

From: Gregory Brown <[REDACTED]>

To: undisclosed-recipients;

Bcc: jeevacation@gmail.com

Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.... 12/29/2013

Date: Sun, 29 Dec 2013 08:37:17 +0000

Attachments: Jon_Stewart_Defends_Duck_Dynasty_Ross_Luippold_Huff_Post_12_20_13.docx;
The_U.S._economy_does_better_under_Democratic_presidents_\u2014_is_it_just_luck_Brad_Plum_er_TWP_December_2,_2013.docx;
The_President_of_the_Cool_Ishmael_Reed_NYT_December_18,_2013.docx;
Inequality,_Government_Is_a_Perp,_Not_a_Bystander_Dean_Baker_Huff_Post_12-23-2013.docx;
Yusef_Lateef,_Innovative_Jazz_Saxophonist_and_Flutist,_Dies_at_93_Peter_Keepnews_NYT_December_24,_2013.docx;
Jet_Fuel_by_the_Acre_Jet_Fuel_By_The_Acre_Todd_Woody_NYT_December_25,_2013.docx

Inline-Images: image.png; image(1).png; image(2).png; image(3).png; image(4).png; image(5).png

DEAR FRIEND.....

 Inline image 5

As someone who like Ishmael Reed grew up wanting to be cool, I took a special interest in Reed's **New York Times** piece – ***The President of the Cool***. And again like Reed, I thought of John F. Kennedy as our first Cool President, even though I was unaware that he pardoned the jazz pianist Hampton Hawes who was a bebop pianist with a right-hand technique so brilliant that he was admired by none other than Art Tatum, widely considered the greatest jazz pianist ever. Hawes had been sentenced to 10 years in a Fort Worth prison for buying drugs from an undercover agent. *“Just after my third Christmas I was watching John Kennedy accept the presidency on the Washington steps,”* Hawes wrote later. *“Something about him, the voice, the eyes, the way he stood bright and coatless and proud in that cold air ... I thought, that’s the right cat; looks like he got some soul and might listen.”* He applied for a pardon, and received one from the president on Aug. 16, 1963.

Democrats have more of an affinity for jazz than Republicans. Even Jimmy Carter, not everybody's idea of a hipster, invited Dizzy Gillespie to the White House. But among the Democrats, President Obama is the one who comes closest to the style of bebop called “the Cool.” Cool jazz is exemplified by the saxophone of Lester Young and his protégé Stan Getz; the trumpet of Miles Davis (especially on his 1957 album ***Birth of the Cool***); the vibraphone of Milt Jackson and the song stylings of Billie Holiday, Sarah Vaughan and June Christy. Like the president, cool musicians carried themselves with a regal bearing. Some members of the generation before them had to engage in minstrel-like antics to make a living. Cool musicians demanded respect, and when attacked didn't blow up, but, like the president, responded stoically. One of his favorite words is *“persistence,”* the attitude of his hero, the saxophonist Sonny Rollins, the greatest surviving bebopper.

And again like with Reed, for a while in the mid-20th century, the Cool was everywhere. As youngsters in the '50s, my friends and I talked cool, walked cool and dressed cool. For us, if you weren't cool, you were hot, square or corny. We thought that Louis Armstrong was too hot and corny, until we read about his dispute with President Dwight D. Eisenhower over school integration.

Armstrong had guts. Last month Reed got to see the president of the Cool at the San Francisco Jazz Center, a \$64 million building that opened earlier this year. Reed who is in his second term as its poet laureate, and one of his poems, *“When I Die I Will Go to Jazz,”* has been installed on one of the building’s walls (in an alley named after Hawes’s memoir, *“Raise Up Off Me”*), so he was invited to attend the event. The pianist who anchored the evening, Herbie Hancock, is cool. He was accompanied by other cool musicians, like the saxophonist Joshua Redman and the bassist Esperanza Spalding, who was so engaged in her instrument that she seemed attached to it. An added attraction were the SFJazz High School All-Stars, a group of white, black and Asian-American students. One of the graduates, the young flutist Elena Pinderhughes, performed with the trio and held her own.

Outside, though, it was hot. Demonstrators against everything from military drones to energy pipelines greeted the president’s entourage when it arrived.

After being introduced, the president just about bounced onto the stage. A few days earlier Reed said that he had heard a commentator say he seemed in the dumps these days, but that afternoon he was fresh, unruffled — in other words, cool. (Maybe it was because our state’s health-insurance exchange, Covered California, demonstrates how well the Affordable Care Act works when implemented correctly: Reed’s youngest daughter got a silver plan that drastically reduces her monthly premiums within an hour of applying. And my 25 year-old daughter is still covered under my ex’s health plan at Stanford University, curiosity of Obamacare.)

One hallmark of a cool musician, like Ms. Spalding earlier in the evening, is an intensity and focus that lurks underneath the detached exterior. Reed sensed the same with Mr. Obama that night. He hit repeatedly on his version of the American dream, that if you work hard you can succeed, no matter who you are. His recent speeches have abandoned the *“tough love”* rhetoric that targeted blacks exclusively; he now includes millions of whites in talking about a *“tangle of pathologies,”* something the political scientist Andrew Hacker first noticed in his 1992 book *“Two Nations.”* At one point, a member of the audience began heckling Mr. Obama, demanding that he be more aggressive on progressive legislative issues. The president replied, without skipping a beat, *“A lot of people have been saying this lately on every problem. Just sign an executive order and we can do everything.”* The Constitution tells him to do otherwise. Then the president of the Cool left to make a speech in Los Angeles.

In 2010 Mr. Obama awarded the **National Medal of Arts and Humanities** to Mr. Rollins, the saxophonist. Oftentimes, there is a gulf between the people receiving this medal and the person conferring it. What does a president know about theater, or architecture? Not so that day. When awarding Mr. Rollins the medal, the president said that his music had *“helped inspire me, or get me through a tough day, or take risks that I might not otherwise have taken.”* Reed..... *I can dig it* — an expression that is now considered corny. In many ways, President Obama reminds me of Walt *“Clyde”* Fraser who in the 1970s was the Prince of Cool on the basketball courts in the NBA. No matter how impossible the shot, he would execute them with the cool of someone who didn’t have a worry in the world.

Critics often charge the President of being too detached. Too professorial? Too smart? Too cold? Too cool? Well I like smart cool Presidents who treat citizens as thinking adults when explaining the intricacies of contradicting government policies, such as the fact that some health insurance policies won’t qualify under the new Affordable Healthcare Act because in essence they are *junk insurance*, often covering much less than promised. Obviously the President has made mistakes and I disagree with him on a number of issues, but on balance he has done a pretty good job. He has gotten us out of

Iraq militarily. Seriously reduced our military commitment in Afghanistan. Kept us out of wars in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Iran and elsewhere. Definitely dialed down the rhetoric with Iran, Russia, China, North Korea and Cuba. Instituted economic policies that has led to the financial markets fully recovering to new all-time highs with the stock market up 20% in the last year and doubled to what it was when President Obama took office in January 2009, as well as sparked the recovery in the housing markets as November had the largest new-home starts (464,000, 16.6% higher than a year ago) in more than ten years. Slowly reduced unemployment, against the objections of Conservatives who pushed austerity instead of job programs. Push a progressive social agenda for equal rights. And his crowning accomplishment is overhauling America's dysfunctional and unsustainable healthcare system, which now provides an increased safety net for tens of millions of Americans who were uninsured. And yes unemployment has only come down to 7%, but Republicans forget that Ronald Reagan got reelected in 1984 when unemployment was 7%, under a campaign banner proclaiming, "*Morning in America.*"

And President Obama has done this with few if any histrionics. Boy do I like our Cool President. And as I like to say to his critics; are we better off now than we were five years ago? For a guy who **The Washington Post** described as *having a bad year*, I can only imagine where the country would be today if he had a great year. But maybe he did. Think about it, the economy grew by a surprising 4.1%, in the third quarter of 2013, with unemployment going down in 45 states. And despite the disastrous start of the Affordable Care Act website, state exchanges are doing great and as a result of the fixes on the National Website, people are signing up in droves but more importantly and often overlooked, healthcare cost grew by less than 2% last year and more people have access than ever before, due to the fact that people with pre-existing conditions (*like myself*) can now get health insurance, and people like my daughter who is 25 can still be covered under her mother's health insurance. I like our cool President and now I know that he (like me) likes jazz too. In the 1960s in New York, I use to hang out with Ishmael Reed in **Max's Kansas City** (*at the time the coolest counter-culture bar in the world*) and to sit in our booth (*The Black Booth*) you had to be Cool, looking back I think the President would have made the cut.....

 Inline image 4

Rarely do I agree with *Ted Cruz, Bobby Jindal* and *Sarah Palin* but in the current hoopla caused by the recent comments in **GQ Magazine** from an interview with the patriarch of the **A&E** cable television blockbuster, (*which is the #1 show on the network*) **Duck Dynasty's** Phil Robertson, who made insensitive and definitely not "*politically correct comments*" on homosexuality, race and religion, I see this is as non-issue. This is a reality show and Phil Robinson is a "*good-old-boy*" from the Louisiana bayous. It should be expected that he reflects ideas that are relics of the *Old South*, when homosexuality was associated with depraved sin and Blacks were happy singing in the fields. "*And why shouldn't they be because they were given jobs and their own water fountains.*" Obviously this is an example of profound ignorance which as I understand is a guaranteed right in the Constitution under *Free Speech*.

Hey.... Rush Limbaugh, Ted Nugent, Ann Coulter, Sean Hannity basically say the same things all the time and it is accepted as part of their shtick. We can't get upset because someone offends our sensibilities, as this happens all of the time in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic pluralistic society. And I am not upset with Paula Deen either, because I am sure that she grew up in a household where the "N" word was liberally used. As long as she doesn't use it in my presence, I don't have a problem with her. And if she uses it to address or demean her employees they should sue. Robinson is a pop phenomenon whose cable reality television show is centered on a family of hillbillies duck hunting in the back waters. Robertson's supporters do have a point here... And let's be honest, *how ignorant can't you be and still keep your reality television show.*

Of course Robertson is a fool. Of course is ignorant. And of course he is totally ill-informed, but many other people are too. As long as what is said is not venomous or with malice and hatred, people shouldn't be castigated for expressing their personal views. I tried watching the show one evening but couldn't make it passed the first eight or ten minutes, yet **A&E** says it has an audience of nine million loyal viewers, so what do I know. Needless to say, it is going to stay on television, especially since the next season is already in the can. Finally, I agree with Conan O'Brien who lamented to **A&E** executives, "*I am shocked that an old bearded duck hunter who lives with his kin folks in the Louisiana bayous did not have progressive views on gay people.*"

Web Link: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/20/jon-stewart-defends-duck-dynasty_n_4479470.html?utm_hp_ref=mostpopular

Please also feel free to take a look at Jon Stewart's take last week on **The Daily Show** on the issue on the above web link, as well as Ross Luippold's accompanying article in **The Huffington Post** attached. And if you believe in free speech like I do, the Duck Dynasty issue is a non-issue because Mr. Robertson should be free to express whatever personal views that he has. As for Palin, Jindal, Cruz, Coulter and other Conservatives, I wonder what their First Amendment position was when the Dixie Chicks got into similar trouble for espousing their personal liberal views.

As many of you know I am a fan of Chris Matthews and a frequent viewer of his show **Hardball** on **MSNBC** and on my birthday, December 12, 2013 Chris gave a great summary of the show that I would like to share.

MATTHEWS: Let me finish tonight with again, what I've been hearing out there on the 10-week book tour for "**Tip and The Gipper: When Politics Worked,**" my story of political coming of age. I hear this from audience after audience, I hear it from applause, the loud deep clap of approval when I say this one line about the condition of our democracy in this country, this endless obstructionism, this constant tilt towards shutdown, the war whooping for doing nothing, this inability to act on your words, deliver what you promise.

Quote, "*This country doesn't need more Democrats, it doesn't need more Republicans, it needs more grown-ups.*" Everyone knows what that means, including the main body of progressive who is come out to hear me. Progressives know that they have the biggest stake in government, delivering on their promise. When there's a screw-up, it helps the other side, the people who campaigned against public action. It always hurts those who like me want to believe, believe that we as a society cannot just promise a better country, but deliver on it.

I've said it before, because it's true. We used to be able to get things done. My book is all about how we did it, viewed by me, back then from the inside. As Jack Kennedy said at American University in the year he died, the problems of man are man-made. They can be solved by man and man can be as big as he wants. In the past, he has solved the seemingly unsolvable. And I believe he can do again. And so do I, and so do you.

 Inline image 6

In the spirit of COOL and JAZZ, I would like to pay homage to legendary **Yusef Lateef**, Innovative Jazz Saxophonist and Flutist who died this past week at the age of 93, as he inspired me to pick up the Flute and allowed me (*with my limited chops*) to sit in with him, Don Cherry, Archie Shepp, Ornette Coleman, Sam Rivers, Rashied Ali and others who were experimenting pass the boundaries of music during the 1960s and 1970s. In addition to being a consummate musician, Yusef Lateef was a *man's man*, who thirst for knowledge and meaning led him to earning a doctorate in education from the **University of Massachusetts**, Amherst, in 1975 (his dissertation: "*An Overview of Western and Islamic Education*") and later taught there and elsewhere in New England.

Mr. Lateef started out as a tenor saxophonist with a big tone and a bluesy style, not significantly more or less talented than numerous other saxophonists in the crowded jazz scene of the 1940s. He served a conventional jazz apprenticeship, working in the bands of Lucky Millinder, Dizzy Gillespie and others. But by the time he made his first records as a leader, in 1957, he had begun establishing a reputation as a decidedly unconventional musician.

He began expanding his instrumental palette by doubling on flute, by no means a common jazz instrument in those years. He later added oboe, bassoon and non-Western wind instruments like the shehnai and argul. "*My attempts to experiment with new instruments grew out of the monotony of hearing the same old sounds played by the same old horns,*" he once told **DownBeat** magazine. "When I looked into those other cultures, I found that good instruments existed there." Those experiments led to an embrace of new influences. At a time when jazz musicians in the United States rarely sought inspiration any farther geographically than Latin America, Mr. Lateef looked well beyond the Western Hemisphere. Anticipating the cross-cultural fusions of later decades, he flavored his music with scales, drones and percussion effects borrowed from Asia and the Middle East. He played world music before world music had a name.

In later years he incorporated elements of contemporary concert music and composed symphonic and chamber works. African influences became more noticeable in his music when he spent four years studying and teaching in Nigeria in the early 1980s. Mr. Lateef professed to find the word "jazz" limiting and degrading; he preferred "autophysiopsychic music," a term he invented. He further distanced himself from the jazz mainstream in 1980 when he declared that he would no longer perform any place where alcohol was served. "*Too much blood, sweat and tears have been spilled creating this music to play it where people are smoking, drinking and talking,*" he explained to **The Boston Globe** in 1999. Still, with its emphasis on melodic improvisation and rhythmic immediacy, his music was always recognizably jazz at its core. And as far afield as his music might roam, his repertoire usually included at least a few **Tin Pan Alley** standards and, especially, plenty of blues.

He was born on Oct. 9, 1920, in Chattanooga, Tenn. Many sources give his birth name as William Evans, the name under which he performed and recorded before converting to Islam in the late 1940s (he belonged to the reformist Ahmadiyya Muslim Community) and changing his name to Yusef Abdul Lateef. But according to Mr. Lateef's website, he was born William Emanuel Huddleston. When he was 5 his family moved to Detroit, where he went on to study saxophone at Miller High School. After spending most of the 1940s on the road as a sideman with various big bands, he returned to Detroit in 1950 to care for his ailing wife and ended up staying for a decade.

While in Detroit he became a popular and respected fixture on the local nightclub scene and a mentor to younger musicians. He also resumed his studies, taking courses in flute and composition at **Wayne State University** and later studying oboe as well. In the later part of the decade he began traveling regularly from Detroit to the East Coast with his working band to record for the **Savoy** and **Prestige** labels. By 1960 he had settled in New York, where he worked with Charles Mingus, Cannonball Adderley and the Nigerian percussionist Babatunde Olatunji before forming his own quartet in 1964. He was soon a bona fide jazz star, with successful albums on the Impulse and Atlantic labels and a busy touring schedule. But he also remained a student, and he eventually became a teacher as well.

He received a bachelor's and a master's degree from the **Manhattan School of Music**, and taught both there and at **Borough of Manhattan Community College** in the 1970s. He earned a doctorate in education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in 1975 (his dissertation: "*An Overview of Western and Islamic Education*") and later taught there and elsewhere in New England. The more he studied, the more ambitious Mr. Lateef grew as a composer. He recorded his seven-movement "*Symphonic Blues Suite*" in 1970 and his "*African-American Epic Suite*," a four-part work for quintet and orchestra, two decades later. His album "*Yusef Lateef's Little Symphony*," on which he played all the instruments via overdubbing, won a **Grammy Award** in 1988, though not in any of the jazz or classical categories; it was named best **New Age** performance. Mr. Lateef said at the time that, while he was grateful for the award, he didn't know what *New Age* music was..... probably to him because all music that explored boundaries was Jazz....

In 2010 he was named a **Jazz Master** by the **National Endowment for the Arts**. Mr. Lateef is survived by his wife, Ayesha; a son, Yusef; a granddaughter; and several great-grandchildren. His first wife, Tahira, died before him, as did a son and a daughter. His creative output was not limited to music. He painted, wrote poetry and published several books of fiction. He also ran his own record company, YAL, which he established in 1992. He remained musically active until a few months before his death. In April he appeared at **Roulette in Brooklyn** in a program titled "**Yusef Lateef: Celebrating 75 Years of Music**," performing with the percussionist Adam Rudolph and presenting the premieres of two works, one for string quartet and the other for piano.

Yusef Lateef made the flute COOL. He explored music in the way that very few others, as he pushed the established boundaries in all directions. I remember him offering to help me get me into Amherst so that I could continue my education but by then I had set a new course for myself in film and television. I am smiling now as I write this piece because I was touched by Jazz Master Yusef Lateef, who for a few years was a mentor and a friend.

THIS WEEK'S READINGS

Obama's Top 50 Accomplishments

By Paul Glasris, Ryan Cooper, and Siyu Hu

1. Passed Health Care Reform: After five presidents over a century failed to create universal health insurance, signed the Affordable Care Act (2010). It will cover 32 million uninsured Americans beginning in 2014 and mandates a suite of experimental measures to cut health care cost growth, the number one cause of America's long-term fiscal problems.

2. Passed the Stimulus: Signed \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in 2009 to spur economic growth amid greatest recession since the Great Depression. Weeks after stimulus went into effect, unemployment claims began to subside. Twelve months later, the private sector began producing more jobs than it was losing, and it has continued to do so for twenty-three straight months, creating a total of nearly 3.7 million new private-sector jobs.

3. Passed Wall Street Reform: Signed the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (2010) to re-regulate the financial sector after its practices caused the Great Recession. The new law tightens capital requirements on large banks and other financial institutions, requires derivatives to be sold on clearinghouses and exchanges, mandates that large banks provide “living wills” to avoid chaotic bankruptcies, limits their ability to trade with customers’ money for their own profit, and creates the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (now headed by Richard Cordray) to crack down on abusive lending products and companies.

4. Ended the War in Iraq: Ordered all U.S. military forces out of the country. Last troops left on December 18, 2011.

5. Began Drawdown of War in Afghanistan: From a peak of 101,000 troops in June 2011, U.S. forces are now down to 91,000, with 23,000 slated to leave by the end of summer 2012. According to Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, the combat mission there will be over by next year.

6. Eliminated Osama bin Laden: In 2011, ordered special forces raid of secret compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in which the terrorist leader was killed and a trove of al-Qaeda documents was discovered.

7. Turned Around U.S. Auto Industry: In 2009, injected \$62 billion in federal money (on top of \$13.4 billion in loans from the Bush administration) into ailing GM and Chrysler in return for equity stakes and agreements for massive restructuring. Since bottoming out in 2009, the auto industry has added more than 100,000 jobs. In 2011, the Big Three automakers all gained market share for the first time in two decades. The government expects to lose \$16 billion of its investment, less if the price of the GM stock it still owns increases.

8. Recapitalized Banks: In the midst of financial crisis, approved controversial Treasury Department plan to lure private capital into the country’s largest banks via “stress tests” of their balance sheets and a public-private fund to buy their “toxic” assets. Got banks back on their feet at essentially zero cost to the government.

9. Repealed “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”: Ended 1990s-era restriction and formalized new policy allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly in the military for the first time.

10. Toppled Moammar Gaddafi: In March 2011, joined a coalition of European and Arab governments in military action, including air power and naval blockade, against Gaddafi regime to defend Libyan civilians and support rebel troops. Gaddafi’s forty-two-year rule ended when the dictator was overthrown and killed by rebels on October 20, 2011. No American lives were lost.

11. Told Mubarak to Go: On February 1, 2011, publicly called on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to accept reform or step down, thus weakening the dictator’s position and putting America on the right side of the Arab Spring. Mubarak ended thirty-year rule when overthrown on February 11.

12. Reversed Bush Torture Policies: Two days after taking office, nullified Bush-era rulings that had allowed detainees in U.S. custody to undergo certain “enhanced” interrogation techniques considered inhumane under the Geneva Conventions. Also released the secret Bush legal rulings supporting the use of these techniques.

13. Improved America’s Image Abroad: With new policies, diplomacy, and rhetoric, reversed a sharp decline in world opinion toward the U.S. (and the corresponding loss of “soft power”) during the Bush years. From 2008 to 2011, favorable

opinion toward the United States rose in ten of fifteen countries surveyed by the Pew Global Attitudes Project, with an average increase of 26 percent.

14. Kicked Banks Out of Federal Student Loan Program, Expanded Pell Grant Spending: As part of the 2010 health care reform bill, signed measure ending the wasteful decades-old practice of subsidizing banks to provide college loans. Starting July 2010 all students began getting their federal student loans directly from the federal government. Treasury will save \$67 billion over ten years, \$36 billion of which will go to expanding Pell Grants to lower-income students.

15. Created Race to the Top: With funds from stimulus, started \$4.35 billion program of competitive grants to encourage and reward states for education reform.

16. Boosted Fuel Efficiency Standards: Released new fuel efficiency standards in 2011 that will nearly double the fuel economy for cars and trucks by 2025.

17. Coordinated International Response to Financial Crisis: To keep world economy out of recession in 2009 and 2010, helped secure from G-20 nations more than \$500 billion for the IMF to provide lines of credit and other support to emerging market countries, which kept them liquid and avoided crises with their currencies.

18. Passed Mini Stimuli: To help families hurt by the recession and spur the economy as stimulus spending declined, signed series of measures (July 22, 2010; December 17, 2010; December 23, 2011) to extend unemployment insurance and cut payroll taxes.

19. Began Asia “Pivot”: In 2011, reoriented American military and diplomatic priorities and focus from the Middle East and Europe to the Asian-Pacific region. Executed multipronged strategy of positively engaging China while reasserting U.S. leadership in the region by increasing American military presence and crafting new commercial, diplomatic, and military alliances with neighboring countries made uncomfortable by recent Chinese behavior.

20. Increased Support for Veterans: With so many soldiers coming home from Iraq and Iran with serious physical and mental health problems, yet facing long waits for services, increased 2010 Department of Veterans Affairs budget by 16 percent and 2011 budget by 10 percent. Also signed new GI bill offering \$78 billion in tuition assistance over a decade, and provided multiple tax credits to encourage businesses to hire veterans.

21. Tightened Sanctions on Iran: In effort to deter Iran’s nuclear program, signed Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability, and Divestment Act (2010) to punish firms and individuals who aid Iran’s petroleum sector. In late 2011 and early 2012, coordinated with other major Western powers to impose sanctions aimed at Iran’s banks and with Japan, South Korea, and China to shift their oil purchases away from Iran.

22. Created Conditions to Begin Closing Dirtiest Power Plants: New EPA restrictions on mercury and toxic pollution, issued in December 2011, likely to lead to the closing of between sixty-eight and 231 of the nation’s oldest and dirtiest coal-fired power plants. Estimated cost to utilities: at least \$11 billion by 2016. Estimated health benefits: \$59 billion to \$140 billion. Will also significantly reduce carbon emissions and, with other regulations, comprises what’s been called Obama’s “stealth climate policy.”

23. Passed Credit Card Reforms: Signed the Credit Card Accountability, Responsibility, and Disclosure Act (2009), which prohibits credit card companies from raising rates without advance notification, mandates a grace period on interest rate increases, and strictly limits overdraft and other fees.

24. Eliminated Catch-22 in Pay Equality Laws: Signed Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009, giving women who are paid less than men for the same work the right to sue their employers after they find out about the discrimination, even if

that discrimination happened years ago. Under previous law, as interpreted by the Supreme Court in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co.*, the statute of limitations on such suits ran out 180 days after the alleged discrimination occurred, even if the victims never knew about it.

25. Protected Two Liberal Seats on the U.S. Supreme Court: Nominated and obtained confirmation for Sonia Sotomayor, the first Hispanic and third woman to serve, in 2009; and Elena Kagan, the fourth woman to serve, in 2010. They replaced David Souter and John Paul Stevens, respectively.

26. Improved Food Safety System: In 2011, signed FDA Food Safety Modernization Act, which boosts the Food and Drug Administration's budget by \$1.4 billion and expands its regulatory responsibilities to include increasing number of food inspections, issuing direct food recalls, and reviewing the current food safety practices of countries importing products into America.

27. Achieved New START Treaty: Signed with Russia (2010) and won ratification in Congress (2011) of treaty that limits each country to 1,550 strategic warheads (down from 2,200) and 700 launchers (down from more than 1,400), and reestablished and strengthened a monitoring and transparency program that had lapsed in 2009, through which each country can monitor the other.

28. Expanded National Service: Signed Serve America Act in 2009, which authorized a tripling of the size of AmeriCorps. Program grew 13 percent to 85,000 members across the country by 2012, when new House GOP majority refused to appropriate more funds for further expansion.

29. Expanded Wilderness and Watershed Protection: Signed Omnibus Public Lands Management Act (2009), which designated more than 2 million acres as wilderness, created thousands of miles of recreational and historic trails, and protected more than 1,000 miles of rivers.

30. Gave the FDA Power to Regulate Tobacco: Signed the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act (2009). Nine years in the making and long resisted by the tobacco industry, the law mandates that tobacco manufacturers disclose all ingredients, obtain FDA approval for new tobacco products, and expand the size and prominence of cigarette warning labels, and bans the sale of misleadingly labeled "light" cigarette brands and tobacco sponsorship of entertainment events.

31. Pushed Federal Agencies to Be Green Leaders: Issued executive order in 2009 requiring all federal agencies to make plans to soften their environmental impacts by 2020. Goals include 30 percent reduction in fleet gasoline use, 26 percent boost in water efficiency, and sustainability requirements for 95 percent of all federal contracts. Because federal government is the country's single biggest purchaser of goods and services, likely to have ripple effects throughout the economy for years to come.

32. Passed Fair Sentencing Act: Signed 2010 legislation that reduces sentencing disparity between crack versus powder cocaine possession from 100 to 1 to 18 to 1.

33. Trimmed and Reoriented Missile Defense: Cut the Reagan-era "Star Wars" missile defense budget, saving \$1.4 billion in 2010, and canceled plans to station antiballistic missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic in favor of sea-based defense plan focused on Iran and North Korea.

34. Began Post-Post-9/11 Military Builddown: After winning agreement from congressional Republicans and Democrats in summer 2011 budget deal to reduce projected defense spending by \$450 billion, proposed new DoD budget this year with cuts of that size and a new national defense strategy that would shrink ground forces from 570,000 to 490,000 over the next ten years while increasing programs in intelligence gathering and cyberwarfare.

35. Let Space Shuttle Die and Killed Planned Moon Mission: Allowed the expensive (\$1 billion per launch), badly designed, dangerous shuttle program to make its final launch on July 8, 2011. Cut off funding for even more bloated and problem-plagued Bush-era Constellation program to build moon base in favor of support for private-sector low-earth orbit ventures, research on new rocket technologies for long-distance manned flight missions, and unmanned space exploration, including the largest interplanetary rover ever launched, which will investigate Mars's potential to support life.

36. Invested Heavily in Renewable Technology: As part of the 2009 stimulus, invested \$90 billion, more than any previous administration, in research on smart grids, energy efficiency, electric cars, renewable electricity generation, cleaner coal, and biofuels.

37. Crafting Next-Generation School Tests: Devoted \$330 million in stimulus money to pay two consortia of states and universities to create competing versions of new K-12 student performance tests based on latest psychometric research. New tests could transform the learning environment in vast majority of public school classrooms beginning in 2014.

38. Cracked Down on Bad For-Profit Colleges: In effort to fight predatory practices of some for-profit colleges, Department of Education issued "gainful employment" regulations in 2011 cutting off commercially focused schools from federal student aid funding if more than 35 percent of former students aren't paying off their loans and/or if the average former student spends more than 12 percent of his or her total earnings servicing student loans.

39. Improved School Nutrition: In coordination with Michelle Obama, signed Healthy Hunger-Free Kids Act in 2010 mandating \$4.5 billion spending boost and higher nutritional and health standards for school lunches. New rules based on the law, released in January, double the amount of fruits and vegetables and require only whole grains in food served to students.

40. Expanded Hate Crimes Protections: Signed Hate Crimes Prevention Act (2009), which expands existing hate crime protections to include crimes based on a victim's sexual orientation, gender, or disability, in addition to race, color, religion, or national origin.

41. Avoided Scandal: As of November 2011, served longer than any president in decades without a scandal, as measured by the appearance of the word "scandal" (or lack thereof) on the front page of the *Washington Post*.

42. Brokered Agreement for Speedy Compensation to Victims of Gulf Oil Spill: Though lacking statutory power to compel British Petroleum to act, used moral authority of his office to convince oil company to agree in 2010 to a \$20 billion fund to compensate victims of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico; \$6.5 billion already paid out without lawsuits. By comparison, it took nearly two decades for plaintiffs in the *Exxon Valdez* Alaska oil spill case to receive \$1.3 billion.

43. Created Recovery.gov: Web site run by independent board of inspectors general looking for fraud and abuse in stimulus spending, provides public with detailed information on every contract funded by \$787 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Thanks partly to this transparency, board has uncovered very little fraud, and Web site has become national model: "The stimulus has done more to promote transparency at almost all levels of government than any piece of legislation in recent memory," reports *Governing* magazine.

44. Pushed Broadband Coverage: Proposed and obtained in 2011 Federal Communications Commission approval for a shift of \$8 billion in subsidies away from landlines and toward broadband Internet for lower-income rural families.

45. Expanded Health Coverage for Children: Signed 2009 Children's Health Insurance Authorization Act, which allows the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to cover health care for 4 million more children, paid for by a tax

increase on tobacco products.

46. Recognized the Dangers of Carbon Dioxide: In 2009, EPA declared carbon dioxide a pollutant, allowing the agency to regulate its production.

47. Expanded Stem Cell Research: In 2009, eliminated the Bush-era restrictions on embryonic stem cell research, which shows promise in treating spinal injuries, among many other areas.

48. Provided Payment to Wronged Minority Farmers: In 2009, signed Claims Resolution Act, which provided \$4.6 billion in funding for a legal settlement with black and Native American farmers who the government cheated out of loans and natural resource royalties in years past.

49. Helped South Sudan Declare Independence: Helped South Sudan Declare Independence: Appointed two envoys to Sudan and personally attended a special UN meeting on the area. Through U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Ambassador Susan Rice, helped negotiate a peaceful split in 2011.

50. Killed the F-22: In 2009, ended further purchases of Lockheed Martin single-seat, twin-engine, fighter aircraft, which cost \$358 million apiece. Though the military had 187 built, the plane has never flown a single combat mission. Eliminating it saved \$4 billion.

Since April when this list was published, the President's Administration has negotiated a settlement with Syria that resulted in the Assad regime getting rid of their chemical weapons stockpile, entered into positive negotiations with the new President in Iran that could led to the stalling if not stopping their quest to become a nuclear power and fostered new negotiations in the Middle East to help resolve the Palestinian/Israeli hostilities. On the domestic front, violent crime is down, financial markets are at an all-time high, residential real estate has rebounded, unemployment is slowly going down, the country's GDP had its second best quarter in ten years and his signature achievement, The Affordable Healthcare Act, looks like not only it will survive but may become as successful as other entitlement programs such as Medicare and Medicaid. Obviously, there is allot more to be done and power kegs like Syria, Southern Sudan, potential terrorist attacks and natural disasters (like Sandy and Katrina) could present other challenges. But given the current state of partisan politics, Congressional accomplishments pale in comparison to those of the Presidents, so do those of Governors who would like to replace him. Not bad for a President who not only is successful but is also Cool.....

I was truly surprised when I recently ran across this article in **The Washington Post** by Brad Plumer – ***The U.S. economy does better under Democratic presidents*** – is it just luck? To be honest, although as a Progressive Liberal Democrat who believes in Keynesian economics, I am not sure why other than the fact that unabated open markets leads to individual greed at the cost of the collective interest of everyone, but based on Plumer's article here are the facts. Since World War II, there's been a strikingly consistent pattern in American politics: The economy does much better when a Democrat is in the White House. More specifically, since 1947, the U.S. economy has grown at an average real rate of 4.35 percent under Democratic presidents and just 2.54 percent under Republicans:

 Inline image 1

Why the big gap? One possible explanation is that Democratic policies are better for economic growth. Another is that Republican policies are better for growth — but there's a time lag, so Democrats tend to benefit. Alternatively, perhaps Democrats simply have better economic luck. That third theory is one favored by economists Alan Blinder and Mark Watson in their new working paper, "**Presidents and the Economy: A Forensic Investigation**". They argue that random economic fluctuations best explain the differences in growth between 1947 and 2013, and not which party happens to hold the White House.

"Democrats would no doubt like to attribute the large D-R growth gap to better macroeconomic policies, but the data do not support such a claim," the authors write. (Blinder worked as an adviser in the Clinton White House, Watson is an econometrician not affiliated with either party.) Instead, the two economists offer three big reasons for the partisan gap in growth rates: oil shocks, productivity growth and consumer confidence. These factors, they say, can explain at least half of the gap. Here's a breakdown:

1) Oil shocks: Republicans have had worse luck with oil shocks, or spikes in the price of crude oil that tend to cramp consumer spending and limit growth. Blinder and Watson draw on University of California, San Diego economist James Hamilton's work on how oil spikes hurt the economy and suggest that these shocks explain between one-eighth and one-fourth of the difference in partisan growth rates. They do note, however, that this isn't entirely independent of policy, as the invasions of Iraq under Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush appeared to have driven up the worldwide price of oil. (The latter, the authors say, was *"the biggest oil shock in the sample,"* with a bigger economic impact than either of the OPEC-driven shocks under Presidents Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter.)

2) Productivity shocks: Total factor productivity has tended to grow faster under Democratic presidents than Republican ones. The big story here was a surge in productivity during the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson administrations, combined with a sharp slowdown during President Ronald Reagan's first term. *"As with oil shocks, we consider [productivity shocks] as mainly reflecting luck,"* the authors write. *"But, of course, we cannot rule out that they have a policy component as well."*

3) Consumer confidence: Consumer confidence tends to leap during the first year of Democratic presidencies. Is this a coincidence? The authors say it's possible that the election of a Democratic president somehow boosts confidence, which in turn boosts spending. But it's surprisingly difficult to tease out why this might be. *"Much of the D-R growth gap in the United States comes from business fixed investment and spending on consumer durables,"* the economists write. *"And it comes mostly in the first year of a presidential term. Yet the superior growth record under Democrats is not forecastable by standard techniques, which means it cannot be attributed to superior initial conditions."* All told, the economists suggest that the three factors above account for 46 percent to 62 percent of the gap. That means we still don't have a full answer.

Other (rejected) theories: The authors also consider — and rule out — a number of other possible explanations:

-- **Deficits.** There doesn't seem to be a huge difference in fiscal policies between the two parties since 1947. The structural federal budget deficit has been 1.5 percent under Democratic presidents and 2.2 percent under Republicans — *"far from statistically significant,"* the economists write.

-- **Military spending.** The authors do find a big difference in military spending — real defense spending grew 5.9 percent under Democrats and just 0.8 percent under Republicans. But they don't think this is enough to drive the difference in growth rates: "On average, federal defense spending accounts for just 8% of GDP over the postwar period. It would be hard for a tail that small to wag such a big dog."

-- **Congress.** Party control of Congress doesn't seem to have much impact on the economy one way or the other.

-- **Federal Reserve.** Fed chairmen appointed by Democrats tend to outperform Fed chiefs appointed by Republicans. But this doesn't necessarily benefit Democratic presidents. Indeed, the Federal Reserve, on average, tends to lower interest rates during Republican administrations and hike them during Democratic administrations. (This might simply be a response to the fact that the economy does better under Democrats, however.)

-- **Inherited economies.** The authors don't give much credence to the idea that Democratic presidents inherit stronger economies. In fact, the opposite may be true: "*Democrats inherit growth rates of 1.8% from the final year of the previous term, while Republicans inherit a growth rate of 4.1%.*" Yet Democratic presidents have still done better, on average, in their first terms since 1947.

-- **Global patterns.** There doesn't seem to be any worldwide pattern here. Canada shows the same partisan gap in growth rates as the United States, with the economy growing faster under Liberal governments than during Conservative governments. But there's no such pattern found in France or Germany.

Obviously, this paper is hardly the last word on the subject. As Blinder and Watson note, they can only explain from 46 percent to 62 percent of the difference in growth rates — there's a lot more work to be done in figuring out the rest of the answer. "*The rest remains, for now, a mystery.*"

Further reading: Princeton political scientist Larry Bartels has also shown that income inequality tends to rise under Republican presidents and fall under Democratic presidents. Blinder and Watson mention this fact in their paper, but they don't examine whether this might relate at all to the partisan gap in growth rates.

8½ Things That Went Right in 2013

 Inline image 3

By Peter Coy: Bloomberg Businessweek

EFTA00979953

It was a year of cronuts and pretzel buns, green eggs and ham, of Syria and Mali and the East China Sea, of Edward Snowden and Pope Francis, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un. Jeff Bezos showed off a package-delivering drone. Twitter tweeted its own IPO announcement. Stocks went up, housing revived, unemployment fell, and banks got fined. American Airlines and US Airways merged, and a solar-powered airplane hopscoched across the U.S. We can't discern much of a pattern here. But in the spirit of the holidays, here's a look on the bright side—a list of the things that went right in 2013, sometimes unexpectedly. It is short, admittedly, but sweet. May 2014 be better yet.

1. Peace Breaks Out in ■■■.

The biggest welcome surprise of 2013 was the uneasy yearend cease-fire in Congress, which was impossible to predict a year ago when the U.S. edged to the brink of a fiscal cliff. Heck, it seemed too much to hope for as recently as October, when a partial government shutdown and brush with default led China's Global Times to write a gleeful editorial headlined, "U.S. fiscal failure warrants a de-Americanized world." House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan defied the Tea Party wing of his party to reach a budget deal with his Senate counterpart that sailed through both houses. It allows Republicans to fight for their positions without being perceived as hostage takers, says Tom Rath, a Republican strategist in New Hampshire: "It saves us from ourselves."

2. Medical Bills: Just What the Doctor Ordered

One year of sub-2 percent health-care inflation in the U.S. was a fluke. Two years of it was intriguing. Now 2013 has made it three years in a row, which looks an awful lot like a pattern. Prices for health care rose just 1.1 percent in the third quarter of 2013 from the previous year, the smallest increase since 1962, according to data from the Department of Commerce's gross domestic product price indexes. The White House and Republicans predictably battled over who or what deserves credit. In September the nonpartisan actuaries of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services cited the slow economy, "judicious" consumers, high-deductible health plans, constraints on Medicare and Medicaid, and expiration of patents on some popular medications.

3. Women on the March

Janet Yellen is lined up to run the Federal Reserve, the world's most powerful central bank. General Motors named Mary Barra to be its next chief executive officer. Angela Merkel won another term as chancellor of Germany, and Park Geun Hye took office as South Korea's president. Kathleen Taylor was named the next chairman of the Royal Bank of Canada, the nation's most profitable company. In Chile's presidential race, both candidates in the runoff were women. True, women didn't get more seats in the boardrooms and C-suites of the biggest U.S. companies, according to women's advocacy group Catalyst, which lamented the "continued shortage." Still, in the year that Facebook Chief Operating Officer Sheryl Sandberg published *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, women everywhere made impressive economic and political gains.

4. Peak Oil? Not So Fast

M. King Hubbert must be turning over in his grave. Peak oil believers have long cited the late Shell geologist's observation that oil production in any given geographical area follows a bell curve: starting small, building fast, then trailing off to nothing. U.S. oil production, which peaked in 1970, seemed to bear out the hypothesis. But fracking and horizontal drilling have given new life to U.S. shale plays, turning Hubbert's curve into a rising roller coaster. Texas alone increased oil production 30 percent from September 2012 to September 2013. That's cutting the U.S. trade deficit and decreasing its reliance on energy supplies from abroad. Al Jazeera referred to the U.S. as "blue-eyed sheikhs," presumably a compliment.

5. Solar Goes Mainstream

OK, so oil is dirty. Solar is clean, though. The most intriguing development of 2013 was the emergence of pro-solar greens in red states. "Some people have called this an unholy alliance," says Debbie Dooley, co-founder of the Green Tea Coalition in Atlanta. "We agree on the need to develop clean energy, but not much else." The second-most intriguing development was the embrace of solar energy by companies with serious money to spend, including Wal-Mart, which has more solar installed than 38 states. "When we find something that works—like solar—we go big with it," the company says. In most regions, solar still requires subsidies, but that could change as efficiency improves. In September a German-French team announced an experimental solar cell that collects light from the infrared to the ultraviolet. It converted 44.7 percent of a super-focused beam into electricity.

6. Farewell to Arms

According to the FBI, the U.S. murder rate has fallen to levels not seen since the early 1960s. At just 4.7 homicides per 100,000 people, it's less than one-half the 1993 level. This drop in violence is reflected in international trends as well. UN data (though patchy) suggest falling murder rates across much of the world and a general decline in armed conflict. The UN General Assembly approved a landmark treaty regulating the trade in small arms, which the U.S. signed in September. The one ongoing interstate war in 2012—between Sudan and South Sudan—officially ended last year, and 2013 has seen no new declarations of war. The final defeat of the M23 militia group in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo means that the century's most deadly conflict, which killed more than 3 million people, may have finally drawn to a close. From 1950 to 2007, there was an average of 148,000 global battlefield deaths per year; from 2008 to 2012, the average was 28,000. This year will see a slight increase in deaths, largely the result of the war in Syria. But on the whole, the 21st century has been remarkably pacific. —Charles Kenny

7. The Euro Zone Survives—and Grows

A year ago the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development was warning that the 17-nation euro zone represented "the greatest downside risk" to the world economy—even greater than

the U.S. fiscal cliff. OECD economists predicted that the single currency area wouldn't pull out of recession until 2014. Instead the region returned to growth—albeit just barely—in the second quarter of 2013. Irish Prime Minister Enda Kenny announced in November that Ireland would exit its bailout program without even the assurance of a precautionary credit line. Spain is also on course for a “clean break” from its aid program, Economy Minister Luis de Guindos told reporters. Latvia is joining the euro on Jan. 1—a sign that for all its problems, the currency is still attractive to some.

8. The Fed Tapers Its Taper Talk

Ben Bernanke's Federal Reserve surprised almost everyone on Sept. 18 by announcing that it wasn't going to cut back on its bond-buying program, which is designed to stimulate the economy by holding down long-term interest rates. (Think mortgages.) In contrast to May, when the Fed chairman's first intimations of a cutback sent the stock market into an ugly “taper tantrum,” stocks soared after Bernanke said the Fed wasn't ready to remove stimulus. On Dec. 18, the Fed finally announced it would start trimming its \$85 billion monthly bond purchases, but in small steps. Bernanke, giving his last Federal Open Market Committee press conference, said “we're certainly not giving up” on trying to get the economy back to full speed. The Standard & Poor's 500-stock index posted its biggest gain in two months.

8½. China Reforms, Kind Of

China loosened its infamous one-child policy, announced it was closing reeducation labor camps, and came down hard on corruption in the Third Plenary Session of the Communist Party's 18th Central Committee. But President Xi Jinping made clear that democracy isn't in the offing, promising new Internet controls. China tangled with South Korea and Japan and threatened to kick out reporters from the New York Times and Bloomberg. Reform has its limits.

These Charts Show Just How Good Congress Was At Being Terrible In 2013



Congress did very, very little in 2013 — setting all-time records for both most unproductive and most unpopular Congress ever. Both the House and Senate have passed dozens of bills that the other chamber ignored, leaving only 65 bills to make their way to the White House and be enacted into law. This count is the latest as of Monday, Dec. 23, and includes the most recent eight bills signed into law by President Obama on Friday, Dec. 20. House Speaker John Boehner had this to say about what's been accomplished: *"The House has continued to listen to the American people and to focus on their concerns. Now, whether it's the economy, whether it's jobs, whether it's protecting the American people from 'Obamacare,' we've done our work."* **This would be a joke if it wasn't so sad.....**

As Dean Baker wrote this week in **The Huffington Post** – ***Inequality: Government Is a Perp, Not a Bystander*** – that President Obama proclaimed earlier this month in a speech that the government could not be a bystander in the effort to reduce inequality, which he described as the defining moral issue of our time. Still little is being done by either the President or his Republican critics, who are now blaming the poor for their lot in life, as if they really had a choice. Economic inequality is not something that just happened. As it turns out that the forces of technology, globalization, and whatever else simply made some people very rich and left others working for low wages or out of work altogether. The president and other like-minded people feel a moral compulsion to reverse the resulting inequality. This story is 180 degrees at odds with the reality. Inequality did not just happen, it was deliberately engineered through a whole range of policies intended to redistribute income upward.

Trade is probably the best place to start just because it is so obvious. Trade deals like NAFTA were quite explicitly designed to place our manufacturing workers in direct competition with the lowest paid workers in the world. The text was written after consulting with top executives at major companies like General Electric. Our negotiators asked these executives what changes in Mexico's law would make it easier for them to set up factories in Mexico. The text was written accordingly. When we saw factory workers losing their jobs to imports from Mexico and other developing countries, this was not an accident. In economic theory, the gains from these trade deals are the result of getting lower priced products due to lower cost labor. The loss of jobs in the United States and the downward pressure on the jobs that remain is a predicted outcome of the deal.

There is nothing about the globalization process that necessitated this result. Doctors work for much less money in Mexico and elsewhere in the developing world than in the United States. In fact, they work for much less money in Europe and Canada than in the United States. If we had structured the trade deals to facilitate the entry of qualified foreign doctors into the country it would have placed downward pressure on the wages of doctors (many of whom are in the top one percent of the income distribution), while saving consumers tens of billions a year in health care costs. In other words, the government quite deliberately structured our trade to put downward pressure on the wages of much of the labor force, while protecting doctors and other highly paid professionals from similar competition. Trade is just one of the many ways in which the government has redistributed income upward over the last three decades.

The subsidy for too big to fail banks, which makes the Wall Street crew incredibly rich, is another way that the government redistributes money to the top. **Bloomberg** estimated the size of this annual subsidy for the Wall Street gang at \$80 billion a year, more than the government spends on food stamps. The longer and stronger patent protection the government has given pharmaceutical companies is another way that money goes from the rest of us to the rich. The annual size of patent rents in the drug industry is currently in the neighborhood of \$270 billion, more than three times as much as the government spends on food stamps. And the macroeconomic policy run by the government has also worsened inequality. Budgets are crafted by politicians, not the gods or nature. The decision not to run a more stimulatory policy to reduce unemployment is every bit as much a conscious act as would be the decision to try to bring the economy to full employment with further stimulus.

One of the biggest lie in American economics, was “*Supply-side Economics/Reaganomics*”, that enacting policies that distributed money to the top would somehow trickle down to everyone else broaden the economic base for all. This experiment has been a dismal failure with more as more and more wealth is being consolidated by the Top 1%, squeezing the Middle Class and totally economically

disenfranchising the poor – as a result, five members of the Walton (Walmart) family have more combined wealth than the bottom 140 million Americans in the country. But real failure of these policies is that for the first time in American history, children of *the Baby Boomers* will be the first generation in America to not live as well as their parents..... Laying waste to the American Dream.....

As a result of current economic policies, Congress and the president have decided to craft budgets that lead to tens of millions of people being unemployed or underemployed. High levels of unemployment put downward pressure on workers' wages, especially those in the bottom third of the labor force. This means we have a federal budget that limits growth and employment in a way that redistributes income upwards. There is a much longer list of ways in which the government has acted to redistribute income upwards over the last three decades. But the key point is that inequality didn't just happen; it was the result of government policy. That is why people who actually want to see inequality reduced, and for poor and middle class to share in the benefits from growth, are not likely to be very happy about President Obama's speech on the topic. His comment about the government being a bystander ignores the real source of the problem. Therefore it is not likely that the current government will come up with much by way of real solutions.

Instead of quantitative easing (free money to Wall Street), an aggressive jobs bill, similar to what FDR did in the 1930s to end the Great Depression could and still should be implemented. First of all, our basic infrastructure is crumbling, so an aggressive rebuilding program of the country's infrastructure would address this most serious problem, as well as greatly stimulate employment and with its multiplier effect vastly grow the country's economy. Today the major American corporations are awashed in cash, holding more than \$3 trillion in cash outside of the country to avoid taxes. So believing that giving the Private Sector more money to stimulate job growth is a misnomer. And if we really want to balance the budget, do away with passive income tax advantage, cut taxes to 25% and do away with loopholes. Raising the minimum wage to \$10 or \$12 (and in several years \$15) per hour would help immediately as low-wage earners circulate their incomes immediately, compared to rich people. These policies are simple. They are also fair. And they would at least curb economic inequality, as well as slash unemployment and grow the economy. Blaming poor people for being poor is the height of hypocrisy as well as a detriment to the country itself.

 Inline image 1

Robert Schmidt, left, SGB's chief scientist; Eric Mathur, chief technologist; and Kirk Haney, chief executive, with a jatropha bush.

President Kennedy was correct when in 1963 he said, "*Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings.*" In a **New York Times** article this week by Todd Woody – ***Jet Fuel by the Acre*** – a group of scientist have produced seeds of the inedible, drought-resistant plants, called jatropha, produce a prize: high-quality oil that can be refined into low-carbon jet fuel or diesel fuel. The mere existence of the bushes is an achievement. Hailed about six years ago as the next big thing in biofuels, jatropha attracted hundreds of millions of dollars in investments, only to fall from favor as the recession set in and as growers discovered that the wild bush yielded too few seeds to produce enough petroleum to be profitable. But SGB, the biofuels company that planted the bushes, pressed on. Thanks to advances in molecular genetics and DNA sequencing technology, the San Diego start-up has, in a few years, succeeded in domesticating jatropha, a process that once took decades. SGB is growing hybrid strains of the plant that produce biofuel in quantities that it says are competitive with petroleum priced at \$99 a barrel. Oil is around \$100 a barrel. Call it, as SGB does, Jatropha 2.0.

The company has deals to plant 250,000 acres of jatropha in Brazil, India and other countries expected to eventually produce about 70 million gallons of fuel a year. That has attracted the interest of energy giants, airlines and other multinational companies seeking alternatives to fossil fuels. They see jatropha as a hedge against spikes in petroleum prices and as a way to comply with government mandates that require the use of low-carbon fuels. *"It is one of the few biofuels that I think has the potential to supply a large fraction of the aviation fuel currently used today,"* said Jim Rekoske, vice president for renewable energy and chemicals at Honeywell, who has visited the company's jatropha plantations in Central America. Mr. Rekoske and biofuel analysts say SGB's biggest challenge will be to replicate the yields it generates in the greenhouse on a commercial scale. *"Given that this crop has somewhat of a checkered past, ultimately getting growers to plant the crop is going to be the key hurdle,"* says Michael Cox, an analyst at Piper Jaffray.

In an unmarked greenhouse, leafy bushes carpet an acre of land here tucked into the suburban sprawl of Southern California, the fruits of SGB's technology are apparent. A typical wild jatropha bush will produce a cluster of six to eight seed-bearing fruits, according to Robert Schmidt, a specialist in corn genetics who is SGB's chief scientist. He picked up a grapefruit-size cluster growing on a hybrid jatropha plant and counted 37 fruits. *"We have examples in Guatemala where we have 60 fruits in a cluster,"* Dr. Schmidt said. SGB's success at improving jatropha seed yields by as much as 900 percent persuaded a consortium that includes Airbus, BP and the Inter-American Development Bank to sign a deal with the company to plant 75,000 acres of jatropha in Brazil. The consortium, called JetBio, aims to develop sources of biofuel for the airline industry as the European Union, Australia and other countries impose caps on aviation carbon emissions. *"The demand is huge — every single airline would like to be flying on biofuel today,"* Rafael Davidsohn Abud, JetBio's managing partner, said in an email.

Jatropha's value as a cash crop, though, may pale compared with a potential genetic gold mine SGB has begun to discover, identifying traits, for instance, that make certain strains of the plant resistant to extreme heat or cold. *"If you figure out how to do heat tolerance for corn or soybeans, what is that trait worth as climate change accelerates?"* asked Arama Kukutai, managing director at Finistere Ventures, a San Diego venture capital firm that has invested in SGB. For now, SGB plans to license its technology to energy companies. But the company is securing patents on its hybridization process, creating a technology platform that can be deployed to discover genetic traits in other agricultural crops. For instance, in November SGB signed a deal with the Yulex Corporation to use its molecular breeding technology to increase the yields of guayule, a wild plant harvested as a replacement for petroleum-based rubber. The technology also could be used to domesticate wild fruits and vegetables, company scientists said. They said the technology has the potential to unleash a new green revolution for a world that will need to grow 70 percent more food by 2050, according to the United Nations, as agricultural productivity is slowing,

The seeds of Jatropha 2.0 were planted in fall of 2008. That year, early on Sept. 15, a Monday, Kirk Haney, SGB's chief executive, went into the living room of his San Diego home to prepare for what was to be a watershed week for his year-old start-up. That Friday, SGB was set to close a \$200 million round of financing from European investors. *"I turned on CNBC and Lehman Brothers had just failed and the Dow was plummeting,"* said Mr. Haney, 42, a technology entrepreneur with the laid-back demeanor and looks of a longtime California surfer. SGB intended to use its financial windfall to plant sprawling farms around the world. Two days after Lehman fell, though, the investors had pulled out, forcing Mr. Haney and a team of top plant geneticists he had recruited from the University of California at San Diego to devise a new strategy.

Dr. Schmidt, SGB's chief scientist, had already concluded that jatropha showed little genetic diversity — a big roadblock to their plan because it would be difficult, if not impossible, to increase seed yields if all jatropha plants were essentially clones of one another. Most jatropha bushes are descendants of plants grown on Cape Verde, an archipelago off Africa's west coast. Cape Verde became the epicenter of jatropha farming 300 years ago, and a single strain of the plant, then valued as living fence to corral livestock, was exported to tropical regions around the globe. As Dr. Schmidt combed the scientific literature on jatropha, he stumbled across a reference to an obscure 30-year-old paper by the botanist Bijan Dehgan. Dr. Dehgan had devoted his career to studying jatropha. He traveled the world collecting and cataloging the 175 species of the plant, speculating that the species originated in Central America.

Following up on Dr. Dehgan's thesis that Guatemala was a jatropha Eden, Dr. Schmidt went to Central America and began analyzing the genetic makeup of the plants there. "It was absolutely spectacular the amount of genetic variation that we collected from the center of origin," he said. That discovery coincided with a plunge in the cost of DNA sequencing that has allowed SGB scientists to rapidly identify the most genetically diverse and productive plants and crossbreed them. It also lets them pinpoint profitable individual traits and mutations, like heat or cold resistance. It costs SGB \$350 to genetically map a single jatropha line to look for valuable mutations, a price that will drop to \$50 in 2014. The price five years ago? About \$150,000, according to Eric Mathur, SGB's chief technologist. The machine that does the mapping cost \$250,000 and is in SGB's laboratory in a suburban San Diego office park.

About the size of a small microwave oven, it is called a semiconductor sequencer and can map 10 to 15 plant lines at a time. It automatically compares those sequences with a master jatropha genome, which SGB spent \$250,000 to create, to identify genetic variations that might indicate desirable traits. "You simply could not do this three years ago without a really high cash flow out the door," Mr. Mathur said.

To domesticate a wild plant, scientists traditionally crossbred two promising lines and hoped for the best, waiting for them to flower to see if the hybrid proved viable. The process could last for years if not decades. SGB's technology allows its scientists to identify potentially productive hybrids in the laboratory at the molecular level before the plants are crossbred. "*This used to be a 10-year discovery process,*" Mr. Mathur said. "*It's more like a 10-month process now.*" Much of the hard molecular biological work is done, Mr. Haney said, giving SGB a five-year head start over any agriculture giant that might try to replicate its success. "*It doesn't matter how much money you have,*" he said. "*You can't make cells divide quicker.*"

We have heard these same prognostications before and seen them disappear in a New York Minute. And even if this new bio-fuel lives up to its promoters wildest dreams, the obvious downside is increased carbon emissions which could increase Global Warming. The less obvious downside is the destruction of Amazon and other wildlife refuges in search of more and more land to plant this new cash-crop, as well as taking land away from which is currently supplying our food chain. But again using the wise words of President Kennedy, "*Our problems are man-made, therefore they may be solved by man. No problem of human destiny is beyond human beings.*" So hopefully these downsides can be corrected.

THIS WEEK'S QUOTE

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead

MY CHOICE FOR MAN OF THE YEAR



Staying in the vein of COOL, the newest “cool kid” on the scene has to be new **Pope Francis**, who has only been on the landscape for nine months, having succeeded Pope Benedict XVI on March 13, 2013 and the first ever from the Americas and the first from outside Europe in more than a millennium. He chose the name Pope Francis, the patron saint of the poor. A new CNN poll released Tuesday found that 88% of American Catholics view Pope Francis favorably. Additionally, nearly 75% of Americans in general think he's doing a good job. It's been quite a year (nine months) for the new Pope. Named **Time's Person Of The Year**, he's been cited for his relatively progressive views on homosexuality, his criticisms of capitalism and his advocacy for the poor. According to a **Global Language Monitor** study, the Pope was the most talked-about person on the Internet in 2013.

The iconic LGBT magazine The Advocate named Pope Francis their person of the year after comments he made this summer about gay priests. *“If someone is gay and seeks the Lord with good will, who am I to judge?”* he told a reporter in July. While his comments are hardly an endorsement of same-sex marriage, they mark a major shift from the church's legacy on homosexuality. According to the CNN poll, the Pope has received high marks among American Catholics for his views. His handling of the priest sex abuse scandal also scored well, with over 60% of responders saying he's managed the fallout well. His predecessor, meanwhile, was criticized for allegedly sweeping many of the most shocking allegations under the rug at first. Pope Francis took over as leader of the church, which lists 1.2 billion in membership, in March after Pope Benedict XVI resigned.

This week **The Huffington Post** did a retrospective article by Alana Horowitz on Pope Francis – **Pope's Approval Rating Soars: CNN Poll.**

Weblink: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/24/popes-approval-rating-poll_n_4497813.html

I am not religious nor have I ever been a Catholic. But like many people around the world I find this new Pope to be a breath of fresh air, as well as an inspiration for all. With this said, he is definitely the Coolest Pope ever and as such I invite everyone to view the retrospective via the above weblink. Because Pope Francis is definitely, *The Pope of Cool*....

GREAT PHOTOS OF LONDON

**Ever wondered what London looks like from 2,400ft?
Spectacular aerial photographs show a bird's eye view of
the city..... enjoy.....**

By MIA DE GRAAF: MailOnLine - UK

Web link: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2527468/Ever-wondered-London-looks-like-2-400ft-Spectacular-aerial-shots-capital-peppered-skyscrapers.html>

THIS WEEK'S MUSIC

Music for the last Week of 2013

Being the last offering of 2013, this week I would like to invite you to listen to a cross-section of music from different genres and decades as they span jazz to hip-hop and include everyone from James Brown to Queen. I hope that you enjoy.....

James Brown & Luciano Pavarotti – *It's a Man's World* -- http://youtu.be/Febr_t_qa9U

Luciano Pavarotti & Barry White – *You're the First , the Last my Everything* -- http://youtu.be/SyEIW_Oov5I

Michael Jackson,James Brown,and Prince on stage (1983) – <http://youtu.be/Yy9L4ft7EGk>

David Bowie & Mick Jagger – *Dancing In The Street* (Live) -- <http://youtu.be/79CWb23NZrc>

Queen & Annie Lennox & David Bowie – *Under Pressure* -- <http://youtu.be/fCP2-Bfhy04>

Mary J Blige Brandy Aretha Franklin Chaka Kahn Cece Winans & Brandy – *Sitting in My Room* -- <http://youtu.be/m1i9cT7TAJ4>

Luther Vandross & Cheryl Lynn – *If This World Were Mine* (Soul Train) -- <http://youtu.be/uwF2IJmLKxI>

Luther Vandross & Beyonce Knowles – *The Closer I Get To You* -- <http://youtu.be/V4PMSjUbg88>

Patti LaBelle & Gerald Levert – *Wind Beneath My Wings* -- <http://youtu.be/YFJCPgMKUVc>

Michael Jackson & Paul McCartney – *The Girl is Mine* -- <http://youtu.be/Y96mdVTMByk>

Tony Bennett & Stevie Wonder – *For Once In My Life* -- http://youtu.be/o4x7V7u_HUg

Dionne Warwick & Friends – *That's What Friends Are For* -- <http://youtu.be/lw-dmwj9X4k>

Paul McCarthy, Elton John & Sting – *Hey Jude* -- http://youtu.be/iI_V6fkcgLA

Julio Iglesias & Willie Nelson – *To All The Girls I Loved Before* -- <http://youtu.be/51tvZnkn5V8>
and <http://youtu.be/yi2AX14eRbk>

Barbra Streisand & Ray Charles – *Crying Time* -- <http://youtu.be/L-magrm3Voo>

Quincy Jones – *Back on Block* (Live) -- http://youtu.be/fp2Xf_h0uPA

Quincy Jones – *The Secret Garden* -- <http://youtu.be/leIZTnV2RYU>

Miles Davis & John Coltrane – *Kind of Blue* -- <http://youtu.be/FEPFH-gz3wE>

Luciano Pavarotti & Frank Sinatra – *My Way* -- http://youtu.be/8vb_xHWgb2s

USA for Africa – *We Are The World* -- http://youtu.be/OoDY8ce_3zk

***I hope that you have enjoyed this week's offerings and wish you
and yours a great New Year....***

Sincerely,

Greg Brown

--
Gregory Brown
Chairman & CEO
GlobalCast Partners, LLC

