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Subject: Greg Brown's Weekend Reading and Other Things.... 03/02/2014
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DEAR FRIEND.....

R. Buckminster Fuller was a renowned 20th century inventor and visionary born in Milton, Massachusetts on July 12, 1895. Dedicating his life to making the world work for all of humanity, Fuller operated as a practical philosopher who demonstrated his ideas as inventions that he called *"artifacts."* Fuller did not limit himself to one field but worked as a 'comprehensive anticipatory design scientist' to solve global problems surrounding housing, shelter, transportation, education, energy, ecological destruction, and poverty. Throughout the course of his life Fuller held 28 patents, authored 28 books, received 47 honorary degrees. And while his most well know artifact, the geodesic dome, has been produced over 300,000 times worldwide, Fuller's true impact on the world today can be found in his continued influence upon generations of designers, architects, scientists and artists working to create a more sustainable planet. Fuller died from cancer on July 1, 1983, 11 days before his 88th birthday in Los Angeles.

Web Link: http://youtu.be/o6yaSLipeWg

"Making the world's available resources serve one hundred percent of an exploding population can only be accomplished by a boldly accelerated design revolution."

There are few men who can justly claim to have revolutionized their discipline. R. Buckminster Fuller revolutionized many. *"Bucky,"* as he was known to most, was a designer, architect, poet, educator, engineer, philosopher, environmentalist, and, above all, humanitarian. Driven by the belief that humanity's major problems were hunger and homelessness he dedicated his life to solving those problems through inexpensive and efficient design.

The grandnephew of the American Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller, *Bucky* was born on July 12, 1895 in Milton, Massachusetts. He was twice expelled from Harvard. Later, Bucky married Anne Hewlett in 1917 and went into the construction business with her father. A decade later he witnessed the first of many business failures, when, due to economic difficulties, he was forced out of the company. Despondent over these failures and family problems, he resolved to focus his energies on a search for socially responsible answers to the major design problems of his time.

Recognizing the inefficiency of the automobile, Bucky spent the late twenties designing a car that would incorporate the engineering advances of the airplane. In 1933, he presented the first prototype of the Dymaxion car. The Dymaxion car could hold twelve passengers, go 120 miles per hour and used half the gas of the standard car, utilizing aerodynamics construction and only three wheels. While demonstrating the car to investors, it crashed, taking one life. Though the crash was later determined not to be the fault of the car, he was never able to find adequate funding.

As World War II ended and housing crises in America became more acute, he turned his sights to what would remain his life-long dream. Using airplane construction methods and materials, Bucky set out to create a pre-fabricated house that could be easily delivered to any location. It would be fireproof and inexpensive and constructed out of lightweight materials. In 1945 however, with thousands of orders in place for his new Dymaxion House, Fuller once again ran into difficulties with investors and had to end the project.

Unsure of his next step and without a job, Bucky accepted a position at a small college in North Carolina, Black Mountain College. There, with the support of an amazing group of professors and students, he began work on the project that was to make him famous and revolutionize the field of engineering. Using lightweight plastics in the simple form of a tetrahedron (a triangular pyramid) he created a small dome. As his work continued it became clear that he had made the first building that could sustain its own weight with no practical limits. The U.S. government recognized the importance of the discovery and employed him to make small domes for the army. Within a few years there were thousands of these domes around the world.

Having finally received recognition for his endeavors, Buckminster Fuller spent the final fifteen years of his life traveling around the world lecturing on ways to better use the world's resources. A favorite of the radical youth of the late 60's and 70's, Fuller worked to expand social activism to an international scope. Among his most famous books were NO MORE SECONDHAND GOD(1963) OPERATING MANUAL FOR THE SPACESHIP EARTH (1969), and EARTH, INC. (1973) in which he writes *"In reality, the Sun, the Earth, and the Moon are nothing else than a most fantastically well-designed and space-programmed team of vehicles. All of us are, always have been, and so long as we exist, always will be–nothing else but–astronauts."*

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Why the First Issue Is Money in Politics

Constitutional scholar and activist Lawrence Lessig, whose march through New Hampshire to get money out of politics is featured on our broadcast this week, often says that his crusade is the most urgent in America because it impacts virtually every other issue. From achieving tax reform to fighting climate change to strengthening the social safety net, we will see no progress until the wealthy entities that benefit can no longer buy up politicians to prevent the status quo from changing.

"The people who want to stop reform will pay an enormous amount of money to be able to achieve that," Lessig told us when we met during his march. "...What this system has done is made the politics of dysfunction incredibly profitable." Some lobbyists, he noted, even advertise their ability to exploit the system and use legislators to "delay and obstruct" progress in Congress.

"We will never get your issue solved until we fix this issue first," Lessig said in a TED talk last year. "So it's not that mine is the most important issue. It's not. Yours is the most important issue, but mine is the first issue, the issue we have to solve before we get to fix the issues you care about."

Here are five examples of issues beaten into stasis by a barrage of big money.

Environment

One example Lessig cites — one that motivates many progressives — is climate change.

"If you are a coal company who's against the idea of climate change legislation, this [political system] is a boon for you," he said, "because it's trivial and cheap to be able to leverage your money, to guarantee nothing ever happens to adjust climate change."

It's a scenario America has seen play out time and again, most recently in 2009-10, when cap and trade, an idea that originated with the Reagan administration and had Republican support, seemed to have a real chance of working its way through Congress.

But in 2009, thousands of lobbyists representing energy and natural resource extraction companies spent more than they ever had before — over $400 million, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. That record was broken the very next year, when spending reached $450 million.

Is it coincidental that in 2010, cap and trade was declared dead? In proposing climate change legislation that year, Sens. John Kerry (D-MA) and Lindsey Graham (R-SC) refused to even discuss cap and trade as a realistic policy suggestion.

It wasn't until last fall, when President Obama used an executive order to circumvent Congress and cap emissions from coal power plants, that the heaviest polluters faced across-the-board emission restrictions.

A similar story is unfolding right now with the Keystone XL pipeline, a massive project that, once operational, would pump more than 800,000 barrels of crude from Alberta's tar sands to refineries on the US Gulf Coast — every day. It has become a defining issue for both the oil industry and environmental activists.

The pipeline's approval is a decision over which a legacy-conscious Obama has vacillated for five years. Following a year of record spending by the American Petroleum Institute, the largest trade association for the oil and natural gas industry, and in the face of growing frustration from red state Democratic senators, earlier this month, the State Department released an environmental impact statement claiming that the project would have little impact on global climate emissions. That statement brought the project one step closer to approval, but the Obama administration cautioned that it was still weighing the pros and cons. A 30-day comment period has begun, during which environmental advocates will continue to encourage the administration to stand up to the oil industry, an outcry the oil industry can be expected to counter with another wave of money.

Taxes

Tax reform is one key issue that especially inflames conservative activists. And as Lessig pointed out when we spoke, the problem of legislative paralysis knows no political alignment; it stumps would-be reformers on both the right and the left.

"It's incredibly naïve to believe that this Congress will ever simplify the tax system, because the complexities in the tax system are fund-raising opportunities," he told [redacted] "Every single special benefit is a reason and a target to raise more money.

"So the special Research & Development Tax Credit which Ronald Reagan created in 1981, and which was originally a temporary provision but has been temporary ever since, is temporary because each time it's about to expire they have a long list of beneficiaries they can go to and say 'Geez, we need to raise some money to support the idea of extending this temporary tax benefit.'"

In fact, as NPR reported, Congress annually rings in the New Year by letting dozens of tax breaks expire. There immediately follows a healthy round of campaign contributions, as lobbyists for a slew of industries — from overseas financial operators to rum retailers, from movie producers to racetrack operators — scramble to get those tax breaks reinstated.

Food Stamps

The recent farm bill cut food stamps even further than the already severe cuts implemented in 2013. But it preserves a different sort of safety net: subsidies for big agriculture.

According to the Center for Responsive Politics, in both 2008 and 2013, the two most recent years that the farm bill has come before Congress (it's renewed every five years), agribusiness spent more than $145 million on lobbying.

Recipients of food stamps, of course, don't have the same kind of lobbying muscle to advocate on their own behalf. In a Congress pushing austerity, the programs that help the poor continue to hit the chopping block while recipients of corporate welfare can afford a hearty defense to protect their benefits.

In fact, both in 2008 and in 2013, although legislation to roll back agricultural subsidies had bipartisan support, the effort to do so fell apart.

And even though subsidies were "reformed" this year, The New York Times reports that in practice, these reforms mean little.

"It's a classic bait-and-switch proposal to protect farm subsidies," Vincent H. Smith, an economist at Montana State University, told the Times. "They've eliminated the politically toxic direct payments program and added the money to a program that will provide farmers with even larger subsidies."

The 2014 farm bill cuts direct payments to farmers, but puts that money into the farm insurance program. Writing in The New Republic, David Dayen explains why this helps big agriculture even more than previous farm bills:

That's because the farm bill will expand subsidies for crop insurance, which looks like a private-sector program but which actually hands over virtually the same amount of taxpayer money to farmers, mostly wealthy ones, as the old direct payment program. What's more, the shift from direct payments to crop insurance ensures that those handouts can be distributed in a hidden, more politically palatable way, making it more difficult to ever dislodge them.

Minimum Wage

The fight over raising the minimum wage is a war of information. Conservative opponents of a proposed increase commission academic studies for use by lobbyists and their front groups. A recent New York Times report illustrates how one of the most prominent think tanks opposing the raise, the Employment Policies Institute, "is run by a public relations firm that also represents the restaurant industry, as part of a tightly coordinated effort to defeat the minimum wage increase that the White House and Democrats in Congress have pushed for."

Their strategy has proven effective, with business groups and the mainstream media continuing to cite research claiming that a raise in the minimum wage will hurt the economy.

Recently, the hotel industry, a major employer of low-wage workers, announced it will lead the fight to keep wages low. According to the congressional newspaper The Hill, the American Hotel and Lodging Association, a group that includes such major hotel chains as Best Western, Hilton and Hyatt, has plans to "lead the charge to beat back the growing emergence of extreme minimum and living wage initiatives that are proven job-killers and ultimately hurt those who are building successful careers from the entry level."

Simultaneously, as money continues to pour into Congress to keep a low minimum wage at the federal level, proponents of increasing it are turning to the states and cities, where they are finding some limited success.

Net Neutrality

Last month, a federal appeals court struck down Net neutrality, the principle that Internet service providers cannot give favorable treatment to some content over others (e.g., Verizon could not give a faster connection to their own video streaming service than to Netflix).

Tom Wheeler, the new head of the FCC, has not settled on a permanent fix to settle Net neutrality, but says he will announce one soon.

One very easy way for the FCC to reinstate Net neutrality would be to reclassify the Internet under the Federal Communications Act as a telecommunications service, not an information service, giving the agency broader regulatory powers. But if the FCC does that, lobbyists representing Internet service providers like Comcast and Verizon, and their Republican allies, will put up a huge fight.

Meanwhile, congressional Democrats' recent attempt to use legislation to preserve Net neutrality until the FCC has time to settle on a permanent fix looks likely to die in the House. It is strongly opposed by industry-backed Republicans. For one, Comcast is the second biggest campaign donor to Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR) — and he's chairman of the communications and technology subcommittee. Instead, FCC Chairman Wheeler reportedly is leaning toward not reclassifying the Internet, but promising instead to take rigorous enforcement action against those Internet providers that attempt to use their considerable size and power to monopolize business or abuse consumers.

But Wheeler is a former lobbyist for the companies he's now supposed to regulate. Add to that Comcast's considerable lobbying clout and Washington connections, which soon may be magnified by its proposed merger with Time Warner. There's reason for doubt that Wheeler's plan would be effective.

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Inline image 1

Last week I did a piece on the new iteration of **NBC's *The Tonight Show* starring Jimmy Fallon**, as I along with many of my generation and our parents grew up with ***The Tonight Show* with Johnny Carson**, and loyally moved on twenty years ago when Jay Leno took over the show. And to my surprise, I found the new show starring Jimmy Fallon to be thoroughly entertaining, especially since I had never seen his previous show ***Late Night*** *with Jimmy Fallon* or remembered him from ***Saturday Night Live***, which I stopped watching since the original cast left in the last 80s and early 90s. My favorite segment of the first week was his ***History of Rap Part 5*** parody with Justin Timberlake.

Having not seen the previous four, I went on **YouTube** to see them. As someone who has everyone from Hendrix to Sinatra to The Beetles, Prince, James Brown to James Taylor, Little Anthony and the Imperials, Lucio Dalla, Pavarotti, Miles Davis, Quincy Jones and Lou Reid on my iPod. I also have a wide sampling of Hip Hop, 2Pac, Biggie, Too Short, Jay Z, NWA, Heavy D and Slick Rick on the same playlist. So after seeing ***History of Rap Part 5***, definitely was interested in viewing the first four... Below please find the web link of the first four and I hope that you enjoy them as much as I did.

History of Rap **-- Jimmy Fallon & Justin Timberlake**

Web Link: http://youtu.be/sWsBirqxEjA

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Inline image 2

Web Link: http://youtu.be/XOZTLoxvBTc and http://youtu.be/VmXsYRhVQ9w

I didn't believe when a friend sent this article to me from **The Huffington Post** written by Shadee Ashtari – ***Tom DeLay Claims God 'Wrote The Constitution'*** – so I actually went on the Internet to see if it was really true or just a hoax by a lefty friend trying to make fun of another *over-the-top* Texas Republican sending out another ***"dispatch from the bubble."*** DeLay: *"I think we got off the track when we allowed our government to become a secular government,"* DeLay explained. *"When we stopped realizing that God created this nation, that he wrote the Constitution, that it's based on biblical principles."* I know that I don't have to tell you all how wrong he is. But for Tom's sake, maybe I can clear it up, based on Biblical principles. God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Men wrote the US constitution, and did it with the express intention of not allowing this country to be a theocracy.

Because so Americans think that God wants America to be special — one of the pitfalls of being a species that embraces both religion and nationalism at the same time — we get logic like DeLay's, who truly believes that God wrote the Constitution, which is a special kind of dim-wittedness that can only come from a culture that believes the world is 6,000 years old, that there's roughly four thousand years from the creation of the universe to the writing of the Constitution. This idiotic perspective makes all history into a fairy tale, where the Founding Fathers might as well have been riding Tyrannosaurus Rexes to Philadelphia, and where Moses could practically be Paul Revere's great-great grandfather. The neoconservative disdain for science and history causes real problems, like men who once held great power thinking that their God insists that every American own at least one gun. This sort of argument ends with evangelicals who want to nuke the Middle East to bring about the end times.

"And Jesus destroyed Satan so that we could be free and that is manifested in what is called the Constitution of the United States. God created this nation and God created the Constitution; it is written on Biblical principles." Tom DeLay former House Majority Leader (R-Texas). These Christian scholars, like DeLay forget to quote the Constitution which actually says, *'Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion.'* The United States has been a secular nation from day one, and we should be so glad that this knucklehead isn't in power anymore. These comments was so over the top that I had to actually Fact Check The Huffington Post, only to find Conservative bloggers and media applauding DeLay's latest "dispatch from the bubble". DeLay does not mention that The Constitution doesn't mention, God, Jesus or the Bible and the only mention of religion is "you shall not establish one." Again, thank God that DeLay is no longer in power and again thank God that the United States is a secular democracy.

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Gov. Jan Brewer to decide if Arizona's anti-LGBTQ measure lives or dies

In the same week that former House Majority Leader (R-Texas) Tom DeLay claimed that *"God wrote the US Constitution"* there was another Republican who shared another pearl of wisdom (dispatches) from ***"the bubble"*** – when Arizona Governor Jan Brewer said that she was reluctant to sign an anti-gay *"religious freedom"* bill passed by the Arizona state legislature this week, telling reporters, , ***"I believe that bigotry and hatred should be free of government regulation."*** She said that while many Arizona business owners currently enjoy employing hateful practices, *"I worry that if big government gets involved, that'll ruin everything."* *"Don't get me wrong—I think the anti-gay bill that the legislature passed was well-meaning,"* she said. *"All [redacted] saying is, let's leave it to the private sector."* Offering an example, she added, *"Look at how Obamacare has messed up health care. [redacted] hate to pass a new law that results in government wrecking bigotry."*

But Governor Brewer got some pushback today from Republican legislator Harland Dorrinson, who told reporters, "[redacted] *as opposed to big government as anyone. But promoting hate-based bias is one area where I believe government has an important role to play."* For her part, Governor Brewer remains unconvinced by that argument. Noting that the current system of hatred and bigotry in place in Arizona has worked well for decades, she said, *"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."* Between Brewer and DeLay, I don't know which one's comments are worse, because they are all so ridiculous, that even Robert Mugabe wouldn't use them. But in a country where free speech is one of the tenets of our democracy, I guess that we have to accept ridiculous accretions from the likes of Ted Nugent, Rafael Cruz, Rush Limbaugh and Louis Farrakhan. With this said I would like to commend Governor Brewer for vetoing the controversial bill Wednesday that would have allowed businesses in the state to deny service to gays and lesbians if they felt that serving them would violate their religious rights. But remember that it took the very vocal outrage of everyone from Arizona Republican Senator John McCain to the company Apple to JP Morgan Chase Bank to the National Football League's threat of moving the Super Bowl which is scheduled next year, as well as hundreds of thousands if not millions of outraged Americans for her to make this decision.

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Dick Cheney

Former Vice President Dick Cheney (R) took a hit at President Barack Obama on Monday, saying he favors food stamps over a strong military. During an interview on **Fox News' *"Hannity,"*** Cheney criticized a proposal put forth by Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel on Monday that called for shrinking the Army to its smallest size in 74 years, closing bases and reshaping forces. The former vice president called the cuts *"just devastating." "I have not been a strong supporter of Barack Obama. But this really is over the top. It does enormous long-term damage to our military,"* Cheney said. *"They act as though it is like highway spending and you can turn it on and off. The fact of the matter is he is having a huge impact on the ability of future presidents to deal with future crises that are bound to arise." "And I think the whole thing is not driven by any change in world circumstances, it is driven by budget considerations,"* Cheney said later. *"[Obama] would much rather spend the money on food stamps than he would on a strong military or support for our troops."* The details revealed by Hagel are included in the defense spending plan that will be part of the 2015 budget that Obama will submit to Congress next week.

I think that for the first time I hope that Vice President Cheney is right, because since World War 2, the US has spent more money than any other country on the planet and it hasn't made us safer than Brazil, Germany, Switzerland or Australia. And using the argument that someone has to do it because our allies won't or can't should not be shouldered by American taxpayers. Global military expenditure this year stands at over $1.7 trillion in annual expenditure at current prices for 2012. It fell by around half a percent compared to 2011 — the first fall since 1998. Of which $614 billion is US military spending down from more than $700 billion in 2009. Since the start of the Cold War in the 1950s US military spending has been on the rise but the increases (from a bit more than $300 billion to more than $700 billion in 2009) are attributed to the so-called War on Terror and the Afghanistan and Iraq invasions. The US budget is larger than the combined military budgets of the next 13 largest countries and the only two (suggested) enemies are Iran and North Korea. And I would have a better chance winning the Super Lottery then either one of them attacking America.

So do we really need 2400s new F35 Fighter planes at a projected cost of $857 billion which has more than doubled in costs since being awarded to Lockheed Martin in 2001? Even with the suggested cuts by Defense Secretary Hagel the US military budget really wouldn't be reduce, it just that it wouldn't be rising as much as hawkish supporters would like and several programs and bases that the Department of Defense would like to eliminated would be cut. One of the *big uglies* in America is food insecurity and that more than 15 million children go to bed hungry. So why would the former Vice President so disparage a program that helps almost 50 million fellow countrymen feed their families and themselves, especially when much of our military expenditures are focus to war strategies that are obsolete? The days of air superiority with fighter pilots facing off in dogfights is almost as out of date as a slide-rule. We have drone technology today that can identify an individual in a moving car or underground bunker, which could easily be designed to shoot down a $200 million state of the art jet fighter. Thank God that we have a President who given the only choice who would rather feed needy Americans at the cost of reducing a bloated military budget.

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Inline image 3

Like many people around the world I am a lover of sports. I grew up playing baseball and football and for a brief moment I flirted with boxing until I spent six minutes in the ring with Victor Valle Jr., whose father was a famous trainer and fixture in the professional boxing world for six decades. Growing up I went to the Penn Relays and I look forward every spring to The Final Four. And like many blacks of my generation inspired by the amazing exploits Tiger Woods, I picked up a golf in the 1990s, until I tore my rotator cup in my right shoulder skiing. But having lived most of my life in New York and later on in Los Angeles, I grew up with the New York Yankees and Mets and drank out of the Stanley Cup when the Rangers and Devils won their championships. Long before I moved to Los Angeles, I cherished the many Laker games that friends took me to at the old LA Forum, and went to the Forum Club so many times, that many members assumed that I was one too. But in spite of the beating that I took at the hands of Victor Valle Jr, which was judged a draw, but still made me realize that boxing was much more fun to watch than do, I frequent ringside during the during the 1970s, 80s and 90s having gotten the bug when my father took my first fight to see a young Cassius Clay defeat Doug Jones at the old Madison Square Garden in 1963. This prefix is only to establish my love for sports, which is why one of my favorite sports television shows, is **HBO's, *Real Sports with Bryant Gumbel***. I was taken aback with the first segment of the most recent show titled, ***Kids and Guns,*** which although about a sport *"sport shooting",* it challenges both the gun culture in America and the marketing of gun to children.

In an effort to gain lifelong customers American gun makers are manufacturing and marketing special hunting guns made just for kids. And in many states it is so easy that kids who can't buy beer, cigarettes or a lottery ticket can by themselves a gun. We have to wonder about this country, it's sad and deadly fascination about guns. Although it's hard to believe in a time when this country's adolescents understandably can't buy alcohol or cigarettes or even adult magazines, they can own guns. Despite growing calls for stricter gun controls, many states these days are actually making it easier to put deadly weapons in the hands of youngsters, whose ability to handle them responsibly is questionable at best. Today the American firearms industry is taking aggressive measures to secure future customers by literally giving young kids a shot. In middle class neighborhoods, kids shooting kids is often described as *"just one of those accidents,"* when many of the shooters having a rifle is not an accident at all. These kids size hunting rifles often come with cute names, such as **Crockett** and marketed in ads no different than the ones that you see for the hottest new toy. **Crickett**, my first rifle. *"I wish that I had one." "A moment but you never forget."* The ads show kids shooting and the gun comes with a gun-toting stuffed animal/teddy bear. In one ad targeted to young girls, it showed a young girl with a **Glock** pistol, with the caption, *"Make Dad "Jealous."* All are part of an aggressive campaign being waged by the gun industry, in the plan to get guns in the hands of a legion of consumers as early as possible, by selling them on something that is fun, exciting and cool, sports.

The gun industry is worried that young people are more interested today in virtual shooting on their computer screens than traditional shooting, which gun enthusiast see as *a loss of our heritage*. With magazines like, **Junior Shooter**, children are being recruited across the country. Magazines like **Junior Shooter** endorse all sorts of guns for kids. One its article was titled, ***"Glocks are for Girls."*** Another listed a high capacity magazine, *"for when you're getting the right toys."* Ad support comes from major gun manufacturers, including **Winchester, Remington, Ruger, SigSauer, Glock** and **Colt,** as well as the industry's trade group, **National Shooting Sports Foundation,** (***'NSSF'***) the architect of the strategy to reach kids through sports. One of the most heavily featured guns in **Junior Shooter**, is the **AR15,** which the **NSSF** calls the modern sporting rifle. The **AR15** is the civilian version of the **M16** military assault weapon. And no surprise it is a huge hit with kids. Recently in **Junior Shooter** there was an article with instructions on how to make one.

Web Link: http://www.juniorshooters.net

Then there are the kids size rifles, *"the training wheels of guns."* Along with **Crickett**, there are other cute names, like **The Chipmunk** and **Rascal** which comes in seven colors. One of the arguments did they make for giving an **AR15** to a child, is that it has less recoil. Calling it sports shooting is the only acceptable way to market guns to children, as a result the **NSSF**, which is the official trade Association for the firearms industry now have focus groups (*testing and marketing*) to fine tune the best ways of getting guns in the hands of children. Many of these kids begin shooting as early as the age of 4 and hunting at the age of 6.

There is a **Hunter's Safety Course** for kids to take as early as the age of 6, and if the child can't read they will read the test to them. These kids can take the test and get licensed in a single day. The class last a little less than 7 hours and it doesn't include live shooting and if the child passes the test that day they can begin shooting the same day. **Think** about being able to get a driver's license without taking a driving test and then being able to drive at the age of 6. Critics say that safety classes don't work because kids will be kids. Kids because of their developmental nature take risks, especially teenagers who are often impulsive. You can talk about safety but what are the developmental capable of? You can teach them, but it's not what they or taught or know, as it is what are they capable of – developmentally. And the science is simple, because we know that the brain develops sequentially and the last area to develop is the free frontal cortex, which is this thinking and reasoning part of the brain and "the break" to one's impulsiveness. And you can't educate a teenager to be less impulsive. Yet the gun industry trade group, **NSSF** and partners have been lobbying States to lower age limits lighten hunter education requirements and to date 35 states have done just that.

Even supporters of the **National Rifle Association** ('***NRA***') and Americans suspicious of government regulation conceded that like cars and alcohol, there are certain thresholds in a society that you do things to preserve and protect the society to avoid chaos. It should be *common sense* that you do not put a loaded firearm in the hands of a kid. In a country that keeps kids away from almost every type of danger there is one odd exception, guns. As an example, **Real Sports** sent a young thirteen year old actor to several stores to buy beer, cigarettes, a pornographic magazine and a lottery ticket and none of the shops would sell them to him. And at several of the establishments, his request was greeted with amusement and outright laughter. Then the sent him to a gun show and within minutes the same thirteen year old was able to legally purchase a *22 calibre* rifle from a private seller. And although not a majority of states allow a thirteen year old to legally buy a rifle, almost all allow them to own them when they are used for *"hunting"* or *"shooting sport."* **This is nuts,** because when you bring a gun into a home you increase the risk to children, teenagers, their families and the community as a whole. The math is simple. Adolescents with access to guns on more than twice as likely to commit suicide.

You can teach an adolescent how to use the gun, load the gun, clean a gun, gun safety and even conservation, but what you can never control a teenager's impulse of resorting to a long term solution for a short term problem. In 2013 there were nine school shootings by teens. Gun enthusiasts will tell you that guns are as safe as tools in the hands of kids if they are trained. But that sounds like industry marketing. And the efforts of the **NSSF** and firearms industry maybe paying off as the number hunters between the ages of 6 and 15 is on the rise. Marketing guns to kids is not only borderline morally but it's insane. There are more than two million kids with access to guns (*their own guns*) in America. And although it is speculated that thousands of children are injured as a result of firearms, there are no real numbers because in 1996 the **NRA** successfully lobbied Congress to not allow people to do studies when he came to guns and safety and violence in the name of Public Health that was sponsored or finance by the **CDC** or with federal funding. This was recently rescinded, but no money has been appropriated to fund these sorts of studies. And for those who don't believe that nothing should be done other than relaxing gun regulations and get guns into more American hands, remember that **Adam Lanza** killed 23 children after killing his mother who was a gun enthusiast and the person who bought the **AR15** that he used to kill her, the children and 4 teachers at **Sandy Hook Elementary School** in the village of Sandy Hook in Newtown, Connecticut on December 14, 2012.

WEEK's READINGS

As Paul Krugman pointed out an **New York Times** op-ed last week — ***The Stimulus Tragedy*** — that the ***American Recovery and Reinvestment Act*** — the ***"stimulus"*** — signed into law by President Obama five years ago — which has been a huge success but for some reason it is a political disaster — because of the perception that somehow the stimulus failed. Let's remember five years ago — the economy was in absolute free-fall; the financial markets had nosedived, the housing prices had crashed, the country was losing 800,000 jobs a month and the country's banking sector was on a verge of collapse. And it is universally accepted that the stimulus helped end the economy's plunge, creating or saving millions of jobs, as well as the banking sector and leaving an important legacy of public and private investment. So how come it is a political disaster.

The case for stimulus was that we were suffering from a huge shortfall in overall spending, and that the hit to the economy from the financial crisis and the bursting of the housing bubble was so severe that the Federal Reserve, which normally fights recessions by cutting short-term interest rates, couldn't overcome this slump on its own. The idea, then, was to provide a temporary boost both by having the government directly spend more and by using tax cuts and public aid to boost family incomes, inducing more private spending. Opponents of stimulus argued vociferously that deficit spending would send interest rates skyrocketing, *"crowding out"* private spending. Proponents responded, however, that crowding out — a real issue when the economy is near full employment — wouldn't happen in a deeply depressed economy, awash in excess capacity and excess savings. And stimulus supporters were right: far from soaring, interest rates fell to historic lows.

People also forget that opponents of the stimulus, vehemently supported austerity, which is what Europe did facing a similar catastrophe, forcing sharp changes in government spending. Some but not all members of the euro area, the group of countries sharing Europe's common currency, were forced into imposing draconian fiscal austerity, that is, negative stimulus. If stimulus opponents had been right about the way the world works, these austerity programs wouldn't have had severe adverse economic effects, because cuts in government spending would have been offset by rising private spending. In fact, austerity led to nasty, in some cases catastrophic, declines in output and employment. And private spending in countries imposing harsh austerity ended up falling instead of rising, amplifying the direct effects of government cutbacks.

All the evidence, then, points to substantial positive short-run effects from the Obama stimulus. And there were surely long-term benefits, too: big investments in everything from green energy to electronic medical records. So why does everyone — or, to be more accurate, everyone those who have seriously studied the issue — believe that the stimulus was a failure? Because the U.S. economy continued to perform poorly — not disastrously, but poorly — after the stimulus went into effect. There's no mystery about why: America was coping with the legacy of a giant housing bubble. Even now, housing has only partly recovered, while consumers are still held back by the huge debts they ran up during the bubble years. And the stimulus was both too small and too short-lived to overcome that dire legacy.

This is not, by the way, a case of making excuses after the fact. In 2009 supporters of President Obama's economic policies (including me) warned everyone who would listen that the Recovery Act was inadequate — and that by falling short, the act would end up discrediting the very idea of stimulus. And so it proved. There's a long-running debate over whether the Obama administration could have gotten more. The administration compounded the damage with excessively optimistic forecasts, based on the false premise that the economy would quickly bounce back once confidence in the financial system was restored. But as Krugman says, *"that's all water under the bridge."*

The important point is that U.S. fiscal policy went completely in the wrong direction after 2010. With the stimulus perceived as a failure, job creation almost disappeared from inside-the-Beltway discourse, replaced with obsessive concern over budget deficits. Government spending, which had been temporarily boosted both by the Recovery Act and by safety-net programs like food stamps and unemployment benefits, began falling, with public investment hit worst. And this anti-stimulus has destroyed millions of jobs. Kurgman again – *"In other words, the overall narrative of the stimulus is tragic. A policy initiative that was good but not good enough ended up being seen as a failure, and set the stage for an immensely destructive wrong turn."*

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As Jim Kuhnhenn wrote an interesting article last week in **The Huffington Post** — ***How America's Debt And Deficit Became An Afterthought In Washington*** – acknowledging what everyone now knows, the fears of the stimulus worsen our economy that was pushed by proponents of austerity five years ago — is a dying ember in Washington's political and policy landscape.

The nation's annual deficit, the amount the government spends beyond what it receives in revenue, has been cut by nearly two-thirds from its 2009 high, thanks to a combination of tax increases, an improving economy and mandatory across-the-board cuts in programs from defense to transportation to education. And lawmakers, fatigued by their budget battles, have called a truce and abandoned the brinkmanship that led to unnerving default threats and a partial government shutdown.

As a result, the impulse to cut will be decidedly weaker when President Barack Obama's submits his latest budget plan to Congress early next month. The White House drove home the point Thursday when it said Obama's budget would drop his past offer to cut spending on federal benefits with lower cost-of-living increases for beneficiaries. "It's hard to deny that there is less political momentum at this moment, in the year 2014, for the type of extensive budget negotiations we saw in 2011 and 2012," said Gene Sperling, the director of the White House's National Economic Council and a close Obama adviser.

That doesn't mean the problem has been solved. Far from it. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office projects deficits will rise again in a couple of years, pushed up by an aging population, rising health care costs and anticipated increases in interest on the nation's debt, the amount accumulated over the years by deficit spending. But the public has shifted its anger.

The 2008-2009 bank bailouts and the stimulus spending that Obama set in motion in 2009 sparked the revolt in 2010 as swing voters — those who might vote for either Democratic or Republican candidates — demanded more fiscal accountability. With another midterm election this year, swing voters appear more concerned about their own personal economic circumstances, and Republicans are focused on making the election a referendum on Obama's health care law. A Gallup poll last week showed public preoccupation with debt and deficits falling as concerns over jobs took over as the top worry for Americans. Health care continued to rank among the top problems cited by those surveyed, though it has dropped slightly from its high in November during the botched enrollment rollout of the law. *"Deficits and debt remain salient with the Republican base, but the middle has moved on,"* Republican pollster Wes Anderson said. *"They were there in 2010, but now they are pretty strongly focused on Obamacare, with the economy as an issue picking up steam."*

Indeed, Republicans are now not only attacking the health care law but shifting from calling for cuts to complaining about them. House Republican leaders drew attention to the health care law's reductions in spending for Medicare Advantage, an option available to older Americans who are eligible for Medicare. In a letter to Obama, House Speaker John Boehner and other top House Republicans complained that the cuts, which Republicans themselves have included in past budgets, would result in higher health care costs for those who enroll in the program. "Now is not the time to shortchange seniors' choices," the Republicans wrote in a not-so-veiled appeal for the over-65 vote. That fundamental shift in attention may well be both a blessing and a curse.

If the cease-fire over budgets holds, the economy no longer will be convulsed by eleventh-hour negotiations, missed deadlines, threatened shutdowns and fears of jeopardizing the nation's credit. The new 2014 projection from the Congressional Budget Office — $514 billion this year from a $1.4 trillion high 2009 — means this year's deficit would be about 3 percent of the nation's economic output, good news in that it would virtually match the average percentage of the past four decades. But the nation's debt continues to grow, the CBO says, ever rising as a share of the nation's gross domestic product. The CBO estimates that the federal debt will equal 74 percent of GDP at the end of the year, the highest since 1946, and it projects that based on existing laws, it will rise to 79 percent in 2024. The main drivers of the debt are the government's biggest benefit programs — Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid. The government revenue stream is simply not keeping up with the aging population and with the increases in the cost of care.

The CBO also predicted that after 2016, the health care law also will lower total working hours as many employees choose to cut back on work to qualify for federal insurance subsidies. Such a reduction would contribute to lower tax revenues and thus higher deficits, CBO director Doug Elmendorf said. That conclusion has become yet another piece of Republican ammunition against the law. White House officials say the revenue projections in the president's budget won't be as pessimistic as CBO's, in part because they will factor in deficit reduction from their immigration overhaul plan. Under White

House projections, deficits as a share of the economy will be below 2 percent after the 2023-2024 fiscal year. The CBO says they will rise to about 4 percent.

In 2011, Obama and Boehner came tantalizing close to striking a *"grand bargain"* that would have increased taxes and contained some of Medicare and Social Security costs. But the deal didn't hold. It's difficult to imagine a set of circumstances anytime in the near future that would bring both parties that close to a significant deal again. Instead, the $1.1 trillion budget agreement struck by House Budget Chairman Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Senate Budget Chair Patty Murray, D-Wash., eased across-the-board mandatory spending cuts and defused any chance of an election-year shutdown. *"They kind of did a grand bargain — they agreed not to do anything," said Robert Bixby of the budget watchdog group The Concord Coalition. "The Ryan-Murray budget was basically an agreement to stop fighting."*

The past three years of confrontations have focused almost exclusively on those aspects of the budget that require annual approval — the *"discretionary"* portion of the budget. Untouched have been the huge benefit programs, which are most responsible for the debt. *"The tragic part of it is, all the anguish we're going through isn't dealing with two-thirds of the American budget,"* said former Sen. Alan Simpson, the Wyoming Republican who co-chaired a presidential debt commission created in 2010. Politically, Social Security and Medicare are much tougher to tackle. While the public does demand fiscal discipline, it often rebels when spending reductions affect them. Consider the GOP letter demanding restoration of Medicare Advantage cuts. Or a recent letter from 16 Senate liberal Democrats calling for Obama not to include in his budget any provision that would reduce increases in Social Security benefits to future retirees. As it turns out, Obama will not. *"You're never going to hit anybody because they'll roll in and roll you over,"* Simpson said.

As a result, with little to lose, President Obama has now decided to ignore so-called "grand bargain" that would raise taxes and cut spending with the goal of deficit reduction and instead shelved cuts in Social Security benefits – increasing cost-of-living adjustments. Sen. Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) shook up the Social Security debate late last year by throwing her weight behind a proposal that would not just keep benefits stable, but would in fact increase payments to retirees. Warren's proposal spotlighted the difficult economic situations many seniors face, and the relative paucity of Social Security checks, moving the debate away from deficit concerns. *"I applaud the President's decision to exclude chained CPI from the 2015 budget,"* Warren said in a statement later Thursday. *"We are facing a very real and growing retirement crisis in America, and cutting social security is the last thing we should do."*

Social Security's actuaries say the program's trust fund can last until 2033 with no changes, and could pay roughly four-fifths of benefits thereafter. Lifting the cap on payroll taxes, which would require top earners to pay Social Security taxes on all income rather than just the first $117,000, would fully eliminate the funding gap. And raising the nation's minimum wage, which the President has fully backed, will life an estimated 900,000 out of poverty. But for me the real problem with the "grand bargain" is that it did nothing to address the misery that many working families, older Americans and poor face on a daily basis. And placing monetary interest over protection of those in need should not be a tenant of our democracy.

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While surfing the net last weekend as I usually do on a daily basis, I was drawn to a **TED Talks** titled – ***Does Money Make You Mean?*** – And under the caption of ***The Science of Greed*** – by Psychologist Paul Piff. The talk was based on an experiment that he and colleagues did, where they rigged a **Monopoly Gam**e by giving one player twice as much money and preferential rules. Their research showed that people who feel wealthy tend to behave entitled and badly to maintain their dominate position.

Paul Piff: ***Does money make you mean?***

Web Link: http://youtu.be/bJ8Kq1wucsk

Piff uses the game as a example to show that even though the privileged players were randomly chosen by a simple flip of a coin, they tended to rationalized their success. And over seven year through dozens of studies and thousands participants across the country, Piff and his colleagues used the games as a metaphor to show how in a hierarchy society where some people have a lot of wealth and a lot of status and a lot of people don't and have a lot less wealth, status and resources the effects show that as a person's levels of wealth increase their compassion and empathy go down and their feelings of entitlements and deservingness and their ideology of self-interest increases. Their surveys show that wealthy individuals more often moralize that greed being good and self-interest is morally good.

In their studies some of the implications of self-interest being morally good, show that people who have more, give less of what they have and the richer participants were the more likely they were to cheat and that participants who were rich more often felt entitled to take more and as the expensiveness of cars increased the drivers more often did not stop for pedestrians at crosswalks. Their studies showed that wealthier individuals were more often to lie in negotiations and endorse unethical behavior at work.

Obviously it isn't only the wealthy who show these patterns of behavior, you only have watch several Judge Judy shows to see how young, old and people of all races scam Social Security, IRS, neighbors, family and friends. Because we all in our day to day lives struggle with these competing motivations of when and if to put our own self-interest in front of other people. And this is understandable because the American Dream is an idea where we all have an equal opportunity to succeed and prosper as long as we apply ourselves and work hard. And a piece of that means that sometimes you have to put your own self-interest above the interests and well-being of the people around you.

Piff and his colleagues conclusions are that the more wealthier you are the more likely you are to pursue achievement and accomplishment to the detriment of the people around you. With the top 20% now owning almost 90% of the wealth in the United States, we are at an precedent level of inequality. Not only is wealth becoming increasing concentrated in a select group of individuals, the American Dream is becoming increasingly more unattainable for an increasing majority of Americans. Therefore if this is the case that the wealthy you are, the more entitled you feel to that wealth and the more likely you are to prioritize your interest above other people and more willing to do things to serve that self-interest, there is no reason to think that those patterns will change. In fact there is every reason to think that things will get worse.

One of the reason why we should worry about economic inequality is not just because of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy, because individuals in groups with lots of economic inequality do worse, not just people at the bottom but everyone. Economic inequality undermines economic growth, community life, life expectancy, educational performance, physical health, social mobility and social trust and all go down when economic inequality goes up, while negative things like abuse of drugs, teenage births, obesity, violence, imprisonment and incidence of punishment are exacerbated as economic inequality increases. And these outcomes affect all strata of society.

After a while, and as someone who loves making money I thought that that the video/**TED Talk** was a *"bashing the rich"* rant, only to find out that Piff and his colleagues' studies show that small psychological interventions, small changes to people's values, small nudges in certain directions can restore levels of egalitarianism and empathy, such as reminding benefits of cooperation or the advantages of community cause wealthier individuals to become as egalitarian as poor people. In one study they show wealthy individuals a 46 second video on childhood poverty that severed as a reminder of the needs of others in the world around them. And after watching they individuals were introduce a stranger in need rich people were just as generous and willing to help out the stranger as often as the poor. The video ends with the quote by Bill Gates – ***Humanities' greatest advances are not in its discoveries, but in how those discoveries are applied to reduce inequality."***

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Health Care Horror Hooey

Paul Krugman: FEB. 23, 2014

Remember the "death tax"? The estate tax is quite literally a millionaire's tax — a tax that affects only a tiny minority of the population, and is mostly paid by a handful of very wealthy heirs. Nonetheless, right-wingers have successfully convinced many voters that the tax is a cruel burden on ordinary Americans — that all across the nation small businesses and family farms are being broken up to pay crushing estate tax liabilities.

You might think that such heart-wrenching cases are actually quite rare, but [redacted] be wrong: they aren't rare; they're nonexistent. In particular, nobody has ever come up with a real modern example of a family farm sold to meet estate taxes. The whole "death tax" campaign has rested on eliciting human sympathy for purely imaginary victims.

And now they're trying a similar campaign against health reform.

[redacted] not sure whether conservatives realize yet that their Plan A on health reform — wait for Obamacare's inevitable collapse, and reap the political rewards — isn't working. But it isn't. Enrollments have recovered strongly from the law's disastrous start-up; in California, which had a working website from the beginning, enrollment has already exceeded first-year projections. The mix of people signed up so far is older than planners had hoped, but not enough so to cause big premium hikes, let alone the often-predicted "death spiral."

And conservatives don't really have a Plan B — in their world, nobody even dares mention the possibility that health reform might actually prove workable. Still, you can already see some on the right groping toward a new strategy, one that relies on highlighting examples of the terrible harm Obamacare does. There's only one problem: they haven't managed to come up with any real examples. Consider several recent ventures on the right:

■ In the official [redacted]. response to the State of the Union address, Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers alluded to the case of "Bette in Spokane," who supposedly lost her good health insurance coverage and was forced to pay nearly $700 more a month in premiums. Local reporters located the real Bette, and found that the story was completely misleading: her original policy provided very little protection, and she could get a much better plan for much less than the claimed cost.

■ In Louisiana, the AstroTurf (fake grass-roots) group Americans for Prosperity — the group appears to be largely financed and controlled by the Koch brothers and other wealthy donors — has been running ads targeting Senator Mary Landrieu. In these ads, we see what appear to be ordinary Louisiana residents receiving notices telling them that their insurance policies have been canceled because of Obamacare. But the people in the ads are, in fact, paid actors, and the scenes they play aren't re-enactments of real events — they're "emblematic," says a spokesman for the group.

■ In Michigan, Americans for Prosperity is running an ad that does feature a real person. But is she telling a real story? In the ad, Julia Boonstra, who is suffering from leukemia, declares that her insurance has been canceled, that the new policy will have unaffordable out-of-pocket costs, and that "If I do not receive my medication, I will die." But Glenn Kessler of The Washington Post tried to check the facts, and learned that thanks to lower premiums she will almost surely save nearly as much if not more than she will be paying in higher out-of-pocket costs. A spokesman for Americans for Prosperity responded to questions about the numbers with bluster and double-talk — this is about "a real person suffering from blood cancer, not some neat and tidy White House PowerPoint."

Even supporters of health reform are somewhat surprised by the right's apparent inability to come up with real cases of hardship. Surely there must be some people somewhere actually being hurt by a reform that affects millions of Americans. Why can't the right find these people and exploit them? The most likely answer is that the true losers from Obamacare generally aren't very sympathetic. For the most part, they're either very affluent people affected by the special taxes that help finance reform, or at least moderately well-off young men in very good health who can no longer buy cheap, minimalist plans. Neither group would play well in tear-jerker ads.

No, what the right wants are struggling average Americans, preferably women, facing financial devastation from health reform. So those are the tales they're telling, even though they haven't been able to come up with any real examples.

Hey, I have a suggestion: Why not have ads in which actors play Americans who have both lost their insurance thanks to Obamacare and lost the family farm to the death tax? I mean, once you're just making stuff up, anything goes.

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Inline image 4

This week in **The New Yorker** I was taken aback by an article by Jeffrey Toobin – ***CLARENCE THOMAS'S DISGRACEFUL SILENCE*** – which pointed out that as of Saturday, February 22nd, eight years has passed since Clarence Thomas last asked a question during a Supreme Court oral argument. His behavior on the bench has gone from curious to bizarre to downright embarrassing, for himself and for the institution he represents. This point was especially apparent on January 13th, when the Court considered the case of National Labor Relations Board v. Noel Canning, which raises important questions about the President's ability to fill vacancies when the Senate is in recess. It was a superb argument—highly skilled lawyers engaging with eight inquisitive judges. The case also offered a kind of primer on the state of the Court in action, with Thomas's colleagues best viewed in pairs.

Antonin Scalia and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. The two oldest Justices (and the Court's senior New Yorkers) usually jump in first with questions. Scalia, who is seventy-seven, often takes a barbed tone with the lawyers, and Ginsburg, who is eighty, is more polite, if no less insistent. Both of them set the tone with their ideologically opposed positions. They offer an early clue as to whether the Court will divide along familiar left-right grounds. Anthony Kennedy and Stephen Breyer. Oddly, these two, both Northern Californians, are starting to resemble each other physically in their eighth decades. Both sit in similar ways, hunched forward, with the fingers of their right hands splayed between forehead and bald head. Kennedy asks questions in a tone of grave concern; Breyer, in his twentieth year on the Court, is still having the time of his life. He laughs at all the jokes, especially his own.

Samuel Alito and John Roberts. Alito sits like a sphinx: his face gives away nothing, but his questions invariably tease out the weak parts of an opposing argument. Roberts looks like the earnest Midwesterner he remains, but he, too, has a litigator's gift for eviscerating an adversary. It is wise to listen closely to these two; they are rarely on the losing side. Sonia Sotomayor and Elena Kagan. The Court's youngest members (and junior New Yorkers) sit on opposite ends of the bench, and both take aggressive tones with the lawyers. Sotomayor leans forward, her right forearm aimed skyward and nearly covered in bracelets; she burrows into the facts of cases in extraordinary detail. Kagan takes the opposite tack. Her early trademark question is about the big picture, and it's usually a refined version of "Counsel, let's cut the crap. Isn't this case really about ... ?" Neither Sotomayor nor Kagan has ever heard Thomas ask a question in the courtroom. (Yes, Thomas did break his silence last year to utter a single stray wisecrack, but that hardly counts as participation.)

As for Thomas, he is physically transformed from his infamous confirmation hearings, in 1991—a great deal grayer and heavier today, at the age of sixty-five. He also projects a different kind of silence than he did earlier in his tenure. In his first years on the Court, Thomas would rock forward, whisper comments about the lawyers to his neighbors Breyer and Kennedy, and generally look like he was acknowledging where he was. These days, Thomas only reclines; his leather chair is pitched so that he can stare at the ceiling, which he does at length. He strokes his chin. His eyelids look heavy. Every schoolteacher knows this look. It's called *"not paying attention."*

Thomas has a part to play, if he wants to take it. The Noel Canning case, for example, raises a profound issue in constitutional law. Noel Canning, a bottling company, is challenging a ruling of the National Labor Relations Board on the ground that some of its members were appointed illegitimately.

All Presidents have used recess appointments, often without much controversy; Obama did so in this case because Congress had refused to act on his nominations, to the point that the [redacted]. didn't have a quorum. But a close, literal reading of the Constitution's text suggests that the practice may be unconstitutional except in narrow circumstances. Does the meaning of the Constitution evolve over time, or is there only a single, immutable understanding of what it says?

Questioning the lawyer for Noel Canning, Breyer noted that Presidents have made thousands of recess appointments over the decades. Even if the Constitution could be read as prohibiting the practice, wasn't it clearly legal now? "It isn't unheard of that over time language in the Constitution takes on a somewhat different meaning," Breyer said, noting that the definitions of "due process" and "interstate commerce" had clearly changed. "I mean, probably different judges have different approaches," Breyer went on. "But if [redacted] concerned about the basic practicality and the basic objective here, why would I agree with you?"

As the lawyer, Noel Francisco, hedged, Scalia jumped in. "The two examples that Justice Breyer gives are examples where we gave it a meaning that was different from what it said." The audience, worldly in such matters, laughed. Breyer, the proponent of the living, changing Constitution, and Scalia, the originalist, have been having this argument for years.

No one, however, has been more outspoken about this conflict, at least on paper, than Thomas, the most extreme originalist on the Court. Scalia believes that the Court owes some deference to its own precedents, even if they differ from the original meaning of the text. Thomas is happy to lay waste to decades, even centuries, of constitutional law. Clearly, then, Thomas could have contributed to this spirited, important debate . Instead, on this day he was, as usual, checked out.

For better or worse, Thomas has made important contributions to the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court. He has imported once outré conservative ideas, about such issues as gun rights under the Second Amendment and deregulation of political campaigns, into the mainstream. Scalia wrote District of Columbia v. Heller, which restricted gun control, and Kennedy wrote Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission, which undermined decades of campaign-finance law, but Thomas was an intellectual godfather of both decisions.

Still, there is more to the job of Supreme Court Justice than writing opinions . The Court's arguments are not televised (though they should be), but they are public. They are, in fact, the public's only windows onto the Justices' thought processes, and they offer the litigants and their lawyers their only chance to look these arbiters in the eye and make their case. There's a reason the phrase "your day in court" resonates. It is an indispensable part of the legal system.

But the process works only if the Justices engage. The current Supreme Court is almost too ready to do so, and sometimes lawyers have a hard time getting a word in edgewise. In question-and-answer sessions at law schools, Thomas has said that his colleagues talk too much, that he wants to let the lawyers say their piece, and that the briefs tell him all he needs to know. But this — as his colleagues' ability to provoke revealing exchanges demonstrates—is nonsense. Thomas is simply not doing his job.

By refusing to acknowledge the advocates or his fellow-Justices, Thomas treats them all with disrespect. It would be one thing if Thomas's petulance reflected badly only on himself, which it did for the first few years of his ludicrous behavior. But at this point, eight years on, Thomas is demeaning the Court. Imagine, for a moment, if all nine Justices behaved as Thomas does on the bench. The public would rightly, and immediately, lose all faith in the Supreme Court. Instead, the public has lost, and should lose, any confidence it might have in Clarence Thomas.

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Inline image 5

You would have to be deaf, dumb and blind and also illiterate and not curious, you most likely would still know that one of the biggest political debates/issues in the United States is **ObamaCare** (***Affordable Care Act***). The Republicans believe that they can not only rally the troops but that they can win elections/races using this issue as their centerpiece to demonize the Obama Administration. It didn't help the President that the initial rollout and website was a disaster, as Republicans used this as evidence that all of their warning were well founded and Democrats in swing districts ran away looking for cover. Since repairing the website in November, sign ups have mushroomed to more than 3.3 million and only one million behind of target enrollment.

In his State of the Union address in January, President Obama advised Republicans to accept the fact that whether or not they liked it, *Obamacare* is here to stay and invited them to come up with ways to improve it. And although there is still much resistance, spearheaded by a number of Republican governors who have refused to implement it in their states, President Obama hosted most of the governors who were in [redacted]. for their annual Governors Convention to the White House for a dinner last Sunday night, calling for collaboration on the economy, education, climate change and health care in what he hopes will be "a year of action."

A recent **Associated Press** analysis found that sign-ups in six Republican-led states — Florida, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, North Carolina and Wisconsin — were on pace to match or exceed figures the states had initially projected. Last week the White House reported that 1 million people signed up nationwide for private insurance under the law in January alone. It remains unclear whether the administration will reach its unofficial goal of 7 million people by the end of March, but it still expects several million enrollees by then. Whether only 5 million people are enrolled by the end of March, with hundreds of thousands signing up every week you will have to be an illiterate **TOMMY** *(deaf, dumb & blind* boy memorialized by **The Who** in their rock opus of the same name in 1969), most of the implementations under *Obamacare* is here to stay for the foreseeable future. For more information please feel free to read article in **The Huffington Post** this week by Ken Thomas and Steve Peoples – ***Governors: Obamacare Is Here To Stay***.

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Often overlook especially by Republicans is that as a result of Obama Administration's successful economic policies a big slice of the deficit has been taken out since it peaked five years ago. The Treasury Department reported Thursday that the federal government's deficit was $680 billion in the last fiscal year, $409 billion less than in 2012, largely because of increased revenue. The federal budget deficit fell precipitously to $680 billion in the 2013 fiscal year from about $1.1 trillion the year before, the Treasury Department said Thursday. That is the smallest deficit since 2008, and marks the end of a five-year stretch when the country's fiscal gap came in at more than a trillion dollars a year. The report comes days before the White House is expected to release a new budget. Democrats have said that the still-tepid recovery requires government investment along with commitments to reduce deficits in the long term — while also emphasizing the rapidly falling budget gap. Republicans have long said that Democrats have proven poor stewards of the economy, overseeing a period of sluggish growth and rising debt. See the attached **New York Times** article by Annie Lowrey – ***Federal Deficit Falls to Smallest Level Since 2008.***

The report, which was a regular update on the country's finances, underscores the persistence, if not the strength, of the recovery after the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. Growth in tax revenue accounts for much of the decline in the deficit. But increases in taxes and cuts in federal spending figure strongly too, as does a surprising — and surprisingly long — slowdown in the pace of health-spending growth. The Treasury said that revenue climbed $324 billion to $2.8 trillion between 2012 and 2013. That is growth of around 12.9 percent, reflecting both higher income rates, including higher top marginal rates and the expiration of the payroll tax holiday, and a strengthening economy. At the same time, government spending grew relatively slowly, to $3.9 trillion from $3.8 trillion a year earlier, the Treasury said. *"Thanks to the tenacity of the American people and the determination of the private sector we are moving in the right direction,"* said Treasury Secretary Jacob J. Lew in the report. *"The United States has recovered faster than any other advanced economy, and our deficit today is less than half of what it was when President Obama first took office."* This is good news so why aren't anyone celebrating?

THIS WEEK's QUOTES

There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly.

R. Buckminster Fuller

When I am working on a problem, I never think about beauty but when I have finished, if the solution is not beautiful, I know it is wrong.

R. Buckminster Fuller

BEST VIDEO OF THE WEEK

Wonderful introduction to Antarctica

Web Link: [redacted]
ui=2&ik=875c48a476&view=att&th=1447be27e9b1180e&attid=0.1&disp=safe&zw

GREAT MAGIC TRICK

This dog is above and beyond!!!

Web Link: [redacted]

THIS WEEK's MUSIC

Inline image 6

This week I would like to share the music of **Barbra Streisand** greatest multitalented artist of our time. In addition to being one of the bestselling female artists of all time, with more than 71.5 million albums shipped in the United States and 145 million records sold worldwide. She is the best-selling female artist on **the Recording Industry Association of America's (RIAA) Top Selling Album Artists** list, the only female recording artist in the top ten, and the only artist outside of the rock and roll genre. Barbra Joan Streisand (born Barbara Joan Streisand, April 24, 1942) is an American singer-songwriter, author, actress, writer, film producer, and director. She has won two Academy Awards, eight Grammy Awards, five Emmy Awards including **one Daytime Emmy**, a **Special Tony Award**, an **American Film Institute** award, a **Kennedy Center Honors** award, a **Peabody Award,** and is one of the few entertainers who have won an **Oscar, Emmy, Grammy**, and **Tony Award**. She has been inducted in the Grammy Hall of Fame three times and inn 2011, she was honored as ***MusiCares Person of the Year by the Grammy Foundation.***

After beginning a successful recording career in the 1960s, by the end of the decade, Streisand ventured into film starring in the critically acclaimed ***Funny Girl,*** for which she won the **Academy Award** and **Golden Globe Award** for Best Actress. Other notable films include ***The Owl and the Pussycat, The Way We Were and A Star Is Born*** for which she received her second **Academy Award** for composing the music to the picture's main song, "***Evergreen***". By the 1980s, Streisand established herself as one of the film industry's most notable figures by becoming the first woman to direct, produce, script and star in her own picture. According to the **RIAA**, Streisand holds the record for the most top ten albums of any female recording artist – a total of 32 since 1963. Streisand has the widest span (48 years) between first and latest top ten albums of any female recording artist. With her 2009 album, ***Love Is the Answer***, she became one of the rare artists to achieve number one albums in five consecutive decades. According to the **RIAA**, she has released **51 Gold** albums, **30 Platinum** albums, and **13 Multi-Platinum** albums in the United States. At the age of 64, well past the prime of most performers, she grossed $92,457,062 and set house gross records in 14 of the 16 arenas played on a 20-concert tour.

I became a fan of Barbra Streisand in the early 1963s after hearing her first album and after hearing her sing ***"People"*** even though I was a teenager I recognize her talent as something so special. I first met Barbra Streisand around 1970 in Greenwich Village in New York City with my friend Jae Mason who was a fellow classmate of hers at Erasmus Hall High School in Brooklyn and famed record producer Richard Perry who was working with her at that time and a fellow classmate at EHHS. Whether it *be* ***On A Clear Day, People*** or ***Smile*** and dozens of other songs, Barbra Streisand's talent is undeniable and without exception a national treasure.... With this said, I invite you to share the music of **Ms. Barbra Streisand.....**

Barbra Streisand – ***People*** -- http://youtu.be/Ur7I7Qy_PgI

Barbra Streisand – ***Somewhere*** -- http://youtu.be/cAu3a7CMA84

Barbra Streisand – ***Evergreen*** -- http://youtu.be/lzHJlncKXTM

Barbra Streisand – ***What Kind Of Fool*** (Duet With Barry Gibb) -- http://youtu.be/yNegRk_tmqU

Barbra Streisand & Neil Diamond – ***You Don't Bring me Flowers*** -- http://youtu.be/wj10EzNKA2M

Barbra Streisand – ***The Way We Were*** -- http://youtu.be/Vyb_gaXhCTk

Barbra Streisand – ***Send In The Clowns*** -- http://youtu.be/VpiONyu87TU

Barbra Streisand – ***On A Clear Day*** -- http://youtu.be/TiSDnddwqSg

Barbra Streisand – ***Smile*** -- http://youtu.be/nDPV3OBwGSs

Barbra Streisand & Burt Bacharach – ***Close to You*** -- http://youtu.be/52jkbJrTwBw

Barbra Streisand – Don't Rain On My Parade -- http://youtu.be/oZTSuMErgsw and http://youtu.be/aO3Gb5mkwTc

Barbra Streisand & Louis Armstrong – ***Hello Dolly*** -- http://youtu.be/oXPNHCboHGU

Barbra Streisand – ***You'll Never Walk Alone*** -- http://youtu.be/4RYUp7gYHwg

Barbra Streisand – ***Guilty*** (Duet With Barry Gibb) -- http://youtu.be/YU7aI9Twgtc

Barbra Streisand – ***As If We Never Said Goodbye*** -- http://youtu.be/pp9_SnIYdJA

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

Sincerely,

Greg Brown
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