

# *The K.F. Stone Weekly*

*(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")*



July 01, 2013

## HEELS ON WHEELS

Without question, America is in need of comprehensive immigration reform; a program that is both comprehensive and compassionate, practical and politically doable. There are, of course, innumerable obstacles on the pathway to success -- like a sizeable number of conservative Tea Party Republicans who refuse to vote for any measure which includes a "path to citizenship." To their way of thinking,



any such path would be rewarding men, women and children for breaking the law -- for being here illegally. Additionally, many have said they would never vote for any measure which did not first secure America's southern border and guard against a future wave of illegal immigrants..

Enter Senators [Bob Corker](#) (R-TN) and [John Hoeven](#) (R-ND). In order

to get the Upper Chamber to pass an immigration reform measure, these two added a provision which helped bring on board more than a dozen Republicans. Their amendment calls for adding roughly \$30 billion to border enforcement measures, including nearly doubling the number of Border Patrol agents from 21,000 to 40,000, and completing 700 miles of fencing. Specifically it requires a \$3.2 billion high-tech border surveillance plan - including drones and long-range thermal imaging cameras - as well as an electronic employment verification

system and a visa entry/exit system at all air and sea ports. To sweeten the deal, the [Corker/Hoeven Amendment](#) requires that all these security measures must be in place before a single immigrant can become a legal permanent resident and receive a green card. (Think of the fence as a kind of Berlin Wall in reverse; the Soviets built their wall in order to keep Germans *in*; the Southern Border fence is for the purpose of keeping Mexicans *out*.)

The Corker/Hoeven strategy worked: the Senate wound up passing a comprehensive immigration bill by a final vote of 67-27. Now it's on to the House, where its chances of passage are somewhere between none and less than that. Already, Speaker Boehner has proclaimed the Senate bill "a non-starter" and invoked the so-called "Hastert Rule," a philosophy/strategy that requires the "majority of the majority" to bring up a bill for a vote in the House. (Please note that it is also a misnomer given that Republican speakers' practice of requiring the support of the majority of their members to put up bills for a vote is not an official rule and was actually started by Newt Gingrich, not Dennis Hastert.) According to Speaker Boehner, "For any legislation, including a conference report, to pass the House, it's going to have to be a bill that has the support of a majority of our members." What he proposes instead, is that the House write its own legislation, covering various aspects of immigration reform in piecemeal fashion.

In all the punditry and reportage surrounding passage of the Senate bill, little ink and even less verbiage has been devoted to a glaring, 100-megawatt inconsistency: that at a time of sequestration and the further cutting of funds for everything from the FDA, SEC and National Parks to Medicaid, Food Stamps and Meals on Wheels, the Senate voted overwhelmingly to authorize and appropriate an additional \$30 billion in order to militarize America's southern border. To me, this \$30 billion is little more than political ransom; the price these guys are willing to pay in order to cover their collective political *tuchuses*.

Believe it or not, net migration from Mexico has [fallen to zero](#) -- and perhaps even less -- over the past several years. Moreover, deportations have increased exponentially since the beginning of the Obama administration. Not surprisingly, conservative Republicans and their mouthpieces refuse to accept this fact. Speaking on the Senate floor at the beginning of the most recent immigration debate, Alabama Republican Jeff Sessions told his colleagues, "The federal government has reached a point now where virtually no one is being deported, except those convicted of serious crimes." Oh really? According to U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement, during its first four years in office the Obama administration has deported, on average, 32,886 people a month (that's a total of 1.6 million) as opposed to a monthly average of 20,964 for George W. Bush and 9,059 for Bill Clinton.

In other words, the Senate has just agreed to spend \$30 billion for something which in reality is not all that critical. What truly galls me is that in order to get Republicans to vote for the measure -- which in the main is a pretty good bill -- Senators Corker and Hoeven proposed adding more than 20,000 workers to the federal workforce, as well as providing billions of dollars to companies that manufacture drones and electronic fences -- all of which goes against their supposed fiscal hawkery. If this bill ever passes the House, the U.S. Border Patrol will actually be larger than the FBI -- 40,000 agents. In doing the math, 40,000 agents for 700 miles of border fence works out to one agent every 250 feet. Talk about overkill! This is *not* the kind of jobs bill we were looking for . . .

Our most pressing need is not to be protected from a diminishing number of illegal Mexican immigrants who are willing to work at menial tasks no other American wants. Our most pressing need is to be protected from malnutrition, hunger and homelessness, from collapsing bridges, overcrowded classroom and minimum-wage jobs . . . indeed, from political opportunists who find no inconsistency in calling for drastic spending cuts and deficit reduction while blithely adding \$30 billion in needless debt.



To a great extent, we the great unwashed public are as much to blame as the people we have elected . . . and reelected. For we have failed to make our voices heard above the ringing of lobbyists' cash registers. Gun manufacturers, distillers, hedge-fund managers, big pharma and bigger farms -- all have well-heeled, nicely-manicured lobbyists who make sure Congress knows and understands their needs and wishes. But what about the malnourished, impoverished senior whose "Meals on Wheels" delivery has been cut from 5 days to 4; who lobbies on her behalf? (*Fact: Due to the Sequester, Meals on Wheels has lost \$51 million in funding. They have had to cut back on their staff, which means that they have had to cut back on those they can feed. That \$51 million represents an infinitesimal .0017% of the money being proposed for beefing up border security.*) What of the sick, homeless veteran who instead of receiving medication and a bed, is put on a waiting list; whose voice is raised for him? What about the millions who, through no fault of their own rely on food stamps, AFDC or other forms of public assistance? Who speaks for them?

While the well-fed in Washington are gung-ho about protecting us from illegal immigrants, who is going to protect meals on wheels from the well-heeled? It is we, the American public. We are the ones who must light a fire on behalf of the the hungry, the homeless, the voiceless. Don't just complain and groan . . . make your voice heard. If we can spend \$30 billion against an enemy that is more phantasmal than real, we can certainly match dollar-for-dollar for those who are truly in need.

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July 08, 2013

## **WHAT THE TEA PARTY CAN LEARN FROM THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD**

In the Mishnaic volume called פרקי אבות -- "The Ethics of the Fathers," -- a sage named *Ben Zoma* asks and answers one of life's most basic, most fundamental questions:

בן זומא אומר: איזה הוא חכם? הלומד מכל אדם.

Namely: "*Who is truly wise? The person who can learn from any and everyone.*" Ben Zoma offers as his proof text a verse from Psalm 119: "*From all my teachers have I gained understanding.*"

Without question, it is a truly powerful gem of wisdom; one which carries just as much weight today as it did more than 2,000 years ago. Come to think of it, perhaps Ben Zoma's insight carries even *more* weight at a time when so many people seem to be afflicted by the sort of moral and intellectual certitude which pretty much precludes the asking of questions or the ability to learn from the mistakes of others. This is especially true for people in public life, who far too often race to enunciate case-hardened positions where true wisdom might dictate a period of thoughtful ambivalence. Case in point: the revolt/coup/political unraveling in Egypt. It is such a monstrously complex situation; one which defies facile statements or self-confident slogans. Anyone averring certain knowledge as to which is the correct path to take -- for Egypt, for Israel, for America and the West for the rest of the Muslim world -- is little better than a soldier marching off to war armed with nothing but a fistful of marshmallows. There are, of course, questions as to what affect the toppling of Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood

will have on the Syrian civil war. And on the West Bank, [Palestinian Authority leaders](#), overjoyed by Morsi's ouster, are urging residents in Gaza to rise up and likewise topple the Hamas government.



The ousting of Mohamed Morsi, Egypt's first democratically-elected president has been breathtaking in its audacity. The toppling of Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood has been equally brash and unpredictable. Less than 3 months ago, a small group sat down at the Borsa Cafe in central Cairo and began discussing

how to invigorate Egypt's tired civil opposition. Their complaints against President Morsi were legion; a torpid economy, high unemployment, high prices for such staples as food and energy, and an administration that was just as corrupt, autocratic, insular and inefficient as that of Hosni Mubarak. What also bothered this small group -- and much of the nation -- were the false pretenses under which Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood had run in the election. While they had promised to focus on jobs and the economy, instead, once in office, they spent the lion's share of their first year in power expanding, extending and consolidating a stridently religious, anti-Western agenda. Through the implementation of an increasingly rigorous moral code, the Brotherhood essentially killed off the nation's tourist industry -- as vital to the Egyptian economy as is oil to Iran. These were some of the issues the five young men at the Borsa Cafe sought to address . . . and to do something about.

Using Smartphones, Facebook and other forms of social media as their organizing tools, the group -- now named *Tamarod* (Rebel) -- was able to gather more than 22 million signatures on petitions calling for Morsi's ouster. Think about it: 22 million signatures in a nation of just over 80 million; that works out to one-in-four Egyptians -- the equivalent of more than 75 million Americans . . . and all this, in less than 3 months time. The *Tamarod* movement spread like wildfire until, less than a week ago, the military stepped in, put Morsi and much of his administration under house arrest, and named former Constitutional Court Chief Judge Adli Mansour Interim President. (It should be noted that the Muslim Brotherhood's "[IkhwanOnline](#)" website ran an article which stated that Mansour is "considered to be a Seventh Day Adventist, which is a Jewish sect." Moreover, the authors of the piece claimed that the Pope of Egypt's Coptic church had refused to convert Mansour to Christianity, and that his appointment was backed by Israel and the U.S. as part of a plan to eventually install former



IAEA chief Mohamed ElBardei as president. The post has since been taken down.)

Many outside of Egypt cheer these events and say "good riddance." Others correctly remind us that regardless of what one thinks about Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood, the Egyptian people did freely elect them. And that to believe in democracy is to also believe that people have the right to make their own mistakes, to elect their own pernicious fools, and to suffer the consequences of their own crummy choices. Some, like Arizona Senator John McCain, argue that the Egyptian military has staged a coup, which means that the United States is now legally obliged to cut off all non-humanitarian aid. "Coup be damned," others argue, "give 'em the money"; the annual \$1.3 billion we give in military aid helps insure the continued peace between Israel and Egypt . . . and besides, the lion's share of this year's aid has already been sent and spent. Without question, this is *not* a black-and-white situation.

In keep with our opening quote from Ben Zoma, there is much to be learned from Morsi and the Egyptian Brotherhood. One group that would be wise to learn from them, their world view and their failure and their fate, is the Tea Party, for in several respects, they are not all that dissimilar. *Both* groups achieved political success by tapping in to popular discontent: the Muslim Brotherhood and the people's hatred of the autocratic Mubarak; the Tea Party and what they referred to as the "left-wing socialistic" Obama Administration. The Muslim Brotherhood keyed in on the precarious state of the Egyptian economy under Mubarak, and promised that this would be their top priority. Likewise, the Tea Party pilloried the Obama Administration for failing to corral the nation's high unemployment, and saddling the nation with crippling debt. Addressing these issues -- as well as creating "jobs, jobs, jobs" -- would, along with repealing Obamacare, be *their* top priority. And, like the Muslim Brotherhood, which took over the reins of government in 2011, the Tea Party managed to score an upset victory in 2010, capturing the House of Representatives as well as governorships and super-majorities in many state legislatures.

Then too, like Morsi and the Brotherhood, the Tea Party has largely ignored or forgotten the platform on which they ran; instead of creating jobs and attending to the economy, they have spent the lion's share of their time and effort on so-called "values" issues like abortion, marriage and the defense of families; on privatizing education, prisons and roadways; on emasculating labor unions and reviving Jim Crow laws for the 21st century. Time and again, they have proven themselves to be anti-science, disparaging towards academia, and desirous of a return to some ideal past. To a great extent, their efforts, like those of the Brotherhood, have been fueled by a moral vision that is both sectarian and

extremely narrow; one which is likely *not* shared by a majority of the public. And like the Brotherhood, much of the Tea Party finds conspiracy theories far too tantalizing to pass up . . .

We are not suggesting that Americans are going to be flocking by the tens of millions to the Ellipse -- or Times Square, Fountain Square or Pershing Square -- to protest these narrow-minded moralists any time soon. *Our* mini-revolutions and coups occur at the polling place, not in the public square. Although we *are* a violent, well-armed people, our sense of outrage is far tamer, far more constrained than that of the Egyptians; our Tea Party need not fear house arrest, banishment, exile or worse. Likewise, the public need not fear armed insurrection. Nonetheless, the Tea Party should learn from the Muslim Brotherhood that those who seek to reshape society in their own sectarian image are doomed to ultimately fail.

For they are not, when all is said and done, terribly wise -- they have failed to grasp a truism which though first stated more than 2,000 years ago, is as fresh and as vital as the day after tomorrow.

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July 13, 2013

## **WHEN IT COMES TO FILIBUSTERS, EVERYONE'S A HYPOCRITE**

Sometime early next week Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) will bring seven of President Obama's stalled nominees to the floor for a vote. But in order to advance to an up-or-down, yay-or-nay vote, each of the nominations must first receive 60 votes in order to break a filibuster. It's not so much that the Senate has found these men and women -- who the president has nominated to lead the Labor Department, Environmental Protection Agency, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and fill posts on the National Labor Relations Board -- it is not that they have been found



wanting, incompetent or of dubious moral character. No, these nominations -- as well as the lion's share of legislation before the United States Senate -- have been summarily blocked by filibustering Republicans, either because they have a jaundiced view of the agencies in question, or simply because they don't want to hand President Obama or his Democratic colleagues a single victory.

Faced with the daunting challenge of finding the 60 votes needed to break the various filibusters, Senator Reid has thrown down the political gauntlet, threatening to use the so-called "nuclear option": altering Senate rules on executive branch nominations to allow them to pass on majority vote. "This is about making Washington work regardless of who's the president," the Nevada Democrat said in a heated debate that consumed the better part of a senate day. "The constant obstruction in this chamber has gone on long enough." Senate Minority Leader

Mitch McConnell (R-KY), feigning the outrage of an idealistic freshman, declared Reid's threatened action *"one of the most consequential changes to the United States Senate in the history of our nation."* The Kentucky senator further charged that Democrats wanted to replace the Senate's mandate of "advise and consent" with "sit down and shut up." McConnell's Republican colleagues further warned Leader Reid and the Democrats that use of the so-called nuclear option would lead them to "shut down the Senate for the rest of the congressional term" and make the filibuster the centerpiece of their campaign in next year's election. Now *there's* a winning issue . . .

This is by no means the first time the United States Senate has heard the words "nuclear option." The term was coined by former Senate Majority leader Trent Lott (R-MS) more than a decade ago, and has been used by leaders of both parties ever since. Back in 2005, when Democrats were in the minority, Senator Reid opposed a threatened Republican-backed rule change that would have ended the filibuster for judicial nominations -- which Democrats were doing rather successfully. Back then, it was Senator Reid who defended the filibuster as one of the senate's most important rules, calling it "a tool that serves the long-term interest of the Senate and the American people and our country." Its as if there are two scripts that keep getting passed back and forth between the two senate leaders: one, which sees the filibuster as a fiat from Mt. Sinai; the other, which proclaims it to be the work of the devil. In other words, whether one is pro- or anti-nuclear option depends not on one's party affiliation, not on whether one is a conservative Republican or a progressive Democrat, but solely on whether one's party is in the majority or the minority. And because the current majority (which hates filibusters and threatens the nuclear option) will one day find itself back in the minority (and thus committed to using the filibuster) that makes everyone a hypocrite.

Including yours truly.

Back in April 2005, I published a piece entitled [\*Where Is Jefferson Smith When We Need Him?\*](#) In it, I took then-Senators Bill Frist (R-TN) and Rick Santorum (R-PA) to task for threatening to use the nuclear option against Senate Democrats -- then a minority -- for using the filibuster against some of President George W. Bush's judicial nominees. In that essay I wrote, *"Without the ability to filibuster, minority voices cease to be heard; other points of view are shushed into oblivion. Not only is this dangerous; it is downright undemocratic."* The essay ended with what one might say was a touch of clairvoyance:

*But, as the old saw goes, "what goes around comes around." If the Republicans want to outlaw the filibuster, their day will come. For as sure as God made little green apples, the Democrats will one day once again hold a Senate majority. And at that time, the filibuster, which in 2005 looked like such a dangerous weapon, will be their best friend. But there won't be a thing they can do about it.*

Shortly after the 2010 election -- in which Democrats lost the House and six Senate seats, New Mexico Sen. Tom Udall and Oregon Sen. Jeff Merkley, both Democrats, called for a "real filibuster" that would make senators show up and talk -- to, in the words of Senator Majority Whip Dick Durbin "park their fanny on the floor." What they were after wasn't just a return to the Huey Long, Strom Thurmond, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" filibuster of yore. Modern filibusters are so lacking in theatre as to be nearly invisible. In most cases, the modern filibuster is typically a threat to deny cloture—60 votes—to move ahead on a bill . . . any bill . . . even those which heretofore were considered merely procedural. Despite Udall and Merkley's good intentions, their reform effort was sandbagged by Harry Reid; that old "what goes around comes around" syndrome of which I wrote back in '05.

But as of last week, it would appear that Senator Reid has had a change of heart; that is more concerned about getting things done today -- this session -- than worrying about what will happen when he and his Democratic colleagues will one day inevitably return to the minority side of the aisle.

Harry Reid has changed his mind . . . and so have I. A change in Senate procedure is both warranted and wise: if you want to filibuster, you have to stand and deliver. If you wish to bring a filibuster to a close let it take a simple majority. The work of the nation -- jobs, health care, education, infrastructure, the proper functioning of our courts, agencies and regulatory boards -- require debate, compromise and action, not political jockeying in the hopes of making the other side look bad for the next election. Both sides have to stow their mock outrage and depart the Land of Oz; the curtain has been parted and revealed the bipartisan hypocrisy that for too long has lurked behind.

Put the filibuster out of its -- and our -- misery.

For the good of America, it's about time that democracy trump hypocrisy.

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July 21, 2013

## LISTEN TO THE BEES

Shortly after graduating college in 1971, I spent a year co-managing a Congressional campaign in what was then California's 16th Congressional District. Located in the heart of "Steinbeck Country," the district extended from Santa Cruz on the northern tip of the Monterey Peninsula to south of Carmel along the coast, and took in such inland farming communities as Watsonville, Salinas, Gilroy, and Castroville, known as the world's leading growers of, respectively, berries, lettuce, garlic and artichokes.

One day, while driving the candidate, Julian Camacho, through the heart of the Salinas Valley, I noted a befuddled look on his face.



"What's on your mind?" I asked.

"Your windshield," he said, pointing to the front window of my VW van.

"What's wrong with it?" I asked. "It looks perfectly clean and clear to me."

"That's the problem," Julian said, shaking his head. "There should be about a million dead bugs on the window; instead there aren't any . . . and that's a big, big problem."

"Why?" I asked, realizing that indeed, there weren't any squashed bugs on the windshield.

"Because it means that the pesticides have killed 'em off . . . and if the bugs and bees can't live, how much longer do you think we humans have . . . ?"

Up until last Tuesday, this little vignette had been hidden from my conscious memory for more than 40 years. So what happened on Tuesday? I was made aware of a new piece of legislation, [H.R. 2692](#), the "Saving America's Pollinator's Act of 2013." According to its sponsors, Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR and John Conyers (D-MI):

*"Bee populations are in serious jeopardy. From flowers to chocolate, berries to tequila, pollinators are integral to the planet, economy, and many aspects of our lives. In fact, the USDA estimates that about one in every three bites of food is either directly or indirectly made possible because of bee pollination. Both our environment and food supply are inextricably tied to the welfare of bees, making the decrease in bee populations a cause for great alarm."*

In doing some [further research](#), I learned that there are more than 20,000 known species of bees in seven to nine recognized families. Bees can be found on every continent except Antarctica -- which has no flowering plants -- and are essential to the production of food. Without them, staples as diverse as berries, nuts, corn, wheat and sorghum don't stand much of a chance of maturing, ripening or becoming edible. I further learned, much to my horror, that according to a recent survey of America's beekeepers almost a third (31% to be precise) of the country's honeybee colonies did not make it through the winter. Moreover, that's been the case almost every year since the U.S. Department of Agriculture began this annual survey, six years ago. Historically, a drop of 12%-15% is expected; the 31% figure is cause for great alarm. In just one reported episode -- which may be the single-largest bee die-off on record -- 50,000 plus bees were recently found littering the parking lot of a Target store in Wilsonville, Oregon, shortly after a landscaping company had sprayed surrounding trees with an insecticide called [Safari](#).



The apian die-off was so dramatic that the Oregon Department of Agriculture enacted a temporary ban on the pesticide used in this incident, and for an additional 17 other insecticide products containing the chemical *dinotefuran*, which is a popular insecticide found in agricultural, professional and household products.

(n.b. Dinotefuran is an insecticide of the [neonicotinoid](#) class, a class of insecticides widely suspected to be the primary cause of the global bee and pollinator die-off we are witnessing today. [Neonicotinoids](#) -- a class of neuro insecticides chemically related to . . . you guessed it . . . nicotine -- include a number of insecticides other than dinotefuran, and have for decades been suspected of being especially dangerous to bees.)



Less than 2 months ago, the European Union (EU) voted to make the use of 3 pesticides illegal. EU officials are banking on the fact that banning the pesticides will help restore populations of honey bees, which as in America, have been dying off at a mind-numbing rate. Speaking of their decision to initiate the ban, EU Health and Consumer Commissioner Tonio Borg said, "I pledge to do my utmost to ensure that our bees, which are so vital to our ecosystem and contribute over €22 billion (\$28.8 billion) annually to European agriculture, are protected." Once again, the Europeans are ahead of us. One of the reasons is that in Europe, they leave science to scientists -- not corporations, not politicians, not lobbyists and certainly not Biblical literalists.

I know, I know: in comparison to such gripping issues as political uncertainty in Egypt, civil war in Syria, the question-mark that is Iran, unemployment, the staggering cost of health insurance, terrorism and domestic spying -- to name but a few -- the plight of the honeybee seems so incredibly tame and third-tier. But it is not. Remember Julian's admonishment: "If the bugs and the bees can't live, how much longer do you think we humans have?"

You had better believe that the pesticide lobby is going to be showering members of the House Agriculture Committee (to which H.R. 2692 has been assigned) to make sure that it never gets a hearing -- much less makes it onto the floor for a vote. As of today, [www.Govtrack.us](http://www.Govtrack.us) gives the bill a 7% chance of getting passed by the committee and 0% chance of being enacted. When you consider just how incredibly crucial the apian world is to ours -- and how incredibly dysfunctional Congress is when it comes to anything but being obtuse -- these figures are more than disheartening. It makes one feel even less in charge of their destiny than the simple honeybee.

But there is something -- albeit a small something -- that we all can do to stave off the feelings of utter helplessness: sign an online [petition](#) urging Congress to enact Rep. Blumenauer's bill. By signing your name, you also help spread the word about this crucial issue.

Might I also urge you to download and read Maurice Maeterlinck's utterly charming work [The Life of the Bee](#), which the Nobel Laureate (Literature, 1911) published in 1901. More than anything I have ever read, this work expresses how absolutely central bees are to human life. And besides, it is a rare pleasure reading the words of a master craftsman.

History's greatest apiculturist, "Brother Adam," (Karl Kehrle 1898-1996) -- the creator of the Buckfast bee -- stated it most simply and succinctly:

*"Follow the bees and let them guide you . . ."*

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## WHERE'S THE OUTRAGE?

No wonder so many people dream about becoming professional athletes:

Just this week, the Boston Red Sox announced that they had come to terms with their



all-star 2nd baseman **Dustin Pedroia** on an 8-year, \$110 million contract extension. If the 5' 8" 165-pound Pedroia keeps to his career averages, this new contract will pay him \$104,166.00 for per game, or \$26,041.66 for every time he comes up to bat. Oh yes, it also works out to \$1,057,693.30 per home run.

This past season, Los Angeles Lakers' guard **Kobe Bryant** earned \$30,453,805.00, which worked out to \$371,387.86 for each game he played, and \$14,277.45 for every point he

scored. Then too, there's Denver Broncos quarterback **Peyton Manning**. He earned \$15,000,000.00 during the 2012 season, which worked out to \$937,500.00 per game played, \$426,666.66 per touchdown thrown.

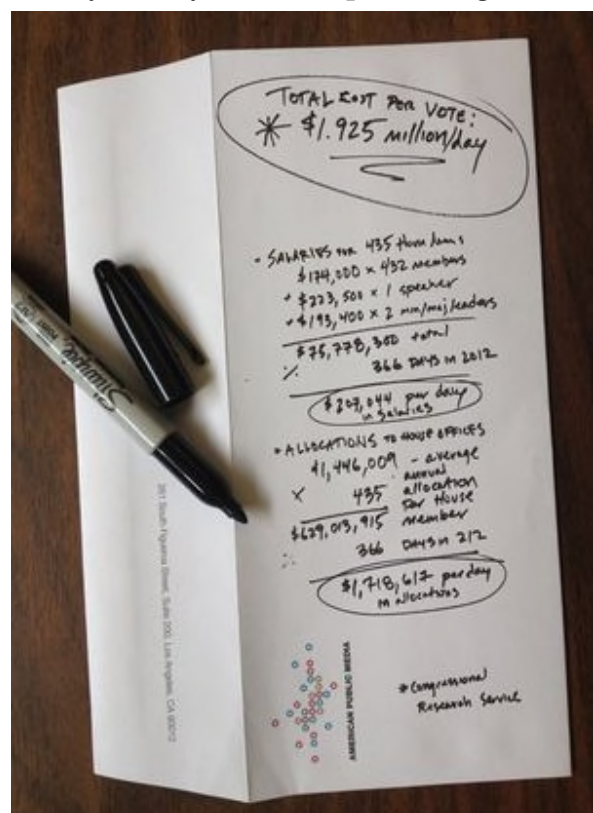
As a society, we have become so inured, so accustomed to the mind-boggling amounts that professional athletes rake in, that we hardly blink an eye when reading that a .250



hitter is "a real steal" at \$2.5 million, or that an oft-injured, forward will be paid the "nominal sum" of \$2 million. I guess they're worth the cost; otherwise their billionaire bosses wouldn't be paying them all those dollars. Whenever I read or hear items about how much ball players earn, I break down their salaries into what I call "achievement equivalents" -- how much per game played, per point scored, etc. I do this in order to get an even better handle on just how high the sports stratosphere really is; of how much one can get paid for merely doing their job -- playing a game, hitting a double, sinking a free-throw. I mean, it is truly daunting to figure out that if only one could hit but a single home run -- based on Dustin Pedroia's salary -- they would be set for life; that if one could somehow manage to run up and down a professional basketball court for just 10 minutes -- based on Kobe Bryant's salary -- they could stop working, take a six month cruise-for-two around the world, and still have money to burn -- and all for ten minutes worth of running! Talk about an achievement equivalent!

But believe it or not, there is a much, much, MUCH pricier reality than the one occupied by the Pedroias, Bryants and Mannings of the world. In this realm, the achievement equivalent is far beyond stratospheric; it is exospheric. In this "sport," *we* are the ones who own the "team"; we are the ones who hire the "players" and sign the checks. This team has 535 players; its name is The United States Congress. Although no one knows precisely how much money it takes to run Congress -- both House and Senate -- per year, Representative Debbie Wasserman-Schultz came up with the figure of \$30 million *per day*. Now, from January through the end of July 2013, the 113th Congress has been in session precisely 85 days. At \$30 million per day, that works out to \$2.55 billion. (Just for yucks, at \$371,387.86 per game played, Kobe Bryant earns more than twice what a representative or senator earns in two years -- \$174,000.00.)

If the purpose of a basketball player is to score points, a quarterback to throw touchdowns and a sports team to win games, the purpose of Congress is to enact laws. Want to know about its "achievement equivalent?" About how much it cost us for every victory or hit? So far, the men and women of the 113th Congress have enacted precisely 18 laws -- an achievement equivalent of \$141,666.666.00 per "hit." And mind



you, of the [18 laws sent to the president](#) for his signature, several were the baseball equivalents of dribblers that barely made it up the third-base line -- such measures as:

- **H.R. 1246, The "District of Columbia Chief Financial Officer Vacancy Act,"** which "*amends the District of Columbia Home Rule Act to provide that the District of Columbia Treasurer or one of the Deputy Chief Financial Officers of the Office of the Chief Financial Officer of the District of Columbia may perform the functions and duties of the Office in an acting capacity if there is a vacancy in the Office.*" (Signed into law 5/1/13)
- **H.R. 1071,** which specifies the size of the precious-metal blanks that will be used in the production of the National Baseball Hall of Fame commemorative coins. (Signed into law 5/17/2013)
- **H.R. 258, The "Stolen Valor Act of 2013,"** which "*amends title 18, United States Code, with respect to fraudulent representations about having received military declarations or medals.*" (Signed into law 6/3/2013)

Without question, the 113th Congress is on a pace to become the least productive in the post-war era. In 1947, Congress enacted 395 laws; in 1957, 316; in 1967, 391; in 1977, 223; in 1987, 240; in 1997, 153; in 2007, 180; so far in 2013 . . . 18.

Is it any wonder that Congress's popularity rating barely clears single digits? While they *have* managed to send President Obama the occasional bill (one of my favorites was -- I kid you not -- S982, the ["Freedom to Fish Act"](#)), on issues of major importance -- immigration, food stamps, education, jobs, infrastructure, gun control etc. -- they have dithered, obstructed, bloviated and failed. In sports terms, the entire Congress has spent the lion's share of the season on the 60-day DL (disabled list); the team is languishing in the cellar, mired in the worst losing streak in recorded memory.

Moreover, every time the House votes to repeal Obamacare (a meaningless exercise meant to energize the Tea Party base), or holds yet another investigation into Benghazi or spends the better part of a legislative day reading the Constitution aloud, it costs we - the team owners -- another \$30 million.

\$30 million a day, \$141,666,666.00 per law enacted. How can a "team" that wastes so much money then turn around and demand fiscal prudence when it comes to the poor, the sick and the elderly? They are failing us. They are last in the league . . . by a huge margin.

And its not like we can look to bring up rookies from the political farm system -- the state legislatures. In many ways, they are even worse. In state after state -- Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, Wisconsin, Ohio -- to name but a few, legislatures have rushed to enact laws restricting the ability to vote, to obtain an abortion, or to

receive an adequate -- let alone a quality -- public education. They are all using the same game-time strategy . . . the one created by ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Council), the Koch-brother funded organization which takes what were once considered wacky, racist, far right ideas, and then pays state legislators to turn them into "mainstream" policy. (You may wish to reread [the piece I wrote on ALEC](#) precisely two years ago.)

So tell me: where's the outrage? Where are the protests? Where are the tens of millions of citizens who still believe that America belongs to the people . . . that we are the owners of the team? Why are we so sheepishly quiescent? How much longer are we going to be willing to shell out billions for players who are little better than pathetic amateurs who evince neither love of the game nor knowledge of its rules.

Where is the outrage?

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