

The K.F. Stone Weekly

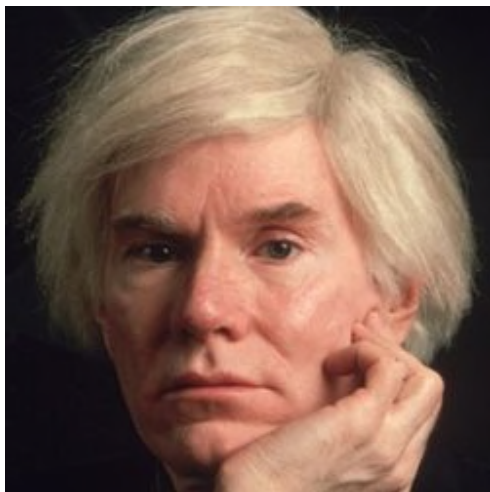
(Formerly "Beating the Bushes")



May 04, 2014

THE PRESCIENCE OF ANDY WARHOL

Back in 1968, artist Andy Warhol gained lasting fame for 15 words of oracular wisdom: *"In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes."* Warhol's aphorism, which originally appeared in the catalogue for an exhibition of his art at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden, has proven to be both prescient and perdurable. I mean, who remembers Rula Leska, Rosie Ruiz, Max Yasgur or



Chuck Wepner? At one point everyone knew their names and faces. How's about Yuri Gagarin, William Hung, Nancy Kerrigan, Levi Johnston, Jessica Hahn, Kato Kaelin, and Flavor Flav? How many remember Phil Robertson, the so-called "Duck Commander" who was the subject of [a K.F. Stone Weekly essay](#) just last December 23rd? Anyone want to wager how many people will remember Cliven Bundy, the subject of last week's essay in, say, six months?

Andy Warhol hit the nail on the head. Fame is not only there for the asking; it can be as fleeting and evanescent as a puddle in the noon-day sun. I've got to admit there *are* a couple of currently-famous people I hope will be just as famous in another ten, twenty or even fifty years: the Dodgers' Yasiel Puig, and Marlin's Jose Fernandez come to mind. Then again, there are more than a few whose fame I hope and pray will fade ASAP: Glenn

Beck, Rush Limbaugh, Ted Cruz, Ann Coulter and Sarah Palin are included in this group.

Warhol's adage does not work as well when it comes to issues; some have more lives than a feline. Two come to mind; both are from the Republican playbook -- Obamacare and Benghazi.

By now, it feels like the former has been on the lips and in the hearts of Republican leaders and strategists for an eternity. Just the other day, [Reuters reported](#) that Republicans plan to use confirmation hearings for Sylvia Mathews Burwell, President Obama's pick to replace Kathleen Sebelius, to "re-energize their election-year attacks on his signature healthcare initiative." "The confirmation process is likely to focus on all of the Obamacare-related disasters," said Brook Hougese, a spokeswoman with the National Republican Senatorial Committee. "One gaffe and they lose the news cycle . . ." In all fairness, there has been a bit of movement on the issue; a dawning realization that despite their best efforts to repeal Obamacare, it is, in all likelihood, here to stay. As such, for some members of the Republican establishment, the "r-word" is no long "repeal" or even "replace," but "reform" and "rewrite." Less than 2 weeks ago, Washington State Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, chair of the House Republican Conference kicked off her re-election campaign by telling supporters " . . . it's unlikely the Affordable Care Act will be repealed. We need to look at reforming the exchanges." Despite criticizing many aspects of the Affordable Care Act ("It is a top-down, one-size-fits-all approach to health care") the fact that a member of the House Republican leadership team used the word "reform" shows a bit of progress. But not to worry: at the same time, Senators Ted Cruz and Mike Lee were out there promising their Tea Party allies that they will defund and dismember Obamacare. It would seem that regardless of any incremental acceptance of Obamacare that may exist, Republicans still see the issue as being strategically central for the upcoming mid-term elections.

Then too, Benghazi is also central . . . and not just to November 2014. It is clear that by keeping the Benghazi tragedy center stage, Republicans hope to deal the administration a mortal blow (can you say "impeachment?") while firing what they hope will be a lethal salvo at Hillary Clinton's presidential aspirations. If Republican strategists really, truly believe that banging the Benghazi gong for another 31 months will guarantee their presidential candidate -- Bush? Paul? Cruz? Huckabee? Walker? Ryan? -- victory in 2016, they have another thing coming. Foreign policy missteps -- even those raised to the level of "the worst, most diabolical scandal ever to emerge from the Oval Office" -- do not -- I repeat DO NOT -- win elections. Issues much closer to home and the dining table -- jobs, the price of food and fuel, the availability of healthcare, the feeling that our elected leaders really give a damn about the plight of the little guy -- these are

the things that win elections. Republicans, like Democrats, know this. And yet, many strategists on the Republican side of the aisle persist in keeping Benghazi in the headlines.

A couple of days ago, White House emails were made available to [Judicial Watch](#), a politically conservative government watchdog group. After receiving the emails, Judicial Watch breathlessly reported, *"On Tuesday, we released explosive new Benghazi scandal documents which immediately precipitated a Washington firestorm that placed the Obama White House on the defensive and may even lead to criminal charges."*

In his twenty paragraph email advising then-UN Ambassador Susan Rice on her upcoming TV appearances, Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes made only two direct references to Benghazi—first highlighting support from the Libyan government for U.S. diplomatic efforts in the country, and later debunking the false claim that there was any “actionable intelligence” prior to the attack on the facility in Benghazi and stating that “the currently available information suggests that the demonstrations in Benghazi were spontaneously inspired by the protests at the US Embassy in Cairo and evolved into a direct assault against the US Consulate and subsequently its annex.” That language is identical to the [initial draft](#) of the separate set of CIA talking points that were crafted by CIA analysts earlier that day, suggesting that Rhodes had seen that early document and was using it to ensure the administration's statements were consistent with the intelligence community's conclusions. Turns out, Rhodes' email that got Judicial Watch, Fox News, Darryl Issa and the usual suspects sufficiently exorcised to loudly proclaim it "the smoking gun," contained virtually nothing new or newsworthy.

Was Benghazi a tragedy? Of course it was. In retrospect, might the White House and State Department have been able to do something to avert the attack, which led to four deaths? Only God -- not Darryl Issa, not Ted Cruz and certainly not the boys and girls of Fox News -- knows. Did Benghazi involve a knowing cover-up that makes Watergate, Iran Contra and Teapot Dome pale by comparison? Give me a break. Is Hillary Clinton ultimately responsible for Benghazi? Yes, and that is precisely what she said when [she testified](#) before Congress on January 21, 2013. Should this disqualify her from becoming president? Let the voters decide.

If the Republicans want to keep holding hearings, calling Secretary of State Kerry to testify and intimating that Barack Obama, Hillary Clinton, Susan Rice and much of the foreign policy establishment is culpable of high crimes and misdemeanors -- let them.

At their own political peril.

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May 10, 2014

DIVIDE AND CONQUER?

This past Tuesday, May 6th, North Carolina House Speaker Thom Tillis won his state's Republican Senate primary, and now can put all his energy into challenging incumbent Democratic Senator Kay Hagen. Tillis, who came in first in a field two major and five minor candidates, captured 46% of the vote, thereby avoiding a costly runoff. Easily the best-funded candidate in the field, Tillis carried the backing of the business and donor class; Mitt Romney and former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush both announced their support for



his campaign. The House Speaker's victory over physician Greg Brannon, (a first-time candidate who was endorsed by Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul) and pastor Mark Harris, (who was backed by former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee), was hailed as [a victory for the Republican establishment](#).

That the words "Thom Tillis" and "Republican establishment" can be uttered in a single breath offers ample testament to just how far to the right the GOP has drifted. Yes, virtually every candidate backed by Tea Party titans Paul, Cruz and Palin [was defeated](#) this past Tuesday; they were 0-for-7. And there is likely more bad news looming in the weeks ahead. And yet, if one pays attention to the platforms of the so-called "establishment Republicans" who defeated Tea Party-backed candidates, one will note less than a nanometer's worth of difference:

- Up until Tuesday evening Tillis was flatly against raising the minimum wage. At one point he went so far as to suggest that government shouldn't set a minimum wage at all. [As of Wednesday morning](#), he is no longer answering questions about the minimum wage.
- Tillis is steadfastly against providing federally-funded Medicaid to more than a half-million North Carolinians.
- Tillis denies the reality of climate change.
- As speaker, he shepherded through a bill permitting people to carry guns in bars.
- In 2011 Tillis championed a bill which required abortion providers to perform a mandatory ultrasound, place the image in the woman's line of sight -- even if she asked not to -- and read a government-mandated script about the immorality of abortion. (This bill has since been blocked by a federal court.)
- Tillis believes that most people receiving public assistance -- i.e. food stamps, unemployment insurance and Medicaid -- are "free loaders" who choose not to work, and instead lead lives of prosperity at government expense. Witness the following video footage from a 2011 political gathering:

What we have to do is find a way to divide and conquer the people who are on assistance. We have to show respect for that woman who has cerebral palsy and had no choice in her condition, that needs help and that we should help. And we need to get those folks to look down at these people who choose to get into a condition that makes them dependent on the government and say, 'at some point you're on your own! We may end up taking care of those babies, but we're not taking care of you.' And we've got to start having that serious discussion. It won't happen next year. Wrong time. Because it's going to be politically charged. One of the reasons why I may never run for another elected office is cause some of these things may just get me railroaded out of town.

Notice that Tillis believes that the lion's share of those requiring public assistance *choose* to be poor and unemployed -- in much the same way he believes people "choose" to be gay. His "divide and conquer" mentality is bad enough. But then, to add insult to injury, he perpetrates the old racist-tinged myth of people bilking the system in order to live like potentates. Admittedly, there *are* people who receive public assistance by jobbing the system. They *are* in violation of the law and should be prosecuted. But to Tillis and his "establishment" cronies, these folks are not statistical anomalies; they represent the overwhelming majority of public mendicants. This is a canard, plain and simple. It is promulgated by the same people who try to convince the politically naive that America is suffering from an epidemic of voter fraud, that the Obama Administration is about to confiscate every gun in America, and that the Common Core Standards Initiative is part of a liberal conspiracy to indoctrinate children and turn them into the homosexual slaves of a future totalitarian global government. **(n.b.** *About the latter: There are plenty of rational arguments for why the Common Core State Standards*

Initiative might not be the solution to reforming public education in America; concern over turning kids into homosexual slaves is not one of them.)

Thom Tillis is by no means alone in contending that the lion's share of people on public assistance are indolent miscreants living the life of Reilly. Moreover, this contention -- though flatly false -- has a venerable conservative pedigree; it harkens back to Ronald Reagan. Even before the Iran-Contra scandal, Reagan developed in his mind, and actually came to believe, that there was a "Welfare Queen" -- an African American woman living in Chicago -- who was collecting dozens of checks monthly, and abusing the welfare system. It was a lie from day one, but nonetheless resonated. (*Turns out, Linda Taylor, [Reagan's "Welfare Queen,"](#) was a world-class scam artist who had more than 80 names, 30 addresses and 15 telephone numbers.*) And this lie has been used by conservatives like Thom Tillis ever since as a way to condemn the poor, implying that that they are all too lazy to work, spend their time drinking taking drugs at public expense, living off the seat of hard working white people. (*This was part of the rationale behind Florida Governor Rick Scott's push to have people on public assistance submit to -- and themselves pay for -- mandatory drug tests. Fortunately, cooler heads prevailed; Governor Scott's draconian measure was found to be unconstitutional.*)

Personally, I find Thom Tillis' "divide and conquer" mentality to be downright odious. And, for one who claims to be devout in his faith, it is distinctly hypocritical and irreligious. I mean, what about "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh" (Luke 6:20-21); or "If anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? (1 John 3:17) or "Whoever gives to the poor will not want, but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse" (Proverbs 28:27). Then again, Tillis and all those who score points on the backs of the poor are in violation of yet another Biblical mandate: "Thou shalt not put a stumbling block before the blind" (Lev. 19:14). Classically, "the blind" are understood to mean those who are intellectually, academically or experientially naive. By repeatedly lying to the politically naive, Tillis *et al* are doing precisely that which the Bible abhors: putting an obstacle in the path of honesty and understanding.

The contest between Tillis and Senator Kay Hagen promises to be a real barn burner. Hagen will no doubt be portrayed as being to the left of Vladimir Lenin and in favor of feeding newborn babies to Satan.

For her part, I hope Senator Hagen will forcefully -- and repeatedly -- bring up Speaker Tillis' "divide and conquer" proposal -- along with all his other anti special interest positions. His is the philosophy and the record of an extremist, not that of a member of anyone's establishment.

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May 18, 2014

NOT THE "WHAT" . . . BUT THE "HOW"

Writing and posting a weekly thousand-word essay requires a certain amount of discipline. Setting aside the many hours it takes to decide on a topic, then research, write, edit and record it can be quite a challenge -- especially when one is also researching, writing and delivering upwards of six college lectures a week and spending the better part of a day and night familiarizing oneself with the latest medical research on such diverse conditions/diseases as *meibomian gland dysfunction*, *lupus erythematosus* or *wegner's granulomatosis*. (I have spent the past twenty years working as a "public representative" of an [Institutional Review Board](#), which is a federally mandated committee that has been formally designated to approve, monitor and review biomedical and behavioral research involving humans.)



In addition to the necessity of being reasonably disciplined, writing a weekly political essay can also require having the hide of a rhinoceros. Let's face it: in addition to those who send laudatory notes, there are a lot of screwy people out there who, hiding behind the shield of internet anonymity, will attack, damn, vilify and threaten with gay abandon. Over the years I have been called both a Nazi and a Communist, a self-hating Jew

and a religious zealot, a prig and a libertine. Why these puppies would continue reading my essays is a question well beyond my pay grade . . .

One of my favorite critics is a classy, well-read mainstream conservative who I actually met face-to-face a couple of years ago. Although we are, for the most part, on opposite sides of the political fence when it comes to economics, foreign policy and President

Obama, we have nonetheless managed to keep our disagreements both civil and gentlemanly. Frequently, he will send me long detailed emails taking apart a weekly essay, pointing out "the error of my ways," and chiding me for being blind to the realities of life. My one regret is that I rarely have the time to respond with the same amount of detail. Recently, I wrote him the following brief tongue-in-cheek email:

I guess it's only fair that for any and every article I write highlighting something ignominious on the conservative side of the aisle, you find some way to tie the sin, error or shortcoming onto Obama's tail. By the way, I'm still waiting for you to announce your candidacy for president and tell us precisely how you would handle the economy, foreign policy and a myriad of other challenges . . .

Amazingly, he, in his words, "took the bait," and sent back a nearly 700-word response. I found myself in agreement with some of his proposals such as:

- "No subsidies to wealthy farmers not to grow"
- "Eliminate the advantages of 'carried interest,'"
- "Mandate, advocate, incentivize, training for the unemployed in skilled jobs, such as welding" and
- "A major comprehensive program to attract scientists and engineers, and others with advanced degrees to America. If you attend Harvard, Yale or Columbia, you must stay here for 5 years, and start your business here, or who the devil needs you to take up space?"

I should mention that we have always been in substantial agreement on hot-button social issues; the man is far from doctrinaire. As I said at the outset, the man is intelligent, well-read and has class . . .

In reading through his proposals for *what* he would implement were he president, I found myself wondering precisely *how* he would do it. This pondering thread led me to recall an old Steve Martin routine which in its own way, addresses this *what/how* dichotomy:

You can be a millionaire . . . and never pay taxes! You can be a millionaire and never pay taxes! You say, "Steve, how can I be a millionaire and never pay taxes?" First, get a million dollars. Now you say, "Steve what do I say to the tax man when he comes to my door and says 'You have never paid taxes?' Two simple words: I FORGOT!"

Yes, it is a funny bit. But, as with much of Steve Martin's humor, it contains far more than a punch line. One will note that while he succinctly states the *what* -- becoming a millionaire who never pays taxes -- he totally glosses over the all-important *how* -- becoming a millionaire in the first place.

It is much the same with my conservative friend and indeed, with virtually all politicians on both sides of the aisle. They are just great when it comes to the *what*, but rarely, if ever, share with the public the far more crucial *how*. Politics is filled with "*whats*" -- platforms which reveal what the individual, bloc or party would do in an ideal world where they could get their way. But in order for any *what* to become reality, people have to seriously engage in *how* -- that complex process which begins with commitment to the commonweal and then proceeds along a path containing what I call "the four C's": commitment, comity, civility and compromise.

Without question, America -- and the rest of the world -- is in the throes of some of the gravest, most vexing challenges in history:

- Economic disparity in this country is far greater than that of the Gilded Age. We have yet to face up to the fact that our economic future will not -- indeed *cannot* - - resemble our past. In order to secure and win the future, we must train and educate a new middle class with new skills suitable for new areas of endeavor.
- American demographics are undergoing a quantum change. By 2030, "we" will become "them." According to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2030, a majority of Americans will be what have long referred to as minorities. Meaningful immigration reform has been stalled for so long that it may have to wait for a "minority-majority" Congress . . . God forbid we should have to wait that long.
- America's infrastructure is not only creaking; it is crumbling before our eyes. Bridges, roads, railroad tracks, ports, dams, levees, schools -- you name it -- are in dire shape. When we speak of a dangerously crumbling infrastructure it is as if we were talking about someone else's home that's falling apart. WRONG. America's infrastructure is our home, and we simply must do something if it is to be habitable.
- We have just about reached the point of no return vis-à-vis climate change. If we are to have a hope of reversing a future that will bring rising seas, coastal and intracoastal flooding, drought, food shortages and a thousand other nightmares, we have to stop appeasing the luddites and start listening to the scientists.

OK. These are all examples of *what* -- of problems and challenges; of areas which need attention and amelioration. The question before us is the far more important one of *how* -- precisely how do we accomplish the tasks, enact the laws, and win the future. One thing I would urge is for we the people to stop accepting all the political fast food our candidates and elected officials try to pass off as well-balanced nutritional meals. When they campaign on a platform of *what*, we must demand that they explain *how* -- of how they are going to get their various dishes onto a finalized political menu. We have to demand -- DEMAND -- that they stop merely telling us *what* is wrong with the other guy, the other party and start telling us *how* they are going to work together for the common good. And don't just tell us "elect me and the future will take care of itself."

Commitment comity, civility and compromise: four major ingredients to hopefully take us from *what* to *how*.

And while we're at it, if not now, when . . .?

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May 24, 2014

AND YOU THOUGHT LOUIE GOHMERT WAS NUTS?

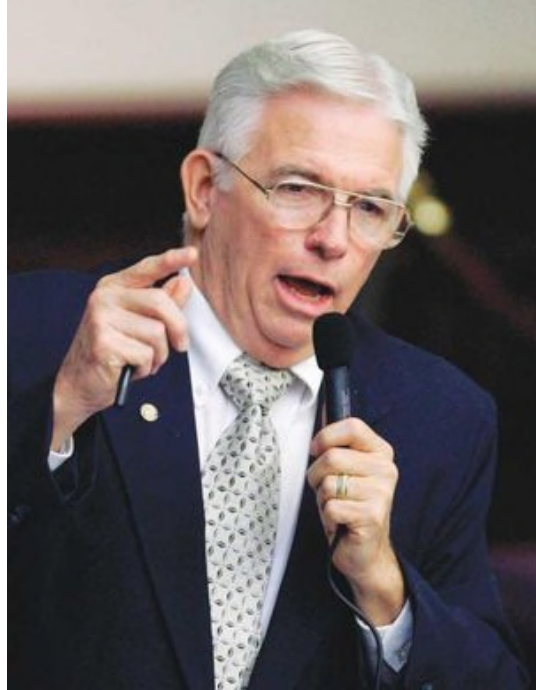
All self-respecting political nerds, geeks and aficionados are familiar with Texas Representative Louie Gohmert. He is, without question one of the political world's most certifiable nuts, one of its most quotable kooks. Gohmert is the fellow who nominated -- and voted for -- [Allen West for Speaker of the House](#) -- after West had already lost his reelection bid. (In all fairness, the Constitution does *not* require the Speaker be a member of the House and Gohmert once voted for Newt Gingrich -- after he'd resigned from Congress)



Back in February 2012, Gohmert -- I kid you not -- actually claimed that [caribou](#) enjoy the warmth of an oil pipeline: "*When [caribou] want to go on a date, they invite each other to head over to the pipeline. . . .*" During a recent wide-ranging interview with Tea Party Unity's Rick Scarborough, Gohmert likened [gun control](#) to bestiality. Then too, Gohmert is convinced, all evidence to the contrary, that there are terrorist organizations -- somewhere, somehow -- concocting schemes to send their pregnant Black Widows to our American shores, spawning natural-born terrorists, and then using them and their US Citizenship Cards, decades on, to decimate America: "*[The children] could be raised and coddled as future terrorists [and] twenty, thirty years down the road, they can be sent in to help destroy our way of life.*"

Without question, Gohmert is right up there with Michelle Bachmann, Sarah Palin, Steve King and Charles Van Zant.

"Charles Van Zant? Who in the name of Eric Von Zipper is Charles Van Zant?" I hear you asking. Well, Charlie Van Zant is a Republican member of the Florida State House of Representatives where he represents Bradford, Putnam, Union and southern Clay Counties. (**Note:** his son, Chas. Jr., is currently the Superintendent of Schools in Clay County.) Van Zant, is a 70-year old architect who earned a doctorate of theology from Western Baptist Theological Seminary in . . . Havana, Cuba. In the House, Van Zant chairs the Joint Select Committee on Collective Bargaining -- which he opposes.



But what Representative Van Zant is best known for -- and what puts him right up there with Louie Gohmert, is his take on the educational reform program known as "Common Core." Back in March, Van Zant gave a speech in which he claimed that standardized testing -- a major item in the Common Core agenda, is a plot to turn kids gay. In the speech, given at the ["Operation Education Conference"](#) Van Zant claimed that American Institutes for Research (AIR), the company the State of Florida has hired at a cost of \$220 million over 6 years to develop and administer new accountability tests to replace the old FCAT (Florida Comprehensive Accountability Test " . . . will attract every one of your children to become as homosexual as they possibly can."

In the speech, Van Zant told his rapt audience:

"Our new secretary of education in Florida recently appointed AIR to receive the \$220 million contract for end-of-course exam testing and to prepare those tests. Please -- go on their website. Click the link to what they are doing with youth, and you will see what their agenda really is. They are promoting as hard as they can any youth that is interested in the LGBT agenda and even name it 2-S, which they define as having two spirits. The Bible says a lot about being double-minded.

"These people that will now receive \$220 million from the state of Florida, unless this is stopped, will promote double mindedness in state education, and attract every one of your

children to become as homosexual as they possibly can. I'm sorry to report that to you. ... I really hate to bring you that news, but you need to know."

Truth to tell, the [AIR.org website](#) *does* mention LGBT youth here and there. I think Van Zant's problem is that AIR doesn't condemn them to being stoned or burned at the stake . . . which to his way of thinking is proof positive that they are in favor of turning kids into gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgenderites. I will not attempt to limn the psychopathology undergirding Van Zant's conspiratorial heebie-jeebies. Suffice it to say he is not alone; the religious right -- both in and out of politics -- sees a pro-gay agenda in everything from gun control (referenced above) and the funding of National Public Radio to, believe it or not, anti-bullying laws. This last one is about as far off the trolley tracks as one can get. Precisely two years ago today, the Illinois Senate turned down [a bill](#) that would have encouraged anti-bullying programs in schools, after conservatives argued that such programs could be used as a front to promote homosexuality. [Focus on Family](#) has long argued that anti-Bullying measures are both pro-gay *and* anti-Christian. They argue that a true Christian should stand up to a bully. Makes one wonder if they've ever read Luke 6:29: "*And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other . . .*"

Conspiracies and the conspiratorial mind have long fascinated me. Indeed, my senior thesis back in college was about the 1952 presidential election and how the Communist-under-every-bed conspiracy made famous by Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy turned what should have been an Eisenhower victory into an Eisenhower rout (Adlai Stevenson won but 9 states and lost by 11 points). Over the years I have written extensively about plots and conspiracies in America, ranging from the so-called "[Judeo-Masonic plot](#)" at the time of the Revolutionary War to the [Know Nothing Papal plot](#) to build a trans-Atlantic tunnel linking the Vatican and Philadelphia in the mid-1840s to the current [FEMA concentration camps](#) in Montana conspiracy, the one that claims the Bush Administration was behind [9/11](#), and the ever popular "[New World Order](#)." And now, there is Charles Van Zant's "Common Core is just another clandestine weapon in the LGBTQ's community's push to make every child in America gay."

Louie Gohmert may well be the wheelman driving the clown car, but Charlie Vant Zant is unquestionably riding shotgun.

And it's a rather large vehicle filled with crazies, no doubt being tailed by an invisible band of . . . of what?

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May 31, 2014

"THE LAST REFUGE OF THE UNIMAGINATIVE"

Unless you've been off vacationing on Neptune or Uranus, you're aware that it's open season on Hillary Clinton. And although no one -- save perhaps Bill, Chelsea and Mrs. Clinton herself knows whether she will throw her hat into the ring for 2016, there are



plenty of folks treating that which, in truth is highly imaginable, as absolutely indisputable. The signs are everywhere. There's Karl Rove's "concern" over the state of Mrs. Clinton's health and not-so-veiled reminders that come January 2017 she will be 69; there's the perpetual refrain of Benghazi and the reemergence of Monica Lewinsky; there's the asinine speculation over whether the former First

Daughter's pregnancy is nothing more than a political diversion. And then there's Louisiana Governor Bobby Jindal's recent piece in [Politico](#), in which he reminds us that back in 1993, when the then First Lady testified before Congress on what was termed "Hillary Care," she told them she was *against* the individual mandate. Horrors! This means that over the past two decades, she actually changed her mind . . . which of

course makes her ineligible for higher office. One would think that in national politics, youth and consistency are as important as vision and integrity. But they are not.

Hold your horses guys. Did the fact that Ronald Reagan was 2-weeks shy of his 70th birthday when he became president bother you? Or that in 2008 John McCain was 72? I don't remember too much concern on your side of the aisle. (*Admittedly, Reagan himself took care of that concern with his marvelous quip "I want you to know also I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's [Walter Mondale] youth and inexperience."*)

Score one for The Gipper.

With each passing day Karl Rove's concern over whether Mrs. Clinton suffered a traumatic brain injury is losing steam. Increasingly, he's looking more and more like a sorry little man trying to maintain a grip on relevance while keeping the mega-bucks flowing into the coffers of [American Crossroads](#) . . .

If Rove, Jindal, Preibus and the rest of the Republican mouthpieces really think they can derail a Clinton candidacy by banging the brain/Benghazi/Lewinsky/Chelsea drum for the next year or two, they are not the political geniuses their colleagues believe them to be.

What interests me far more is the attack on Mrs. Clinton for having changed her position on the so-called individual mandate. And not for the sake of that one issue -- healthcare -- or indeed any issue in particular. No, my concern here -- and it is a serious one -- is how easy it is for people to adopt a "once a sinner always an unrepentant sinner" position for their opponents while turning a blind eye to the "apparel changes" of their allies.

Case in point: Robert Byrd and Ronald Reagan.

First, Senator Robert Byrd:

Back in the early 1940s, the 20-something Byrd created a chapter of the Ku Klux Klan in Sophia, West Virginia. He remained with the Klan for a couple of years, even being elected to the top leadership post (Exalted Cyclops) of his local unit. By the time he was 30, Byrd was out of the Klan for good, and spent the rest of his life trying to live it down. In his autobiography ([Robert C. Byrd: Child of the Appalachian Coalfields](#)) Byrd wrote that he was " . . . sorely afflicted with tunnel vision – a jejune and immature outlook – seeing only what I wanted to see because I thought the Klan could provide an outlet for my talents and ambitions. I know now I was wrong. Intolerance had no



place in America. I apologized a thousand times ... and I don't mind apologizing over and over again. I can't erase what happened." Despite the fact that Byrd would eventually receive a 100% rating from the NAACP, Republicans never ceased pointing out the fact that he had been a Klan leader, and that anything else he accomplished -- any position he espoused no matter how progressive -- had to be viewed through the lens of his racist past.

When it comes to Ronald Reagan, his political meanderings are forgiven, forgotten or rationalized away. Seen today as the patron saint of conservatism, Reagan is the only president who led a labor union: from 1947 to 1952 and again in 1959, he was president of SAG -- the Screen Actors Guild. Reagan began his political life as an ardent pro-New Dealer. In 1945 he attempted to lead an anti-nuclear rally in Hollywood, only to be threatened by his employer, Warner Bros. In 1950 he actively supported Democratic Representative Helen Gahagan Douglas in her senate race against then Representative



Richard Nixon. In 1952, he urged Dwight Eisenhower to run for president -- as a Democrat. In later years, Reagan explained his switch to the Republican Party with the famous quip "I didn't leave the Democratic Party; the party left me." Whenever conservatives bring up Reagan's pre-Republican past (which is rather rare), they see the change as a sign of strength, growth and maturation . . . anything but inconsistency. Unlike the case of Robert C. Byrd, all is forgiven.

Like Ronald Reagan, Charlie Crist has changed parties. For that he is branded a craven political opportunist who lacks principles, standards or backbone. In matter of fact, American political history is heavily dotted with these sorts of changes and inconsistencies:

- Martin Van Buren was elected to numerous offices -- NY Attorney General and Governor, U.S. Senator, Vice President and President -- as a Democrat. In 1848, he was standard bearer for the Free Soil Party.
- In 1932, liberal Democrat Wendell Willkie took a break from his lucrative law practice to challenge Franklin D. Roosevelt for the Democratic presidential nomination. In 1940, he ran against Roosevelt as a Republican.
- In 1964, 17-year old Hillary Rodham was a "Goldwater Girl," -- cowgirl outfit and all. The following year she was elected president of the Wellesley Young Republicans.

- Senators Rick Santorum, Orrin Hatch, Bob Dole, and Chuck Grassley as well as former Speaker Newt Gingrich [all originally supported](#) -- and strongly so -- the individual health care mandate. When it became a Democratic -- i.e. Obama -- backed plan, they all made a 180 degree turn.

Demanding consistency from one's foes while casting a blind eye upon the inconsistencies of one's allies is . . . well, rather inconsistent, don't you think? To never change one's mind or position is to be intellectually stiff and fossilized. Admittedly, some course changes are a matter of political survival, and, as we know, the first rule of politics seems to be "get thyself reelected."

"Consistency," in the words of Aldous Huxley, " . . . is contrary to nature, contrary to life. The only completely consistent people are the dead."

Or better yet, "Consistency," as Oscar Wilde, would have it, "is the last refuge of the unimaginative."

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