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Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.... 03/17/2013

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Attachments: [Challengers_from_the_Sidelines_-_Understanding_America's_Violent_Far-Right_by_Arie_Perliger_-_West_Point-November_2012..pdf](#);
[The_Extraordinary_Science_of_Addictive_Junk_Food_Michael_Moss_NYT_February_20,_2013.pdf](#); [The_Bliss_Point_-_March_2013.pdf](#);
[Watch_out_for_the_bliss_point_Nickie_Polson_Canada.com_March_8,_2013.pdf](#);
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[SAC_Capital_to_Pay_\\$616_Million_in_Insider_Trading_Cases_Peter_Lattman_NYT_MAR_CH_15,_2013.pdf](#); [Patti_LaBelle_bio.docx](#)

DEAR FRIENDS....

Lost in the worldwide hoopla of *choosing a new Pope* and a third *Carnival Cruise Ship fiasco*, almost unnoticed was the inflammatory speech last Tuesday by the President of Afghanistan Harmid Karzai, who he went over the top equating the U.S. with the Taliban as forces working to undermine the government, particularly given the tremendous resources the U.S. has provided to Karzai's government over the past decade -- and that he owes his position, as well as any progress that has been made to date -- to the U.S. As the U.S. prepares to withdraw the majority of its remaining troops, the country's security forces remain woefully unprepared to assume responsibility for the country's security, corruption remains endemic, and many observers admit that Afghanistan is in reality little better off today than it was when Karzai assumed power in 2004. With his leadership slated to end next year, there is little reason to believe that his successor will do any better in meaningfully addressing Afghanistan's plethora of problems.

It appears that Karzai wants to be perceived as the '*great uniter*' of Afghanistan's intractable ethnic and political factions, yet he has done little during his tenure to make this a reality -- and, in any event, no other leader of modern Afghanistan has been able to achieve the same. His chances of doing so now, with a year or so left in office, are zero. But it will be hard to convince the average Afghan that Karzai is a national hero when he invited the foreign military presence into their country, actively promoted its growth and stay, and has willfully courted foreign aid, which has made the country so

dependent on the good will of others in order to function. Especially when life for the average Afghan has become more difficult under Karzai's rule, and the Afghan people certainly know it.

An internal report from the **British Defense Ministry** has concluded that the ongoing occupation of Afghanistan is "*unwinnable in military terms,*" ruling that the NATO goals have largely failed and the survival of the Karzai government cannot be guaranteed. The report says that whenever international troops leave, they will be leaving Afghanistan with a "*very weak economic base,*" and NATO will be on the hook for "*large-scale support*" of the government for many years. It goes on to compare the NATO occupation for Afghanistan to the previous attempt by the Soviet Union, saying there are "*an extraordinary number of similar factors*" surrounding the two wars, and that commanders should learn the lessons of the Soviet war. Elaborating, they say both wars aimed at imposing "*an ideology foreign to the Afghan people*" and that both eventually abandoned it in favor trying to secure relative support for their respective propped-up governments as the only alternative to the mujaheddin, adding that the historical estimate of the NATO war would be, as with the Soviets', linked entirely to how long the government survived after they leave.

So with the war in Afghanistan being the longest in US history, at the price of more than 2,060 US military casualties and more than 18,000 injured and costing more than \$1 trillion in American taxpayer's money, we seriously have to asked ourselves was this war worth it, especially in light of the gratitude shown in President Karzai's latest comments. More importantly we have to call the War in Afghanistan for what it is.... A Huge Mistake.... *In every way....*

LET's REMEMBER: Ten years ago when President George W. Bush announced the invasion into Iraq in March 2003, the goal was to remove a dangerous dictator and his supposed stocks of weapons of mass destruction. It was also to create a functioning democracy and thereby inspire what Bush called a "*global democracy revolution.*" The effort was supposed to be cheap -- to require few troops and even less time. Instead, it cost the United States \$800 billion at least, thousands of lives and nearly nine grueling years ... Today in Fallujah, the site of two of the war's largest and most devastating military campaigns, the very best that can be said is that two years late to the party -- not 10 years early -- the Arab Spring has arrived. But the government the people are rising up against is the very one the U.S. installed. How depressing to look back on the months before the war in Iraq -- that nearly nine-year misadventure that left thousands of Americans (and more than 100,000 Iraqis) dead, that failed to deliver on even the simplest of promises of its progenitors -- and take note of how few public figures stood in its way.

There were rare moments. In late September 2002, a few months before American troops would topple the government in Baghdad and set the U.S. on course for nearly a decade of insurgency and internecine conflict and improvised explosive devises, a wizened Sen. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) stood on the floor of the Senate and urged his fellow lawmakers to pace themselves on the way to war. "*The war fervor, the drums of war, the bugles of war, the clouds of war -- this war hysteria has blown in like a hurricane,*" Byrd warned. A month later, Sen. Paul Wellstone, the progressive icon from Minnesota, rose to the podium to object to a resolution that would authorize President George W. Bush to wage his war, absent the support of the United Nations. Gesturing forcefully, and punctuating his words with a deep knee bend, Wellstone warned that acting unilaterally would eventually be regretted. "*The pre-emptive, go-it-alone use of force, right now, which is what the resolution before us calls for, in the midst of continuing efforts to enlist the world community to back a tough, new disarmament resolution on Iraq, could be a very costly mistake,*" Wellstone said. He'd never know how right he was. A few weeks later, Wellstone's life was cut tragically short in a plane crash in his home state. By then, the two senators had earned the support of 19 Democratic colleagues (and a lone Republican) in voting against the Iraq war resolution.

Wellstone and Byrd, got it right in Iraq is short. A handful of lawmakers, some anti-war activists, some cooler heads at the U.N. who had been to Iraq looking for weapons of mass destruction and saw that there were none. A young state senator named Barack Obama, speaking before an anti-war rally in Chicago, said he didn't oppose all wars, just the "dumb" ones. They are joined by the small cadre of allies in print – **the Washington Post's** Walter Pincus, the national security bureau of **Knight-Ridder** -- who dared to doubt the *mise en place* of intelligence being hand-delivered to the press by an administration already girded for combat.

How depressing to look back on those days and see not just the obvious -- Douglas Feith, Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice; those who promised America would be "*greeted as liberators*" (Cheney), and who threatened nuclear "*mushroom clouds*" (Rice) if action didn't come imminently. But there also were still-popular and prominent figures who got it wrong. We now know that the strongest war advocates had just about everything wrong. There were no weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Saddam Hussein had no links to al Qaeda. The U.S. was greeted not as liberators, but as occupiers. And nearly 1 million troops would be required to fight in the years of war.

Still, can we forget Joseph Biden, then a venerated senator from Delaware, telling his colleagues in 2002 that "*the world would be a better place without*" Saddam Hussein? "*I do not believe it is a rush to war,*" Biden said at the time. "*I believe it is a march to peace and security.*" Or how about Hillary Clinton, then a first-term senator from New York, telling the Senate that "*Saddam Hussein has worked to rebuild his chemical and biological weapons stock, his missile delivery capability and his nuclear program. He has also given aid, comfort and sanctuary to terrorists, including al Qaeda members. ... Any vote that may lead to war should be hard, but I cast it with conviction.*" It was their fault, and the copious mainstream media columnists and journalists who joined them, as much as anyone, paved the way to nearly nine years of war -- a war of choice, an unnecessary and costly war, without which the world most certainly would be a better place. How depressing to think that so many who should have known better, so many who perhaps even did, fell on the wrong side of history's ledger. LET US NOT FORGET!

Joshua Hersh

Huffington Post

The Urban Dictionary defines **Nickeling-and-Diming** as: *Traditionally used as part of the larger phrase "To be nickled and dimed to death", referring to the undesired price of upkeep for a certain item. More fundamentally, it refers simply to seemingly hidden ongoing expenses which, over time, add up to a large expense.* Today's Congressional Republicans' strategy is to Nickel-and-Dime President Obama's policies to death with the ultimate goal of dismantling almost all of his accomplishments, as well as to eviscerate Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. Last year the tenants of this same Ryan plan was celebrated by the GOP as the "*Pathway to Prosperity*" campaign — cutting spending by \$4.6 trillion through 2023, largely by rolling back President Obama's legislative accomplishments while also taking advantage of the savings they created.

The 10-year spending plan released Tuesday by Rep. Paul Ryan is virtually identical to last year's GOP budget: It would defund President Obama's health-care initiative, end guaranteed Medicare coverage for future retirees and sharply restrain spending on the poor, college students and federal workers.

The one big new development: Ryan's latest blueprint would balance the budget, producing a small surplus in 2023 — a goal achieved not primarily through deeper spending cuts, but by the addition of more than \$3.2 trillion in new tax revenue. The tax hike is already in effect. Ryan (R-Wis.) merely adopts new revenue projections laid out by the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office in the wake of a year-end deal to raise rates on income over \$450,000. But the impact on his budget is huge.

The changes that Ryan is proposing for Medicare (*vouchers*) and Medicaid (*state block grants*) would merely shift the health-care burden from the federal government to individuals and states. Because private health plans aren't as efficient as Medicare, total public and private spending on health care would almost certainly increase -- the opposite of what's needed in a country headed toward devoting \$1 in every \$5 of gross domestic product to health care. It is crucial that policy makers find ways to bring down medical costs, but there are ways to do this without leaving the elderly and poor with inadequate health care. Medicare could, for example, raise premiums for high earners, reduce payments to drug companies or drive competition by making public the prices it pays for drugs, devices and medical services.

More and more people are realizing is that the "new" Ryan Budget requires **Hollywood Accounting** (*smoke & mirrors*) to make it work, as it proposes closing loopholes without saying which ones, simplifying the tax code by creating lowering the top tax bracket from 35% down to 25% with everyone else paying only 10%. When every sensible economist will tell you that one of the reasons why the country's deficit is so high is because taxes are too low. US corporate taxes is the lowest in the industrialized world – corporate taxes are expected to raise just 1.3 percent of G.D.P. this year, about a third of what it was in the 1950s. American taxes (*all levels*) are 26.9% of the country's GDP in comparison to Canada 32.2%, Germany 40.6, Israel 36.8%, Japan 28.3%, Australia 30.8%, Switzerland 29.4%, Brazil 34.4%, Denmark 49%, Sweden 47.9%, United Kingdom 39% and Mexico 39.7% – **Heritage Foundation** (Conservative think-tank).

In stark contrast to the austerity the Republican budget pursues, Senate Democrats have propose investing \$100 billion in a new economic stimulus program that would provide job training and set aside money to repair roads and bridges. Democrats said they would pay for the plan by closing loopholes in the tax code that benefit corporations and wealthy Americans..... which like Ryan's, I will believe it when I see it.... The Democrats' plan would meet their goals with an equal mix of deficit reduction through spending cuts and closing tax loopholes. Those cuts (which at least they specified) — about \$975 billion worth — would include \$240 billion in military spending and \$493 billion on the domestic side, Democrats said. Notably, the plan will also include special fast-track instructions known as reconciliation that would ensure it could not be filibustered, meaning that the Senate would only have to come up with a simple majority of 51 votes instead of the 60 often required to pass legislation in the Senate. The Ryan budget was fully vetted in the 2012 presidential campaign. And the result was; Democrats won the White House and picked up seats in the Senate and House. Republicans can keep offering the same platform of spending and tax cuts to achieve prosperity and more and more people are realizing that it is total BS.....

"The only way you can do that [decrease taxes, balance the budget, and increase military spending] is with mirrors...."

— John B. Anderson

(Illinois Congressman 1961-1881 & Independent Presidential candidate 1980)

US agriculture subsidies -- terrible

The U.S. government is considering a plan to buy 400,000 tons of processed sugar. The scheme would constitute a double subsidy for “*big sugar*,” an industry that rivals tobacco in terms of its negative effects on American health.

The horrendous morass that is U.S. agricultural subsidies amounts to \$20- billion (U.S.) annually. The programs, which arose from depression-era legislation designed to alleviate the economic effects of the dust bowl drought, have nothing to do with a free market economy and everything to do with powerful lobby groups.

Subsidies for ethanol production, for example, are estimated at \$5-billion per year, despite the consensus view among economists that the program amounts to burning food, with little or no positive impact on the environment. At least in that case, the ethanol industry has spurred research that may provide environmentally friendly developments down the road. Sugar subsidies are a different and far more insidious form of graft.

Approximately 450,000 acres of Florida are planted with sugar cane each year, and not one would be profitable without the estimated \$2-billion in subsidies doled out annually from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The subsidies also serve to increase the retail price of sugar far beyond the free market cost if it was imported from outside the country.

The recently-announced proposal for the government to buy sugar is particularly outrageous. The USDA loan program to the sugar industry – which creates between \$700-million and \$900-million in taxpayer losses annually according to the **Government Accountability Office** – was not enough this year. An 18 per cent fall in sugar prices means the already heavily-subsidized sugar corporations are set to default on these loans. The government purchase of 400,000 tons is designed as another subsidy that will prevent default.

Worse, two thirds of Americans are classified as either overweight or obese, and increased sugar levels in processed food have been a major contributor to the problem. A recent **New York Times** feature story highlighted the success food companies have had in generating increased sales by raising the sugar content in allegedly healthy foods like yogurt. Heinz ketchup is 24 per cent sugar, and snack makers have found that even potato chips sell better when sugar is included as an ingredient.

To date, congressional efforts to reduce subsidies to the sugar industry have been quietly squashed by lobby groups. The result is an industry that is wasting billions of dollars of U.S. taxpayer money to support the boom in type II Diabetes.

SCOTT BARLOW

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As a baby-boomer who grew up during the Cold War and a lover of television spy dramas such as **HOMELAND**, **MI5** and **TINKER, TAILOR, SOLDIER, SPY**, I strongly urge everyone who also love spy dramas to watch the new **FX Network** dramatic series, **THE AMERICANS**. Set during the Cold War period in the 1980s, *The Americans* is the multi-layered story of Elizabeth (*Keri Russell*) and Philip Jennings (*Matthew Rhys*), two Soviet KGB officers posing as American citizens – married couple living in deep cover since their arrival in the early 1960s, with two teenager born in the USA and raised with American values. The series premiered in the United States on January 30, 2013, on the **FX Network**. The series has been renewed for a second season. Rob Brunner of **Entertainment Weekly** described it as *"an absorbing spy thriller,"* while David Hinkley of the **New York Daily News** praised the pace, noting that *"It's a premise that requires as much clever dramatic footwork as you might expect, and creator Joe Weisberg, a former CIA agent, handles the challenge."* Verne Gay of *Newsday* called it a *"smart newcomer with a pair of leads that turns THE AMERICANS into a likely winner"* and gave it a grade of an "A-".

The renewal comes as no surprise, considering the Keri Russell/Matthew Rhys drama was **FX's** most-watched debut ever, garnering 5.11 million total viewers for its premiere. Seven episodes currently remain in the show's freshman season, and the series will return for a 13-episode second season in 2014. *"THE AMERICANS' has quickly established itself as a key part FX's acclaimed drama lineup,"* **FX** President John Landgraf said in a statement. *"Executive Producers Joe Weisberg, Joel Fields and Graham Yost and their collaborators are telling riveting and deeply emotional stories and the performances of Keri Russell, Matthew Rhys, Noah Emmerich and the entire cast are simply outstanding. The show is truly worthy of its widespread critical acclaim and we are confident that its quality will continue to yield a robust and passionate audience."* Filming began for the first season in November 2012 in the area of New York City. The production utilizes location shots to simulate a dramatic setting of Washington, D.C. As a result, its early filming was delayed by flooding caused by Hurricane Sandy. **THE AMERICANS** is one really great dramatic series with intelligently presented multi-layered plots with superb, well cast and played characters. The fast, unpredictable turns of plot make you anxious for the next week..... As such if you like television spy dramas, **THE AMERICANS** should not disappoint you. I give this new series.... a solid "A."

As most of you know, I am a big fan of **Bill Moyers** and this week's show on **Moyers & Company** was an encore: **Ending the Silence on Climate Change** with scientist Anthony Leiserowitz, director of the Yale Project on Climate Change Communication, discussing his efforts to galvanize communities over what's arguably the greatest single threat facing humanity. Leiserowitz, who specializes in the psychology of risk perception, knows better than anyone if people are willing to change their behavior to make a difference. As Leiserowitz told Bill, *"A pervasive sense up to now has been that climate change is distant – distant in time, and distant in space."* *2012 was the hottest year on record. 2011 carbon dioxide emissions the highest on record; Arctic sea ice shrank to a record low; the world's largest trees are dying at an alarming rate, I could go on and on. Scientists are telling us that we are approaching a tipping point And they say that unless we slow the release of*

global emissions from fossil fuels, slow it enough to keep the planet's temperature from rising by two degrees Celsius, or 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, the earth's polar ice sheets will melt away -- with catastrophic consequences. Earlier this year two major scientific reports concluded that the rapid increase in fossil fuel emissions makes that increase of two degrees Celsius all but inevitable. This headline in the "National Journal" spells it out: "It's Already Too Late to Stop Climate Change."

2011 was an all-time record year in the United States – we had 14 individual climate and weather related disasters that each cost this country more than \$1 billion. That was an all-time record, blew away previous records. And in 2012 we had events ranging from the summer-like days in January in Chicago with people out on the beach, clearly not a normal occurrence, an unusually warm spring, record setting searing temperatures across much of the lower 48, one of the worst droughts that America has ever experienced, a whole succession of extreme weather events. And this doesn't include Hurricane Sandy. Leiserowitz says that there is no doubt that climate change is already happen and two decades of scientific study confirming that man-made carbon emissions have accelerated it. He says that we are currently scheduled, unless we change direction, to go through the two-degree mark. And in fact, we're heading on towards three, four degrees and perhaps even six degrees centigrade warmer than in the past. As you go things get much, much worse.

Leiserowitz: And in fact, let me just use a simple analogy. Because people often will say, "Wow, you know, four, five degrees, that doesn't sound like very much. I mean, I see the temperature change more from night to day." But it's the wrong way to think about it. I mean, think about when you get sick and you get a fever, okay. Your body is usually at, you know, 98.7 degrees. If your temperature rises by one degree you feel a little off, but you can still go to work. You're fine. It rises by two degrees and you're now feeling sick, in fact you're probably going to take the day off because you definitely don't feel good. And in fact, you're getting everything from hot flashes to cold chills, okay.

At three you're starting to get really sick. And at four degrees and five degrees your brain is actually slipping into a coma, okay, you're close to death. I think there's an analogy here of that little difference in global average temperature just like that little difference in global body temperature can have huge implications as you keep going. And so unfortunately the world after two and especially after three degrees starts getting much more frightening, and that's exactly what the scientists keep telling us. But will we pay attention to those warning signs?

Leiserowitz again: This is within our power. We have waited however a long time to really engage this issue and to get started. And unfortunately, and this is actually a core American value, it goes back to the founding of this country and it goes back to Benjamin Franklin, one of the leading lights of that time, who said - and every American knows this - "*An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.*" A little action now is going to forestall much greater-- the need for much greater action later. And that's exactly the nature of this problem, is that if we delay-- if we wait until we've reached three and four degrees, it's too late. At that point the climate system is locked. It's a massive system. The heat is already in earth's system, it's absorbed in the oceans, it's being absorbed by the ice systems. It's in the atmosphere, there is no magic vacuum cleaner that's going to suddenly pull the CO2 out and bring our temperatures back to what we consider normal. So that's why it's so imperative that we begin taking these actions now to forestall the worst effects that are going to happen decades to come.

Climate Change is real, and as they use to say when I was a kid, "even Ray Charles can see it." But as Leiserowitz points out in the interview that until we start with a movement from the bottom up based on issues that effects us all it will be difficult to institute the national policies that are going to be required, much less the international policies that are also going to be required. So far the issue of climate science has been to direct political leaders to impose solutions on this country, on our states, at the world from the top-down. Now we need a movement from the bottom up to meet them halfway. Otherwise, the greatest challenge facing mankind today is not nuclear proliferation, population control and our growing deficits..... It is the tipping point when the polar ice caps melt, oceans warm and rise drastically altering weather patterns that changes the world as we know it today for every life-form on the planet. Scientists are warning us today.... And we should listen.

One of the great things about living in California, like New York, you can come in contact with cool people and no better example of this is that my next door neighbors are Gene & Toni Bua. And although they don't have the fame of a Brad and Angelina, in serious acting and theater circles in Los Angeles they are the "real deal," having been together for 47 years, starting out as the young lovers in the television soap opera, '*Love of Life*' in New York and then moving to LA in the 1980s where they set-up the **Gene Bua Acting School For Life**, that over the years mentored thousands of young and seasoned actors (including the likes of Brad Pitt, Drew Barrymore and Katay Sagal), as well as writing hundreds of songs and writing and producing a number of musicals including "**Pepper Street**," which became the longest running musical in Los Angeles. Needless to say, it was always great to hear piano playing and singing across the hedges as their living room was often the sanctuary and incubator, for musicians, singers, song writers and composer's offerings. After 13 years of fighting Parkinson Disease, Gene Bua died last November and this week several hundred of his friends attended a memorial celebration chronicling his life and legacy in the loving tribute, "**Anything Can Happen**," written by his wife Toni and performed at the **Colony Theater** in Burbank California. And what I would like to share with you today is a poem written by his 44 year old son, the artist Justin Bua.

My father has passed. I wanted to share this poem. R.I.P GENE BUA.

UPON MY FATHER'S DEATHBED

In his final breath he wanted to be one with his son.
The unsung son. The forgotten one... But I am the sun.
The solar truth, who knew his life's death.
All that wasn't done, all that came undone, all that had purpose, purposely avoided in the empty ether of the his sun's atmosphere.
In living he was afraid to see me in him. For I was him and he was me. Except his me was enslaved to having no memories. His me was a servant to time for a ruthless crime for which he did no time... Except eternity.
As he lies with gnarled claws and brittle bones, joints like stones he looks out with a pitiful gaze onto his son and into the sun.
The fire of Aries burns bright scorching Libra's flight to the other side beyond the black tangled night.
His frail frame slouches in linen sands. Tangled hands ail with jaundice strands.
His eyes no longer see through his glass menagerie but rather through a kaleidoscope of his own final judgment.
Passing before my own eyes, he realizes his real-eyes. Seeing all other matter has no matter. Only truth matters.
His eyes genuflect to me. His bent, crippled lips tremble with sweetness as he kisses nectar on my head. My love softens only to know him for a moment unshackled.
He sits still shaking in his stony sleep but he is running, cut loose from the voracious chains that forever suffocate his sleepless nights.
He ambles naked alone but for a moment.

I take his hand as we run together, dance and laugh under the sun's warmth. This past has passed, freedom at last.

Sun warming. Souls interlocked. Forever together.

My Father, don't go I love you so.

He breathes his last breath into me.

I exhale forgiveness.

Justin Bua

Born in Brooklyn, New York... Gene Bua was larger than life. Trained at New York's Neighborhood Playhouse, Bua's career kicked off in his teenage years after famed composer Richard Rodgers plucked him to play the lead in the Broadway revival of "*The Boys from Syracuse*," and went on to receive honors from the White House, United Nations, six California mayors and the Los Angeles. And like myself family seems to have played second fiddle to his mastery of putting people in touch with their genuine feelings to evoke the expressions of what lives in their hearts. *We should all hope to be Gene Buas.....*

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

I wanted to include this last week but thought that it might be a data overload and have include it this week. Attached please find ***Challengers from the Sidelines*** (*Understanding America's Violent Far-Right*) by Arie Perliger – which was commissioned by THE **COMBATING TERRORISM CENTER AT WEST POINT** in 2012. This study is more than a hundred pages and is a serious analysis of why anti-government sentiment is currently growing so rapidly in America and how to combat/address it. It starts with the following story:

Oklahoma state trooper Charles J. Hanger was patrolling interstate highway I-35 in the morning hours of 19 April 1995 when he suddenly observed an old yellow Mercury Marquis with no license plates.

After signaling the driver to park the car on the sideway, Hanger approached the car, and his suspicions were instantly raised. Not only were the plates missing, but the driver also reacted in an unusual manner. Instead of waiting within the car as most people would do, he stepped out and started calmly engaging the state trooper in conversation, admitting he had neither insurance nor license plates. The driver also admitted that he had a knife and a loaded handgun in his possession, the latter without an appropriate license. In the state of Oklahoma, these infractions result in immediate detention. To complete the unusual picture, the driver was wearing a shirt printed with provocative phrases. The front of the shirt quoted the words shouted by John Wilkes Booth after shooting Abraham Lincoln: "*Thus, always, to tyrants*," and on the back was Thomas Jefferson's statement: "The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants." As expected, the driver, Timothy James McVeigh, was arrested and taken to the Perry District Detention Center to await trial for illegal possession of a firearm. However, three days later, the FBI concluded that this was the least of his crimes. Apparently, McVeigh was responsible for the most devastating terrorist attack on US soil until then.

Little more than an hour before he had been arrested, McVeigh had driven a Ryder truck loaded with over 6500 pounds of explosives and parked it near the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building in Oklahoma City. The subsequent explosion, two minutes after 9am, had almost completely destroyed the northeast side of the building, although failing to raze the building as McVeigh had hoped. One hundred and sixty-eight people, including 19 children, were killed. Hundreds were injured. The city of Oklahoma, and large parts of the country, were in a state of shock and disbelief.

The FBI investigation revealed that the attack was not the act of a single fanatic, but an operation planned by a small network consisting of four people,⁶ all with ties to the American far-right

subculture. Motivated by their rage, frustration and resentment towards the federal government, they decided to take matters into their own hands. For them, the only way to raise the awareness of the American public of what they perceived as the growing corruption and incompetence of the federal government, as well as its increasing tendency to violate civil and constitutional rights, was by conducting a dramatic mass-casualty attack, killing as many representatives of the Federal government as possible.

Although unique in its impact and in the level of destruction it caused, the case of McVeigh's network is not exceptional in terms of the social, political, economic, and contextual conditions that fostered its members' radicalization. As in many other violent political groups, the background and the radicalization process of the network's members appear to be associated with a supportive social enclave, sentiments of alienation from the mainstream culture and political system, personal financial and mental crises, and previous experience with exercising extreme violence. Hence, evidence suggests that the use of theory deriving from the political violence and terrorism literature is valuable in deciphering violent manifestations of the American far-right. However, does the scale of the phenomenon justify a closer and more rigorous examination? Or are we dealing with a marginal phenomenon? Looking at recent trends of far-right violence in the United States could facilitate the formulation of an answer.

Until the attack in Oklahoma, very few people noticed that the previous years (1994–5) had been characterized by a striking rise in the number of violent attacks by American far-right groups. After a relatively quiet 1993 in which the American far-right was almost non-active (*only nine attacks*), no less than 75 attacks were perpetrated in the following year, with another 30 attacks in the first three months of 1995. What occurred in Oklahoma was not a random, isolated attack but part of a wave of far-right violence which was fueled by specific political and social conditions. Although following "OKBOMB," the US government significantly augmented the resources and measures employed to detect and dismantle violent and potentially dangerous far-right associations, far-right groups did not cease to exist. Some of them adapted to the growing governmental scrutiny by shifting to milder, less militant activities; others formed new organizational entities in place of the old ones, hoping to deter suspicion. Combined with the emergence of the Jihadi threat, this facilitated a prevailing sense that the far right was in decline. However, this apparent interlude is over. In the last few years, especially since 2007, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of attacks and violent plots originating in the far-right of American politics. Does this reflect the return of far-right violence? And if so, should we expect, as in previous waves, the emergence of groups which will be willing to initiate mass casualty attacks, similar to the one perpetrated by McVeigh and his associates? The current study will assess the current and future threat from the far right by providing answers to three core questions:

- 1)** What are the main current characteristics of the violence produced by the far right?
- 2)** What type of far-right groups are more prone than others to become involved in violence? How are the characteristics of those particular far-right groups correlated with their tendency to engage in violence?
- 3)** What are the social and political factors associated with the level of far-right violence? Are there political or social conditions that foster or discourage violence? The first part of the study provides a contextual foundation by conceptualizing the American far right and then depicting its ideological and organizational/operational development. The second part analyzes the violence and radicalization processes in the different streams of the violent American far right using a comprehensive dataset that documents American far-right violence in the last 22 years. The last part of the study is an assessment of the future trajectory of American far right violence.

Last week while watching an interview about how processed foods are designed and modified so that they appeal to the **Bliss Point**, a term that I didn't know, so I looked it up. **Wikipedia:** In economics, a '*bliss point*' is a quantity of consumption where any further increase would make the consumer less satisfied. It is a quantity of consumption which maximizes utility in the absence budget constraint. In other words, it refers to the amount of consumption that would be chosen by a person so rich that money imposed no constraint on his or her decisions. AND In the formulation of food products using food optimization, the bliss point is the amount of an ingredient such as salt, sugar, or fat which optimizes palatability. Realizing that this is just a partial explanation, I dug a little further.

It turns out that in the Junk and Process Food Business – **The Bliss Point** – is when food is engineered and designed by adding the ideal amount/combination of salt, sugar, fat and other additives to the point that make our brains respond to the endorphins which are genetically designed to reward nutrients and dopamine that can become an unbelievably powerful addiction to our neurotransmitter in our brain – taste bud. In combination, sugar, fat, and salt act synergistically: combinations are far more addictive than any single one alone. Mice, for instance, will work as hard to get a mixture of corn oil and sugar as they will to get cocaine. The food industry tries very hard to make each food contain combinations of 2 or 3 of these nutrients at their Bliss Points. It's done to encourage us to buy the food again, because we really like it. That's why it's so hard to stay away from some of these foods. For those of us who are sensitive to the power of endorphins and dopamine, it becomes virtually impossible not to over-eat.

For nutrients that we like and therefore seek out, there is a particular concentration that makes food most palatable.

- Too little sugar, and it's not sweet enough. Too much, and it's too sweet. The "*just right*" amount is the Bliss Point.
- Too little salt, and it's not salty enough. Too much, and it's too salty. The "*just right*" amount is the Bliss Point.
- Too little fat, and it's too bland. Too much, and it's too rich. The "*just right*" amount is the Bliss Point.

These are nutrients that have been so important to us in our evolutionary history that Natural Selection favored genetic variations that

1. Enable us to taste these nutrients
2. Make our brains respond with a "reward" [we like it, it tastes good]
 - The Reward Center of the brain gives us a little jolt of endorphins for our reward
 - Endorphins are the endogenous morphine-like chemicals that work on the same neuronal receptors as opiate drugs
3. Make our brains remember what we did to get that reward, and make us want to do it again
 - This is run by the neurotransmitter, dopamine
 - Reward-seeking actions can become unbelievably powerful, which is what addiction is.

When food companies are engineering/designing for taste and not for nutrients, it in itself is not a problem, as long as we the public understand what the ingredients are and how they affect our bodies. But my fear is that when food processors have to make a choice between health and profits..... believe me when I say..... public consumers will end up with the short straws... even if these choices lead to obesity, high blood pressure, diabetes and other diseases currently plaguing our country, especially our young..

Last week the country received very encouraging economic news with the Dow closing a week ago Friday at 14,397.07 more than double of what it was four years ago. Also the Labor Department data showed 236,000 jobs were added in February. January's numbers were revised down, but the figures from December were increased. All told, monthly gains have averaged more than 200,000 jobs since November. and the unemployment rate dropped to 7.7 percent, the lowest in four years. With both housing starts and home values their highest since 2008. And corporate America has hoarded more than \$3 trillion. But as I pointed out, the numbers don't tell the entire story, as profits in corporate America are soaring and the rich are getting richer, while from 2009 to 2011, average real income per family grew modestly by 1.7% but the gains were very uneven. Top 1% incomes grew by 11.2% while bottom 99% incomes shrunk by 0.4%. **Hence, the top 1% captured 121% of the income gains in the first two years of the recovery.**

It appears that we now have a five-tier economy: **The Super Rich** who are doing beyond the beyond. **The Rich** who are doing better than ever. The ever dwindling **Middle Class** who have seen their adjusted incomes decrease over the past three decades. The **Working Poor** who are living/surviving paycheck to paycheck. **And the unemployed, elderly and poor** who are increasingly being shunned by both political parties. The **Wall Street Journal** recently reported that the market for luxury goods is booming. The newspaper characterizes this as evidence of the economic robustness, connecting "*The economy has bounced back from recession*" to "*As a result, wealthy Americans are spending freely on expensive clothing, accessories, jewelry and beauty products.*" **The Wall Street Journal** quotes HSBC luxury-goods analyst Antoine Belge, "*Trends in luxury consumption in the U.S. have continued to outperform overall consumer trends*" This is actually evidence that you and most of the people you know are getting left, far behind, in the post-crash economy. The average participant in the overall American economy isn't fooled by any of this. They well know what Matt Phillips points out at Quartz, household incomes "*haven't gone anywhere but down.*" As Phillips relates, "*Real median US household income -- that's "real," as in "adjusted for inflation" -- was \$50,054 in 2011, the most recent data available from the US Census Bureau. That's 8% lower than the 2007 peak of \$54,489.*"

As **The Huffington Post** pointed out last week in – **Dow Jones Hits 'Record High' Thanks To Strong Performances From Stocks, Mirrors Sectors** – *We are led, then, inevitably, to a conclusion that we all feel, but no one says aloud. The American middle class, in other words, no longer lives in a financial economy. But the gold-standard economic metrics that we hold out as the key measurements of prosperity -- the economy of Wall Street, of gross domestic product figures, and the Dow Jones Industrial Average is purely financial. For the time being, assume that you and everyone who you care about is screwed. Congratulations.* And as I would like to add, like everything else numbers, like ideology can often mask the real issues and last week's encouraging numbers did

reflect the pain and suffering that half of America is currently suffering and no amount of tax breaks or stock market gains will cure. The real remedy is jobs, jobs, jobs, and more jobs and if the Private Sector isn't generating them, then government should, as jobs have a multiplier effect on the economy and on the population as a whole. And as I pointed advocated last week, with the cost of borrowing at an all time low the federal government should embark on rebuilding the country's crumbling infrastructure which will both boost the economy and leave a stronger country for future generations.

Included this week is an article in the **New York Times** by Michael Moss – ***The Extraordinary Science of Addictive Junk Food***. The **New York Times'** article exposes the clever and surprisingly immoral ways the food industry manufactures foods to rival hard drugs for their addictive potential. Well worth the read, the article discusses “designer sodium”, the genesis of the ideal kid's lunch, and the search for the morphine-like “bliss point” in soda. One scientist's description of Cheetos, in particular, highlighted the extraordinary detail that goes into what we see as a normal, familiar food: “*This,*” Witherly said, “*is one of the most marvelously constructed foods on the planet, in terms of pure pleasure.*” He ticked off a dozen attributes of the Cheetos that make the brain say more. But the one he focused on most was the puff's uncanny ability to melt in the mouth. “*It's called vanishing caloric density,*” Witherly said. “*If something melts down quickly, your brain thinks that there's no calories in it . . . you can just keep eating it forever.*”

Nearly all widely available foods, from Cutie clementines to the dozens of Pringles flavors, have been exquisitely manufactured to appeal to our primal need for salt, fat and sugar, and for our just-as-ancient yearning to get the most calories for the least amount of labor. We're all hungry and lazy. Anyone looking to introduce new and untested food – in-vitro meat, for instance – would do well to remember that food science has already perfected the art of hooking consumers on whatever they care to feed us. Also I have include several other snippets for you to peruse, as our taste buds are being manipulated beyond most people's imaginations.

I love to read Paul Krugman because in addition to having the technical understanding and depth of a Nobel Laureate, he also has the compassion of someone who understands that economists and politicians should look beyond the numbers as they are only part of the equation, when the real story is the effect on the public and private sectors and people in general. This week in an op-ed in the **New York Times** – ***Dwindling Deficit Disorder*** – he points out that the continued fixation on budget deficits and austerity and that deficit spending is actually appropriate in a depressed economy – especially in a period of low interest rates. People still talk as if the deficit were exploding, as if the United States budget were on an unsustainable path; in fact, the deficit is falling more rapidly than it has for generations, it is already down to sustainable levels, and it is too small given the state of the economy.

Starting with the raw numbers. America's budget deficit soared after the 2008 financial crisis and the recession that went with it, as revenue plunged and spending on unemployment benefits and other

safety-net programs rose. And this rise in the deficit was a good thing! Federal spending helped sustain the economy at a time when the private sector was in panicked retreat; arguably, the stabilizing role of a large government was the main reason the Great Recession didn't turn into a full replay of the Great Depression. But after peaking in 2009 at \$1.4 trillion, the deficit began coming down. The Congressional Budget Office expects the deficit for fiscal 2013 (which began in October and is almost half over) to be \$845 billion. That may still sound like a big number, but given the state of the economy it really isn't.

Krugman believes that that the budget doesn't have to be balanced to put us on a fiscally sustainable path; all we need is a deficit small enough that debt grows more slowly than the economy. To take the classic example, America never did pay off the debt from World War II — in fact, our debt doubled in the 30 years that followed the war. But debt as a percentage of G.D.P. fell by three-quarters over the same period. Right now, a sustainable deficit would be around \$460 billion. The actual deficit is bigger than that. But according to new estimates by the budget office, half of our current deficit reflects the effects of a still-depressed economy. The “*cyclically adjusted*” deficit — what the deficit would be if we were near full employment — is only about \$423 billion, which puts it in the sustainable range; next year the budget office expects that number to fall to just \$172 billion. And that's why budget office projections show the nation's debt position more or less stable over the next decade. So we do not, repeat do not, face any kind of deficit crisis either now or for years to come.

He excepts that there are longer-term fiscal issues: rising health costs and an aging population will put the budget under growing pressure over the course of the 2020s but he hasn't see any coherent explanation of why these longer-run concerns should determine budget policy right now. And that smart fiscal policy involves having the government spend when the private sector won't, supporting the economy when it is weak and reducing debt only when it is strong and that the cyclically adjusted deficit as a share of G.D.P. is currently about what it was in 2006, at the height of the housing boom — and it is headed down. Krugman says that when the economy solidly recovers we can then concentrate on reducing the deficit because unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, is still unacceptably high. “*The boom, not the slump, is the time for austerity,*” John Maynard Keynes declared many years ago. Kurgman: He was right — all you have to do is look at Europe to see the disastrous effects of austerity on weak economies. And this is still nothing like a boom.

Krugman says that fiscal fearmongering is a major industry inside the Beltway, especially among those looking for excuses to do what they really want, namely dismantle Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security. People whose careers are heavily invested in the deficit-sold industry don't want to let evidence undermine their scare tactics; as the deficit dwindles, we're sure to encounter a blizzard of bogus numbers purporting to show that we're still in some kind of fiscal crisis. And that the deficit is indeed dwindling, and the case for making the deficit a central policy concern, which was never very strong given low borrowing costs and high unemployment, has now completely vanished. Since WW11 many the country's policies have been based on fear and today's deficit dire warnings/debate in Washington is just another example, when the truth is that this proponents on the other side are only using it to take apart the safety net for the elderly and poor. I often hear the argument that seniors are receiving \$3 for every \$1 that they put into Social Security and Medicare. I asked after investing four decades in anything should you receive a three or four to one return.

Included this week is an op-ed by David Goldhill in **The Washington Post** — ***The high costs of Medicare's low prices*** — which I totally disagree, because it focuses on the cost of healthcare, instead of its effectiveness and efficiency. Obviously healthcare in the United States is broken. And to continue to believe that we have the best healthcare in the world is naïve. 12 years ago, the **World Health Organization** released the World Health Report 2000. Inside the report there was an ambitious task — to rank the world's best healthcare systems. The results became notorious — the US healthcare system came in 15th in overall performance, and first in overall expenditure per capita. That result meant that its overall ranking was 37th. The results have long been debated, with critics arguing that the data was out-of-date, incomplete, and that factors such as literacy and life expectancy were over-weighted. So controversial were the results that the WHO declined to rank countries in their World Health Report 2010, but the debate has raged on. In that same year, a report from the Commonwealth Fund ranked seven developed countries on their health care performance — the US came dead last.

Despite having the most expensive health care system, the United States ranks last overall compared to six other industrialized countries — Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom — on measures of health system performance in five areas: quality, efficiency, access to care, equity and the ability to lead long, healthy, productive lives, according to a new Commonwealth Fund report. While there is room for improvement in every country, the U.S. stands out for not getting good value for its health care dollars, ranking last despite spending \$7,290 per capita on health care in 2007 compared to the \$3,837 spent per capita in the Netherlands, which ranked first overall. Provisions in the Affordable Care Act that could extend health insurance coverage to 32 million uninsured Americans have the potential to promote improvements to the United States' standing when it comes to access to care and equity, according to **Mirror Mirror On The Wall: How the Performance of the U.S. Health Care System Compares Internationally 2010 Update**, by Commonwealth Fund researchers Karen Davis, Cathy Schoen, and Kristof Stremikis. The United States' low marks in the quality and efficiency dimensions demonstrate the need to quickly implement provisions in the new health reform law and stimulus legislation that focus on realigning incentives to reward higher quality and greater value, investment in preventive care, and expanding the use of health information technology.

The Patient Factor is an independent online source for news, views and commentary on Canadian health care. Improving the Canadian Healthcare System does not mean we must emulate the American system, but it may mean that perhaps we can learn from countries that rank better than both Canada and the USA at keeping their citizens healthy. I would suggest the same for the US. *"It is disappointing, but not surprising that, despite our significant investment in health care, the U.S. continues to lag behind other countries,"* said Commonwealth Fund President and lead author Karen Davis. *"With enactment of the Affordable Care Act, however, we have entered a new era in American health care. We will begin strengthening primary care and investing in health information technology and quality improvement, ensuring that all Americans can obtain access to high quality, efficient health care."* Obviously healthcare policies in the United States are a cash-cow for the medical/insurance establishments. Maybe we should look at France which is Rank #1 by the World Health Organization and Italy #2 or Japan #10 or the UK #18 or Canada #30.

And the one thing that they all have in common is that they have a single-payer system. For those who would like to deny healthcare to the less fortunate in the richest country in the world... *Shame on you.....* And let's institute a single-payer system that both expands coverage as well as bring down the costs. And forget ObamaCare for that matter because why bring insurance companies into the equation and have citizens pay the government directly.... And if this is a tax increase, so be it....

Two years after the *Arab Spring*, questions still remain as to how much social media actually helped fuel and drive the uprisings that arose in Tunisia and swept across the region. But regardless of what happened during those Twitter-fueled revolutions, what's happened afterward? That's what social media analytics firm **Crimson Hexagon and Sanitas International** wanted to find out when it decided to analyze tweets coming out of Egypt, Libya and even Syria, where there still is a war going on. The results of its 3-month study, which will be discussed in a panel at SXSW on Sunday, underscore the changes these countries are undergoing. "*Nobody has really talked about what happens when people put their flags away and go home,*" Christopher Harvin, co-founder and partner at **Sanitas International**, told **Mashable**.

Crimson Hexagon turned to Twitter and crafted specific keywords to analyze the tweets. That's how the authors of the study were able to have an idea about what the population of these countries we're talking about online, according to Elizabeth Breese, an analyst at Crimson Hexagon. The main discovery of the study is that after the uprisings brought down decades-old regimes, "*citizens in Egypt and Libya use social media to talk about revolution and state-building in two distinct registers: instrumental and interpretative,*" the study's abstract says.

In Egypt, that means that citizens are both expressing their opinions and views of the current political atmosphere and talking about the new institutions and how to build a new government. Spanning from February 2011 to June 2012, the study analyzed around 12 million tweets in Arabic and more than one million in English. The results underline how the population shifted its focus from looking back and reflecting on the revolution, to looking forward and focusing on new state institutions and the elections. Before the election period, from February 2011 until November of the same year, 54% of the tweets analyzed were "*reflections on the revolution.*" After that, and until mid-January 2012, only 26% of tweets were about the uprising, and the rest were about the elections and state institutions. From February until June, tweets about revolutionary activities dropped to 10%, according to the study abstract.

The picture in Libya is significantly different, according to the data. After the death of Gaddafi, in October 2011 and until December of the same year, depending on the language of the tweets, the people were talking about different things. In English more tweets were about military clashes, while in Arabic most of the conversations were about state-building. Most interestingly, Libyan people seemed to struggle to move on more than Egyptians. Even months after Gaddafi's death, more than one-third of of conversation in both languages were about "*the punishment and fate of Gaddafi's family,*" and "*the crimes of the Gaddafi era,*" according to the abstract.

Sanitas and Crimson Hexagon decided to analyze tweets from Syria too, even though the country is still at war. Unsurprisingly, most tweets (more than 60% in both Arabic and English) in Syria are about war clashes, violence and coping with death. Perhaps unexpectedly, only 7% of tweets in English and 4% in Arabic criticize the U.N. and call for international intervention. See the attached article by Lorenzo Franceschi-Bicchierai in **Mashable** – ***What Happens to Social Media After a Twitter Revolution*** – and checkout the data comparison in the infographic.

I recently heard one of the punters on one of the Sunday morning news shows describe Paul Ryan as economic wonk with the expertise to work with the Administration to resolve the current budget impasse. But like Grover Norquist, his real priority is not to make the federal government fiscally sustainable as it is to make it smaller. As Eugene Robinson pointed out this week in an op-ed in **The Washington Post** — **Paul Ryan's make-believe budget** — that last year, "the Ryan Budget" was a big Republican selling point with Ryan proposing turning Medicare into a voucher program and offering the usual Republican recipe of tax cuts — to be offset by closing certain loopholes, which he would not specify — along with drastic reductions in non-defense "discretionary" spending. What his supporters don't mention is that if the Ryan plan had been enacted, the federal budget would not come into balance until 2040.

Robinson: Voters were supposed to believe that Ryan was an apostle of fiscal rectitude. But his real aim wasn't to balance the budget. It was to starve the federal government of revenue. Big government, in his worldview, is inherently bad — never mind that we live in an awfully big country. Ryan and Mitt Romney offered their vision, President Obama offered his, and Americans made their choice. Rather emphatically. Now Ryan, as chairman of the House Budget Committee, is coming back with an ostensibly new and improved version of the framework that voters rejected in November. Judging by the preview he offered Sunday, the new plan is even less grounded in reality than was the old one. Voters might not have focused on the fact that Ryan's original plan wouldn't have produced a balanced budget until today's high school students reached middle age, but the true deficit hawks in the House Republican caucus certainly noticed. They demanded a budget that reached balance much sooner. Hence Ryan's revised plan, which claims to accomplish this feat of equilibrium within a decade.

It will, in fact, do nothing of the sort, because it appears to depend on at least one ridiculous assumption and two glaring contradictions. That's for starters; I'm confident we'll see more absurdities when the full proposal is released soon. Appearing on "**Fox News Sunday**," Ryan said his plan assumes that the far-reaching reforms known as Obamacare will be repealed. Host Chris Wallace reacted with open disbelief: "*That's not going to happen.*" Indeed, to take Ryan seriously is to believe that legislation repealing the landmark Affordable Care Act would be approved by the Senate, with its Democratic majority, and signed by Obama. Last year Ryan attacked Obama's health reforms for cutting about \$700 billion from Medicare over a decade, not by slashing benefits but by reducing payments to providers. Ryan neglected to mention that his own budget — the one he convinced the party to run on in 2012 — would cut Medicare by the same amount. Actually, by a little more.

Robinson Again: This was hypocrisy raised to high art. How could anyone who claimed to be so very worried about the crushing federal debt blithely renounce \$700 billion in savings? Ryan suggested Sunday that once Obamacare is repealed, this money can be plowed back into Medicare. Which, as you recall, will never happen. While Ryan's new budget assumes that Obamacare goes away, it also assumes that the tax increase on high earners approved in the "fiscal cliff" deal remains in place. "*That's current law*," he said, as if Obamacare were not. Ryan's sudden respect for a tax increase that had to be — metaphorically — crammed down Republicans' throats is easily explained. He needs the \$600 billion in revenue it produces to make his new fantasyland budget appear to reach balance.

Ryan is likely to reprise — and even augment — the hundreds of billions of dollars in cuts he proposed last year for social programs. He indicated that he still believes Medicare should be voucherized, although he objects to the word and insists that what he advocates is "*premium support*." And he asserted that Obamacare's expansion of Medicaid, the health-care program for the poor, is "*reckless*" — even as tea party-approved Republican governors such as Rick Scott of Florida announce their states' participation. From the evidence, Ryan cares less about deficits or tax rates than about finding

some way to dramatically reduce the size of the federal government. He has every right to hold that view. But it's hard to take him seriously as long as he refuses to come clean about his intentions.

This week in **The New York Times** editorial the title says it all — ***The Worst of the Ryan Budgets*** — when the House Budget Committee chairman, Representative Paul Ryan, on Tuesday unveiled his 2014 spending plan: a retread of ideas that voters soundly rejected, made even worse, if possible, by sharper cuts to vital services and more dishonest tax provisions. All the tired ideas from 2011 and 2012 are back: eliminating Medicare's guarantee to retirees by turning it into a voucher plan; dispensing with Medicaid and food stamps by turning them into block grants for states to cut freely; repealing most of the reforms to health care and Wall Street; shrinking beyond recognition the federal role in education, job training, transportation and scientific and medical research. The public opinion of these callous proposals was made clear in the fall election, but Mr. Ryan is too ideologically fervid to have learned that lesson. Most of all, cutting \$4.6 trillion from spending over the next decade, it would reverse the country's nascent economic growth, kill millions of real and potential jobs, and deprive those suffering the most of social assistance.

The 2014 budget is even worse than that of the previous two years because it attempts to balance the budget in 10 years instead of the previous 20 or more. That would take nondefense discretionary spending down to nearly 2 percent of the economy, the lowest in modern history. And in its laziest section, it sets a goal of slashing the top tax rate for the rich to 25 percent from 39.6 percent, though naturally Mr. Ryan doesn't explain how this could happen without raising taxes on middle- and lower-income people. There's no need, of course, to balance the budget in 10 years or even 20; these dates are arbitrary, designed solely to impress the extreme fiscal conservatives who now compose the core of the Republican Party. That same core in the House will almost certainly reject the 2014 Democratic budget expected from the Senate on Wednesday. It will take a far more evenhanded approach, cutting spending by \$1 trillion while eliminating tax breaks for the wealthy and spending \$100 billion on job training and infrastructure. Engaging in *my way or the highway politics*, Paul Ryan's budget demonstrates that he is tone-deaf to wishes of the American voters, as he and Mitt Romney were soundly defeated last November, running on the same economic policies.

Although I am a die-hard liberal Democrat, please allow me to make this observation about the Republican Party, because I believe that a strong two-party system is better for the country, as it encourages and forces the other party to be more honest. This week Chris Christie and GOProud were not invited to Conservative Political Action Conference because they weren't suitably conservative enough as the far right fringe are demanding ideological purity. Every year the doyens of the Conservative Political Action Conference issue a series of indirect proclamations on who qualifies as an echt conservative. It's not surprising that CPAC is interested in ideological purity, considering the right-wing confab is organized by the American Conservative Union, a group that provides "*legislative rankings*" to those in Congress who insist on differentiating between those "*who protect liberty as conservatives and those who are truly liberal.*" But now it is open season to hunt of RINOs ("*Republicans in Name Only*"), the replacing of unreliably conservative candidates

with the under-educated and un-electable ones, lost the party a number of safe seats in recent years. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie was disqualified because he was too chummy with the president during Hurricane Sandy and too squishy on gun control. The conservative group GOProud was disqualified because they are openly gay. While both on wives #3, Newt Gingrich and Donald Trump is lauded as an American patriot, because he demanded the President Obama show his long-form birth certificate, were invited to speak. As a result, much of the sentiment and discussion at CPAC was about how Obama's socialist/Marxist/Maoist economic policies are driving the country into serfdom, punctuated with references to Sharia Law, Muslim Brotherhood, Benghazi, taking our guns away, and Marc Rubio suggesting that the Republican Party should not change its policies.

As a result, this week in **The Daily Beast**, Michael Moynihan wrote – *The Heresy Hunters of CPAC* – that these fringe players are making the Republican Party increasingly unpopular as 73 percent of Americans between 18 and 29 years old support gay marriage and Christie is America's most popular governor in either party. *"Not only are [GOP leaders] out of touch with most Americans,"* said GOProud co-founder Jimmy LaSalvia via email, *"they don't even know what their own base thinks."* *The massive shift in attitudes toward gay rights, he argues, means that Republicans who don't embrace tolerance will doom the party. "Until they are willing to publicly engage with gay Americans, they will continue to lose at the ballot box."* Many members of the conservative establishment agree. **MSNBC's** house righty, S.E. Cupp, pulled out of the conference over the exclusion of GOProud. And the blackballing of Christie raised the hackles of **Wall Street Journal** editorial page editor Paul Gigot, **Fox News** contributor Charles Krauthammer, and Rep. Peter King (R-NY), who told CNN that ignoring Christie was "a suicidal death wish." But the president of one CPAC co-sponsor, Accuracy in Media, celebrated the decision and recommended *"a panel on the dangers of the homosexual movement and why some of its members seem prone to violence, terror, and treason."* One could reasonably conclude that CPAC organizers either put little trust in the intellectual agility of its participants (lest they be swayed by poisonous heresies) or believe that too many activists — the type who travel to D.C. for CPAC — would be offended by the heterodoxies of Christie and GOProud.

The instinct that there is something rotten — or at least broken — in modern conservatism isn't limited to those on the party's socially liberal, libertarian-leaning wing. In *The American Conservative*, Rod Dreher wrote recently that *"even though I'm a middle-aged, churchgoing white right-winger who has not the slightest attraction to liberalism, I increasingly don't want to be associated with what 'conservative' means here and now."* A number of conservative journalists I spoke with expressed similar dissatisfaction with the state of *"the movement,"* all chuckling when asked if they would be attending CPAC. Too many kooks, said one. Too much Gingrich and Trump, said another. It's funny, then, to see a panel discussion celebrating the legacy of sainted conservative intellectual William F. Buckley, a man who not only purged bonkers conspiracists like the John Birch Society but edited a magazine that openly and robustly debated gay rights. A 1978 article excoriated Pat Buchanan's homophobia and the *"irrational"* conservative fear of homosexuality; a 1986 cover story was succinctly titled *"A Conservative Speaks Out for Gay Rights."* But here we are, in 2013, and conservatism's biggest gathering wants to ensure that the Republican Party maintains ideological purity and the ability to consistently lose elections. But as a loyal American, a more diverse Republican Party is better for the Country as it keeps Democrats in-check and allows me and others to vote across party lines to support a Chris

Christie because he is doing a great job as Governor in New Jersey.... and not due to ideology.... left or right....

In an article this week in **The New York Times** Liiz Alderman wrote – ***On the Brink in Italy*** – Since a government austerity plan designed to shield Italy from Europe's debt crisis took hold last year, the economy has tumbled into one of worst recessions of any euro zone country causing an estimated six million companies, businesses of all sizes have been going belly up in Italy, at the rate of 1,000 a day over the last year, especially among the small and midsize companies that represent the backbone of Italy's 1.5 trillion euro, or \$2 trillion, economy. The situation has become more urgent after inconclusive elections in February that left politics in Rome gridlocked. "*With no one governing the country, there will be more paralysis, so things will get worse,*" said Mr. Tedeschi, 49 who owns a custom factory just north of Rome, casting a worried glance at his wife and their 23-year-old son. They help fill the trickle of orders, now that Mr. Tedeschi has had to lay off 6 of the 11 full-time employees he had in mid-2011. And a new caretaker government, which could be installed in weeks, is unlikely to be strong enough to pass growth-enhancing reforms, deepening problems for Italy, and for Europe, that could take years to reverse – This underscores the likelihood of Italy having a Japan-like decade with phenomenally slow growth, while raising painful questions about the long-run stability of growth in the euro zone over all.

Although Italy's political quagmire might not affect global financial markets right away, it raises the specter of the European crisis grinding on and on making it hard for European leaders put together big deals needed to stabilize Europe. Italy's reliance on companies with 50 or fewer employees that are struggling to compete in the global marketplace because of a lumbering bureaucracy and stifling labor regulations. As such Italy's economy grew at only half of the rate of the 17-nation euro currency nations. Last year Italy's economy shrank 2.4%. As such, one in two small companies cannot pay its employees on time, according to CGIA di Mestre, a research institute. With layoffs surging, unemployment rose to 11.7 percent in January. Youth unemployment has jumped to 38.7 percent. The austerity program was intended to reduce the risk of a debt crisis and ensure the backing of the European Central Bank, but instead it left the country with no growth. And without growth, Italy will have a harder time paying down its 2 trillion euros (*\$2.6 trillion*) in debt, one of the largest debt burdens in the euro zone.

Obviously, for growth and unemployment to improve, we need to have a government that can remove uncertainty for businesses, consumers, investors and banks. And political instability is probably one of the most damaging things for the economy. In some respects, Italy is not as hobbled as some other euro countries. The Italian government has managed to shrink the budget deficit. Industrial companies like Ferrari, Benetton and Ducati continue to help Italy maintain the euro zone's second-largest manufacturing base after Germany. But it is businesses like Mr. Tedeschi's – ones with fewer than 50 workers, which constitute the vast majority of Italy's economy and long provided much of its vitality – that are buckling as banks halt lending and taxes rise. Credit issued by Italian banks fell in 2012 to the lowest level in more than a decade. And the government owes an estimated 70 billion euros in unpaid bills for goods and services to Italian companies.

Mr. Tedeschi started feeling the pinch in late 2011 at his factory in Guidonia, an industrial town north of Rome in Lazio, a sprawling region that is in many ways a microcosm of Italy itself. Here, amid low-lying mountains and rolling green hills, are many midsize factories specializing in products stamped *"Made in Italy."* But hundreds of those businesses have been shut lately. *"In one and a half years, everything changed,"* Mr. Tedeschi said. *"People started feeling afraid, and they stopped spending money. All the promises Monti made to relaunch the economy and help us enhance productivity never materialized."* Orders for Temeca's custom-built bedrooms, kitchens, windows and doors slowed to a trickle. Even the Vatican, which commissioned a choir stand and furnishings for one of its palaces from Mr. Tedeschi's company, stopped placing orders last year.

Recently, he took a step he had hoped never to have to make: laying off employees, including a man who had been with the company for more than 30 years. *"When I had to fire those people, I cried,"* he said, sitting in his small office under a picture of Mother Teresa as his wife, Annarita Neroni, and his son, Lorenzo, looked on. Mr. Tedeschi said several members of a local trade group took their own lives last year when they could no longer maintain their business. *"This is a moment where if you stay alone in this situation,"* he said, *"you will wind up by shooting yourself."*

Mr. Tedeschi's wife said the family stopped drawing salaries more than a year ago to make payroll for the remaining workers. Disillusioned with the economy's rapid erosion under Mr. Monti, the family voted for the anti-establishment Five Star movement, led by the comedian turned activist Beppe Grillo, in the February elections, even though they knew it might lead to chaos. *"It's a form of protest,"* Lorenzo Tedeschi said, adding that he had been drawn by Mr. Grillo's plan to cut billions of euros in corruption and wasteful spending. *"We need to start from scratch in this country, and he gives us hope that there is a chance to make things equal."*

That may be tough, given that the discord Mr. Grillo created is likely to delay a recovery. Few people believe that official forecasts of a return to mild growth this year will materialize. Lorenzo said he had no choice but to be optimistic. *"I still have my life ahead of me,"* he said. *"I have to believe that things will get better."* Mr. Tedeschi interrupted his son. *"What has been happening is humiliating,"* he said. *"If I fail, and businesses like mine fail, then everything else fails."* Ms. Tedeschi put her hand on her husband's shoulder. *"We are going through a financial war, which is burying us,"* she said. *"Will there be any survivors?"*

This week in the **New York Times**, Peter Lattman article – **SAC Capital to Pay \$616 Million in Insider Trading Cases** – about the settlement made the giant hedge fund to resolve the governments multiyear investigation relating to improper trading at the fund, which George S. Canellos, the Securities and Exchange Commission's acting enforcement director called, "historic." What an f....ing joke..... Yes, the sum exceeds the amounts of older enforcement actions, including a \$550 million settlement with Goldman Sachs in 2010 related to fraud accusations tied to the sale of mortgage investments, and a \$400 million settlement with Mr. Milken, the junk bond financier, in 1990. And yes, the forfeited money will come from SAC, meaning that the firm will write the government a check and SAC's investors will not pay anything or absorb any losses. And of course the

\$616 million will go into a general revenue fund of the United States Treasury. But under the securities laws, the S.E.C. could have secured a penalty of \$825 million. Also, under this settlement SAC Capital Advisors admits "*no wrong doing*" and although \$616 million is a huge amount of money for this \$15 billion fund, it is just the cost of doing business for a company where yearly partner bonuses easily exceed this amount. Unless these white collar fraudsters are treated like any other criminal who steal, with harsh jail sentences and confiscation of their wealth, this type of crime will continue, especially at a time when politicians and government regulators are saying that there are now institutions that are too big to fail and too important to prosecute. Let's take a page from the Chinese and put people who are caught doing things like this in jail.....

This week in **Reuters**, journalist Daniel Trotta wrote – ***Iraq War Cost U.S. More Than \$2 Trillion, Could Grow to \$6 Trillion, Says Watson Institute Study***. As of this month the study says that the U.S. war in Iraq has cost \$1.7 trillion with an additional \$490 billion in benefits owed to war veterans, expenses that could grow to more than \$6 trillion over the next four decades counting interest. According to the **Costs of War Project by the Watson Institute for International Studies at Brown University**, the war has also killed at least 134,000 Iraqi civilians and may have contributed to the deaths of as many as four times that number. And when security forces, insurgents, journalists and humanitarian workers were included, the war's death toll rose to an estimated 176,000 to 189,000, the study said. The report, the work of approximately 30 academics and experts at **Brown University**, was published in advance of the 10th anniversary of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq on March 19, 2003. It was also an update of a 2011 report the **Watson Institute** produced ahead of the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks that assessed the cost in dollars and lives from the resulting wars in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq.

The 2011 study said the combined cost of the wars was at least \$3.7 trillion, based on actual expenditures from the U.S. Treasury and future commitments, such as the medical and disability claims of U.S. war veterans. That estimate climbed to nearly \$4 trillion in the update. And the estimated death toll from the three wars, previously at 224,000 to 258,000, increased to a range of 272,000 to 329,000 two years later. Not included are indirect deaths caused by the mass exodus of doctors and a devastated infrastructure. And the study left out trillions of dollars in interest costs, that the United States will be paying over the next 40 years. The interest on expenses for the Iraq war could amount to about \$4 trillion during that period, the report said. The report also examined the burden on U.S. veterans and their families, showing a deep social cost as well as an increase in spending on veterans. The 2011 study found U.S. medical and disability claims for veterans after a decade of war totaled \$33 billion. Two years later, that number had risen to \$134.7 billion.

This latest number of \$4 to \$6 trillion vastly exceeds the initial 2002 estimates by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget of \$50 to \$60 billion when a number of officials, including former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and his deputy Paul Wolfowitz suggested the war could be done on the cheap and that it would largely pay for itself. In October 2003, Rumsfeld told a press conference about President Bush's request for \$21 billion for Iraq and Afghan reconstruction that "*the \$20 billion the president requested is not intended to cover all of Iraq's needs. The bulk of the funds for Iraq's reconstruction will come from Iraqis -- from oil revenues, recovered assets, international trade, direct foreign investment, as well as some contributions we've already received and hope to receive from the international community.*" In March 2003, Mr. Wolfowitz told Congress that "*we're really dealing with a country that could finance its own reconstruction.*" In April 2003, the Pentagon said

the war would cost about \$2 billion a month, and in July of that year Rumsfeld increased that estimate to \$4 billion.

The report concluded the United States gained little from the war while Iraq was traumatized by it. The war reinvigorated radical Islamist militants in the region, set back women's rights, and weakened an already precarious healthcare system, the report said. Meanwhile, the \$212 billion reconstruction effort was largely a failure with most of that money spent on security or lost to waste and fraud, it said. Former President George W. Bush's administration cited its belief that Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's government held weapons of mass destruction to justify the decision to go to war. U.S. and allied forces later found that such stockpiles did not exist. There are many costs of these wars that we have not yet been able to quantify and assess. With our limited resources, we focused on the human toll in the major war zones, Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan and on US spending, as well as on assessing the claims made for enhanced security, democracy, and women's condition.

Among the group's main findings:

- More than 70 percent of those who died of direct war violence in Iraq have been civilians — an estimated 134,000. This number does not account for indirect deaths due to increased vulnerability to disease or injury as a result of war-degraded conditions. That number is estimated to be several times higher.
- The Iraq War will ultimately cost U.S. taxpayers at least \$2.2 trillion. Because the Iraq war appropriations were funded by borrowing, cumulative interest through 2053 could amount to more than \$3.9 trillion.
- The \$2.2 trillion figure includes care for veterans who were injured in the war in Iraq, which will cost the United States almost \$500 billion through 2053.
- The total of U.S. service members killed in Iraq is 4,488. At least 3,400 U.S. contractors have died as well, a number often under-reported.
- Terrorism in Iraq increased dramatically as a result of the invasion and tactics and fighters were exported to Syria and other neighboring countries.
- Iraq's health care infrastructure remains devastated from sanctions and war. More than half of Iraq's medical doctors left the country during the 2000s, and tens of thousands of Iraqi patients are forced to seek health care outside the country.
- The \$60 billion spent on reconstruction for Iraq has not gone to rebuilding infrastructure such as roads, health care, and water treatment systems, but primarily to the military and police. The Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction has found massive fraud, waste, and abuse of reconstruction fund.

George W. Bush said, we will attack "*at a time of our choosing.*" He dismissed the United Nations, saying "*The United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities. So we will rise to ours.*" He chose to attack Iraq on the evening of March 19, 2003, and he

did so with shock and awe, but without legality under international law. Less than two months later, Bush dressed up in a flight suit, landed on the aircraft carrier, the USS Abraham Lincoln, stood under a sign that said "*Mission Accomplished*," and boasted with his usual shortsightedness, "*In the Battle of Iraq, the United States and our allies have prevailed.*" If it weren't for the power of the United States, the neocons in the Bush Administration including the President and the Vice President would be on trial at the International Criminal Court today. Because where I come from even if I think that my neighbor is a bad person, if I kill him preemptively..... I go to jail..... Unless I am a white 28 year old man in Florida tracking a black teenager wearing a hoody in the rain..... because he looks suspicious..... Then I can shoot this unarmed suspect.... claiming..... "*I stood my ground*".....

There is still much more to know and understand about how all those affected by the wars have had their health, economies, and communities altered by the decade of war, and what solutions exist for the problems they face as a result of the wars' destruction. But what we also know is that the price of crude oil rose by five-fold, raising energy costs worldwide, with Russia and Iran as the ultimate beneficiaries, while at the same time totally destabilizing the entire Middle East Dick Cheney said, "*We will be greeted as liberators.*" Donald Rumsfeld said, in effect, that the war would pay for itself: "*The bulk of the funds for Iraq's reconstruction will come from Iraqis – from oil revenues, recovered assets, international trade, direct foreign investment....*" *We really have to come to terms that both wars were totally unnecessary and that they were totally based on deception and lies. AND more importantly, we have to ask, why are people not facing this truth, in light of all of the facts.... FINALLY we have come to terms that like the war in Vietnam which most people accept as a huge mistake, it is now more than ever evident, that the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq may be larger mistakes. Because if we don't face up to this, the country is destined to repeat this same mistake again...*

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE

Commenting on Medicine and Medical Care in America

"We think that we have all the answers but when you look at this country The United States of America maybe the unhealthiest nation on the industrialized planet, a third of all our people are obese, ten percent of our population suffer from diabetes, we are twenty-fifth in preventing heart disease, we are seventh globally in preventing cancer, twenty-seven in life expectancy, so it can be said that I medicine here sucks... As such it can be safely said that we don't have all the answers."

Dr Sidney Napur

(Character in David E. Kelly and Dr. Sanjay Gupta's new show 'Monday Mornings,' on TNT)

AMAZING CARD TRICK VIDEO

10 reasons to visit Portugal...

THIS WEEK'S MUSIC

This week I would like to share the music of Patti LaBelle with you. Patricia Louise Holte-Edwards (born May 24, 1944), better known under the stage name Patti LaBelle, is a multi-Grammy Award-winning American singer, author, actress and recently pitch-woman who has spent over 50 years in the music industry. LaBelle spent 16 years as lead singer of Patti LaBelle and the Bluebelles, who changed their name to Labelle in the early 1970s and released the iconic disco song "*Lady Marmalade*".

LaBelle started her solo career shortly after the group disbanded in 1977 and crossed over to pop music with "*On My Own*", "*If Only You Knew*", "*If You Asked Me To*", "*Stir It Up*", and "*New Attitude*". She has also recorded R&B ballads such as "*You Are My Friend*" and "*Love, Need and Want You*". LaBelle possessed the vocal range of a soprano. This Philadelphia native has received recognition of her works, being inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame, the Hollywood Walk of Fame, the Apollo Hall of Fame, the Songwriters' Hall of Fame as well as the World Music Awards presenting her with the prestigious Legend Award. LaBelle has sold over 50 million records worldwide.

Patti Labelle — *Somewhere Over the Rainbow* -- [REDACTED]

Patti Labelle — *You'll Never Walk Alone* -- [REDACTED]

Joe Cocker, Patti Labelle, Billy Preston — *You Are So Beautiful* -- [REDACTED]
[v=Wh7Bu56vsfw](#)

Patti LaBelle — *If Only You Knew* -- [REDACTED]

Patti LaBelle — *I Have Nothing* -- [REDACTED]

Patti LaBelle — *Ain't No Way* -- [REDACTED]

Patti Labelle and Michael McDonald — *OWN MY OWN* -- [REDACTED]

Patti LaBelle and Gerald Levert — *Wind Beneath My Wings* -- [REDACTED]
[v=YFJCPgMKUVc](#)

Patti Labelle — *If you Asked me To* -- [REDACTED]

Patti Labelle — *Somebody Loves You* -- [REDACTED]

Patti Labelle — *You are my Friend* -- [REDACTED]

Patti Labelle — *I Believe - One Night Only* -- [REDACTED]

Patti LaBelle — *New Day* -- [REDACTED]

Patti Labelle — *Diva Medley* - Live in NY -- [REDACTED]

Patti LaBelle — *Lady Marmalade* (1975) -- [REDACTED]

RECOMMENDATION

Last night I had the pleasure to see *Zero Dark Thirty* -- American historical drama film directed by Kathryn Bigelow and starring Jessica Chastain, who won an Oscar at the 85th Academy Awards as Best Actress..... *GREAT MOVIE*.....

I hope that you enjoyed this week's offerings and wish you a great week....

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

--

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