be a law against this sort of thing. Hey, come to think of it, there *is* a law against this sort of thing; for does not the Bible clearly state not once, but twice (Ex. 20:3-5 Deut. 5:7-9) that it is a massive wrong to make or bow down to any idol or false god? To "engrave" Mr. Norquist's "no taxes, no how" commandment onto the tablet of a political career is, in my estimation, as blasphemous as worshipping at the altar of Baal.

Over the past few days, President Obama has, like Abraham of old, taken an axe to the idols of Terach; with stiffened spine, he has unequivocally stated that in order to create jobs and begin fixing a broken economy, it will be absolutely necessary to spend money AND to raise taxes on the wealthy. In throwing down the gauntlet and picking up the axe, the president has, for the first time in a long time, started sounding like a Democrat. Not surprisingly, those who are committed to praying at the anti-tax "high places of wickedness" (c.f. Hosea 10:8) believe that the president has signed his political death notice; that the public shares their "no taxes" orthodoxy.

Once wonders . . .

Recent polling indicates that the great unwashed public is fed up with both Republicans and Democrats. They are beginning to understand that President Obama and the Democrats are not nearly as responsible for the economic nightmare on Main Street as the speculators, manipulators and banksters of Wall Street. The public is also beginning to understand that any country that can fund wars of whim and back bailouts and tax breaks for billionaires is not broke. As John Nichols noted in this week's *The Nation*, "There is money. It's just misallocated. The demand for jobs must be coupled with demands for better budgeting and new sources of revenue."

That's precisely what the president is talking about of late . . .

One proposed source of new revenue is a minuscule (less than .05%) tax on Wall Street trading of stocks, derivatives, currencies, credit default swaps and futures -- the same speculative financial instruments that got us into our mess in the first place. There is already a legislative proposal (H.R. 4191) before Congress that has collected more than 5 dozen cosponsors. Co-authored by Oregon Representative Peter DeFazio and Iowa Senator Tom Harkin H.R. 4191, the ["Let Wall Street Pay for the Restoration of Main Street Act"](#) was originally submitted in 2009. It has garnered the support of economists, Wall Street investors, labor organizations and consumer groups. By one conservative estimate this transaction tax could raise a minimum of \$150 billion in new revenue, thus forcing the banksters of Wall Street to pay for at least some of the devastation they caused to the folks on Main Street. (Not surprisingly, DeFazio's bill has also drawn fire from many others, who claim that it will kill jobs by placing yet another layer of regulation on an already over-regulated financial world.)

The DeFazio bill is written in such a way as to ensure that the tax is targeted at speculators, and "has no impact on the average investor and pension fund." The tax will be refunded for:

- Tax-favored retirement accounts
- 401(k)s
- Mutual funds
- Education Savings Accounts
- Health Savings Accounts, and
- The first \$100,000 of transactions annually that are not already exempted.

In [a recent New York Times article](#), University of Massachusetts economics professor Nancy Folbre came out in support of the initiative: "*Purchases of stocks, bonds and other financial instruments in the United States go untaxed but for a tiny fee (less than a half-cent) on stock trades that helps finance the Securities and Exchange Commission. In Britain, by contrast,*" Professor Folbre wrote, "*. . . a 0.5 percent tax on stock transactions raises about*

\$40 billion a year. President Nicolas Sarkozy of France and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany recently announced plans to introduce a similar tax in the 27 nations of the European Community. Our current tax policies favor speculative investment in financial instruments over productive investments in human capabilities. . . "

On September 1, thousands of members of "National Nurses United" flocked to Capitol Hill, lobbying more than 5 dozen members of Congress. They called it the "[National Day of Action to Tax Wall Street](#)." Representatives were urged to sign a pledge in support of the Wall Street transaction tax. Unlike the Norquist pledge -- a sweeping across-the-board anti-tax stance signed by virtually every member of the GOP -- this one was in support of a single piece of legislation whose affect would be felt not on Wall Street, but rather on Main Street.

Without question, jobs and unemployment are going to be the major issues of the 2012 election. If the president and the Democrats will continue holding firm and show by both word and deed that they are fighting on behalf of Main Street, they may just pull off a major victory over Wall Street. The "Let Wall Street Pay for the Restoration of Main Street" bill is one weapon in their arsenal. And whether or not it passes Congress (it will not) is actually irrelevant; it serves to underscore just who is fighting for the middle class . . .

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September 26, 2011

FROM TELEGRAPH TO TWITTER: A RAY OF HOPE AT THE NEW YEAR

A little over a year ago -- just before the Jewish New Year -- I published a piece entitled [*With the New Year Comes Hope*](#). In it, I discussed President Obama's push to get the Israelis and Palestinians to sit down and talk seriously with one another, the prospect for peace in the Middle East and the fact that at the time of a new year, there is always room for hope.

Well, here we are, more than a year later, and some things are a bit better, some a bit worse, but for the most part, things are pretty much the same:

- Nothing came of the much-hyped direct talks between Abbas, Netanyahu and the Obama Administration;
- Despite pressure from both the American Administration, and members of his own government, Netanyahu refused to extend an embargo on new construction projects in disputed areas -- a major sticking point with the Palestinians;
- President Obama got himself into a firestorm of controversy when, in giving a speech at the Pentagon, he mentioned "pre-1967 borders" as an aspect of future negotiations;
- Hamas and Fatah -- heretofore the *alpha* and *omega* of Palestinian political factions -- affected a "reconciliation," agreeing to form an interim government;
- Oppressive Arab regimes fell in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, while Syrians and Yemins took to the streets with their demands, and Saudi King Abdullah proclaimed that women will have the right to vote beginning in 2015.

- Young Egyptians surrounded the Israeli Embassy in Cairo, thus necessitating the emergency evacuation of all Israeli diplomats -- with an able assist from the Obama Administration.
- Despite an official UN determination that the Israeli naval blockade of Gaza was both "legal" and "a legitimate security measure," the Turkish government expelled the Israeli Ambassador. In announcing his government's actions, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said, "*The time has come for Israel to pay for its stance that sees it above international laws and disregards human conscience. The first and foremost result is that Israel is going to be devoid of Turkey's friendship.*"
- The 2012 presidential campaign got underway in earnest, with virtually every Republican hopeful trying to sound like the second coming of Ze'ev Jabotinsky while simultaneously portraying Barack Obama as a Muslim appeaser who doesn't know the difference between a katyusha and a falafal;
- Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas went before the United Nations seeking statehood; President Obama flatly stated that the United States would veto any such resolution in the Security Council. Despite what many saw as a brave and supportive stance, the president was once again pilloried -- even *prior* to making his speech -- for being both naive and an enemy of the Jewish State.

Yes, it's been quite a year.

In response to the Palestinian statehood proposal, the so-called "Middle East Quartet" (the U.S., the U.N., the European Union and Russia) strongly urged that Israel and the Palestinians resume peace talks with the goal of making a deal by the end of 2012. Almost immediately, President Abbas said that while he would review the Middle East Quartet's idea for peace talks to start within a month, he is both firmly and irrevocably against any plan that does not require Israel to stop building settlements: "*We will not deal with any initiative that does not contain a halt to settlement or the '67 borders.*"

Sound familiar?

Who amongst us can remember the last time two or more sides agreed to sit down and seriously discuss the issues which divided them without first etching prior demands into case-hardened concrete? What sense does it make to say "I will gladly talk to you just so long as you give in to me before we begin our discussion?" Yes, I recognize that a lot of this is political posturing, plain and simple; throwing some raw meat to the base, so to speak. And yet, we see this "agreement-must-precede-discussion" nonsense not only on the international stage, but in virtually every issue arising in Congress; in our local, state and national elections; in negotiations between management and labor; and certainly in most international disputes. And what makes matters worse -- regardless of whether the venue is Congress, the United Nations or the court of public opinion -- is

that one side views the other -- and its attendant world view, opinions, and claims -- as being flat-out wrong . . . a mendacious evil to be denied at any and all costs.

It would appear that the further we progress -- if indeed, "progress" be the correct term -- the more our points of view are not, in fact, the products of education, experience, knowledge and contemplation, but rather believed to be matters of "divine revelation." And that which is believed to have emanated from some historic mount -- whether it be Sinai, Gerizim, Gilboa, Nebo, Ararat or Jabal Musa -- or through the mouth of God's anointed prophet -- whoever he or she may be -- is, by definition, sacred, immutable and beyond question. In a world increasingly given over to fanaticism, is the inability to reach compromise or rapprochement -- let alone even consider it -- all that shocking?

In political economics, those who favor increased government spending are accused by those who insist on cutting taxes and regulations of being Socialists; those who wish nothing more than to wreck the capitalist system. Conversely, those who insist that cutting government spending is the only way to save the American economy are tarred with the brush of heartless misanthropy; those who would steal the coal from Tiny Tim's Christmas stocking.

Likewise with the Middle East: each side sees the other as being conscious agents of evil who are incapable of perceiving even an ounce of humanity in their enemy. Both sides accuse the other of unspeakable crimes against humanity -- regardless of what the historic record may prove. How can one even hope to reach settlement when both sides say "You are wrong, wrong, wrong!" Truth to tell, there is plenty on the record to prove that over the years, Israel has gone the extra mile -- and more than once -- to accept Palestinian Statehood. And yet, for many, that record is non-existent, because it was "created" by an evil people for their own evil purposes.

Back in 1848-1849, Europe went through a period known to history variously as the **Spring of Nations**, **Springtime of the Peoples** or the **Year of Revolution**. From late February 1848 through early 1849, people's revolutions spread like wildfire from France to the German States, to the Austrian Empire, the Italian States, Denmark, and many other places. In all more than 50 countries were affected. And yet, despite the fact that many of the revolutions failed in the short-run, they did set the wheels in motion for a new Europe. One of the unsung "fathers" of that continent-wide uprising was Samuel F.B. Morse, whose telegraph made it possible for people from Paris to Budapest and from Amsterdam to Warsaw, to be in contact with one another. One thing they were able to learn -- for perhaps the first time in history -- was how very similar they were in their wants, their needs and their desires. This knowledge, if nothing else, gave them hope.

Fast forward to the Arab Spring of 2011. It is possible that when the history of this era will one day be written, that the name of Christopher Isaac "Biz" Stone, the co-founder

and Creative Director of Twitter will be writ large as one of the unsung "fathers" of that movement. For just as Morse's telegraph made it possible for people throughout Europe to discover how much they had in common, Stone's social networking sites are providing Muslims and Jews, Arabs and Israelis, Socialists and Capitalists, an opportunity to go a bit beyond politics and get to know one another as human beings.

If the new year brings renewed hope -- and I for one believe it does -- then perhaps this is where it will be at ... with young people breaking down the barriers raised by their elders and finally discovering that just beneath the surface, we are all pretty much the same . . .

Here's to hope in 5772!

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THEY SHOOT AMERICANS, DON'T THEY?

Back in 1972 then-President Richard Nixon went to China and met



with Chairman Mao. As a result of that historic act, the political world obtained a new, highly-charged metaphor: "Nixon goes to China." Just beneath the surface of these four easily grasped words lurked a profound political truth: That only a person like Richard Nixon -- a man of impeccable, unquestionable anti-

Communist credentials -- could have "gotten away with" going to "Red China" and shaking hands with Chairman Mao. Just about anyone else in the world of politics or diplomacy would have been accused of cowardice, complicity or worse . . . treason. But not Richard Nixon; after all, hadn't he played a pivotal role in uncovering the treachery of Alger Hiss? Wasn't he more rabidly anti-Red than J. Edgar Hoover?

The metaphor "Nixon goes to China" has long since been understood to refer to the ability of a politician with an unassailable reputation among his or her supporters for representing and defending their values to take actions that would draw criticism and even stern opposition if taken by someone without those credentials. Although the most common examples of the "Nixon goes to China" metaphor

involve hawks making moves towards peace with traditional, implacable foes, it can also, on occasion refer to a "white-shoe diplomatist" defying expectations by taking aggressive military action -- a "shoot first and ask questions later," approach, so to speak.

Which brings us to President Barack Obama and the targeted killings of two American-born terrorists in Yemen: Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Kahn. There is no question that the New Mexico-born al-Awlaki was a warrior in the terrorist battle against America and the West. Just how central and effective a warrior he was in that battle is a matter for debate. One former U.S. intelligence officer referred to him as Al Qaeda's "ideological leader"; another simply referred to him as "a big fish." Others weren't so sure of his overall importance or standing within the terrorist organization.

What *is* clear is that al-Awlaki was included on a list of Americans the president ordered assassinated without due process of law -- something not done since the days of Abraham Lincoln. The *Washington Post's* Dana Priest



[first reported](#) on the administration's "hit list" back in January 2010: *"The Administration's stance is that if a U.S. citizen joins al-Qaeda . . . they are then part of the enemy . . . Both the CIA and the JSOC (Joint Special Operations Command) maintain lists of individuals called "High Value Targets" and "High Value individuals," whom they seek to kill or capture. The JSOC list includes three Americans, including [New Mexico-born Islamic cleric Anwar] Aulaqi [sic]"*

What is also clear is that the Obama Administration did not assemble its list of "High Value Targets" without a great deal of internal debate. According to the *Daily Beast's* [Richard Miniter](#), Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and then-CIA Director Leon Panetta formed the "war-wing," taking the ". . . hard-line view that Americans who seek to kill other Americans can themselves be killed so save lives." According to

Miniter's report, Attorney General Eric Holder and other lawyers in the DOJ held to a much narrower interpretation; that Congress had authorized war in Afghanistan, not Yemen. Consequently, the "battlefield exception" did not apply to people like al-Awlaki and Kahn. And, they noted, "killing a U.S. citizen was wrong."

Much of the reportage on the al-Awlaki killing has noted his ". . . key role in propagandizing non-Arabic speakers to join the jihad against America." Most articles noted his proven links to Major Nidal Hasan (the Ft. Hood shooter), Umar Farouq Abdulmutallab, the so-called "underpants bomber," and the Times Square bomber. Without question then, the man was both a menace and a danger who counseled and urged the deaths of innocent Americans.

But the very deep and thorny question remains as to whether, as an American citizen, this dangerous menace could be "taken out" legally without even a semblance of due process. The administration argues that al-Awlaki represented an "imminent threat" to the lives of Americans and our allies. Moreover, the president holds, as "a leader in an enemy organization that was actively attacking the United States," there is "ample constitutional precedent for killing enemy leaders in war time, even if they are U.S. citizens."

(The "ample constitutional precedent": In late April 1861, President Lincoln suspended writs of *habeas corpus*. His action was challenged in court and overturned by the U.S. Circuit Court in *Ex Parte Merryman*. In September 1862, Lincoln again suspended *habeas corpus* on his own authority. On October 17, 2006, President George W. Bush signed the "Military Commissions Act of 2006," a law suspending the right of *habeas corpus* to persons "determined by the United States" to be an "enemy combatant in the Global War on Terror.")

Many applaud the targeted killings of Anwar al-Awlaki and Samir Kahn, and view them as President Obama's "Nixon goes to China" moment. By this they mean to say, who would have thought that the soaring wordsmith, the professor of constitutional law, would be capable of pulling off that which the Texas cowboy, George W. Bush, could not . . . the assassination and decimation of Al Qaeda's most

murderous leaders? Ironically, many who are today standing and cheering over the summary executions of al-Awlaki and Kahn were just last week expressing their deep mortification over all those who crassly cheered the more than 230 people executed during the decade-long tenure of Texas Governor Rick Perry -- criminals who, in the words of *Salon.com*'s [Glen Greenwald](#), ". . . were at least given a trial and appeals and the other trappings of due process before being killed."

Let us be clear: keeping America safe from terrorist attacks is of paramount importance; placing lethally insurmountable stumbling blocks in the path of our mortal enemies is essential. But, if in order to accomplish these essential tasks we must first eviscerate the Constitution by denying due process of law, what have we truly gained? Is an American citizen to have his or her rights -- not to mention life -- summarily eliminated once they have become traitors? Must we resort to the "star chamber" brand of injustice in order to keep ourselves safe and secure?

These questions -- and their answers -- are at the very heart of what many refer to as "American exceptionalism." Anyone, it seems to me, who sees the questions and answers as being black-and-white, is fooling himself. For indeed, this is going to turn out to be one of the most difficult -- and important -- of all national debates.

The question is, will we as a nation have our "Nixon goes to China" moment and figure out how to preserve our safety without destroying our integrity?

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WHOSE VALUES?

The recently concluded ["Values Voters Summit"](#) was a less than edifying -- or religiously tolerant -- event. Of the 1983 voters casting ballots in the Summit's Family Research Council-sponsored straw poll, Rep. Ron Paul came in first with 734 votes (37%), followed by:

- Herman Cain 23%
- Rick Santorum 16%
- Rick Perry 8%
- Michele Bachmann 8%
- Mitt Romney 4%
- Newt Gingrich 3%
- Undecided 1%
- Jon Huntsman 0%

That Rep. Paul should win the straw poll going away is as much an indication of how well-organized his supporters are as how enamored Christian conservatives are with the Texas Libertarian. It should be noted that most Paul supporters arrived at the conference just before the vote and departed almost immediately thereafter. During his presentation to the 3,406 registered attendees, Paul likened the sprawling federal government to the king sought by the Israelites in the book of Samuel. "We have too long relied upon our king in Washington and we have to change that." Paul went on to indict the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, stating that "one of the most greatest threats (*sic*) to the family is war. It undermines the family." He concluded his indictment with Jesus' quote "Blessed are the peacemakers."

That former Pennsylvania Senator Rick Santorum should receive double the vote of such icons as Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann shows two things:

1. That "Values Voters" delegates are extremely conservative, and that

2. Whoever the eventual Republican nominee is, he (or she) will have to walk a fine line between the positions of the Christian right and the politics of victory.

During the summit, one Rick Perry supporter, Dallas pastor Robert Jeffries equated Mormonism with a "cult." Conservative radio host and former Reagan official William Bennett condemned Jeffries "bigotry." Obliquely responding to Jeffries' assertion, Romney told the audience that "decency and civility are values, too," castigating the pastor (within naming him) for "poisonous language that does not advance our cause." "The blessings of faith," the former Massachusetts governor told the summit, "carry the responsibility of civil and respectful debate. The task before us is to focus on conservative beliefs and values that unite us -- let no agenda, narrow our division or drive us apart . . ."

A couple of questions come to mind:

- Precisely whose values were the delegates endorsing?
- Whose interpretation of Holy Writ do they follow? and
- What gives these people the right to determine precisely who is moral and religious?

My answer to these questions comes in the form of an invocation I delivered before a session of the Florida Legislature this past spring. (One should understand that conservative Republicans -- many of whom are supporters of the Family Research Council -- hold a super majority in this body):

Master of the Universe:

We call you by a hundred different names, and call upon you in a thousand different ways. And yet, whether we address you as God, Jesus, Ha-Shem, Allah, Vishnu, Sh'chinah, Rama or Yawheh; whether we stand, kneel or fall prostrate on the ground; whether we recite prayers are written from left to right, right to left or top to bottom, we are all essentially addressing the one who creates and sustains, who exalts and judges, who blesses and enables that which is the best in each of us.

Through the very act of invoking your name, we seek your guidance, your approval, and above all, your strength and blessing.

Unquestionably, you have already bestowed manifold blessings upon the members of this august legislative body-- blessings that have permitted them to become leaders in this great state. We pray that they be ever mindful of the awesome responsibility that comes from being so gifted; that they constantly pause to reflect upon the very nature of communal responsibility. May they keep uppermost in their hearts and minds the most basic and purposive reasons any of us are here on earth: to feed the hungry and clothe the naked; to exercise stewardship over all the natural glories which you have created; to educate, to elevate and to advocate.

May they, who have been given so many blessing, be ever cognizant of the fact that many paths can lead to the same destination. May these men and women – they who call each other "Honorable" -- "Distinguished" and "My Good Friend" -- realize that you, dear God, have given us two ears with which to hear and but one mouth with which to speak. May we all understand that although there are undoubtedly many paths to the gates of glory, there is but one gatekeeper -- you and you alone. As a result, none has the right to presume that his path must be my path, that her belief must be my belief.

May you bless us and keep us.

May you cause your great countenance to shine upon us and be gracious unto us.

May you lift up the light of your countenance and grant us the most precious of all your abundant blessings -- the blessing of peace.

Amen!

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October 16, 2011

HERMAN & HILLARY: THE SIMPLE SOLUTION VS. THE HARD TRUTH



During last week's *Washington Post-Bloomberg* Republican debate, former Godfather's Pizza CEO Herman Cain unveiled 9-9-9 -- his utterly simple (and utterly simplistic) solution to curing the nation's economic woes. Based on the notion that America's Byzantine tax code must be overhauled, if not totally scrapped, Cain's 9-9-9 -- which both political and economic cognoscenti have proclaimed "Dead On Arrival" -- would eventually repeal and temporarily replace said code with:

- A 9% tax on income
- A 9% business transactions tax, and
- A 9% federal sales (AKA "flat") tax

Regardless of whether or not 9-9-9 has legs, it has propelled Herman Cain to the top of the Republican presidential heap -- at least for now. In a sense, he has become the newest "flavor-of-the-week."

When asked the day after the debate who or what the genesis of 9-9-9 was, Cain (an ardent support of Steve Forbes and *his* flat tax proposal back in 2000) named Rich Lowrie of Cleveland, whom the charismatic candidate characterized as "my lead economist."

Not so fast, Mr. Cain.

According to [Mr. Lowrie's LinkedIn profile](#) he has a B.A. in accountancy from Case Western Reserve University, not economics. When questioned by the *Washington Post's* Glenn Kessler, Lowrie said he did not consider himself to be an economist. In his piece on Cain's 9-9-9, Kessler wryly noted, "It almost sounds like something out of the movie 'Dave,' in which the accidental president [Kevin Klein] enlists his accountant friend. Murray Blum [Charles Grodin], to help him figure out the federal budget."

According to Lowrie, Cain's 9-9-9 is " . . . an attempt to shift the tax burden away from production and towards consumption to balance the load." He explains that by "ripping out a whole bunch of taxes," prices of goods will fall, U.S. exports will be more competitive and business will thrive. He also claims that once enacted, 9-9-9 will create 6 million new jobs as business becomes more competitive.

Right. And next year's World Series will pit the Houston Astros against the Minnesota Twins . . .

As noted above, the vast majority of economists, business people and political pros have seen Cain's 9-9-9 for what it really is: an easily trumpeted campaign slogan masquerading as a serious solution to the nation's dire straits. To the extent that it is really little more than a campaign slogan, it has worked brilliantly; "Herman Cain" and "9-9-9" have been front page news for nearly a week. Tens of millions of people who are likely unaware of what a 9% national sales tax would mean to their pocketbooks say they support it.

It is yet another stunning example of how the press can turn its 500,000 megawatt spotlight on an amoeba, thereby making it appear to be a Tyrannosaurus Rex.

The truth is, if ever instituted 9-9-9 would impose new taxes on easily more than half the American public, and, in essence, rob the seriously imperiled Peter to pay the already prosperous Paul. It never ceases to amaze what supposedly serious candidates will do, say or propose in order to get noticed. Don't people like Herman Cain understand that the restoration of America's economic health - and with it our status in the world -- will require far, far more than "simple solutions" and pithy slogans?

Apparently not.

While the press has been busily turning Herman Cain and 9-9-9 into the latest and greatest symbol of national salvation, it has, sadly, given precious little coverage to a hard truth presented by another person with the initials "H.C." --

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In [a speech last Friday before the Economic Club](#) of New York, Secretary Clinton said something of surpassing importance which by comparison, makes Herman Cain's 9-9-9 plan even more obviously simpleminded:

"Today our foreign and economic relations remain indivisible. Only now, our great challenge is not deterring any single military foe, but advancing our global leadership at a time when power is more often measured and exercised in economic terms

In other words, in today's world, economic power counts far more than military punch.

This is a point that most world leaders have grasped since the end of the Cold War more than 20 years ago. But it does not seem to have registered in Washington. As journalist Leslie Gelb wrote in a piece on Secretary Clinton's speech, *"There in the home of the non-sequitur, the inaccurate fact, the seven-second 'truth bite,' and the economics-challenged, the talk is about how much will be cut from the precious Pentagon budget over the next ten years."* The Pentagon budget is all the legislators on Capitol Hill and the media covering them know or understand about America's fiscal house of horrors. Again, to quote Mr. Gelb, *"For legislators, it's their political honey pot. For foreign-policy experts, it's their way to show their toughness. For media, the planes and tanks are visual lollipops."*



Today, China is the first global power in history not to be a global military power. Its military might is pretty much restricted to its own borders; its money travels everywhere. Today, Brazil, India and Turkey top the list of emerging powers. Why? Not because any of them is a regional military superpower, but because they can carry what economists refer to as "market weight." As Secretary Clinton put it in her speech to the Economic Club, *"And everywhere I travel, I see countries gaining influence less because of the size of their armies than because of the growth of their economies. . ."*

In concluding her speech, Secretary Clinton noted, *"A strong economy has been a quiet pillar of American power in the world. It gives us the leverage we need to exert influence and advance our interests. It gives other countries confidence in our leadership and a great stake in partnering with us."*

Talk about delivering a hard truth! In comparison to the trenchant message delivered by the Secretary of State, candidate Cain's 9-9-9 proposal has all the reality of a parlor silhouette; a shifting of tectonic plates as compared to a hiccup. Although Clinton and Cain are ostensibly speaking on the same subject, they approach it from a position of bipolar temporality: -- Cain's righting the

revenue stream for the sake of getting elected, vs. Clinton's rethinking the entire federal budget for the sake of America's future in the a radically changing world. We've become so accustomed to simple solutions that do not and cannot work, even while turning a blind eye and deaf ear towards hard truths that we will ultimately have to face. Simply stated, this cannot bode well for the future of our country.

It's the difference between presenting a simple solution and propounding a hard truth. Herman Cain has chosen the former; Hillary Clinton the latter.

The former, like junk food, looks and tastes great but ultimately contains little of nutritional value.

The latter, like a diet of fruits, vegetables and plenty of water, may be less tasty and hard to get used to, but ultimately leads to a longer, stronger, and healthier life.

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WITH APOLOGIES TO BOZ

Permit me to badly paraphrase Charles Dickens: "It was the best of weeks, it was the weirdest of weeks, it was a time of fascinating possibilities, it was a time of unfathomable lunacy . . ."

First, that which was "best" and carried with it "fascinating possibilities":

- After more than five years as a prisoner of Hamas, Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit was finally set free, in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian criminals, -- many of them terrorists and mass murderers serving life sentences in Israeli prisons. And despite the extraordinary one-sidedness of the prisoner exchange, nearly 80% of the Israeli public stood behind the Egyptian-brokered deal. For more than five years, Shalit name, face and plight has been kept alive on a daily basis -- not only in Israel, but in synagogues and non-Jewish houses of worship around the world. Many have questioned what Israel truly gains by securing the freedom of one soldier in exchange for more than one thousand terrorists -- many of whom have pledged themselves to future acts of violence? Although this is a question without a simple, straightforward answer, Israel's actions are not at all surprising. There exists within the great

corpus of Jewish law (*halacha*), the principle known as *pidyon sh'vuyim* -- literally, "Redemption of Captives." Indeed, the *Talmud* calls *pidyon sh'vuyim* a *mitzvah rabah* -- literally, "a great commandment." In Jewish law, captivity is viewed as being even worse than starvation and death; hence the command to redeem all captives. Might this lopsided prisoner exchange signal a change in relations between Palestinians and the Jewish State? Likely not, for *Hamas* still has the utter destruction of both Israel and the Jewish people as the central focus of their charter. Nonetheless, it's great that Gilad Shalit is back home . . .

- This week saw yet another of the world's most disgusting, psychopathic despots come to a violent end: Libyan dictator Moammar Kadhafi. Few -- if any -- mourn his passing. President Obama proclaimed that "The dark shadow of tyranny has been lifted." UN General Secretary Ban ki-Moon said that Kadhafi's death "marks an historic change" and warned that the "road ahead for Libya and its people will be filled with challenges." Alone among world leaders, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez called Kadhafi's death "an outrage," saying that the ousted Libyan mass murderer would be remembered "our whole lives as a great fighter, a revolutionary and a martyr." (Thereby proving that psychopaths are different from you and me . . .) What will become of Libya now that Kadhafi is dead is anyone's guess. In any event, his death is a definite step forward for a people, a country long imprisoned.
- Lastly, just this past Friday President Obama announced that the 40,000 American troops remaining in Iraq will be "home for the holidays," thus fulfilling a campaign promise and acceding to the reality of a depleted treasury and overwhelming public opinion. In more than eight years, the war has cost a minimum of \$1 trillion, and brought 4,400 American and more than 100,000 Iraqi deaths.) Predictably, the announcement has met with broad support within Democratic circles, and derisive commentary on the part of the G.O.P. (Mitt Romney: "*President Obama's astonishing failure to secure an orderly transition in Iraq has unnecessarily put at risk the victories that were won through the*

blood and sacrifice of thousands of American men and women.") And while American forces leave behind what one journalist called "a stumbling democracy, still beset by sectarian violence and tilting closer to its neighbor Iran," it is a likely sign that the Obama Administration has finally learned an important lesson: that if the U.S. is to transform the Middle East, it cannot be done through military might. Better to bring the troops home and begin to work on solving crises here at home.

Next, that which was "weird" and suffused with "unfathomable lunacy":

- During the most recent Republican presidential debate Texas Governor attacked former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney for once knowingly hiring a landscape firm that hired illegal immigrants. "The idea that you stand here before us and talk about that you're strong on immigration is, on its face, the height of hypocrisy," Perry scolded, wagging a finger at the erstwhile Republican frontrunner. "What's so weird about that?" one might well ask. Two things: first, this precise issue was raised again and again when Romney ran for the Republican nomination in 2008; second, when America's unemployment rate is above 9%, whether or not Romney had an illegal pulling weeds in his backyard isn't terribly on point. The plain fact is that most Americans who employ gardeners or landscaping services, go to the car wash, hire roofers to make repairs, or eat California-grown lettuce are benefitting from the labor of illegal aliens.
- Just hours after he stood next to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and accused Pakistan of harboring the enemies of his government, Afghan President Hamid Karzai said his country would support Pakistan if it ever went to war with the United States. This is the very definition of weird. In making this bizarre statement, it's almost as if Mr. Karzai were unaware that without the the United States -- and other Western allies -- he wouldn't be President of Afghanistan. He seems to have conveniently forgotten just who has been shoring up his

- administration with tens upon tens of billions of dollars and military support over the past decade.
- But the prize for unfathomable lunacy goes to Florida Governor Rick Scott, who has seen fit to post the salaries of tens of thousands university professors [online](#). This move comes on the very eve of his going to the legislature and pushing substantial higher education reforms. Having already dramatically shortchanged public in favor of charter schools, eliminating tenure for K-12 teachers and basing their salaries on how well students perform on an as-yet-to-be revamped standardized test, the nation's least popular governor is now going after [university professors](#) -- whom he wants voters to believe are vastly overpaid and thus, represent a serious roadblock on Florida's highway to economic recovery. In defending the governor's move, his spokesman said "it's just part of [his] effort to enhance the transparency of state government." At the same time, Scott has expressed interest in ending university tenure and "weeding out unproductive professors." (Note: as a longtime adjunct professor at both Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University, I can tell you that many of my colleagues are funded primarily through outside grant dollars, and *not* through the state.) Interestingly, while Scott has put the salaries of more than 50,000 professors out there for all to see, his office has yet -- despite repeated requests -- to release the names of companies that got taxpayer dollars over the past decade to create jobs that never materialized. The head of Scott's Department of Economic Opportunity said requests for the names of six companies paid \$38 million despite not creating a single job posed a "quandary" to him. "The governor's office," he said, "doesn't want to embarrass them by releasing their names." Such unfathomable lunacy!

Perhaps good old Boz was right:

"Vengeance and retribution take a long time; it is the rule!"

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



October 29, 2011

A GOAT ALSO HAS A BEARD . . .

The humorist Sam Levinson once quipped, "*A goat also has a beard, but that doesn't make him a rabbi.*" Lurking about a half-centimeter beneath the drollery was an obvious bit of wisdom: that looks can be deceiving; that form can easily obfuscate substance.

Never has Levinson's one-liner been more telling than today, the era of mass mendacity. To wit, just because a "fact" winds up in eighty bazillion e-mailboxes doesn't make it true. And yet, for many, the mere fact that the same "fact" or set of "facts" appears on hundreds -- if not thousands or tens of thousands -- of internet sites gives it at least the patina or veneer of verisimilitude. And, if one begins receiving the same email, breathlessly recounting the same "fact" or set of "facts" over and over and over, that patina can easily metamorphose into reality.

Case in point, the so-called "28th Amendment" to the U .S. Constitution.

Over the past two years, I have received the following email from no fewer than 75 people:

Warren Buffett, in a recent interview with CNBC, offers one of the best quotes about the debt ceiling:

"I could end the deficit in 5 minutes," he told CNBC. "You just pass a law that says that anytime there is a deficit of more than 3% of GDP, all sitting members of Congress are ineligible for re-election.

The 26th amendment (granting the right to vote for 18 year-olds) took only 3 months

& 8 days to be ratified! Why? Simple! The people demanded it. That was in 1971 . . . before computers, e-mail, cell phones, etc. Of the 27 amendments to the Constitution, seven (7) took 1 year or less to become the law of the land...all because of public pressure.

Warren Buffet is asking each addressee to forward this email to a minimum of twenty people on their address list; in turn ask each of those to do likewise. In three days, most people in The United States of America will have the message. This is one idea that really should be passed around.

Congressional Reform Act of 2011

1. TERM LIMITS:

12 years only, one of several possibilities:

A. Two Six-year Senate terms

B. Six Two-Year House Terms

C. One Six-Year Senate term and three Two-Year House terms.

2. NO TENURE/NO PENSION:

A Congressman collects a salary while in office and receives no pay when they are out of office.

3. CONGRESS (PAST, PRESENT & FUTURE) PARTICIPATES IN SOCIAL SECURITY:

All funds in the Congressional retirement fund move to the Social Security system immediately. All future funds flow into the Social Security system, and Congress participates with the American people. It may not be used for any other purpose.

4. CONGRESS CAN PURCHASE THEIR OWN RETIREMENT PLAN, JUST AS ALL AMERICANS DO.

5. CONGRESS WILL NO LONGER VOTE THEMSELES A PAY RAISE:

Congressional pay will rise by the lower of CPI or 3%.

6. CONGRESS LOSES THEIR CURRENT HEALTH CARE SYSTEM AND PARTICIPATES IN THE SAME HEALTH CARE SYSTEM AS THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

7. CONGRESS MUST EQUALLY ABIDE BY ALL LAWS THEY IMPOSE ON THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

8. ALL CONTRACTS WITH PAST AND PRESENT CONGRESSMEN ARE VOID EFFECTIVE 1/1/12.

The American people did not make this contract with Congressmen. Congressmen made all these contracts for themselves. Serving in Congress is an honor, not a career. The Founding Fathers envisioned citizen legislators, so ours should serve their term(s), then go home and back to work. If each person contacts a minimum of twenty people then it will only take three days for most people (in the U.S.) to receive the message. Maybe it is time.

Wow . . . where to begin? I have responded to this email more than two dozen times, generally beginning by saying that it has "more holes than a pound of Swiss Cheese." Permit me to "shave the goat's beard," thus proving that we are *not* dealing with a "rabbi."

The one bit of truth in the above is that Warren Buffett, in a July 7, 2011 interview with CNBC conducted by Becky Quick did indeed voice the quote about "ending the deficit in about five minutes." However, the rest of the email that so many of us have been receiving again and again and again, has virtually nothing to do with Mr. Buffett. He has never asked "each addressee to forward this email to a minimum of twenty people . . ."

What is now being called "The Congressional Reform Act of 2011," has been circulating on the Internet for the past two years. It was originally called "The Congressional Reform Act of 2009." Despite the fact that it is presented as a proposed 28th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, it has never been put forward by a single member of Congress. It is merely a form of Internet-based politicking -- a bearded goat masquerading as a rabbi.

Let's take a look at some of the specifics:

First and foremost, although a Constitutional Amendment could conceivably be passed without Congress voting on it (see [Article 5](#)), the chances of such an omnibus measure being enacted are precisely two: absolutely none and a lot less than that.

The issue about term limits, although understandable given the public's almost total disdain for our legislative branch, is a truly bad idea. The workings of Congress are not easily learned. Heck, it takes a couple of months to learn the quickest way from one's office to the House or Senate floor, let alone how to draft a bill, the proper procedures in floor debate, and the difference, say, between a "continuing resolution" and a "private petition." Under terms of the so-called "28th Amendment," Congress would wind up being run by the staff; they would be the only ones on the Hill to possess both the know-how and the institutional memory. And, being unelected, they are even less sensitive to the will of the people. Additionally enacting strict term limits pretty much guarantees that an even higher percentage of those running for office will be the truly wealthy -- those who can afford to self-finance . . .

No Tenure/No Pension: The truth is that members of Congress *cannot* retire with full pension after serving merely one term. Period! The size of one's Congressional pension is determined by a number of factors, the most important of which is the length of one's service. There are a handful of cases in which a person was elected to congress at a very young age, served several decades and then retired (or was defeated) while still relatively young. They *will* collect quite a bit in terms of retirement benefits over the rest of their natural life. However, this is the extreme exception, not the rule.

Paying into Social Security: Since 1984, all members of Congress have been required to pay into Social Security. (There are a few exceptions both inside and outside of government, but not for members of Congress.) Prior to 1984, the members of Congress did not pay into the Social Security Fund because they participated in a separate program for civil servants. That all changed in 1983 with the passage of [Public Law 98-21](#).

Some members of Congress participated in the older Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS); others in the newer Federal Employees' Retirement System (FERS). Regardless of which system they participate in, their pensions are funded by a combination of tax provisions and contributions from the participants. Members of Congress in the FERS plan must pay 6.2% of their salaries (up to the Social Security wage base of \$106,800) into Social Security, as well as 1.3% of their full salary (currently \$174,000) into the Civil Service and Retirement Disability Fund.

Congressional Health Plans: Members of Congress do purchase their own health plans. At the time of the most recent health care debate, there was an erroneous assumption that congressional efforts to establish a "public option" for health insurance would have required everyone (except members of Congress) to participate in a new federal insurance plan. The proposed legislation (which eventually failed) would merely have required everyone (including members of Congress) to have health insurance that met minimum benefit standards. The bill that did pass in March 2010 stated that "Members of Congress and congressional staff" will only have access to

plans they created by the health care bill or offered through the exchanges established by the bill. In other words, they are pretty much in the same boat as everyone else . . .

Congress Must Abide By All Laws: [Public Law 104-1](#) (the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995) made a variety of laws related to civil rights and workplace regulations applicable to the legislative branch of the federal government. Section 201 specifically prohibits sexual harassment, as well as harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, or national origin. Nonetheless, there are many emails which posit that members of Congress cannot be arrested for sexual harassment. There are also rumors that the children of members of Congress are exempt from paying back students loans. This is also a fabrication.

All contracts past and present are null and void as of 1/1/12: This is patent nonsense; Congress (and perhaps the Supreme Court under truly unique circumstances) is the only body empowered to make past contracts "null and void." The only way "all contracts past and present" could be overturned is if an entirely new House and Senate - - one having little institutional memory -- were to be elected. And as things go, that is simply never going to happen.

And so, the next time you receive the email about Warren Buffett urging everyone to pass along the proposed "28th Amendment" you might remember the words of Sam Levinson: "A goat also has a beard, but that doesn't make him a rabbi." Just because its on the Internet, that doesn't mean it's true.

Additionally, you may just wish to send out a link to this article . . .

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PRE-OCCUPIED

The Occupy Wall Street wave seems to have struck a raw nerve among the "1%" and their cheerleaders. Why else would they be characterizing the so-called "99%" of being an "unruly mob" made up of "Communists," and "anti-Semites," who "haven't found jobs" because of their "tattooed necks, gauged ears, facial piercings and dirty dreadlocks?"



Reading, watching or listening to the comments of such conservative stalwarts as [Newt Gingrich](#), [Bill Kristol](#), [Maybeth Hicks](#) and the [Emergency Committee For Israel](#) (created by the *Weekly Standard*'s Mr. Kristol) is to get the eerie feeling that Yogi Berra called "deja vu all over

again" -- a return to the late 1960s/early 1970s when the "New Left" was tarred with pretty much the same noxious brush. Back then, we were accused of being "atheistic Communists" who should "take a bath, get a haircut, get a job" and "go back to Russia where you belong."

40 years ago, the issues causing so many to march and to gather were war, peace, and economic justice; not so terribly dissimilar from that which undergirds the current wave of angry young Americans. Back then, we were accused of being spoiled brats; unpatriotic misfits who should "love it or leave it." And, truth to tell, many of us *were* rather spoiled; tuition was low, rent was cheap, gas cost about 35¢ a gallon and a CEO's were paid nearly 30 times more than an average worker. Today's wave is faced with a far more difficult world; one in which debt is endemic, the cost of living is stratospheric and a CEO is now making [more than 450 times that of an average worker](#). 40 years ago, despite protests, the future seemed like a limitless horizon; today, the deck is stacked against most. Back then, the political process was still viewed as a viable avenue for

progressive change; today, utter distrust of that process is a given -- by both the left *and* the right. And by that, we refer to the Occupy Wall Street wave and the Tea Party movement.

Both sides are stimulated by anger at a system which seems to exist only for the sake of its financial backers. Both sides are furious that the will of the people has been completely usurped by the wallet of the powerful. And yet, there are a couple of fascinating differences:

- In comparison to the Tea Party, the OWS folks are far more diverse. A typical OWS gathering includes people of all ages, colors, religions (or lack thereof) and political philosophies. Although there are undoubtedly some members of religious and ethnic minorities within the Tea Party ranks, the movement gives the impression of being overwhelmingly white and Christian.
- The structure (or again, lack thereof) of OWS is such that it all but defies cooptation. It is difficult to imagine OWS endorsing insurgent candidates, let being taken over by the Democratic Party in the way that the Tea Party now controls the G.O.P.'s far-right flank.
- In their speeches, arguments and exhortations, Tea Party luminaries aim for the gut; their platform can be embroidered on a tea towel -- "Lower taxes, less regulation, more freedom." OWS speakers, by comparison aim far more often for the head; their platform -- the ["99% Declaration"](#) (some of which is highly debatable and overly naive) -- reads more like a treatise than a series of slogans. (I wrote about this left-right dichotomy back in [April 2010](#) in a piece entitled "Head and Heart"). Additionally, for what it's worth, to me, OWS speakers sound more articulate . . .

When the Tea Party movement first came to the public's attention back in 2008-9, they were accused of being a racist faction filled with people who were against abortion, birth-control, public education and the teaching of Evolution; brandished weapons and believed President Obama was a foreign-born Muslim; and supported a whole host of far, far right loony-tune ideas. Immediately -- and understandably -- there was a cacophonous roar from the folks at Fox, the *Washington Times* and the G.O.P. itself, who screamed "How dare you characterize an entire movement because of the beliefs of a mere handful? They do not represent what the Tea Party movement is all about! And besides, what ever happened to free speech?"

Seems to me that in proclaiming the Occupy Wall Street wave to both anti-Semitic and anti-Israel, people like Bill Kristol, Newt Gingrich, Ann Coulter, *Washington Post* blogger [Jennifer Rubin](#) and the "Emergency Committee for Israel" -- among many others -- are doing precisely that which they hated having

done to their side: characterizing an entire movement or wave because of the actions or statements of a handful. The expression "What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" comes to mind. Without question, there *are* people on the left who are pro-Palestinian; some of them are attending OWS gatherings. And yes, we have seen photos of people holding up anti-Semitic, anti-



Zionist signs at OWS rallies. Investigating these claims of anti-Jewish, anti-Israel sentiments, the Anti Defamation League found them to be highly overstated and not worthy of further comment . . . to which they were accused of being a "mere arm of the Obama White House." Talk about *chutzpah* . . .

In truth, a sizeable percentage of the OSW wave is Jewish. There were actually well-attended services on *Yom Kippur* and a *haimesche succah* in the park, where Jews, Christians and Muslims came by for some shade, a snack and a singalong.

Just about everyone accusing the OSW wave of being in thrall to the anti-Semites has quoted the L.A. protester -- a woman named Patricia McAllister: "*I think that the Zionist Jews, who are running these big banks and our Federal Reserve, which is not run by the federal government . . . they need to be run out of this country.*" Or they have noted that on the American Nazi Party website, ". . . leader Rocky Suhayda has voiced support for Occupy Wall St. and asked '*Who hold the wealth and power in this country? The Judeo-Capitalists . . .*'"

It's all so terribly familiar. Back in the 60s and early 70s, the Establishment press first attacked the New Left for being dirty, bearded, pot-smoking hedonists. Then they labeled them "Communists," "Socialists," and "Anarchists" (as if the terms were synonymous) and warned that unless stopped, they would attempt to take over the United States by violent means. Those of us who were part of the New Left felt a measure of vindication; that in pointing out a series of injustices within the American political system -- and in pushing for peace and greater economic justice -- we had hit a raw nerve. Perhaps the same can be said of the Occupy Wall Street wave; that they too have hit a raw nerve by repeatedly pointing out some very difficult truths.

More power to you!

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November 12, 2011

CAIN AIN'T ABLE . . . AND NEITHER ARE PERRY, PAUL, GINGRICH ET AL

Writing a column on the ups-and-downs, the tumbles and stumbles of all those seeking the Republican presidential nomination is not easy. It seems about as pointless as writing a piece on a tennis match while it's in progress; in the time it takes to shape a thought or identify an apt expression, the ball can easily have crossed the net a dozen times or more, the advantage shifting with each volley, lob or smash. So too with the Republican field: each day brings new polls which may proclaim a new "leader of the pack." He who is in first on Monday, can easily rank third on Thursday. (**n.b.** My use of the pronoun "he" is deliberate; Michele Bachmann hasn't been a factor since August 14 -- the day *after* she won the Ames Straw Poll.)



This past week, the lion's share of ink has gone to Herman Cain and Rick Perry; the former because of his inability to address charges of sexual harassment with any honesty, consistency or professionalism; the latter because of an "Oops!" moment in which he could not recall the names of all three federal cabinet agencies he -- like most Republican hopefuls -- has pledged to eliminate.

As of today, it appears that the harassment charges against Herman Cain have yet to deal his candidacy a fatal blow. His core constituency is still, for the most part, with him; they are willing to look beyond both the charges and the candidate's various -- and varying -- counter-charges ("It's all a lie!" "It is a smear perpetrated by the Perry campaign!" "It is a conspiracy on the part of the liberal media!") and applaud him for his down-home, "common-sense" approach to addressing the nation's challenges and ills.

At the same time, it must be stated that Herman Cain is never -- repeat never -- going to be the Republican standard bearer. From day one, his has been a campaign based mostly on personality. That he lacks a professional organization capable of going the distance is obvious; one of the first things a seasoned campaign staff does is a complete and scrupulous vetting of their own candidate, so that hopefully, there won't be any surprises. One of the first rules in a serious campaign is that you have to know even more about your candidate's foibles than his or her opponents do. Cain's campaign staff clearly did not do their job. The second rule is to school your candidate on as many issues as humanly possible. By now it is clear that Herman Cain is the master of misstatement. But despite all this, he is still the front-runner -- for whatever *that's* worth -- in Florida. Look for Herman Cain to secure a show on Fox sometime next year . . .

Herman Cain's appeal has been his "plain-speaking," his "common-sense approach to the issues," and the fact that he's a political neophyte who comes from the world of business. His gaffs, misstatements and untruths have served to merely prop up and reify that appeal. Perry's appeal, on the other hand, has been his "good-old-boy" Acme-booted Texas swagger; that he was barely a "C student" at a Texas aggie college is actually a plus with his core supporters. At least he isn't some sort of effete Ivy League snob like Barack Obama . . . or George W. Bush.

Like Cain, Governor Rick Perry is never going to become the Republican nominee -- and not merely because he forgot to name the Department of Energy. Like Herman Cain, Rick Perry is simply "Not ready for prime time." This week's "junior moment" turns out to be merely the latest in a series of gaffs, misstatements and spells of gross inarticulateness. Seeing Perry do self-parody on Letterman has served to take a ton of steam out of the swagger. Although being able to hold one's own in a debate is not *necessarily* a criterion for being leader of the Free World, it sure helps one to be taken seriously as a potential candidate.

Whether they know it or not, both Cain and Perry are toast . . .

With the possible exception of former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney (recently referred to as "The Great White Nope") and former Utah Governor Jon Huntsman (who has pretty much pinned all his hopes on New Hampshire), the rest of the Republican field -- Cain, Perry, Bachmann, Paul, Santorum, and Gingrich -- is definitely made up of third-stringers. Romney and Huntsman -- both of whom are Mormons, which is a problem with many on the Christian right -- possess a measure of polish and grativas which the "simple six" clearly lack. Governor Romney is despised by many in the G.O.P., who consider him a "Republican in Name Only" (RINO) and continually flail him for being on every side of every issue. Huntsman is suspect not only because he served as President Obama's Ambassador to China, but because he has the audacity to state that manmade global warming is a reality. Should Romney become his party's nominee (highly likely), look for the Obama campaign to remind voters that as the

founder and head of Bain Capital (\$65 billion in assets as of 2010) he made a 9-figure fortune by purchasing companies and then selling off assets, which put literally tens of thousands of people out of work. Should Huntsman become his party's nominee (highly unlikely) look for the president to thank him again and again and again for his dedicated service in China.

This past week, former Speaker Newt Gingrich has seen his poll numbers on the rise. This is due in part because in comparison to Cain and Perry, Gingrich comes off as a "deep thinker" who "knows and understands the issues." Anyone who has read any of his books or given a serious listen to any of his speeches, will know that Mr. Gingrich is a charlatan; a pompously corrupt, self-merchandising corporation posing as a man with a plan.

Back on December 31, 2010, I published a piece entitled [*And You Thought Tomorrow Begins 2011*](#). In it, I wrote about five potential Republican candidates for president: Mitt Romney, Sarah Palin, Newt Gingrich, Haley Barbour and Mike Huckabee. I also suggested that it was likely that none of them would garner enough enthusiasm to be considered a viable challenger to President Obama. At the tail end of the article I went out on a limb and suggested that perhaps the party would, after finding fault with virtually every other candidate, draft former Florida Governor Jeb Bush. Stranger things have been known to happen. Will it happen? I just don't know . . .

One thing I do know: when it comes to choosing a president, I want and expect someone who is a lot smarter, better educated and more polished than I.

And from where I sit, that person is still Barack Obama.

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November 20, 2011

MITT ROMNEY: CAMPAIGNING IN POETRY

Years ago, Governor Mario Cuomo distilled the essence of the political process into precisely eight insightful words: "You campaign in poetry; you govern in prose." By



this, Cuomo sought to instruct future generations of office-seekers about the perverse dichotomy that exists between the theater of words and the reality of deeds. In a perfect world no such dichotomy would exist; the soaring promises one made during a campaign would be soon become the law of the land. But this is far from a perfect world; the gap between what candidates may proclaim and then as office holders can do is indeed vast. And woe to the man or woman who forgets where they stood last year as opposed to this week . . .

The current crop of Republican presidential aspirants would do well to heed Cuomo's dictum - none more so than former Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney.

Over the years, Governor Romney - who seemingly has been running for president most of his adult life - has been characterized by both friend and foe alike as a man who "never met a position he could not espouse." Whether it is on issues as diverse as war and peace, healthcare, abortion and stem-cell research, taxes, terrorism or nuclear weapons, Romney has been all over the map. To watch Romney denigrate and disown the very healthcare program he instituted in Massachusetts - in order to deride and defame the president's program - is to witness a man sinking in quicksand yet declaring it solid ground.

Even more glaringly apparent are Romney's flip flops and position changes on Iran. In late October 2007, shortly after President George W. Bush announced tougher economic sanctions against Iran, then-candidate Romney applauded the president's action. Nonetheless, he was quoted at the time as saying, *'If for some reasons they continue down*

their course of folly toward nuclear ambition, then I would take military action if that's available to us,' He further suggested that as president, he would “. . . advocate a military blockade or ‘bombardment of some kind’ if Iran did not yield to diplomatic and economic pressure to give up its nuclear program.” Fascinatingly, when asked in 2007



whether he would need Congressional consent for a military raid on Iran, Romney said that he would have to pass the issue by his lawyers first – perfectly understandable for a CEO, perfectly unthinkable for a Commander-in-Chief. “You sit down with your attorneys and tell you what you have to do,” Romney said at the time. Responding to this, a Wall Street Journal editorial wryly noted, “Egad. Call in the attorneys? Perhaps it is Mr. Romney’s experience in business that taught him to want lawyers at his elbow, given that no CEO can survive without them these days [D]eferred to lawyers to tell a President when he can and cannot use force to defend the country is not the proper understanding of executive power under the Constitution, and it is dangerous if it is the first instinct of a Commander in Chief. Mr. Romney should have said that a President’s first duty is to do whatever it takes to protect the United States, and that he’d have the Constitutional authority to use military force to do so Mr. Romney doesn’t need a lawyer; he needs to reread the Federalist Papers.”

In November 2011, still-candidate Romney has toned down the bellicosity. In a piece he published recently in the [Wall Street Journal](#), Romney now declares, “I want peace. And if I am president, I will begin by imposing a new round of far tougher economic sanctions on Iran. I will do this together with the world if we can, unilaterally if we must. I will speak out forcefully on behalf of Iranian dissidents. By this, he clearly means to imply that President Obama has failed to impose “tough economic sanctions” and has not “sp[oken] out forcefully on behalf of Iranian dissidents.” Truth to tell, President Obama has rallied the international community and isolated Iran. Moreover, the cooperation of our international partners has allowed us to impose the most aggressive set of sanctions that Iran has ever faced, including persuading the U.N. to impose a fourth round of sanctions in 2010 and signing tough legislation a month later. With regards to supporting Iranian dissidents, as far back as 2009, President Obama “strongly condemned” what he characterized as the “unjust actions” in response to Iranian protesters. He described the American government as being “appalled and outraged.”



Governor Romney has further promised *"I will back up American diplomacy with a very real and very credible military option. I will restore the regular presence of aircraft carrier groups in the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf region simultaneously. I will increase military assistance to Israel and coordination with all of our allies in the region."* One

wonders whether Romney understands Mario Cuomo's distinction between poetry and prose. If he did, he would quickly recognize that his promises are, to use an old expression, "A day late and a dollar short." While the Obama Administration is pursuing a diplomatic channel – which Romney and the other Republican aspirants view as a weakness -- it has consistently refused to take any options off the table. Whether Governor Romney knows it or not there already is a full-time carrier presence in the Persian Gulf, and carriers are frequently present in the Mediterranean to support deployments in the Middle East. The record shows that President Obama has sought unprecedented levels of security assistance for Israel, significantly increasing U.S. military aid to Israel, conducting military exercises, and financing the "Iron Dome" mortar and rocket defense system. As the *Washington Post* put it, "Obama has also greatly strengthened security and military ties with the Jewish state and defended Israel repeatedly at the United Nations.

It is an axiom of modern campaign politics that Republican hopefuls must run as far to the right of center as they dare during primary season and then, once nominated, gravitate towards the center for November. It is clear that on domestic issues and questions such as abortion, the beginning of life and healthcare – to name but three – Mitt Romney is far, far further to the right in 2011 than he was in 2006 -- or '07, '08, '09 or '10. And when it comes to foreign policy and defense issues, he is unaware or out of touch with what the Obama Administration has accomplished. He is merely reciting poetry while the president is governing in prose.

Not only does Mitt Romney need to "reread the Federalist Papers"; he should familiarize himself with the wisdom of Mario Cuomo . . .

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November 27, 2011

THIS WEEK'S GUEST COLUMNIST: GOD

An introductory note: Lest anyone feel the necessity of getting their knickers in a twist over this week's piece, please note before reading that it is satire, herein defined as "a literary composition in verse or prose, in which human folly or vice are held up to scorn, derision or ridicule." It will be left to the individual reader's determination as to whether the piece is literary . . . or literate.

It seems that once again, President Obama is in deep water with many of those who claim to be my most loyal adherents. From what I read and hear, these children of mine are acting . . . well, very childish. They are all terribly exorcised over the fact that the president did not mention me during his brief Thanksgiving address last Thursday (Although he *did* end his message with "And may God bless you" and *did* issue thanks in an earlier speech while pardoning a turkey). "Somebody ought to remind Obama that when Americans sit down around a meal today and give thanks, they give thanks to God," one columnist acidly noted. A Fox News personality complained that the president's "remarks were void of any religious references although Thanksgiving is a holiday traditionally steeped in giving thanks and praise to God." Yet a third -- one Ben Shapiro -- tweeted "Unreal that Obama doesn't mention God in Thanksgiving message. Militant atheist. To whom does he think we are giving thanks?"

For the love of God! (Or should I say "For the love of Me?") With all the unemployment, gross income inequality, global warming and international chaos going on around the planet, this is the best they can come up with? This is the most important issue to discuss? If giving me my due in public is so all fired important, why didn't these same folks go after Newt Gingrich, Mitt Romney or Rick Santorum -- none of whom



mentioned me in *their* Thanksgiving messages? Its all reather silly and peruile, and brings to mind a couple of quotes from two of my most gifted children: William Shakespeare and King Solomon. The first two come from Willie -- "*Much Ado About Nothing*," and "*What a piece of work is a man . . .*" The second is from the quill of King Shlomo who, writing under the pen name of Koheleth (that's *Ecclesiastes* to my non-Jewish children) noted "There's nothing new under the sun."

Do all those currently deriding Barack Obama for failing to mention me really believe they've hit on something new? Stuff and nonsense! More importantly, are they really all that outraged and offended by his omission? Likely not, but hey, anything they can tar the man with they see as fair game.

How well I remember the political food fight between Adams and Jefferson back in 1800. To me, it seems like only yesterday. First, campaigners for the young "Sage of Monticello" accused "Old Sink or Swim" of having a "hideous hermaphroditical character, which has neither the force and firmness of a man nor the gentleness and sensibility of a woman." In response, Adams' surrogates called Jefferson "a mean-spirited, low-lived fellow, the son of a half-breed Indian squaw, sired by a Virginia mulatto father . . . a weakling, an atheist, a libertine, and a coward!" One thing you've got to hand them: back then calumnies had a lot more linguistic "oopmh" then they do today.



Now, did Jefferson's mouthpieces really, truly believe that Adams was a "hideous hermaphroditical creature?" Of course not, although it did make for a pretty nifty alliteration. Likewise, I can tell you that none of Adams' handlers went to bed at night thinking "Jefferson is a half-breed atheist." So why did they even bother giving voice to these slurs? Politics and the art of winning, plain and simple. Indeed, there *is* "Nothing new under the sun." I told you King Sol was one gifted son-of-a-gun . . .

Personally, I can tell you that I get more than my share of thanks from people attending churches, synagogues, mosques and other assorted houses of worship. I don't need -- nor particularly want -- thanks from politicians on the hustings. I am humbled by all those invoking my name and giving thanks before meals; I am delighted whenever anyone engages in feeding the poor, clothing the naked or caring for the orphaned, the homeless or the sick. I am *not* in the least offended when people take the time to question my existence or wonder aloud why bad things happen to good people. Doing

justice, loving mercy and walking with humility; these have always been my three highest priorities for all of you.

On the other hand, I am really stupefied by all those who use my name -- or worse, call upon me -- to justify acts of violence, bigotry, destruction or utter selfishness. Please be forewarned: claiming to know my will better than the next guy is not a good way to earn divine points; proclaiming that you are more pious or beloved than the next guy is the precise opposite of piety or divine love. How person X, Y, or Z will be judged in the end of days -- and when that end will come -- is *my* business, not yours.

Now, with regards to politics in the United States, let me state emphatically that I lean toward neither the Democrats nor the Republicans; I favor neither the Tea Party nor the Occupy Wall Street Crowd; that I can just as easily love and bless a conservative as a Communist. As the one whose very essence is existence, I transcend all labels. If you wish to know something of my political ideals, study the Bible; don't just quote it from memory -- really, truly study it along with as many commentaries as you can comprehend. There you will discover that I am on the side of the poor and downtrodden; that I loathe war and baseless hatred; that I really, truly have created you to be each other's keepers. What you will *not* find is that I have a position on Capital Gains taxes, Oil Depletion Allowances, prayer in the public schools, carrying concealed weapons are a thousand-and-one other temporal issues. (Although I must say, having paid a great deal of attention to how my children are treated in the workplace, I am far more pro-labor than management.) Do not -- I repeat DO NOT -- use my name to justify your political platforms; I am not here to endorse anyone's candidacy. For you see, my dear children, I really, truly do believe in the separation of church -- and synagogue and mosque -- and state. I mean after all, it is *I* who created Thomas Jefferson.

Personally, I could care less if President Obama mentions me in a Thanksgiving address. That is mere verbiage. What I do care about is how he -- and his administration and the Congress and the nation he tries to lead act -- not what they say.

So roll up your sleeves, park your arch pettiness by the side of the road, and try working together for the common good -- not just the enrichment of the already rich.

That will be thanks enough . . .

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THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT THE NAME



For nearly a half-century, I have been slowly, surely, inexorably making my way through the entire Dickens literary *corpus*; all twenty novels, four short story collections, plus nine additional works of non-fiction, poetry and plays. Some, like *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *David Copperfield*, I have already read five or six times. Others, like *Dombey and Sons*, *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*, I have read only once. I've yet to crack the cover of *The Uncommercial Traveller*, *Mugby Junction* or *The Frozen Deep*, Dickens one and only play. But I'll get to these

any day now . . .

Besides being hands down the greatest prose writer in the history of the English language, Charles Dickens was an activist who used his novels as vehicles for underscoring some of English society's most egregious wrongs. Along the way, he also managed to imbue hundreds upon hundreds of characters with the most delightfully whimsical and telling names. Among my all-time favorites are:

- **Serjeant Buzfuz**, a barrister in *The Pickwick Papers*.
- **Mr. M'Choakumchild**, the nasty teacher in *Hard Times*.
- **Thomas Gradgrind**, a retired mill owner, also in *Hard Times*.
- **Abel Magwitch**, the convict who was Pip's benefactor in *Great Expectations*.
- **Newman Noggs**, the impoverished clerk in *Nicholas Nickleby*.
- **Seth Pecksniff**, the architect who "never built anything" in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.
- **Wackford Squeers**, the proprietor of Dothboy's Hall in *Nicholas Nickleby*.

- **Prince Turveydrop**, the dance school proprietor in *Bleak House*, and
- **Alfred and Sophronia Laemlle**, the deluded society couple in *Our Mutual Friend*.

You just don't run across such fantastic names in novels -- let alone everyday life -- anymore, and for one obvious reason: Charles Dickens has been dead for more than 140 years.

But wait: What about **Newton Leroy Gingrich**? Although the name was obviously *not* dreamed up by Dickens, it nonetheless does carry the onomatopoetic whimsicality for which "Boz" was famous. And if the name **Newton Gingrich** is purely Dickensian in sound, so too, in many ways is the man in reality. Who but a Dickens character would come up with the idea of repealing child labor laws and making 9-year olds clean toilets in public schools, or resurrecting orphanages for the purpose of housing the children of welfare recipients? (It is somewhat ironic that the one fellow who is offering the loudest, most resounding defense of Gingrich these days has an even more Dickensian-sounding name and persona than he: **Rush Limbaugh**.)

Who but a creature of Dickens could be so pompously self-important or motivated by the all-mighty dollar? How about [*Hard Times'* Josiah Bounderby](#) and [*Martin Chuzzlewit's* Tigg Montague](#)? Then there is the monumental hypocrisy of the man: Gingrich is the fellow who actually sought to convict President Bill Clinton for lying about a sexual dalliance with a White House intern at the precise moment that *he* -- Gingrich -- was cheating on his second wife with a junior member of his House office staff . . . who would become his third wife. How reminiscent of Dickens' most hypocritical creation, **Seth Pecksniff**, whom Boz likened to ". . . a direction-post, which is always telling the way to a place, and never goes there."



Then too, Gingrich is the fellow, who when asked last month about precisely what advice he gave to Freddie Mac back in 2006-07 in his role as a "historian" that was worth more than \$1.6 million, responded:

"My advice as a historian, when they walked in and said to me, 'We are now making loans to people who have no credit history and have no record of paying back anything, but that's what the government wants us to do,' as I said to them at the time, this is a bubble. This is insane. This is impossible."

And yet, in the best Pecksniffian tradition, in an April 2007, interview promoting the virtues of Freddie Mac, Gingrich said:

"I think it is telling that there is strong bipartisan support for maintaining the GSE (Government-Sponsored Enterprise) model in housing. There is not much support for the idea of removing the GSE charters from Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae. And I think it's clear why. The housing GSEs have made an important contribution to home ownership and the housing finance system . . . Millions of people have entered the middle class through building wealth in their homes, and there is a lot of evidence that home ownership contributes to stable families and communities. These are results I think conservatives should embrace and want to extend as widely as possible. So while we need to improve the regulation of the GSEs, I would be very cautious about fundamentally changing their role or the model itself."

In this, the former Speaker reminds one of Dickens' **Professor Redlaw** ([*The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*](#)), who, visited by a phantom on Christmas Eve, is given the "gift" of forgetting the past. The gift turns out to be a curse as it is passed on to all those Redlaw touches. For Gingrich, this would be nirvana -- if everyone he touched were to forget what he did or said in the past. Fortunately, Professor Redlaw -- and his curse are pure fiction. Oh that Newt were so.

Newt Gingrich has been in the media crosshairs for so many decades that, as one pundit noted, " . . . even his baggage has baggage." Most believe that his initial impetus for getting into the race was not becoming president, but rather extending the reach -- not to mention the profitability -- of "Gingrich, Inc." Now that he is experiencing the phenomenon that goes variously by the name "Flavor-of-the-Moment," and "Anybody But Mitt," he is taking his candidacy seriously. And that is why he is spewing even more "transformational ideas" than normal; it keeps him in the headlines. Gingrich has just enough political smarts to know that in the event he actually manages to capture the Republican nomination, many of his current statements are going to come back to bite him on the rear. Statements like:



- *"Really poor children in really poor neighborhoods have no habits of working and have nobody around them who works. So they literally have no habit of showing up on Monday. They have no habit of staying all day. They have no habit of 'I do this and you give me cash' unless it's illegal."*
- *"I am much like Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, I'm such an unconventional political figure . . ."*
- *"I was not a presider, I was the leader . . . I think Henry Clay's probably the only other speaker to have been a national leader and a speaker of the House simultaneously."*

Gingrich, like Dickens' most infamous candidate for political office -- **Horatio Fizkin** of *Pickwick Papers* fame -- is never going to be elected. As the *New Republic's* Jonathan Bernstein notes, *"He's still the same candidate with all the same baggage. He's still got his history of deviations from party orthodoxy on practically every issue, and the ethics violations,*

and the marital problems. He's still the same guy who wound up not being trusted at all by those who worked with him when he was in office. And he's still got a long history of just not being very popular with anyone outside of the most intense of intense partisans . . ."

I would recommend that if Newt Gingrich -- who seems to believe that he is the equal of history's great men and women -- wants to do something truly transformational, he should memorize the fictional Sidney Carton's exit line from *A Tale of Two Cities*, and then simply fade away.

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THE HIJACKING OF ISRAEL

This past Thursday, what remains of the Republican presidential field made a visit to a gathering of the Republican Jewish Coalition. By the end of the evening, it was hard to tell if the six assembled candidates -- Rep. Ron Paul was absent, having been "disinvited" -- were running for **POTUS** (President of the United States) or **PMOI** (Prime Minister of Israel). One after the other, the six sought to portray him/herself as the best, the strongest, the most stalwartly unflinching friend of Israel in the room, if not on the planet. Each in turn gave their *tum-lev yisrael* (Israeli *bona fides*) and sought to outdo each other in the actions they promised to take on their first day in the White House.

All that was missing were the stereotypical Israeli shorts, sandals and *rafal* hat.

Senator Rick Santorum received a solid round of applause when he informed the crowd that he and his wife " . . . have been to Israel where we purchased one of those tiles that says 'pray for the peace of Jerusalem' and we have that in our kitchen right above our sink . . ."

Not to be outdone, Governor Rick Perry shared that he and *his* wife had been repeatedly been to the "Holy Land," especially, ". . . the Western Wall, that most sacred symbol of . . . where Jewish pilgrims gather to pray today."

Then came Rep. Michele Bachmann's turn: "The day after I graduated from high school, I got on a plane and went to Israel where I worked on a *kibbutz* . . ."

Former Speaker Newt Gingrich said that "Within two hours of taking the oath of office, I'll move the US embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem." Not to be outdone on this particular issue, Rep. Bachmann added "I've already raised the money

privately for moving the embassy, and I'll recognize any future annexation of settlements by Israel."

Governor Romney chastised the Obama Administration for "pushing an appeasement policy," pledged that as POTUS, he would make Israel his first foreign destination, and firmly pledged that "Iran's Ayatollahs will not be permitted to obtain nuclear weapons on my watch." To listen to Bachmann, Santorum and Gingrich, it would seem that they are more than willing to take America into a war with Iran. While this might make for a good applause line in front of a partisan conservative crowd, it is in reality nothing more than campaign rhetoric. For once a president takes the oath of office, co* (he or she) no longer has the luxury of demagogic independence; now co* must deal with Congress, the Joints Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, DIA, FBI and a thousand-and-one other governmental entities . . . and reality.

Comedy Central's Jon Stewart skewered the candidates for pandering to the Republican Jewish.

Jon Stewart aside, there is far more going on here than mere parodic humor. For what these Republican candidates are attempting is nothing short of the hijacking of Israel as a positive political plank. Not only are the Republicans aiming for Jewish votes and dollars; they are also seeking the votes of evangelical Christians who make up large portions of Republican primary voters in South Carolina and caucus-goers in Iowa. They are also wagering that by making themselves out to be "the best friend Israel ever had," and painting President Obama and the Democrats as "blame Israel firsters," they can pick up crucial votes in general election swing states like Pennsylvania and Florida. And, by keeping Jewish voters' hearts and minds riveted on Israel, they hope to keep them from paying too much attention to GOP positions on a whole host of other crucial issues like women's rights, job creation, immigration, the environment, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, tax breaks for the rich and the separation of church and state.

In hijacking Israel, Republican strategists seem to have reached the cynical conclusion that for Jewish voters, Israel is the main -- if not the sole -- concern they have in determining who they will support for president; that somehow the so-called "pocket book issues" are of secondary or even tertiary importance.

Here in Jewish voter-rich South Florida that strategy has, to an extent, been working. By repeatedly portraying themselves as more Hawkish than Moshe Dayan -- as opposed to President Obama, whom they portray as more than ready to "throw Israel under the bus" -- the Republicans have indeed been making some inroads.

The other day, I was giving a lecture before a fairly large group of Jewish seniors. During the Q&A at the end of the lecture one elderly woman asked me "What do you think about President Obama when it comes to Israel?"

"What do *you* think?" I asked her.

"He's the worst president we've ever had. When it comes to Israel, he's on the side of the Palestinians. He wants Israel to go back to the pre-1967 borders . . . and, he's always apologizing for America to the Arabs."

"Actually," I began in response, "President Obama never said he wanted to 'go back to the pre-1967 borders.' Rather, he said . . ."

"That's not true," the woman interrupted. "He *did* say that!"

"And where did you get that bit of misinformation?" I asked.

"It's . . . it's just true!" the woman shouted.

"And how many of you here this afternoon agree with our friend?" I asked.

About a third of those in front of me raised their hands. I had my work cut out for me . . .

"In reality," I said, President Obama called for using the pre-1967 borders with 'mutually agreed-upon swaps' as the basis for future negotiations. And in that, he was saying the same thing as Presidents Clinton, and George W. Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu . . ."

"That's not true," a man answered. "That's just not true. The Israelis hate Obama . . ."

I then went through a brief laundry list of things this president and his administration have done for Israel:

- Sent Israel with the largest-ever security package (\$2.775 billion) in 2010.
- Surpassed the 2010 package with a \$3 billion package in 2011.
- Repeatedly opposed unilateral efforts at a Palestinian state.
- Provided Israel with the most sophisticated missile defense system in the world.
- Vetoed the 2010 Security Council resolution criticizing Israel's construction of settlements,
- Ordered the largest-ever joint US-Israel military exercises in history, and

- Supported, along with 10 other nations, the Gaza Counter-Arms Smuggling Program.

I also informed them that according to [a poll released just this week](#) by the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings, 54% of the Israeli public says they have a favorable view of President Obama, as opposed to just 41% a year ago.

"That's not true," a woman responded.

"OK," I said. "The hour's getting late and I have to be leaving. But before I go, let me ask you a question: If President Obama's so bad for Israel, who are you going to vote for? Are you going to be happy voting for someone who wants to privatize Social Security, cut Medicare, eliminate a woman's right to choose and erase the line separating church and state? Please, do yourselves a favor and think about it."

Indeed, think about it . . .

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MT. RUSHMORE AFTER DARK



(The following "conversation" is only partly a product of my imagination; all of the italicized lines represent actual quotes from the four men looking out from Mt. Rushmore . . .)

T. Roosevelt: "Psst . . . Mr. Lincoln . . . Are you awake? In the mood for a chat? I've got a horrific case of insomnia and just know that I'm going to be up all

night. I've got a lot on my mind, and can't stand just being idle . . . must do something to wile away the night."

A. Lincoln: "Yes, Mr. Roosevelt, I am also awake, and also have a lot on *my* mind. I'm always up for a good jawing. As the saying goes, 'I like talking with a man who likes to talk.' So, on what topics shall we speak this beautiful moonlit night? And by the way, after all these years, isn't it about time you started calling me 'Abe?'"

T. Roosevelt: "Thanks . . . Abe. And likewise, please call me Teddy . . . it's much more friendly-sounding than 'Theodore.' Now, as to what's on my mind . . . well, to be quite blunt, it's the state of politics . . . indeed, the very direction of these United States. And when I say 'politics,' I mean not to refer just to the Democrats or our fellow Republicans, although I must say -- and in this I suspect you shall concur -- it is not at all the party we belonged to and led in our day. It seems to me *we* used



to be so much more concerned with people than with power . . . with speaking to the point rather than obfuscating the issue. I mean today, *a typical vice of American politics is the avoidance of saying anything real on real issues.*"

A. Lincoln: "Ah, you've noticed that too, have you? Yes indeed, this current crop of Republicans -- and many Democrats -- when you get down to it, are seemingly incapable of addressing real issues with anything approaching sincerity or conviction. Or of even speaking the truth. Nonetheless, *I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.* And as for our party -- of which I am proud to have been its first standard-bearer, I remember us being *for both the man and the dollar, but in the case of conflict, the man before the dollar.* I am greatly saddened to conclude that this is no longer the case. *These capitalists generally act harmoniously to fleece the people,* and our partisans are either totally blind to the fact at best, or in full agreement at worst."

T. Jefferson: "Excuse me gentlemen: mind if an old Virginian joins in the conversation? I couldn't help but overhearing what you are talking about, and am likewise quite



exorcised by the craven mindlessness of our republic's leaders. Seems to me that your party has been hijacked by a faction whose fuel is anger and fear . . . leavened with a rather large dose of sectarian apocalypticism."

T. Roosevelt: "Ah President Jefferson! How wonderful having you and your felicitous phraseology enter our conversation . . . hope our chattering did not awaken you."

T. Jefferson: "No, not at all. You may remember that in life, I rarely slept more than 3 hours at a stretch. From the time I was a mere lad, I was always of the thought that too much sleep would likely deprive me of too many experiences . . . In any event, I am truly concerned about how little the nation's politicians or leaders actually lead or act; of how much they follow or react. And what's more, it seems to be a virtual mania these days to promote ignorance and denigrate knowledge. *If a nation expects to be ignorant and free, in a state of civilization, it expects that which was never was . . . and never shall be.* Indeed, your party has definitely been taken over by a beast."

A. Lincoln: "I certainly agree with you there Tom. As I have often said, *When you have an elephant by the hind legs and he's trying to run away, it's best to let him run away.* I think that before too long, our Republican leaders will wake up and see that the faction they nurtured and anointed is, if left unchecked, going to lead them into 40 years of wandering in the political wilderness. I mean, this notion that by cutting taxes on the wealthiest 1% somehow the 99% will be better off is political



alchemy; I mean, *how many legs does a dog have if you call a tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg . . .*"

T. Roosevelt: "With all due respect, President Jefferson . . . uh . . . Tom . . . As much as I do agree with you on the issue of political ignorance, I'm not so sure about your take on the religious aspect of the problem. I mean after all, you've never been what might be called a 'believer.'"

T. Jefferson: "Ah, there you have it wrong, my dear Teddy! As I once wrote my good friend, Dr. Rush, *To the corruptions of Christianity I am, indeed, opposed; but not to the genuine precepts of Jesus Himself. I am a Christian, in the only sense in which He wished any one to be: sincerely attached to His doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to Himself every human excellence; and believing He never claimed any other.*" I have nothing against religion; it's just that I cannot fathom it playing such a seemingly crucial role in our national political discussion. *The truth is, the greatest enemies of the doctrines of Jesus are calling themselves the expositors of them, who have perverted them for the structure of a system of fancy absolutely incomprehensible, and without any foundation in his genuine words. Nonetheless I remain a thorough-going optimist. A little patience and we shall see the reign of witches pass over, their spells dissolved, and the people recovering their true sight, restoring their government to its true principles . . .*"



G. Washington: "Thomas: might your reference to 'witches' be an illusion to that young woman from Delaware? Seems to me that more than concerning ourselves with witches and warlocks hovering about the nation's political arena, we would do well to *guard against the postitures of pretended patriotism.*"

T. Jefferson: "How delightful having you join our conversation, Mr. President. I certainly agree that I too am greatly bothered by those whose patriotic fervor will not permit them to see -- or even consider -- the opinion of another without declaring it to be essentially treasonous. These modern folks seem to have forgotten that *every difference in opinion is not a difference in principle.*"

G. Washington: "Yes, Thomas. There you have it right. I remember writing Mr. Hamilton, *Differences in political opinions are as unavoidable as, to a certain point, they may perhaps be necessary; but it is exceedingly to be regretted that subjects cannot be discussed with temper on the one hand, or decisions submitted to without having the motives, which led to them, improperly implicated on the other; and this regret borders on chagrin when we find that men of abilities, zealous patriots, having the same general objects in view, and the same upright intentions to prosecute them, will not exercise more charity in deciding on the opinions and actions of one another. . .*"

T. Roosevelt: "Gentlemen: I regret to say that the dawn is breaking, and soon the tourists are going to be gathering and taking all those interminable photos and videos. Perhaps it will be best for us to continue the conversation in the near future, for there is so very much to discuss. Next time, perhaps we can get into the corruption which pervades the entire political process. Perhaps as we sign off, each of us can ante up a thought in anticipation of our next chat. For me it would be, *When they call the roll in the Senate, the Senators do not know whether to answer "Present" or "Not guilty."* How about you Abe?"

A. Lincoln: *"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and cause me to tremble for safety of my country; corporations have been enthroned, an era of corruption in High Places will follow, and the Money Power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the People, until the wealth is aggregated in a few hands, and the Republic destroyed."*

T. Roosevelt: Tom?

T. Jefferson: *"You and I have formerly seen warm debates and high political passions. But gentlemen of different politics would then speak to each other and separate the business of the Senate from that of society. It is not so now. Men who have been intimate all their lives, cross the streets to avoid meeting, and turn their heads another way, lest they should be obliged to touch their hats. This may do for young men with whom passion is enjoyment. But it is afflicting to peaceable minds. Tranquility is the old man's milk."*



T. Roosevelt: "The final thought goes to you, General Washington, and then we shall bid *adieu* to this moonlit night . . ."

G. Washington: *"Few men have virtue to withstand the highest bidder . . ."*

T. Roosevelt: "And together, may we all say, *Amen* . . ."

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FACTS: A CURE FOR FOXIFICATION?



Back in December 1770, John Adams, noted in a legal brief ("Argument in Defense of the soldiers in the Massachusetts Massacre Trials") that "*Facts are stubborn things; and whatever may be our wishes, our inclinations, or the dictates of our passion, they cannot alter the state of facts and evidence.*" Whenever I come across this quote, I find myself wondering were Adams, the 'Colossus of Independence' alive today, would he disavow his insightful gem? Would he turn on the TV, watch an hour of Fox News and then amend his statement to read "Facts are *stupid* things" -- which in fact Ronald Reagan would say more than two centuries later?

Today, more than ever, facts have become subjective; more frequently than not they are what the speaker says they are. And here, I am not referring to the *interpretation* of facts, but rather the deliberate avoidance and ignorance of them. Take as but one example, all those who breathlessly inform their partisans -- despite a welter of statistical evidence to the contrary -- that "Obama's stimulus hasn't created a single job." Standing in opposition to this one subjective "fact" is a set of statistical ones -- provided in a [Congressional Budget Office report](#) which concludes that the stimulus "*increased employment by between 1.4 million and 3.3 million people, compared with what employment would have been otherwise.*"

Ah facts . . . such stupid things.

As a partial antidote to what might be called the "Foxification of Facts," I hereby present the following series of stubborn statistics. (The facts presented herein are all gleaned from the [Bureau of Labor Statistics Website](#)):

Fox Fact #1: Unemployment is always higher under Democrats:

The reality: Going back to 1953, every time America had 8 or more consecutive years of Republican administrations in the White House, unemployment starts low with them but ends up ABOVE 6% at the end of those eight years. On the other hand, going back to 1953, every time we have had 8 or more consecutive years of Democratic administrations, unemployment starts high (handed to them by the GOP) but then ends BELOW 6%.

Don't believe me? Let's check the facts:

DEMOCRAT - Harry Truman

January 1953: Democrat Harry Truman hands the White House over to Republican Dwight Eisenhower.

Unemployment Rate (January '53) = 2.9%

REPUBLICAN - Dwight Eisenhower

January 1953, Takes White House..... Unemployment Rate that month = 2.9%
January 1961, Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 6.6%
NOTE: After 8 years, a Republican hands the White House back over to a Democrat with **unemployment ABOVE 6%**.

DEMOCRATS - John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson

January 1961, Kennedy Takes White House.... Unemployment Rate that month = 6.6%

January 1969, Johnson Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 3.4%

NOTE: After 8 years, a Democrat hands the White House back over to a Republican with **unemployment BELOW 5%**.

Republicans -- Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford

January 1969, Nixon Takes White House.... Unemployment Rate that month = 3.4%

January 1977, Ford Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.5%

NOTE: After 8 years, a Republican (again) hands the White House back over to a Democrat with **unemployment ABOVE 6%**.

DEMOCRAT – Jimmy Carter

January 1977, Carter Takes White House.... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.5%

January 1981, Carter Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.5%

REPUBLICANS – Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush (Bush # 1)

January 1981, Reagan Takes White House.... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.5%

January 1993, Bush # 1 Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.3%

NOTE: After 12 years, a Republican (again) hands the White House back over to a Democrat with **unemployment ABOVE 6%**.

DEMOCRAT – Bill Clinton

January 1993, Clinton Takes White House.... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.3%

January 2001, Clinton Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 4.2%

NOTE: After 8 years, a Democrat (again) hands the White House back over to a Republican with **unemployment BELOW 5%**.

REPUBLICAN – George W. Bush (Bush # 2)

January 2001, Bush # 2 Takes White House.... Unemployment Rate that month = 4.2%

January 2009, Bush # 2 Leaves White House... Unemployment Rate that month = 7.8%

NOTE: After 8 years, a Republican (again) hands the White House back over to a Democrat with **unemployment ABOVE 6%**.

Fox Fact #2: "Made-in-America" job creation is always greatest under Republicans than Democrats.

The reality: Looking back 34 years, to 1977, every single Republican we've had in the White House has had a NET LOSS in U.S. "Made In America" manufacturing jobs, comparing the manufacturing jobs numbers from the January of the year that they took office with the January of the year that they

leave office. By the same token, looking back over the same 34 years, to 1977, every single Democrat we've had in the White House has had a NET GAIN in U.S. "Made In America" manufacturing jobs, comparing the manufacturing jobs numbers from the January of the year that they took office with the January of the year that they leave office.

Don't believe me? Here's the actual data from the "Manufacturing Sector Employed" numbers, available at the [Bureau of Labor Statistics Website](#):

Democrat - Jimmy Carter

January 1977, Carter Takes White House.... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 17,803,000

January 1981, Carter Leaves White House... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 18,639,000

NET GAIN in "MADE IN AMERICA" manufacturing jobs under this Democrat
= **+836,000**

Republican - Ronald Reagan

January 1981, Reagan Takes White House.... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 18,639,000

January 1989, Reagan Leaves White House... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 18,057,000

NET LOSS in "MADE IN AMERICA" manufacturing jobs under this Republican
= **-582,000**

Republican - George H.W. Bush (Bush # 1)

January 1989, Bush # 1 Takes White House.... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 18,057,000

January 1993, Bush # 1 Leaves White House... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 16,791,000

NET LOSS in "MADE IN AMERICA" manufacturing jobs under this Republican
= **-1,266,000**

Democrat - Bill Clinton

January 1993, Clinton Takes White House.... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 16,791,000

January 2001, Clinton Leaves White House... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month
= 17,114,000

NET GAIN in "MADE IN AMERICA" manufacturing jobs under this Democrat
= **+323,000**

Republican – George W. Bush (Bush # 2)

January 2001, Bush # 2 Takes White House.... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month = 17,114,000

January 2009, Bush # 2 Leaves White House... # of Manufacturing Jobs that month = 12,559,000

NET LOSS in “MADE IN AMERICA” manufacturing jobs under this Republican = **-4,555,000**

Democrat -- Barack Obama

2010 — In 2010, for the first time since Bill Clinton, the nation had a **NET GAIN of +153,000 “MADE IN AMERICA” manufacturing jobs.**

2011 — In 2011 up to this last month’s data (November), for the SECOND TIME since Bill Clinton, the nation has had **a NET GAIN in “MADE IN AMERICA” manufacturing jobs equal to +146,000 so far in 2011.**

Fox Fact #3: American Trade is healthiest when Republicans control the reins of government.

The reality: Going back to 1977, every time we’ve had the Democrats controlling at least 2-out of-3 of the White House, Senate and House of Representatives, the nation’s TRADE DEFICIT shrinks (the USA imports less and exports more). By the same token, going back to 1981, every time we’ve had the Republicans controlling at least 2-out of-3 of the White House, Senate and House of Representatives, the nation’s TRADE DEFICIT grows (the USA imports more and exports less).

Don't believe me? Here’s the data, [courtesy of the U.S. Census Bureau](#), which tracks these things:

1977 to 1980, Democrats control 3-of-3, i.e., the White House, Senate and the House of Representatives

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1977 = \$27.2 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1980 = \$19.4 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit REDUCES by 29% when Democrats controlled 3-of-3.

1981 to 1986, Republicans control 2-of-3, i.e., the White House (Ronald Reagan) and the Senate

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1981 = \$ 16.2 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1986 = \$138.5 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit INCREASES by 755% when Republicans control 2-of-3.

1987 to 1994, Democrats control 2-of-3, i.e., the Senate and the House of Representatives

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1987 = \$151.7 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1994 = \$ 98.5 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit REDUCES by 35% when Democrats control 2-of-3.

1995 to 2000, Republicans control 2-of-3, i.e., the Senate and the House of Representatives

U.S. Trade Deficit in 1995 = \$ 96.4 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit in 2000 = \$376.7 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit INCREASES by 291% when Republicans control 2-of-3.

2001 to 2006, Republicans control 3-of-3, i.e., the White House (Bush # 2), the Senate, and the House of Representatives.

U.S. Trade Deficit in 2001 = \$361.8 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit in 2006 = \$753.3 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit INCREASES by 108% when Republicans control 3-of-3.

2007 to 2010, Democrats control 3-of-3...

U.S. Trade Deficit in 2007 = \$696.7 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit in 2010 = \$500.0 billion

U.S. Trade Deficit REDUCES by 28% when Democrats control 3-of-3.

So there you have it . . . the force of facts, not the fiction of FOX.

In an ideal world, the former would conquer the latter. But this is not an ideal world, and facts, no matter how powerful they are, suffer from a stubborn malady: they simply aren't nearly as entertaining as fiction.

More's the pity . . .

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The K.F. Stone Weekly

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December 31, 2011

TRAVELING AT THE SPEED OF LIFE



Nearly a century ago, Woodrow Wilson, arguably our most scholarly president (PhD Johns Hopkins, 1883) noted that the worst part about his job was that it afforded almost no time for what he called "concentrated thought." Wilson was a man for whom contemplation and deliberation were close to divinity. Here was a man given to grand ideas which were fully-formed, then communicated with unsurpassed -- yet understandable -- eloquence. Once, when asked how long it took him to prepare a speech, an uncharacteristically jocose Wilson responded, *"If I am to speak for ten minutes, I need a week for preparation; if fifteen minutes, three days; if half an hour, two days; if an hour, I am ready now."* Reading between the lines, one senses Wilson's frustration at having lost "the needed time alone to think." For the nation's 28th president, the speed of life had simply become too rapid to permit serious contemplation.

Ironically, at the time Wilson was bemoaning the "breakneck pace of human life," the maximum speed limit in Washington, D.C. was only 10 MPH. The most expeditious way for him to communicate with other world leaders was the via diplomatic cable, which could take more than 24-hours; a trip between Washington and Berlin took about a week -- provided that there were no storms at sea. A person in San Francisco sending a letter to a friend or family member in, say Boston, could start looking for a response in about 7 or 8 days. And yet for Wilson, the world was moving entirely too fast for comfort. Imagine what "The Phrasemaker" would have to say about the speed of life in 2012, when an email or text that goes answered for more than a few minutes causes us to stew or fret .

..

The ever-increasing speed of life is like a narcotic; we can never get enough. That which was considered to be "faster than a speeding bullet" just yesterday, is no better than a snail's pace today. The ever-increasing speed of life has made us ever-increasingly impatient. Not that long ago, no one gave a second thought to the fact that a radio or television took anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute to "warm up." Today that wait would be a totally unacceptable eternity. Remember when getting up off the couch to change channels on the one television in the house was *de rigueur*? Or how little time it took to figure out which programs were on at 8:00 pm? Today, a life without many remotes for many flat-screens is a life filled with deprivation; one needs a good 5 minutes just to look through the menu selector in order to check out the hundreds of programs coming on in the next time-slot. Remember when a 56k dial-up modem was the ultimate in speed? It wasn't all that long ago. Really. Today, a wait of more than a couple of nano-seconds is worse than waiting for Godot . . .



There are several corollaries to the heightened impatience and sense of immediacy brought on by the ever-increasing speed of life: a rise in unrealistic expectations; an explosion in the number of instantaneous sources providing information; even less time for "concentrated thought." How else to explain why today a new president has at best, a one month "honeymoon" with the public, where yesterday it might last the better part of two years? Or the rapid rise and even more rapid fall of "front runners" like Bachmann, Perry, Cain and Gingrich? Time and again we anoint a new messiah, a new emperor, only to discover that he or she has no clothes. We give leaders next to no time to solve social, political and economic problems that may have taken years to fester before reaching the surface. We proclaim programs to be abject failures even before they go into effect. It is reminiscent of the old joke about the die-hard Cubs fan who, after an Opening Day loss, loudly proclaimed, "Just wait until *next* year!" We expect reality to mirror a two-hour motion picture in which all problems can be addressed, analyzed, and solved by super heroes before a glorious final fadeout. But reality is *not* a motion picture; our leaders are *not* super heroes, let alone messiahs or emperors. And its not their "nakedness" which makes them unacceptable; it's the discovery that they are clothed in off-the-rack garments, just like the rest of us . . .

Viewed in this light, is it all that surprising that impatience, frustration and anger are the most prevalent of public emotions? We see ourselves caught in the gaping maw of insoluble problems -- issues of economy and ecology, of war and of peace -- that are rarely addressed with anything even approaching well-conceived seriousness. Time and again we hear candidates and commentators

tell us precisely who or what is the source of our communal challenges and difficulties -- as if the act of identifying a culprit will make the challenges go away. And as much as we may know that this is simply not the case -- that there are no simple solutions to systemic problems -- many will hold their nose, suspend their belief and anoint yet another messiah who will be labeled a failure within a fortnight.

Beyond any partisan political wishes I may have for 2012, I pray that we as a nation engage in more "concentrated thought"; that a strong, active, and purpose-driven majority will finally grow up and quit looking for the one person with the one slogan who promises to make all our problems magically vanish. Historically, psychology and emotion have always lagged behind advances in technology. Simply stated, invention is easy, adaptation is not. If we are ever to put our nation, our economy and our people back on secure footing it will come *not* through enslaving ourselves to a mythic time when everything worked -- which is utterly ridiculous and counter-intuitive -- but through adapting to -- and mastering -- the speed of life.

May the optimism, energy and hopefulness of our founders and pioneers be our inheritance in 2012.

As 2011 winds down, permit me to conclude with Grandpa Doc's favorite all-purpose toast: "

Here's to health and happiness . . ."

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