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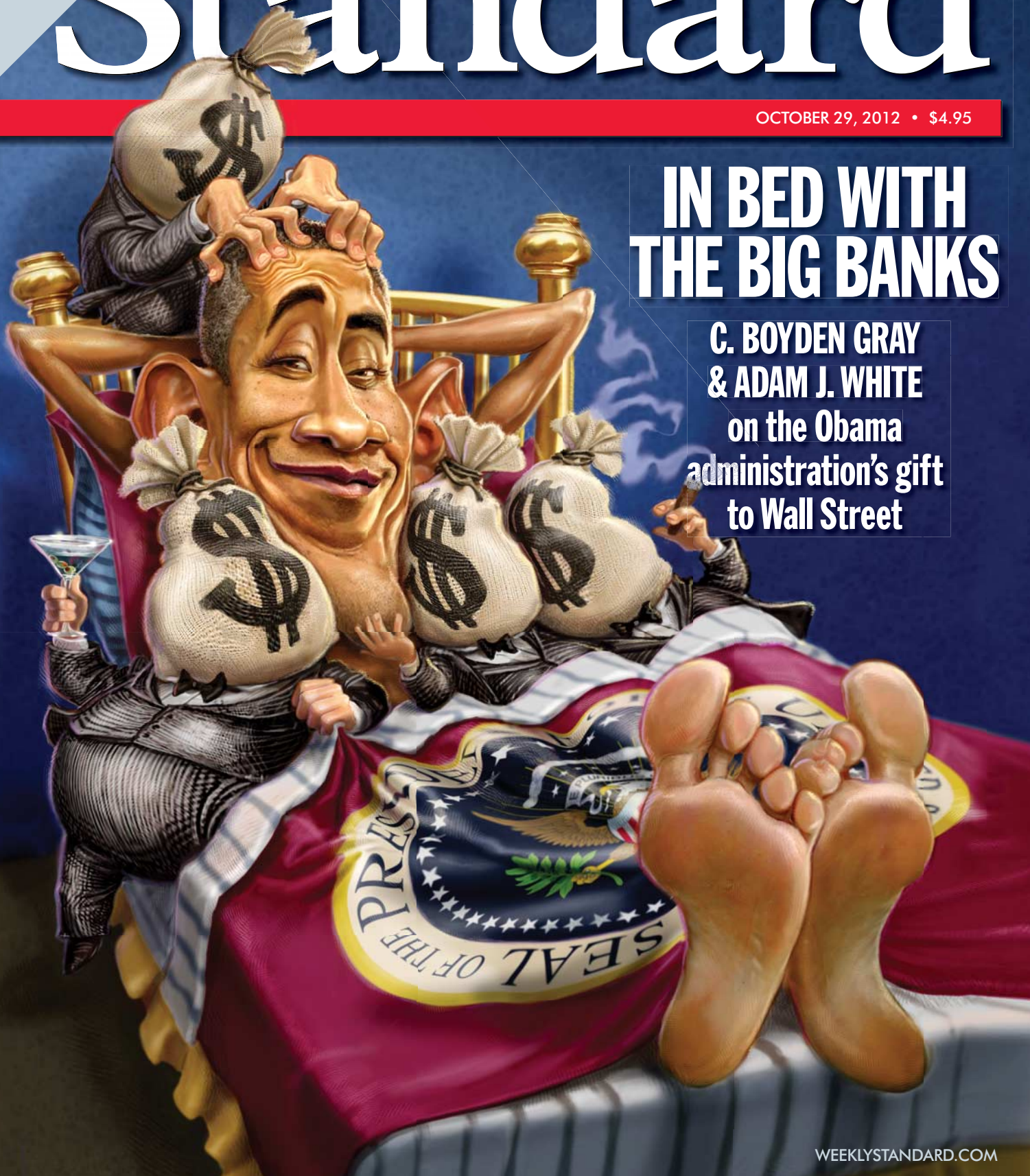
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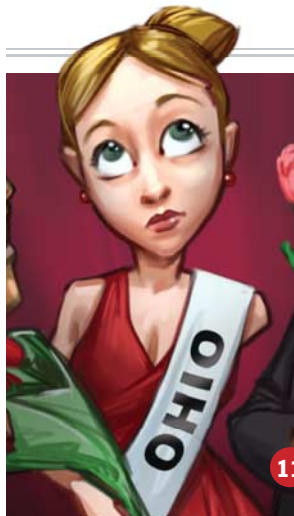
IN BED WITH THE BIG BANKS

**C. BOYDEN GRAY
& ADAM J. WHITE**
on the Obama
administration's gift
to Wall Street



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COVER BY GARY LOCKE

Bill Collector in Chief

Over the last few years THE SCRAPBOOK has watched the rise of the behavioral social sciences with a profound sense of unease. It's best to be alert to the limits of social science for many reasons, but chief among them is that any supposed insights into human behavior are rapidly seized upon by professionals who manipulate people for a living.

For a particularly disturbing example of this, look no further than the increasingly Orwellian marketing tactics of the Obama campaign. Earlier this year, Obama for America released a smartphone app that produces maps telling you the political affiliation of your neighbors. THE SCRAPBOOK also recently received this email from the Obama campaign:

According to our records associated with this email address -- hopefully it's yours if you're reading this! -- here's your online giving history for this organization:

-- Your supporter ID number is: 1009733799

-- Your most recent online donation was: \$0

-- Total amount donated online in 2012: \$0

It looks like you haven't made an online donation to the campaign yet. If you were waiting for the last minute, you're pretty much there.

The knowledge that the Obama campaign is tracking us with a 10-digit supporter ID number was a bit disturbing, as was the general tone of the email. (We guess the number goes up to 10 digits because the Obama campaign assumes that admirers of our humble leader number in the billions.) Thankfully, we're not the only ones who felt that way.

One prominent regulatory lawyer told *Politico* that if a major financial services company sent out a similarly manipulative letter, they would run afoul of the Federal Trade Commission. And no less than Scott Goodstein, the external online director for Obama's 2008 campaign, said, "While squeaking out a little more cash, is it worth it if it turns off base supporters that are reading your narrative and doing the hard work?" He went on to describe the fundraising appeal as "a 'collection-style' bill from the campaign's auditor."

If Goodstein finds this unseemly, perhaps that's because he's not taking into account that the Obama campaign posing as a bill collector is less unusual than it would have been when Goodstein handled fundraising during the '08 campaign. Thanks to the president's stewardship of the economy, Americans have grown much more accustomed to hearing from bill collectors.

Still, the symbolism of this missive is something to behold. Obama rings up \$5 trillion in new debt and wants to raise taxes, but he acts like you're in arrears with his campaign.

Unfortunately, it appears that such sleazy attempts to manipulate supporters are here to stay. If you thought posing as a bill collector to juice campaign cash was scraping the barrel, it gets worse. The *New York Times* recently reported that political campaigns are closely tracking your every move:

In the weeks before Election Day, millions of voters will hear from callers with surprisingly detailed knowledge of their lives. These callers—friends or friends or long-lost work colleagues—will identify themselves as volunteers for the campaigns or independent political groups.

The callers will be guided by scripts and call lists compiled by people—or computers—with access to details like whether voters may have visited pornography Web sites, have homes in foreclosure, are more prone to drink Michelob Ultra than Corona or have gay friends or enjoy expensive vacations.

So next time you hear from a campaign, just go ahead and write the check already. It's only a matter of time before they make the logical jump from crass manipulation to blackmail. ♦

Friday Night Fights

It began in 1984, when the Reagan reelection apparatus made the mistake of thinking that Bruce Springsteen's song "Born in the USA" would make a suitable anthem for the campaign. "America's future rests in a thousand dreams inside your hearts," President Reagan told a Hammonton, New Jersey, audience. "It rests in the message of hope in songs so many young Americans admire: New Jersey's own Bruce Springsteen."

The trouble, of course, was that

"Born in the USA" contained not a message of hope but of despair, which the left-wing Springsteen was quick to explain publicly. Whereupon the Democratic nominee that year, Walter Mondale, piled on: "Bruce Springsteen may have been born to run," he exulted, "but he wasn't born yesterday." And then claimed that the Boss had endorsed him, not Reagan. (To his credit, Springsteen denied any such Mondale endorsement—but went on to a career of performing for Democratic candidates, up to and including Barack Obama.)

And so the pattern was set: In every subsequent presidential campaign, if any band played any popular song at any venue in conjunction with any Republican candidate, the composer or performer or arranger or lyricist would issue a swift, uncompromising, legal-sounding order to cease and desist, followed by a caustic/sarcastic commentary: "As anyone who actually knows and loves my music would be aware, the values expressed in my extraordinary songs are thoroughly at odds with the offensive views of Candidate X."

The reductio ad absurdum of this wearisome trend came swiftly—in 1988, when musician Bobby McFerrin commanded, in especially vehement terms, that the George H. W. Bush presidential campaign stop using his novelty hit (“Don’t Worry, Be Happy”) as its “official” song. Which, of course, it had not: It was, in fact, a left-wing talking point of the political season that “Don’t Worry, Be Happy” ought to be the Bush anthem—poor Mr. McFerrin seems to have gotten confused.

Not that the press would bother to clarify such things, or fail to cover, in lavish detail, these perennial attention-getting interludes at the expense of GOP candidates. That is how THE SCRAPBOOK learned that surviving members of the heavy metal ensemble Twisted Sister had demanded that the Romney campaign stop playing their composition—“We’re Not Gonna Take It”—at rallies. It is also how we learned that Mitt Romney’s favorite inspirational catchphrase—“Clear eyes, full hearts, can’t lose,” from a television series called *Friday Night Lights*—had catapulted the self-described “creator” of the show, Peter Berg, into high dudgeon: “Your politics and campaign,” he wrote to Romney, “are clearly not aligned with the themes we portrayed in our series.”

Alas, THE SCRAPBOOK, never having seen *Friday Night Lights*, is in no position to judge the merits of this dispute. At the same time, however, we’re not sure that the occasional use of an uncopyrighted catchphrase or brief quotation in politics—sock it to me, we must love one another or die, where’s the beef?—is quite the same as broadcasting a published song over the P.A. system at public events.

Our suspicion is that Mr. Berg just wanted an excuse to reassure everyone in Televisionland that he’s not thinking any heretical thoughts this year—unlike, say, Buzz Bissinger, the 2008 Obama supporter who wrote the 1991 book *Friday Night Lights*, on which the TV series is based.

Bissinger’s for Romney. ♦



Revolt of the Drivers (cont.)

THE SCRAPBOOK never intended to become a weekly chronicle of the woes of the Chevy Volt—the boondoggle that only a big government-big auto alliance could have created. But desperate times call for desperate measures. It seems that a Michigan-based company making batteries for the Volt received \$151 million in taxpayer funds via the \$800 billion stimulus bill. President Obama showed up for the plant’s groundbreaking ceremony in July 2010. The enterprise is now going about as well as you might expect, according to an investigation

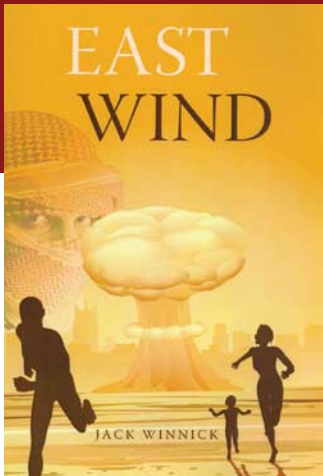
by the local NBC affiliate, Wood TV:

Workers at LG Chem, a \$300 million lithium-ion battery plant heavily funded by taxpayers, tell Target 8 that they have so little work to do that they spend hours playing cards and board games, reading magazines or watching movies. They say it’s been going on for months.

“There would be up to 40 of us that would just sit in there during the day,” said former LG Chem employee Nicole Merryman, who said she quit in May.

Current employees at the plant declined to be named for fear of losing their, ahem, jobs, but confirmed that they are still collecting taxpayer-subsidized paychecks while “playing

When terrorists threaten to blow up American cities...



...a crack counter-terrorist team is pitted against a group of Hezbollah-based operatives. An FBI agent teams up with a Mossad field agent in a desperate cross-country chase.



"In the genre of international spy thrillers from Daniel Silva and Vince Flynn, **Jack Winnick's East Wind** is a fast-paced, page-turner novel involving a credible scenario: Muslim terrorists have penetrated the

United States, detonated one small nuclear dirty bomb in a major U.S. city and are threatening further attacks if the U.S. does not cease its support for Israel."

-- **Lee Bender, Philadelphia Jewish Voice**

"A riveting thriller with real world connections, **East Wind** is a fine read, and highly recommended."

-- **Midwest Book Review**

"Only from an engineer with over 40 years of experience in nuclear and chemical engineering could an international terror plot thriller be so detailed and effective."

-- **Gerard Casale, Jr., Shofar Magazine**

East Wind is available at:

Firesidepubs.com | Kindle.com
Amazon.com | Nook.com
BN.com | Major bookstores

video games, Texas hold-'em and Monopoly or doing Sudoku or crossword puzzles—all on company time." The irony of using \$151 million in stimulus funds to pay people to sit around counting Monopoly money is almost too great to bear.

To their credit, the existing employees said they are ready and willing to work. Many are using their time to clean and maintain the building and seek productive tasks related to their job. However, the problems seem to be way above their pay grade. When LG Chem's public relations specialist was contacted, he told Wood TV he no longer worked for the company. The Department of Energy inspector general, Gregory Friedman, is now on the case. Friedman deserves taxpayer plaudits for opening over 100 investigations into stimulus fraud related to Department of Energy projects.

We wish we could say the same for the rest of the Obama administration. Vice President Joe Biden scoffed at the recent veep debate when Paul Ryan brought up the extraordinary amount of fraud in Department of Energy stimulus programs. But then he scoffed at every Ryan utterance.

You're probably wondering about Obama's remarks at the plant's groundbreaking ceremony two years ago. "This is a symbol of where Michigan is going, this is a symbol of where Holland is going, and this is a symbol of where America's going," he said. Prescient. ♦

Sentences We Didn't Finish

I was in the early days of my acting career in 1962, when Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* made its way onto best-seller lists and college campuses and into living rooms across America and sowed the seeds of today's environmental movement. The story of that movement still represents for me who we are as a country: a people dedicated to something greater than . . ." (Robert Redford, "Why I'm Supporting President Obama," *Huffington Post*, October 19). ♦

the weekly Standard

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The Greatest Story Never Read

Academics, I'm told, used to play a game at parties in which each person confessed to some great work he or she should have but never got around to reading. Stakes in this game rose quickly. One might begin by allowing one has never read *The Courtier* by Baldassare Castiglione and, a few drinks on, end by admitting to never having read *Romeo and Juliet*. I never attended a party where this game was played. A pity, too, for I could have trumped everyone in the room by announcing, as I am here, that I have never read the Bible.

When I was a small child, my father read portions of a child's Bible to me. I recall the story of the Garden of Eden, of Abraham being asked to sacrifice his son Isaac, of Jacob outwitting his brother Esau for his father's blessing, of Joseph's brothers mauling him and leaving him for dead, of David with his slingshot defeating Goliath, of Solomon's decision about the two women disputing possession of a child. At 13, a bar-mitzvah boy, I read a few paragraphs of the Bible, my Torah portion, to the northside Chicago synagogue congregation of Ner Tamid. In later years, I read bits of the Bible, when studying *Paradise Lost* or reading Thomas Mann's *Joseph and His Brothers*. But that is as far as it went.

Until six or seven weeks ago, when I determined to read the Bible straight through, which I am now doing. The dreariness of the so-called New Atheists—Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, the late Christopher Hitchens—may have been an unconscious motive for my doing so. The Bible is advertised as

the greatest story ever told, and, as a literary man, I would be foolish to depart the planet without having read it. Is the Bible the greatest story ever told? I'll let you know when I get to the end at page 1130; I am currently only at 251. Miles to go, as the poet said, before I sleep.

I generally read three chapters a day, with my breakfast, and just this morn-



ing I have come to The Book of Judges. As a literary snob, I am of course reading the Bible in the King James Version. Marvelous stuff, though there is a small price to pay. What one gains in lilting rhythm and elegant vocabulary, one sometimes loses in repetition. A brief example from The Book of Joshua, where one reads: "... Joshua waxed old and stricken with age. . . . And Joshua called for all Israel, and for their elders, and for their heads, and for their judges, and for their officers, and said unto to them, I am old and stricken with age."

Longueurs there are in plenty. One must gird one's loins and keep one's mind on the job when the begats begin, or when the land of Canaan is divided among the 12 tribes of Israel, each portion of land specified in a thicket of proper names. Prepara-

tion of animals for sacrifice is set out in detail of a kind likely to drain the color from a vegan's cheek.

Violence can be swift and unremitting. Should Israel not obey the Lord in all his commandments, "they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish off this good land which the Lord your God has given you." The God of the Old Testament does not, unlike American democracy, offer much in the way of second chances.

When encouraging people to read the great but formidably long books—Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*—I tell them they have to read them religiously, by which I mean in small portions, but relentlessly, showing up at the same time every day for the job.

Have I been reading the Bible religiously in the word's more fundamental sense? Although I intend to read through both the Old and New Testaments, in the Old Testament I can, as the kids used to say, identify; these are my people being written about. I feel a small but real satisfaction when I get through my morning's Bible reading, as if I have done the right thing. Thus far I cannot say that I have felt that special frisson that is associated with religious emotion.

As someone more and more impressed with the mysteries of life, and less and less impressed with science and human explanations of those mysteries, I find a certain comfort in reading the Bible, with its miracles, feats of endurance, and obedience to a higher power. Reading my daily portion, I like to think that I have not given up on God. More important, while reading it, I hope that God has not given up on me.

JOSEPH EPSTEIN

Presidential Mitt

On September 2, 1939, the day after Hitler invaded Poland, Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain made clear in the House of Commons that he still entertained hopes for negotiations with the Führer: “If the German Government should agree to withdraw their forces then His Majesty’s Government would be willing to regard the position as being the same as it was before the German forces crossed the Polish frontier. That is to say, the way would be open to discussion between the German and Polish Governments on the matters at issue.”

The acting leader of the opposition, Arthur Greenwood, rose to reply to the prime minister. He began by saying he would be speaking on behalf of the Labour party. The prominent Conservative and opponent of appeasement Leo Amery, appalled by what Chamberlain had said, dramatically interrupted Greenwood from the Tory backbenches, shouting across the chamber: “Speak for England, Arthur!”

It’s not 1939. But the clouds are darkening and storms are gathering. Americans sense the dangers we face. So in the foreign policy debate for the rest of the campaign, Mitt Romney’s task is not merely to speak *for* the Republican party and conservative opponents of Barack Obama. Nor is his task merely to speak *to* undecided suburban women. Mitt Romney’s task is to rise above partisanship and gamesmanship, above debating points and electoral calculations. Mitt Romney’s task is to speak for America.

What does this mean? It means speaking in a bipartisan way. It means appealing to the broad American tradition of international leadership, to the actions of Harry Truman as well as those of Ronald Reagan. It means citing Joe Lieberman as well as John McCain, and the *Washington Post* editorial page as well as THE WEEKLY STANDARD. It means praising our soldiers and our Marines, our diplomats and our intelligence professionals. It means finding something to praise in the actions of President Obama—perhaps his authorization of the raid that killed Osama bin Laden—and someone to praise among Obama’s appointees—perhaps Secretary of State Hillary Clinton for her

tireless travels on behalf of the nation and for stepping forward to take responsibility for the tragic failure to provide security in Benghazi.

Speaking for America also means speaking in a forward-looking way. There’s no need for Mitt Romney to flyspeck Barack Obama’s foreign policy record. Voters are aware of the deficiencies of Obama’s foreign policy. In any case, Obama is not going to win the presidency

on the strength of his foreign policy. So Romney doesn’t have to mount a detailed critique of various Obama foreign policies. He has to stipulate that all is not turning out as Obama claimed it would, that all is not well in the state of the world. Then, even more important, Romney has to demonstrate that he can be trusted to steer the American ship of state in a sounder direction and with a steadier hand. This will require setting forth the core principles he will follow—principles of American strength and leadership, of standing by our allies and of standing up to enemies—and then explaining how, in general terms, he will execute a foreign policy based on these principles.

Speaking for America also means speaking presidentially. It means speaking less as a challenger to the current president, less as a critic and a prosecutor of the current president, and more as . . . the next president. Romney should appear by Election Day to be more presidential than the incumbent.

Mitt Romney is a combative and competitive man. But his worst moments in the debates were when he became too pettily combative. His best were when he briefly stipulated the failures of President Obama’s policies, then pivoted to lay out his own agenda for the nation for the next four years and beyond.

It’s possible that adopting what might be called a pre-presidential rhetoric would deprive Romney of various small victories on the campaign trail. But the point isn’t to win small debating skirmishes. The point is to win the presidency. The way to win the presidency is to speak for America.

—William Kristol



Speak for America.

The Minigolfer

Viewers of the 2012 debates have witnessed an extraordinary turnaround. John Stuart Mill famously spoke of “a party of order and stability, and a party of progress or reform.” Once upon a time, Barack Obama and Joe Biden could claim the mantle of change and progress. But the televised exchanges between Mitt Romney and Obama and Paul Ryan and Biden have revealed that this is no longer the case.

The Republicans are now the ones offering ideas of progress or reform, while the Democrats fiercely fight to protect the established order of entitlements, tax hikes, and obeisance to unions, greens, and feminists. Even when Obama and Biden have been highly caffeinated, they have not stated their plans and goals for a second term. They are too busy painting a socialist-realist mural of Romney and Ryan as maniacal reactionaries. They are too preoccupied with protecting subsidies for Big Bird, Planned Parenthood, and windmills.

Four years ago, President Obama and Vice President Biden were bursting with plans. Obama said he would cut

the deficit, middle-class taxes, and health care premiums, while also creating a new entitlement to health insurance. He said he'd revamp America's energy, education, and immigration policies for the 21st century. He delivered a speech in the early months of his term saying he'd put America on a “new foundation.” His 2011 State of the Union address was devoted to “winning the future.”

But all of these big dreams have crashed against the granite wall of reality. The deficit is up, the price of fuel and health care premiums has increased, incomes are down, and tax increases loom. Obama is exhausted. His political capital is spent. The boldest proposal he's put forward recently is hiring another 100,000 teachers. That doesn't even rise to the level of small-ball. It's mini-golf.

The Republicans are playing a big-boy's game as the Democrats heckle from the sidelines. Romney wants to reform the federal tax code by lowering rates while closing loopholes and deductions. Obama says it can't be done, and argues instead for higher rates on a smaller base. Romney wants to reform Medicare and Medicaid by introducing a premium-support system that retains traditional Medicare as an option and by block-granting monies to the states to give governors more flexibility. Obama vows to protect the existing system, even while acknowledging that health spending is out of control.

Romney wants to increase permits for oil and natural gas

Let Business Lead on Health Reform

By Thomas J. Donohue

President and CEO
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

As Ronald Reagan said, “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are: I'm from the government and I'm here to help.”

While much of the attention throughout the health reform debate has been on the role of government, it is the private sector that is leading the country to adopt innovative solutions to our health care deficiencies.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce believes that private, market-based solutions can improve the quality of health care, decrease the cost of services, and expand access to affordable coverage and care. American businesses have already driven health care solutions that are tailored to the needs of their employees and bolster transparency, reward innovation, and encourage health and wellness.

Greater transparency enables consumers to understand the price and quality of health services so that they can

make informed decisions to improve the value of their care and drive competition in the marketplace. The Hospital Quality Alliance, a public-private partnership sponsored by the Chamber, is leading an effort to improve transparency in hospital care. By publishing information on services for participating hospitals, we can reward providers that lower cost and improve quality.

New value-based insurance products are designed to promote the use of services that provide the greatest clinical value, and they help make each health care dollar go farther. If we make necessary treatments less expensive and unnecessary care more expensive, these plans can improve health outcomes and decrease costs. Many private employers are adopting these plans as a way to encourage employees to use high-value, low-cost services.

Private health insurance exchanges offer a new option for employees to take a set amount of money provided by their employers and pick a plan based on their individual needs and priorities. These online

insurance marketplaces enable consumers to shop from a variety of health plans through interactive technology.

Employers are also driving down health care costs through workplace wellness initiatives. Health promotion efforts can lower expenses by preventing and treating chronic diseases and raising workplace productivity.

To highlight private sector efforts, the Chamber will this week hold its first ever Health Care Summit, *Rewarding Innovation and Improving Transparency*. Health system representatives, policy experts, and business leaders will come together to discuss strategies to strengthen our health care system. The business community has shown leadership in advancing solutions and will be a critical voice in finding effective health care reform that protects American jobs and the employers that create them.



100 Years Standing Up for American Enterprise
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

drilling in the Lower 48, offshore, and in Alaska; lay pipeline; and exploit cutting-edge technologies such as hydraulic fracturing and horizontal drilling. Obama responds desultorily that the energy picture is fine and that the government must protect, and even double down on, subsidies and loans to alt-fuel failures such as Solyndra, A123 Systems, and Abound Solar. Romney wants to repeal the unpopular, unconstitutional, and partisan health care overhaul, and replace it with measures that would spur competition and consumer choice and protect doctors from frivolous lawsuits. Obama never will agree to a repeal of his signature legislation, and likely would spend a second term implementing, protecting, enhancing, and expanding it.

It is Obama, not Romney, who is the obstacle to change. Even the liberal *New Republic* admits that disheartened progressives should support Obama's reelection simply so he can block the Republicans: "Without a second term, the accomplishments of his first would evaporate." But suppose these dubious "accomplishments" are unpopular and counterproductive (which they are). Wouldn't we be better off if they did indeed "evaporate," and if serious, adult, and competent measures to restore a productive and growing economy took their place?

The party of progress in a liberal democracy is the party of growth. Economic growth would reduce joblessness, increase take-home pay, generate additional revenue for the Treasury, improve the condition of the poor, and diminish the widespread sense of national anxiety and decline. Growth would act as a salve on our acrimonious, polarized, and bitter politics.

Which party stands today for growth? The record of the Democratic administration is not encouraging. Economic growth has been under 2 percent in 2011 and 2012, well below trend. Obama says the solution is for the Treasury to "invest" more, but whatever short-term benefits government spending brings are purchased at the long-term cost of debt and taxes. Besides, most of the spending Obama has in mind is not for public goods such as roads and bridges, research, and the military, but for transfer payments that finance present consumption while acting as marginal tax increases on the working poor. That is not the way to prosperity.

The Romney strategy is to spur growth through increased productivity. Simplify and reduce taxes. Cut spending and modernize entitlements to free up capital and improve the long-term fiscal picture. Expand trade, while ensuring that China is not cheating by manipulating its currency and using low-wage labor to dump goods into U.S. markets. Remove the sword of Damocles that Obamacare holds over the heads of small businesses. Boost American carbon energy production through the vigorous promotion of oil, shale, coal, and natural gas.

Joined to a spirited defense of American interests and values and constitutional principles, Romney and his Republican allies can make the case for growth, enlargement, and advance. They can detail the policies that will

strengthen America's future. They can persuade independents and swing voters that the Republicans have learned from past failures. And they can cement the GOP reputation as the party of progress and reform.

—Matthew Continetti

Twenty Questions

At about 3 P.M. on Thursday, October 18, Barack Obama strode into the Manhattan studios of Comedy Central for a taping of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. The two men discussed several issues, including Libya. Stewart noted the exchange between Obama and Mitt Romney on that subject at the debate earlier in the week and asked Obama about the "confusion within the administration" over the attack that left Ambassador Christopher Stevens and three other Americans dead in Benghazi.

"Why? What was it that caused that confusion?" Stewart asked.

"Well, we weren't confused about the fact that four Americans had been killed," the president replied. "I wasn't confused about the fact that we needed to ramp up diplomatic security around the world right after it happened. I wasn't confused about the fact that we had to investigate exactly what happened so it gets fixed. And I wasn't confused about the fact that we're going to hunt down whoever did it and bring 'em to justice. So, as I said during the debate, nobody's more interested in figuring this out more than I am."

At roughly the same time the president was chatting with Stewart in New York City, another interview was taking place in Benghazi, Libya. The man suspected of organizing the attack on the U.S. consulate there, Ahmed Abu Khattala, "spent two leisurely hours . . . sipping a strawberry frappe on a patio" with a reporter from the *New York Times* and boasting that he hasn't even been questioned by investigators from the governments of Libya or the United States. He has not gone into hiding and has no plans to do so. The *Times* reported that Abu Khattala, a leader of al Qaeda-linked Ansar al Sharia, "expressed a notable absence of remorse over the assault." According to the story, "witnesses have said they saw him directing other fighters that night," and both governments believe he was involved. Abu Khattala denied he masterminded the attack but confirmed reports that he was in the compound. Why? He happened to be in the area "to break up a traffic jam," and after the fighting broke out he entered

the facility because he wanted to help Libyan guards working for the Americans.

We commend *Times* reporter David Kirkpatrick for getting the interview, but it raises an obvious question. Why is it that, more than a month after the attack, a *New York Times* reporter can spend two leisurely hours with the alleged mastermind, yet no agent of the U.S. government has ever approached him?

In his interview with Jon Stewart, Obama also claimed, implausibly, that his administration has been eager to share information about the attacks with the American people.

“When a tragic event like this happens on the other side of the world, immediately a whole bunch of intelligence starts coming in and people try to piece together exactly what happened,” he explained. “And what I have always tried to do is to make sure we just get all the facts, figure out what went wrong, and make sure it doesn’t happen again. And we’re still in that process now. But everything we get, every piece of information we get—as we got it—we laid it out for the American people.” Really?

On Friday, the Associated Press reported: “The CIA station chief in Libya reported to Washington within 24 hours of last month’s deadly attack on the U.S. consulate that there was evidence it was carried out by militants, not a spontaneous mob upset about an American-made video ridiculing Islam’s Prophet Muhammad.”

But the Obama administration took more than a week to acknowledge directly that it was a terrorist attack. And some two weeks after the fact, top administration officials, including the president himself, were still pushing the discredited notion that the assault grew out of a spontaneous protest sparked by the video.

The CIA station chief in Libya would certainly be the first person consulted after the attacks and the official with the most authoritative voice in explaining what happened. Are we really to believe that his reporting was ignored for two weeks?

If the president really wants to level with the American people, here are some questions he needs to answer.

1. Were there references to Libyan security threats in the President’s Daily Brief (PDB) during the three weeks before the attacks in Benghazi?

2. If there were, did President Obama participate in an intelligence briefing after the Libya threat was raised in the PDB?

3. Did President Obama ask his CIA briefer about threats in Libya during the three weeks before the attacks?

4. Were Libyan security threats discussed in any daily intelligence briefing that President Obama did not attend?

5. How many morning intelligence briefings did President Obama participate in during the month prior to the Benghazi attack?

6. Did any other governments or liaison intelligence services warn us about threats in Libya in the days before the attack in Benghazi?

7. Did any of the communications from intelligence officials in Libya on September 10 include discussions of threats to the consulate in Benghazi or other U.S. interests? Will the administration make those communications available?

8. The State Department’s timeline notes that Ambassador Stevens, who participated in meetings around Benghazi on September 10, was instructed to remain in the Benghazi compound on September 11, the day of the attack? Why? Were there specific threat warnings?

9. Did any intelligence product—raw or finished—include detailed reporting on any protest outside the compound in Benghazi before the attack began?

10. If not, why did administration officials repeatedly mention alleged protests? Where did those claims originate?

11. A senior administration official told the *Washington Post* on September 13 that the compound in Benghazi featured a “robust American security presence.” Does the White House stand by that assessment?

12. Why did U.N. ambassador Susan Rice, who has no direct involvement in the Libya attacks and no special intelligence knowledge on Libya, appear on multiple TV shows on September 16 to claim that spontaneous protests over the video led to the attack? Was Secretary Clinton or some other high official asked to represent the administration, before Rice was sent out instead?

13. Did James Clapper, the director of national intelligence and CIA director David Petraeus clear Susan Rice’s talking points? If not, who did?

14. A September 28 statement from Clapper’s office claiming that administration talking points had come from the intelligence community was not signed by Clapper. Why not?

15. Who was on the interagency phone call on Saturday, September 15, to prepare Rice for her TV interviews?

16. Did Rice talk to any senior Obama campaign advisers before she spoke for the administration?

17. Is there any intelligence product—raw or finished—that links the attacks in Benghazi to the anti-Islam YouTube video?

18. If not, why did President Obama himself make a direct link between the film and the attack during his September 18 appearance on the David Letterman show?

19. Will the White House release unclassified versions of the PDBs and Daily Threat Briefs for the three weeks before the Benghazi attack?

20. Will President Obama ever hold a news conference to address these and other unanswered questions about the attacks in Benghazi?

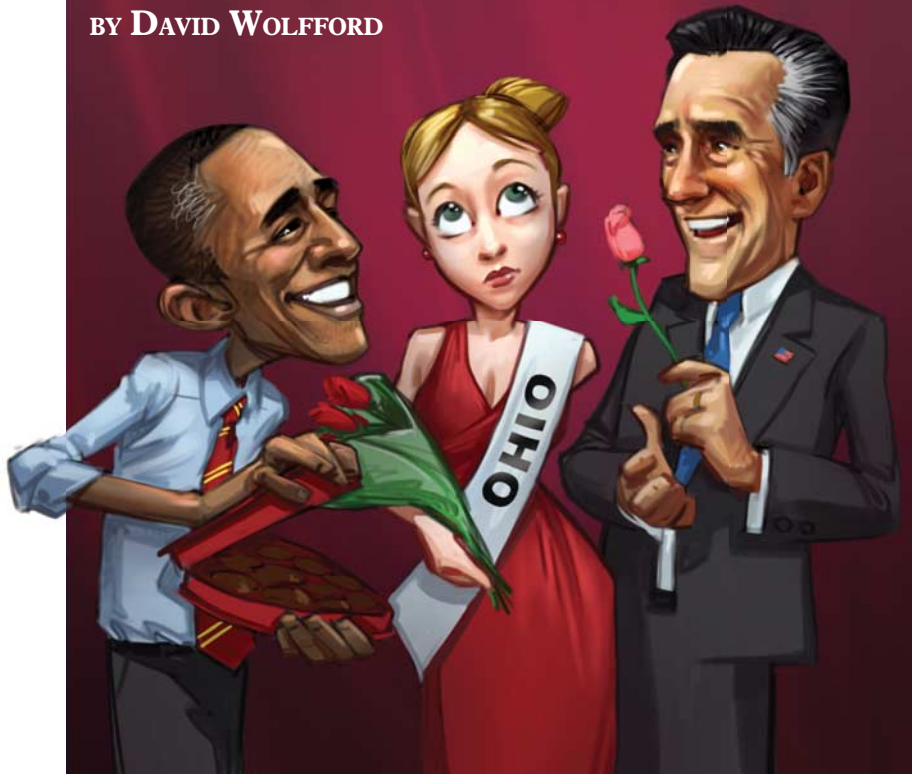
That makes 20 questions for the president, but this is no parlor game. Four lives were lost, and the credibility of the administration is at stake.

—Stephen F. Hayes

Romancing Ohio

The wooing of swing state voters proceeds apace.

BY DAVID WOLFFORD



No candidate has won the presidency without Ohio since John Kennedy, and no Republican has done so ever. At this writing, the state's 18 electoral votes are in play, and both campaigns are visiting Ohio with the insistence of a determined suitor.

No sooner had Mitt Romney named Paul Ryan as his running mate (after seriously considering Ohio senator Rob Portman) than Ryan stumped at his alma mater, Miami University in Oxford, 30 miles northwest of Cincinnati. Both parties placed leading Ohio politicians on their national convention stages in prime time. And after the

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Cincinnati GOP convention, the Romneys made their first campaign stop in Cincinnati.

The response in the state was not especially enthusiastic. By late September, Barack Obama led Romney in the *Real Clear Politics* state average by 5 points; one poll gave the president a 10-point lead. Romney and Ryan toured the state by bus for three days, and Obama's RCP lead grew to 5.6 points. Pundits predicted Romney's team might shift resources from Ohio to other battlegrounds.

Then came October 3. The night of the first presidential debate, at Romney's campaign office on Cincinnati's working-class west side, anxious conservatives in Romney T-shirts ate finger sandwiches and cookies from a potluck table. A few volunteers manned the phones. But

when Romney came out swinging and, paraphrasing Joe Biden, declared the middle class has been "buried" in the last four years, the room was electrified. Supporters finally had the aggressive Romney they wanted. "After the debate, we got a lot of phone calls for yard signs," state GOP chairman Bob Bennett told me. "We had to put in a new order." Soon Romney was back in Ohio, speaking in Cuyahoga Falls, Lancaster, Mt. Vernon, and more to audiences averaging 9,000 a stop.

The president, too, has come courting, seeking the youth vote and claiming credit for the state's increased jobs. Unemployment has fallen to 7 percent, and in the Cleveland area—where Obama emphasizes the auto bailout—manufacturing unemployment has dropped 2.5 percentage points from a year ago.

The Obama campaign is strongly urging supporters to vote early. The first lady addressed a crowd of nearly 7,000 in Cincinnati on October 2, the first day of early voting, and encouraged voters to go straight to their local board of elections to cast their ballot. A week later, the president addressed a crowd more than twice that size at Ohio State University, in Columbus, and his campaign took supporters by bus to register or vote. The Franklin County Board of Elections tallied 842 registered Democrats voting that day, as well as over 3,194 unaffiliated voters, but only 182 Republicans.

As of last Thursday, more than 16,000 in-person votes had been cast in the Columbus area, 4,342 by registered Democrats, 1,202 by Republicans, and 10,854 by independents. Analysts believe the unaffiliated are disproportionately voting for Obama, partly because Ohio determines party preference by the party ballot requested in the previous primary; since the last Democratic presidential primary was uncontested, turnout was low.

"The president has a stronger ground game," says Daniel Coffey of the University of Akron's Ray C. Bliss Institute and coauthor of *Buckeye Battleground* (2011), which argued that personal voter contacts were crucial in Ohio in the last two presidential

DAVE MALAN

elections. The AFL-CIO is also registering voters—roughly 65,000 this year, according to its state president, Tim Burga. Union “members haven’t forgotten” the Republicans’ attempt last year to eliminate public sector collective bargaining, says Burga. The collective-bargaining measure, passed by a Republican-dominated legislature and signed by Republican governor John Kasich, was repealed by referendum last November.

Meanwhile, Ohio’s Republican secretary of state, John Husted, just lost the final round in an early-voting controversy: The U.S. Supreme Court last week rejected his plan to free election officials from the burden of early voting on the final three days before November 6. African-American leaders, who’d alleged “voter suppression,” are touting this victory in black precincts.

If the first debate moved the ball closer to the 50-yard line in the Buckeye State, it’s too early to move the chains after the candidates’ second encounter. Romney’s bedrock challenge in Ohio remains what it’s always been: to win Reagan Democrats, social conservatives, and the Appalachian region to the east and southeast.

“The group to watch is white working-class voters,” says Paul Beck, a longtime communications and political science professor at Ohio State. In the 2008 primary, they did not warm to Obama—Hillary Clinton won 66 percent—but this year they are wary of Romney. His “47 percent” comment was received with mixed emotions. “These voters resent people that live off government,” says Beck. “On the other hand, they are asking, ‘Am I part of the *them*, or am I part of the *us*?’”

Romney is targeting this group with a one-minute ad in which he looks straight into the camera and says: “President Obama and I both care about poor and middle-class families. . . . We shouldn’t measure compassion by how many people are on welfare, we should measure compassion by how many people are able to get off welfare and get a good paying job.”

The pitch has little chance of succeeding in true blue Cleveland, but Romney aims to capture

white working-class voters, libertarians, and independents in surrounding Cuyahoga County. The local Republican chairman, Rob Frost, is optimistic. The number of registered Democrats in the county has dropped by 52,000 since 2008, and the number of Republicans has risen by nearly 34,000.

Communities centered on the auto industry want free and fair trade policies, and some are skeptical of bailouts, says Frost. “Take Parma,” with its nearby Ford Motor plant. “Ford refused the bailout, restructured, and eliminated their debt. This community resents the bailout and embraces the handicap”—that is, the handicap of

Romney’s ‘47 percent’ comment was received with mixed emotions among working-class white voters, says Ohio State’s Paul Beck: ‘These voters resent people that live off government. On the other hand, they are asking, “Am I part of the *them*, or am I part of the *us*?”’

now competing against companies that took public money.

As for social conservatives, Buck Niehoff—Cincinnati attorney, fundraiser for Republicans from George H.W. Bush through John McCain, and the author of *Winning Cincinnati*—explains, “National races are won or lost on Republican turnout in Greater Cincinnati, which can offset Cleveland. Until the [first] debate . . . Romney never made a connection.” As of last week, Niehoff thought there was still time to get social conservatives fired up.

In the sparsely populated Appalachian region, the predominantly white working-class and social-conservative electorate mostly voted for Bill Clinton, then George W. Bush. In 2004, southeast Ohio favored amending the Ohio constitution to enshrine traditional marriage by over 70 percent, while giving Bush 54 percent of the vote. It’s the kind of region where

voters cling to their guns and their religion (in the infamous Obama phrase) . . . and their coal. The Democrats’ liberal evolution could turn this region—and thus Ohio—Romney’s way.

“Gay marriage and coal are both winning issues in our area,” says Brian Wilson, Republican chairman of Jefferson County, along the western bank of the upper Ohio. Wilson and coal advocates insist EPA standards have increased electricity rates and shut down power plants and coal mines. In 2008, roughly 36,000 votes were cast here; Obama won the county by a mere 76 ballots over McCain. Statewide, unemployment in mining and logging has risen 2.5 percentage points from last year. It’s why Romney emphasized oil, coal, and gas in the Hofstra debate.

On October 13, Romney stopped in Portsmouth, where the Scioto River flows into the Ohio, and spoke encouragingly about a uranium enrichment plant proposed nearby as taking America one step closer to energy independence. From there he headed west to Lebanon, to speak at the Golden Lamb, an 1803 inn owned by the family of Senator Portman. In a county that four years ago cast more than twice as many votes for McCain as for Obama, over 10,000 gathered to hear Romney, Portman, and Bengals Hall-of-Famer Anthony Muñoz. This was the twentieth Ohio county Romney had visited since the primary in March, and the sixth last week.

The second debate seems unlikely to have changed much. A one-day Rasmussen survey the day after showed Romney at 49 percent and Obama at 48 percent in the state. So the wooing continues.

Paul Ryan dropped by Cincinnati’s municipal airport the day before the debate and appeared with Condoleezza Rice in Cleveland the day after. The president, too, has returned to battleground Ohio, this time appearing before 14,000 at Ohio University in Athens, a liberal island in the otherwise mixed southeast. When supporters booed Romney, Obama responded with his standard line: “Don’t boo—vote.” ♦

A Rising Political Star in Arkansas

The state's Republicans are in tall cotton.

BY FRED BARNES

Texarkana, Ark.

Tom Cotton is a first-time candidate for the House in Arkansas. What passes for campaign headquarters is his small house in Dardanelle, his hometown, population 4,720. His campaign manager, Doug Coutts, is an old Army friend with an MBA but no background in politics. Coutts often subs as Cotton's driver and one-man entourage. His campaign team consists of five people, two of them unpaid volunteers. There's no press secretary. He's his own chief strategist and fundraiser. He says he discovered shortly after announcing his candidacy in July 2011 that "the most effective pitchman was me."

Cotton, 35, is lanky (6-foot-5), mild-mannered, and doesn't have a dynamic stump speech. He announced his candidacy by replying "yes" when an AP reporter asked if he planned to run. Until airing TV ads in the GOP primary this spring, he was largely unknown in a district whose most famous offspring, besides Bill Clinton, are country singers Glen Campbell and the late Johnny Cash. Dallas Cowboys owner Jerry Jones has a ranch in the district. Cotton is running, he says, because "it's a winnable district, and it's a crucial time for the country."

His modest and easygoing style is deceptive. He's raised about \$2 million, more than enough to pay for TV spots in the district's five media markets, plus radio. The National



Republican Congressional Committee has given him "vanguard" status. This means he's likely to win in a breeze and can afford to help other Republican challengers. He's already donated \$75,000 to fellow Republican candidates, including to the better-known Mia Love in Utah.

If his lack of political experience is a drawback, you'd never know it. He's an impressive candidate, knowledgeable on issues, seems bound to attract attention in Washington, and is blessed with bright prospects for gaining still higher office. John Goodson, a trial lawyer and longtime Democratic powerhouse in Texarkana, says Cotton is "going to be our congressman, then our senator, then our president."

Goodson is a convert. Before he met Cotton, he'd never raised money for a Republican. He's held two fundraisers for Cotton. Last week, he took Cotton, predawn, to greet workers at the gate of the Cooper Tire plant, the biggest employer in town. "The Democratic party has moved away from a lot of these people," Goodson says. Nearly all are members of the Steelworkers union. But as they shook hands, some asked if Cotton is a Republican. They reacted favorably when he said yes.

It was Cotton's résumé that hooked Goodson. The résumé is merely the story of Cotton's life. He went to Dardanelle High (his father is public address announcer at the school's football games). When he learned he'd done well on his college boards, he decided to apply to top colleges and was accepted at Harvard and later at Harvard Law School.

Then came 9/11. He knew instantly he wanted to join the Army to fight America's enemies. He was just beginning his final year of law school. He finished, spent two years as a lawyer to pay off his college loans, and in 2004 volunteered. The recruiting officer suggested he become a JAG officer, a military lawyer serving far from the combat zone. Cotton wasn't interested. He signed up for OCS and requested the infantry.

Fred Barnes is executive editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

THOMAS FLUHARTY

As a second lieutenant, he took advanced infantry training, went through paratrooper and Ranger school, and was sent to Iraq as company commander in the 101st Airborne. From Iraq in 2006, he wrote a letter to the *New York Times* condemning the paper for disclosing an anti-terrorist financing program. The *Times* spiked his letter, but it became an Internet sensation, first on *Power Line*.

Post-Iraq, Cotton served in the House Guard at Fort Myer outside Washington before volunteering in 2008 for a tour in Afghanistan with a provincial reconstruction team. His duties were half-political, half-military. He worked on construction projects, advised local Afghan governing councils, and provided security. After his five-year Army stint, he joined McKinsey & Company for a year, then returned home.

Given his extraordinary record, several friends in the legislature urged Cotton to run against Democratic senator Blanche Lincoln in 2010. He declined. "It didn't seem like the right time at all," he says. It was, however, for Republican John Boozman, who defeated Lincoln in a landslide.

But a House race this year interested Cotton. The incumbent, Democrat Mike Ross, had bucked the GOP tide in Arkansas in 2010, defeating Republican Beth Anne Rankin, 58-40. But the parties were flipping in Arkansas. Republicans were surging, Democrats in rapid decline with the Clintons gone. Word spread that Cotton would run days before Ross announced his retirement, perhaps spurring Ross's decision.

Based on his personal story alone—rural background, Harvard, combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan—Cotton is an appealing candidate. In Arkansas, "the Army is a big thing," Goodson says. But there's more to Cotton and his candidacy than that.

Politics was rarely discussed as he grew up on the family cattle ranch. But when he was 15, Clinton, Arkansas's governor, won the presidency. And Cotton began to follow the news. Rather than fall under Clinton's spell, he embraced conservative views.

Harvard, counterintuitively, deepened his conservatism. "I realized there was a different breed of Democrat there," he says. He joined the Harvard Republican Club. As a government major, he studied under Harvey Mansfield and Peter Berkowitz, both conservatives. He wrote his thesis on the Federalist Papers.

Between college and law school, Cotton spent a year at Claremont Graduate University and was strongly influenced by conservative scholar Charles Kesler, who taught American political thought. At Claremont, he gained "the ability to connect high principles to low politics," he says. "If your thinking is grounded in timeless things, you don't have to worry about shifting with the political winds."

As you might guess, Cotton stresses conservative ideas in talking to voters, notably the need to curb the size and power of Washington. Ideas, he says, are the key to the Republican rise in Arkansas. Democrats won by playing up personality, geography, and political connections. "They have never had to run contests of ideas," Cotton says. "I don't think Democratic candidates in Arkansas

have adjusted to that new reality."

Cotton talks about conservative ideas and little else. His favorite Republicans in Congress are the most idea-oriented conservatives: Senators Pat Toomey of Pennsylvania, Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, and Jim DeMint of South Carolina and Representative Jim Jordan of Ohio.

Assuming Cotton is elected on November 6, he'll face a big decision on whether to run for the Senate in 2014. Democrat Mark Pryor is vulnerable, all the more because the "D" by his name is fast becoming a stigma. Ex-governor Mike Huckabee has moved to Florida. The popular Republican congressman from northwest Arkansas, Steve Womack, is from the same hometown, Rogers, as Senator Boozman, which would be a problem.

So will Cotton try to move up to the Senate? Two years is a lifetime in politics. If Romney wins, Cotton has the prospect of serving in a House that will take the lead in reversing the liberal policies of President Obama. That would provide Cotton with plenty to keep him busy. On the other hand, he's never been a guy to shy away from a challenge. ♦

Is Allen Able . . .

To beat Kaine?

BY MICHAEL WARREN

Richmond, Va.

It's George Allen's turn to give an opening statement at the second general election debate. The 60-year-old Republican's broad shoulders slump a bit. Standing next to him is his Democratic opponent, the perpetually grinning Tim Kaine. Allen begins with a line from his stump speech, delivered in his distinctive drawl: "Folks, I'm envisioning a much better future than what

we're having to endure these days."

These days, the future looks a little brighter for Allen. He may be on his way to reclaiming the Virginia Senate seat he lost six years ago. His defeat by fewer than 10,000 votes to Democrat Jim Webb (who declined to run for reelection in 2012) came in a terrible year for Republicans nationally. And during that race, Allen's image seemed irrevocably damaged after video surfaced of the senator referring to a Democratic staffer with an obscure alleged ethnic slur at a campaign rally. It was a

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devastating defeat, but Allen hasn't focused on the loss.

"The way I'm looking at this is not back. What I'm doing is looking forward," Allen told me in June.

Forward, that is, to a race that has remained tight. The Old Dominion elected Barack Obama over John McCain in 2008, its first Democratic vote for president since 1964. What's more, in the last decade, the state has elected two Democratic governors and two Democratic senators. But the subsequent cycles saw a comeback for the GOP, first in the statewide elections in 2009 and then in the federal midterms in 2010. This year, Virginia is a bona fide swing state, and the close Senate battle is a prime example.

If Allen hopes to return to Capitol Hill, he'll have to win the critical outer suburbs of Northern Virginia, particularly Loudoun and Prince William counties. In recent years, Democrats and Republicans alike have won statewide elections by winning in those swing counties. The Virginians who live there are younger and newer to the state than the suburbanites around Richmond and Hampton Roads, so to them, Allen may be a relatively blank slate.

Allen has run a straightforward, unremarkable campaign. His simple message echoes the broadly conservative GOP agenda: keep taxes low, reduce spending, maintain a strong national defense (he's hit Kaine on his support of the debt deal that led to the possibility of defense budget sequestration), and repeal Obamacare.

That could be enough. Public polls show Kaine is running even with Obama, while Allen is lagging about two points behind Romney. But Jonathan Collegio of American Crossroads, the super-PAC that runs ads on behalf of conservative candidates, says their internal polling and focus groups indicate Kaine may be running behind Obama. Allen, too, may be doing better than the stories the polls tell. That's made the race a top priority of American Crossroads. "I would venture that we've spent as much there as anywhere," says Collegio.

Allen is spending a lot of time on the trail and in his debate performances touting his four-year tenure as governor in the mid-1990s. He passed conservative reforms of welfare and education, while attracting new high-tech businesses to the state. A recent article in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* called him "one of Virginia's most accomplished modern governors," a designation

to those swing voters willing to split their ballots between a moderate conservative like Mitt Romney and a pro-choice, pro-defense liberal like, well, Tim Kaine. Democrats believe there are more "Romney-Kaine" voters than "Obama-Allen" ones. So rather than make a case for robust, Obama-era liberalism, Kaine has remodeled himself as a bipartisan pragmatist.

In the Richmond debate, he



Tim Kaine and George Allen in their first debate, September 20

Allen made sure to mention in the Richmond debate.

The 54-year-old Kaine, on the other hand, left the governor's mansion at the beginning of 2010 with a multimillion-dollar hole in the state's two-year budget amidst a bad recession. Kaine, a practicing Catholic whose wife is the daughter of A. Linwood Holton (the first Republican governor of Virginia since Reconstruction), had a reputation as a moderate Democrat in the vein of his predecessor, Mark Warner. That was tarnished when, in 2009, the last year of his governorship, he also served as chairman of the Democratic National Committee—an explicitly partisan role—at the behest of President Obama.

Kaine, however, appears to have recognized a strategic opening: Appeal

pledged to "always be a partner of the president of the United States, whoever that president is." He plugged his work not only with President Obama but also with President Bush. A recent ad features Kaine standing alongside his fellow Democrat Mark Warner, who was elected to the Senate in 2008 and has earned some bipartisan credibility on energy and defense issues. "We'll be a great team in Washington," says Kaine, beaming.

Kaine has deflected questions about whether he would support Harry Reid, the Nevada Democrat, to continue as majority leader. "It's too early to talk about leadership questions," Kaine told reporters after the debate in Richmond, even though it's utterly implausible he would vote for the alternative, Republican Mitch McConnell.

On policy, he vows to protect popular spending, like Social Security, defense, and public broadcasting, while on taxes, Kaine claims his position splits the difference between the parties. Republicans want to extend the Bush tax rates on millionaires and billionaires (and everyone else, he'll rarely say), while Democrats want to let tax cuts expire for those making over \$250,000 a year. Kaine offers a "compromise": Let them expire for income over \$500,000.

"There's no theology or magic to that number," Kaine recently told a small group of seniors in Fairfax. "But it's a number that is a compromise."

He's also a huge fan of women. At a rally for Obama at George Mason University, nearly a hundred women sat on risers behind Kaine as he spoke, a perfect backdrop for the TV cameras.

"My opponent was asked about some of his, frankly, extreme views on issues relating to women's health," Kaine said. "I gotta tell you, as a husband and father, I know that what we're referring to aren't just women's issues or social issues. They're family issues and they're economic issues."

How is this repositioning working? Kaine has led Allen in 12 of the last 14 polls of the race, sometimes by as much as 10 points. Since September, some polls have shown Kaine breaking the 50 percent threshold of support. But according to the *Real Clear Politics* poll average, Kaine is ahead by only 2.2 points. Indeed, throughout the campaign, each boomlet for Kaine has been followed by a recalibration of the race at a statistical tie.

Jennifer Duffy, an analyst with the Cook Political Report, says Virginia's is the one Senate race in the country that will be determined by the presidential race. "Democrats have Kaine up a couple of points, Republicans have Allen up a couple of points," she says. "Call it even."

"Even" isn't a great position for Allen to stage a political comeback. But with Romney on the rise in Virginia and groups like American Crossroads continuing to pour money into the state, it isn't all that bad, either. ♦

Letting the Rabble Off Easy

The Iranian Revolution, according to Ben Affleck.

BY KELLY JANE TORRANCE

Hollywood loves to think of itself as socially significant. But given how long it can take to finance a film—let alone make one—it's exceedingly rare for its products to be attuned to the zeitgeist. So it's fortuitous for the makers of the new movie *Argo* that its depiction of rioters storming a U.S. embassy might be mistaken for footage from the evening news. At the same time, current events make the movie's implication that the Americans were kind of asking for it all the more unsettling.

Argo is set during the 1979 Iranian Revolution that deposed the shah and installed the theocracy that rules Iran to this day. The film's early scenes would be frightening even if they weren't so disturbingly familiar. A mob shouting anti-American slurs grows in size, sound, and rage. The Americans trapped inside their embassy watch in horror as the crowd finally breaches the entrance and rushes the compound.

The movie (reviewed by John Podhoretz on page 38 of this issue) opened October 12, a month after four Americans, including Ambassador Christopher Stevens, were murdered in a violent attack on the U.S. consulate in Benghazi, Libya—and just days after President Obama admitted the assault was a premeditated terrorist strike. I spoke with director and star Ben Affleck about the film twice, first at a press conference in Beverly Hills, then with a few other journalists in Washington, D.C.

Kelly Jane Torrance is a movie critic for the Washington Examiner and assistant managing editor of THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

At both events, the 40-year-old filmmaker emphasized that he didn't set out to make a political statement. "It was always important to us that the movie not be politicized. We went to great pains to try to make it very factual and fact-based, . . . knowing that it was coming up before an election in the United States, when a lot of things get politicized," he said. "We couldn't obviously forecast how terrible things would become now."

Argo is based on the true story of how the CIA, working with the Canadian government, secretly brought home six Americans who managed to escape as a student mob took over the U.S. embassy in Tehran on November 4, 1979. Fifty-two Americans spent 444 days in captivity. The half-dozen who got away hid in the homes of two Canadians, one the ambassador, before escaping months later on a commercial flight. CIA officer Tony Mendez, played by Affleck, concocted an absurd—but successful—plan to give the six cover identities as Canadian filmmakers scouting locations for a science-fiction story with an exotic setting.

You expect Hollywood to take liberties when translating real events to celluloid. But *Argo* doesn't just simplify the story of the revolution; it corrupts it. The way Affleck frames events, the tyrannical shah, kept in power by the CIA, embarked on a Westernization of the country that enraged Iran's citizenry, leading to a popular uprising in which Americans were targeted because of their complicity in human rights violations.

Everything about the very entertaining *Argo* is colorful, but the picture it paints of Mohammad Reza

Pahlavi is black and white. Characters in the film declare he tortured people and “killed months-old babies in the arms of their mothers.” There’s no question he was an unsavory leader; like every Middle Eastern ruler, he cracked down on dissent. But he also gave women the vote and the ability to become lawyers, judges, and elected officials. Those rights were immediately curtailed by the revolution. Pahlavi raised the age at which girls could be married to 15; after the revolution, the mullahs lowered it to 9.

The film mentions none of those positive acts. I asked Affleck why he characterized the Iranian players the way he did. Those watching without an understanding of recent history would have no idea that women fared much better under the shah than in the regime that followed. “That’s a really good question. I’m glad you brought it up,” he responded. He argued that he had given a three-dimensional view of the prerevolutionary regime because, during a brief montage, “We showed female scientists working in a lab.”

He explained that he thought it more essential for viewers to learn what the United States wrought in Iran. (Read “our” and “we” here as “America.”) “This theme of the unintended consequences of great powers getting into business with regimes in other countries is highly relevant, obviously. You have Egypt, Tunisia, and Syria now, and so on. While I didn’t want to be didactic . . . we did want to factually tell this story and talk about how we believe that our support of the shah was right in part because of his progressive stand on a lot of these issues. And we looked the other way in terms of some of the political repression and the absence of democracy and some of the literal atrocities that took place. That narrative very closely mirrors the narrative around other countries, primarily in the Middle East. So it wasn’t really about placing a value judgment on what happened to women after the Islamic Revolution.”

He didn’t think Americans needed to be reminded of the sins of the ruling



One of the U.S. hostages, just outside the embassy in Tehran, November 9, 1979

theocrats anyway. “One of the things that we were all operating under was the assumption that people know,” he said. “It was Khomeini then. It’s Khomeini now. And we all know that it’s become quite repressive.”

Affleck comprehends more about the Iranian Revolution than his movie suggests. “The beginning of the revolution involved Communists and secularists and merchants and people who were just looking to get out from under the yoke of the shah’s oppression,” he said at one point. Many of these people, pushed aside as Khomeini consolidated power, came to regret inadvertently helping give rise to theocracy. The hostage-taking served to cement Khomeini’s control. “It was hard for the United States and the Carter administration to understand why this guy doesn’t want to deal with us. What they didn’t realize at the time was that it wasn’t necessarily all about us or even about the shah.”

That’s not the impression *Argo* gives. The embassy takeover is portrayed as payback for propping up a despot. “The people starved,” the narrator informs us of the shah’s nearly three decades in power. Pahlavi’s reforms didn’t much help the agricultural sector, it’s true. But they did modernize the country and create

wealth that, besides increasing his own coffers, expanded the middle class. Between 1964 and 1978, the gross national product of Iran grew at an average annual rate of 13.2 percent. In the decade after the revolution, it decreased, on average, 1.7 percent a year. In 1979, unemployment was 8 percent. Now, economists guess it to be between 20 and 25 percent.

“I don’t think anyone would argue that the Islamic Revolution was good for the country,” Affleck said. “It’s just that it was a reaction to the shah, who was not good for the country, who was embezzling a lot.” Affleck argued that statistics don’t tell the full story. “Unemployment was low, but a lot of those jobs were done by foreigners, because they didn’t have Persians who were trained to fly the helicopters he was buying and run the cranes and even drive trucks. So there was a lot of importation of labor that the people resented.”

To be fair, Affleck doesn’t paint the revolutionaries in rosy hues. “You see them hanging people from construction cranes, you see firing squads happening impromptu in the streets,” he pointed out, “you see a place that’s living in fear under the Revolutionary Guard.”

The movie leaves out how brutally

the revolutionaries treated their American captives, except for one scene in which, for amusement, they make hostages believe they're about to face a firing squad. Simply seeing *Argo*, you might believe the Iranian official who, at the time, called the hostages "our guests." But it's a strange host who subjects his visitors to beatings and long stretches of solitary confinement, treatment so unbearable that more than one hostage attempted suicide.

Some filmmakers would have walked out on—or at least expressed irritation at—critical challenges to their work. Affleck remained engaged. He mused at the 2004 Democratic convention that he might one day run for office—a plausible ambition given his evident political skills. For now, he's a famous face and an artist taken increasingly seriously. At the end of our back-and-forth in two cities, he remained firmly behind his work, which could net him his first Oscar since the award he shared as a young screenwriter with Matt Damon, for 1997's *Good Will Hunting*.

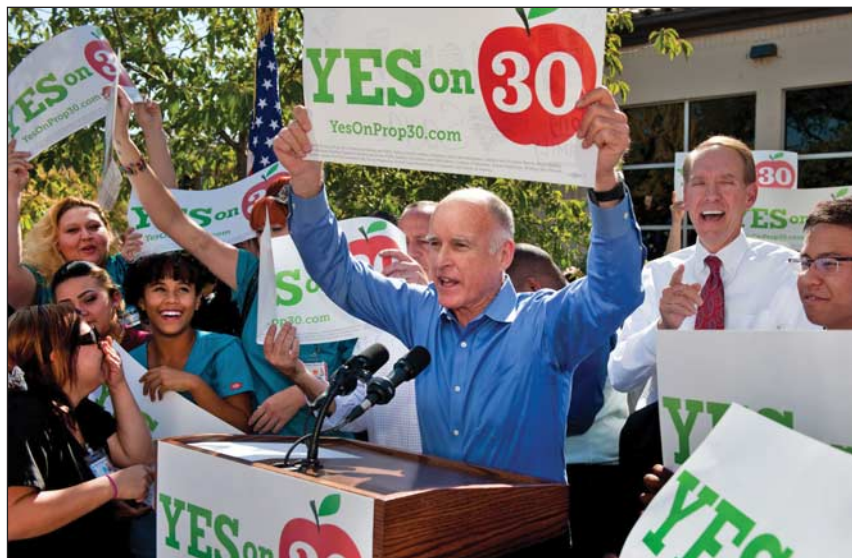
"It's an extraordinarily complicated scenario," he concluded. "I was a Middle Eastern studies major. I took classes and classes and classes on this and still don't feel I understood the Iranian revolution sufficiently. I do know that we tried to capture the essence of the truth. I absolutely stand by the prologues—people call it the history lesson—but I also acknowledge that we did not have the room, dramatically, to really get into the minutiae and the complexity and the nuance of what happened as the Islamic Revolution took hold. I do feel that we show it in a fairly negative light, but I also wanted to give people some context, so that they see it wasn't just mad barbarians who made a rush for a country, but that this was something that was developing over time as a reaction to the shah's policies."

A savvy advocate. The hunky actor turns out to be also an intellectually inclined spokesman—with the self-discipline never to stray from his talking points. ♦

A Taxing Proposition

Will California's voters soak themselves?

BY KATE HAVARD



It's all about the schools, right?

"California is a wonderful state mismanaged by lunatics," declares Steven Greenhut, vice president of journalism for the Franklin Center for Government and Public Integrity. Anyone who examines California's economy ought to agree.

Unemployment is stuck above 10 percent, and 3.8 percent of the population is on welfare, the highest rate in the nation. Four cities have recently declared bankruptcy. Citizens are fleeing the state—roughly 225,000 every year.

"If California is going to be saved, it's not going to be at the state level," Greenhut says. "It'll be at the local level. Cities are going bankrupt, and running out of money focuses the mind."

If that's the case, Governor Jerry Brown's mind should be razor-sharp.

Kate Havard is an editorial assistant at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

When he took office last year, Brown estimated the state to be \$28 billion in debt. Last month, the State Budget Crisis Task Force discovered he was way off: California's debt is closer to \$170 billion and could be as high as \$335 billion.

Rather than enacting real, structural reforms that might keep California from imploding, the state's Democrats are out stumping for Proposition 30, a "temporary" tax increase. Brown calls it a "millionaires' tax," but it would affect anyone making over \$250,000 per year. It would also increase the sales tax for all.

Californians have rejected the last eight tax increases on the ballot. What makes the governor think this one will pass?

Brown has chained Prop 30 to the future of California's schools. He wrote this year's "balanced budget" as if Prop 30 had already passed, which means that if it doesn't, \$6 billion in what he

RANDY PENCH / MGT / LANDOW

calls “draconian” budget cuts will automatically go into effect. Speaking at San Diego City College, Brown promised that if Prop 30 failed, “real suffering” would result.

Support for Prop 30 has started to sink, however, despite Brown’s tough talk and backing from the powerful teachers’ union. Two other ballot initiatives that would raise taxes (Props 38 and 39) aren’t doing well, either, while an initiative aimed at curbing union power (Prop 32) is doing better than expected.

Polling on the propositions shows the contests, at best, too close for anything other than cautious optimism. But in a state that’s set to reelect President Obama by 20 points, you take what you can get.

And “Jerry Brown’s tax increase,” as Prop 30 is known, has some powerful pushers. In response to Brown’s threats, California State Universities are holding back their acceptance letters until after the election. In September, the *Los Angeles Times* published a draft of an email prepared for applicants to California State University, Monterey Bay. “Because enrollment capacity is tied to the amount of available state funding, the campuses will be able to admit more applicants if Proposition 30 passes and fewer applicants if the proposition fails,” it said. The email contained a link to a “Yes on 30” website.

If Proposition 30 fails, schools will face cuts; but only because Brown engineered it that way. If it passes, much of the revenue will flow into the general fund instead.

That’s the brief of lawyer Molly Munger, sponsor of Proposition 38, a rival tax increase.

If both propositions increasing personal income taxes pass (Prop 39 targets businesses), the one with more votes will become law. Despite calls for her to withdraw—including a personal plea from Brown—Munger’s not backing down. Proposition 38 is a \$120 billion tax increase. But it does take meticulous steps to ensure that revenues raised to fund education would actually be spent on education. Prop 38 revenues cannot go

toward increasing teachers’ salaries.

Brown’s allies say that the only effect of Proposition 38 will be to drain support from Proposition 30, ensuring no tax increase passes. Prop 38 is likely to lose: Over half of registered voters oppose it, and just 34 percent are in favor, according to a recent USC Dornsife/*Los Angeles Times* poll. The first ads in the wealthy Munger’s multimillion-dollar blitz against Prop 30 began airing last week, and Brown’s tax increase has already seen its support slip.

In March, USC Dornsife/*L.A. Times* found that 64 percent of voters favored Proposition 30, with 33 percent opposed. In September, the same poll showed that support for Proposition 30 had dropped by 10 points: 54 percent of voters approve, and 37 percent are opposed. When voters were read two statements, for and against Proposition 30, backing for the bill dropped again: 48 percent approved, 43 percent were opposed. The “against” statement read: “Sacramento politicians need to cut wasteful spending before raising our taxes.”

That’s a sentiment the governor might want to ponder. Brown is fond of showing how serious he is about fiscal responsibility. He flies Southwest Airlines and eats leftover tuna sandwiches for lunch. But he’s less frugal where it counts.

In May, while promoting Proposition 30, Brown’s office released a list of 70 state parks it planned to close because the state could no longer afford them. In July, the *Sacramento Bee* discovered that the Department of Parks and Recreation was hiding \$54 million in operating funds.

Perhaps more egregious: Jerry Brown asked the legislature in July for \$6 billion to launch his high-speed rail boondoggle, which will cost at least \$68 billion to complete—already more costly than the \$40 billion plan voters agreed to in 2008.

“What kind of governor would threaten cutting 14 days from the school year if his tax increases don’t pass, and then do this?” asks Katy Grimes, a reporter for CalWatchdog.

org. A governor who favors big labor, that’s who. The light rail is a “union labor jobs bill,” Grimes says, a “dream” for unions, but a “nightmare” for taxpayers.

If Proposition 30 passes, Brown will have a \$6 billion a year excuse to leave the state’s unsustainable public-sector pension plans untouched. “Brown put the unions in power 30 years ago as governor, and this is the result,” Grimes says. “This is why passing Proposition 32 is so important. It’s an actual reform.”

Prop 32, the Paycheck Protection Act, would ban automatic deduction of union dues for political purposes. It would also bar corporations and unions from donating to local and state candidates. The impact on California politics would be enormous.

Endorsing the proposition, the *Orange County Register* wrote:

Anyone familiar with California politics knows that the most powerful forces, by far, in the state Capitol are the public-employee unions. Their clout was demonstrated this year when the California Teachers Association, the most powerful of them all, killed Senate Bill 1530, which would have made it easier to fire bad teachers for actions “that involve certain sex offenses, controlled-substance offenses or child abuse offenses.” . . . The bill advanced after several cases of teacher abuse against children came to light. . . . The bill passed overwhelmingly in the state Senate. . . . Then the CTA killed it in the Assembly Education Committee.

Labor unions have spent \$45 million on a “No on 32” campaign. According to Field Poll, Proposition 32 is struggling. Voters oppose it 44-38 percent.

It’s too close, and too early, to call Prop 30 or Prop 32. Californians *might* choose to start making needed cuts and curb the power of labor unions. If they don’t, the State Budget Crisis Task Force will need a more unnerving name.

As Laer Pearce, author of *Crazifornia*, warns, “We have hit bottom already, but not the bottom of the bottom.” ♦

What About Religious Freedom?

The other consequences of Obamacare.

BY WESLEY J. SMITH



Protesting against Obamacare in New York, March 23, 2012

Obamacare won't just ruin health care. It is also a cultural bulldozer. Before the law is even fully in effect, Health and Human Services bureaucrats have begun wielding their sweeping new powers to assault freedom of religion in the name of their preferred social order.

The promulgation of the free birth control rule indicates the regulatory road ahead. The government now requires every covered employer to provide health insurance that offers birth control and sterilization surgeries free of charge—even if such drugs and procedures violate the religious beliefs of the employer. Only houses of worship and monastic communities are exempt. Religious institutions

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have until August 1, 2013, to comply.

The lawsuits are flying. In August, the Catholic owners of Hercules Industries, a Colorado air conditioning and heating manufacturer, won a preliminary injunction against enforcement of the free birth control rule against their company (*Newland v. Sebelius*). The case hinges on the meaning of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA), enacted in 1993 to remedy a Supreme Court decision allowing federal drug laws of “general applicability” to supersede Native American religious ceremonies in which peyote is used. Since many laws not aimed at stifling a specific faith can be construed to do so, the threat to religious liberty was clear. A Democratic Congress passed, and President Clinton signed, RFRA.

RFRA states that the government “shall not substantially burden a person’s exercise of religion” unless it can demonstrate that the law “is in

furtherance of a compelling governmental interest.” The *Newland* trial judge found that forcing Hercules to pay for birth control—the company is self-insured—did indeed constitute a substantial burden on the owners’ free exercise of their Catholic faith. Since no compelling government interest was found, the judge protected the company from the rule pending trial. The Department of Justice has appealed.

Alas, in a nearly identical case, *O’Brien v. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services*, U.S. District Judge Carol E. Jackson reached the opposite legal conclusion. Frank O’Brien is the Catholic owner of O’Brien Industrial Holdings, LLC, a mining company in St. Louis. Demonstrating the sincerity and depth of O’Brien’s faith, a statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus greets visitors in the company’s lobby, and the mission statement on its website affirms the intent “to make our labor pleasing to the Lord.”

Despite acknowledging “the sincerity of plaintiff’s beliefs” and “the centrality of plaintiff’s condemnation of contraception to their exercise of the Catholic religion,” Jackson dismissed O’Brien’s case on the basis that forcing his company to buy insurance covering contraception was not a “substantial burden” on his religious freedom.

Here is the philosophical core of the ruling:

The challenged regulations do not demand that plaintiffs alter their behavior in a manner that will directly and inevitably prevent plaintiffs from acting in accordance with their religious beliefs. Frank O’Brien is not prevented from keeping the Sabbath, from providing a religious upbringing for his children, or from participating in a religious ritual such as communion. Instead, plaintiffs remain free to exercise their religion, by not using contraceptives and by discouraging employees from using contraceptives.

Excuse me, but that’s a lot like a judge telling a Jewish butcher that his freedom of religion is not violated by a regulation requiring

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him to carry nonkosher wares in his shop. After all, the government wouldn't be requiring *the butcher* to eat nonkosher meat.

More to the point, Jackson embraced the Department of Justice's reasoning. If this view prevails, it will shrivel the "free exercise of religion" guaranteed by the First Amendment into mere "freedom of worship," limiting RFRA's protections to personal morality, domestic activities, and religious rites behind closed doors. Worse, the court ruled that O'Brien is the aggressor in the matter, *that it is he who is seeking to violate the rights of his employees*. "RFRA is a shield, not a sword," Judge Jackson wrote, "it is not a means to force one's religious practices upon others."

How does O'Brien's desire not to involve himself in any way with contraception force Catholicism upon his employees? He hasn't threatened anyone's job for not following Catholic moral teaching. He hasn't tried to prevent any employee from using birth control. He hasn't compelled employees to go to confession or get baptized. He merely chooses not to be complicit in what he considers sinful activities.

But that analysis presupposes that O'Brien's religious freedom extends to his actions as an employer. It doesn't, sayeth the Obama administration: "By definition, a secular employer does not engage in any 'exercise of religion,'" the Department of Justice argued in the *Newland* case. In other words, according to the Obama administration, the realm of commerce is a religion-free zone.

Some might dismiss these employers' concerns because birth control is hardly controversial outside of orthodox religious circles. But these birth control cases are stalking horses for far more intrusive violations of religious liberty to come, e.g., requiring businesses to provide free abortions to their employees. Consider the Democratic party's 2012 platform:

The Democratic party strongly and

unequivocally supports *Roe v. Wade* and a woman's right to make decisions regarding her pregnancy, including a safe and legal abortion, *regardless of ability to pay*. [Emphasis added.]

If Democrats regain the control of Congress and the presidency they enjoyed in 2009 and 2010, look for the Affordable Care Act to be amended consistent with their platform. After that, it won't take long for HHS to promulgate a free abortion rule along lines similar to the free birth control mandate.

And what could be done about it? According to Judge Jackson's thinking, ensuring free access to abortion would not prevent employers from "keeping the Sabbath." They would

not be prohibited from "providing a religious upbringing" for their children or "participating in a religious ritual such as communion." Rather, they would be barred from "forcing their religious practices" on employees by leaving employees to pay for their own terminations. In time, why shouldn't in-vitro fertilization, assisted suicide, and sex change operations be added to the list?

If higher courts accept this radically antireligious view, the only corrective will be to amend RFRA to spell out that its protections extend to the actions of employers. In fact, why not take that step now and short circuit what could be years of litigation defending religious liberty in the public square? ♦

Whose Vote Counts Most?

For maximum clout in the presidential election, move to Virginia. BY JOSEPH BOTTUM

The good thing about the Electoral College—our strangely still-surviving 18th-century experiment in federalism—is that it's clear, coherent, and commonsensical. If you live in Ohio, say, a state that's closely contested in the presidential race this year, you know down in your bones that your ballot is important. More important, certainly, than the ballots coming out of Illinois, where President Obama remains so messianic that even the dead will rise up to vote for him, if necessary.

The bad thing about the Electoral College, unfortunately, springs from the same root: It's clear, coherent, and commonsensical. The rise of personal computers over the last 30 years has

taught everyone in America the deep truth of information theory: If it's a system, it's got inequalities. If it uses rules, it can be gamed. Added up one way, a voter in Wyoming casts what is easily the most influential ballot in this year's presidential race: 3.52 times the value of a Texas ballot. Added up another way, people in the District of Columbia have the most say in the national election: 3.60 times more than voters in Wisconsin.

The really interesting numbers, however, are found when you try to estimate the worth of votes in the narrow margins of tossup states. Given recent polls, a single presidential ballot in Utah counts for very little—while each ballot in neighboring Colorado could influence the national result. If you live in Massachusetts, you probably won't be missed if you stay home on Election Day. If you live in Nevada,

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you should crawl across the desert over broken glass to get to a ballot box.

What produces these variations are differences in voting-age population, local patterns of voter turnout, and the size of the gap between the candidates. Behind them all, lies the Electoral College: In any given election, voters in some states will contribute far more to the choice of president than voters in other states.

The Electoral College's numbers—its 538 members—are determined by adding up each state's senators and representatives. Every state has two senators and at least one member of Congress. One result is that no state can fall below three votes (the District of Columbia is also granted three votes), which means that small-population states are more valuable in relative terms. Another result is that larger states, commanding larger vote totals, are more valuable in absolute terms.

Thus, for example, the most consequential possible vote in a presidential election—we're talking theoretically, here; a logical fantasy—would be if only a single Californian voted: That one voter would direct 55 votes in the Electoral College—20 percent of what a candidate needs to win the White House.

But even when we bring the possible results a little closer to reality, there's still a good-sized gap between the states. As a function of general population, Wyoming offers by far the most valuable ballots: Under 600,000 people with 3 electoral votes works out to 5.32 electoral votes per million. The District of Columbia, Vermont, North Dakota, and Alaska come next, each of them over 4 electoral votes per million residents. California stumbles down to last, with 1.48 electoral votes per million, followed closely by New York and Texas.

By that population measure, a Wyoming ballot is worth around three and a half times a California ballot. Of course, the effect is often minor: The 10 least populous jurisdictions average 4.1 electoral votes per million residents, but they add up to only 32 electors. The 10 most populous states

average 1.6 electors per million but produce 256 electoral votes: a good way toward the 270 needed for victory. The 12 largest states, by themselves, could elect a president. Working from the other end, a candidate would need all 40 of the smallest states plus the District of Columbia to reach 270 electoral votes.

If we look not at total population but at the percentage that actually turns out to vote (averaged over the last three presidential cycles), the District of Columbia leaps far into the lead, with 12.06 electors per mil-



...and its votes count more.

lion who vote. Wyoming at 11.32, Vermont at 9.30, and North Dakota at 9.19 round out the valuable end. Coming in last are Ohio with 3.31 electors per million of turnout, Wisconsin with 3.35, and Michigan with 3.40.

None of this is new, exactly. Back in 1968, J.F. Banzhaf published "One Man, 3.312 Votes," which remains one of the most cited essays about the effect of the Electoral College. Curiously, if an argument against the American way of elections lurks in Banzhaf's "power index" of voting, it derives from his conclusion that disproportionate electoral power actually belongs to voters in *large* states rather than small states.

The math of such statistical analyses is complicated and much disputed, but at the root lies the fairly simple fact that when a state with a large population is closely contested, it can multiply its voters' electoral power: up to 3.312 times in a random election, Banzhaf claimed.

This electoral power lives in the

voting gap—the number of decisive voters—between the candidates. If one candidate gains 3 million votes in a state, while the other candidate receives only 2 million, then the race could be said to boil down to the one million who made a difference.

So, for example, the District of Columbia ought to be at the top of Electoral College power per voter. But given the tightness of the race between Mitt Romney and Barack Obama nationally, the District actually comes in dead last in power: likely to produce this year's least consequential votes. With Obama favored by over 90 percent of its voters, Washington commands only 14.04 Electoral College votes per million decisive voters. Utah at 14.46 electors per million deciding votes, New York at 14.57, and Oklahoma at 16.32 are similarly low.

Compare that with Iowa, Florida, Wisconsin, and Ohio, all at over a hundred electors per million decisive voters. And then the big four: Nevada at 399.12, Colorado at 562.47, New Hampshire at 836.06, and, overwhelmingly, Virginia at 932.85. In terms of producing an Electoral College vote, given the current state of the polls, a vote in Arlington, Virginia, is 66 times more valuable than a vote across the river in Washington, D.C.

Right in the middle, at 38.79 Electoral College votes per million poll-gap voters, lies Maine. Which is where it should be, one supposes: As I said, the Electoral College matches surprisingly well our commonsense understanding of the nation.

Our commonsense understanding of voting, for that matter. Little states concentrate their ballots enormously but end up with low influence on the election. Large states dilute their ballots but generally determine the outcome. States dominated by a single candidate tend to diminish the worth of their individual votes, while battleground states tend to magnify their votes. And the Electoral College—our strangely still-surviving 18th-century experiment in federalism—works to smooth the whole thing out. ♦

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'The Biggest Kiss'

*Mitt Romney was right:
Dodd-Frank is a gift to big banks*

BY C. BOYDEN GRAY
& ADAM J. WHITE

Big Wall Street banks caused a financial crisis and brought the nation to the brink of economic collapse; President Obama signed the Dodd-Frank Act to punish those banks and end government bailouts of too-big-to-fail financial institutions.

That's what President Obama believes, at least. He said so when he signed Dodd-Frank into law on July 21, 2010: Wall Street banks long had tricked Americans with fine-print traps, opaque investment pitches, and "abusive practices in the mortgage industry," but Dodd-Frank would foster transparency and competition, and "make sure that everybody follows the same set of rules." Wall Street banks had used the threat of systemic financial collapse to extort bailouts from the public, but Dodd-Frank would ensure that "the American people will never again be asked to foot the bill for Wall Street's mistakes." Above all else, there would be "no dividing line between Main Street and Wall Street. We rise or fall together as one nation" under Dodd-Frank.

So you can imagine the president's frustration two years later, when he stood onstage at the first of three presidential debates and heard his opponent paint a very different picture. Said Mitt Romney:

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Dodd-Frank was passed. And it includes within it a number of provisions that I think [have] some unintended consequences that are harmful to the economy. One is it designates a number of banks as too big to fail, and the y're effectively guaranteed by the federal government. This is the biggest kiss that's been given to—to New York banks I've ever seen.

Romney was launching a direct assault not just on Dodd-Frank, but also on the conventional wisdom that Dodd-Frank punished Wall Street.

If President Obama was frustrated by this sharp criticism of one of the administration's landmark legislative achievements, he was not alone. The *New Republic's* Alec MacGillis lambasted "the full chutzpah of Romney's move," "attempting to paint Obama as a crony of the biggest banks" despite bankers' political contributions to Republicans. Elsewhere, Sheila Bair, former chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, called Romney's comments "misinformed."

If Romney touched a nerve, it was not because he was contrarian, but because he was correct. As many analysts and officials have explained, Dodd-Frank subsidizes large, influential Wall Street financial institutions, while imposing disproportionately heavy burdens on Main Street banks and the communities they serve. Even if we take President Obama, Senator Dodd, Representative Frank, and the rest of Dodd-Frank's supporters at face value when they protest that they actually intended to rein in Wall Street banks, the laws they passed accomplish the opposite result. Intentional or not, a kiss is still a kiss.

Governor Romney's criticisms targeted the parts of Dodd-Frank that were ostensibly enacted to limit the power of too-big-to-fail financial institutions. Title I creates the Financial Stability Oversight Council, an interagency board that will formally designate



GARY LOCKE

certain large banks and nonbank financial companies as “systemically important financial institutions” (SIFIs). Title II creates the Orderly Liquidation Authority, by which the Treasury secretary and the FDIC are empowered to “liquidate” troubled SIFIs.

By granting federal bureaucrats open-ended power and insulating them against crucial checks and balances, these provisions present grave constitutional concerns, which are the subject of a federal lawsuit filed recently by private plaintiffs and three states. More significant for present purposes, Titles I and II exacerbate the very problem they were purported to solve: the dangerous power of financial institutions that are treated as too big to fail.

According to the Treasury secretary, who chairs the Financial Stability Oversight Council, the council will soon begin designating large financial institutions as “systemically important.” When it does, the council will be making official a status that before Dodd-Frank was strictly unofficial and conjectural.

Official SIFI status will be worth billions of dollars to the companies that receive it, as demonstrated by the ever-heightening mountain of research that has attempted to quantify its benefits. Before Dodd-Frank, a handful of big banks enjoyed unofficial too-big-to-fail status among investors, simply because of the banks’ disproportionate size—\$100 billion in assets was a common benchmark. Because those banks were seen as enjoying the likely protection of government intervention to prevent their failure, investors saw the banks as less risky than their “small enough to fail” competitors. Accordingly, the big banks were able to attract investment capital at much lower cost.

That has amounted to an immense subsidy, worth “about \$4 billion per year before the crisis, increasing to \$60 billion during the crisis, topping \$84 billion in 2008,” according to a recent paper by the World Bank’s Deniz Anginer and Syracuse University’s A. Joseph Warburton. Other studies, including one by the Bank of England, presented similar findings.

Instead of ending that subsidy to big banks, Dodd-Frank intensifies it in at least three ways. First, by officially designating SIFIs, Dodd-Frank eliminates any uncertainty as to whether a bank is actually considered too big to fail. Second, by lowering the asset threshold from \$100 billion to \$50 billion, it increases the number of likely SIFIs. And third, by including not just banks

but also nonbank financial companies, Dodd-Frank further expands the universe of possible SIFIs.

President Obama, former FDIC director Bair, and others suggest that these SIFI designations are something that financial companies will want to avoid, not obtain, because SIFIs will face stricter oversight by federal regulators. Dodd-Frank’s regulators will put SIFIs into “a penalty box,” said Bair: Big banks might “try to spin it like it’s a good thing” to receive the government’s SIFI designation, “but it’s a bad thing.”

Such predictions reflect the triumph of hope over experience. If unofficial too-big-to-fail status was worth billions before Dodd-Frank, then official SIFI status will be worth even more today. One management consulting firm, Deloitte, went so far as to predict that banks falling short of the \$50 billion threshold “are likely to face a strategic decision”:

Either forgo SIFI status or “aim to become SIFIs to take advantage of possible perceived funding and other advantages, from being seen as having implicit government guarantees from being too big to fail.”

The *Washington Post* was blunter in its assessment: “Get ready for Too-Big-to-Fail envy,” it warned readers last year.

To the extent that Dodd-Frank’s proponents ever acknowledge this problem, they tend to fall back on a second defense: that

Dodd-Frank’s Title II ensures that troubled SIFIs will be “liquidated,” not rescued, and that “taxpayers shall bear no losses from the exercise of” that liquidation authority. President Obama pressed this point when he signed Dodd-Frank: “Because of this law, the American people will never again be asked to foot the bill for Wall Street’s mistakes. There will be no more tax-funded bailouts—period. If a large financial institution should ever fail, this reform gives us the ability to wind it down without endangering the broader economy.”

That is wishful thinking. Title II does not actually require the government to “wind down” a troubled SIFI. Under Dodd-Frank, “liquidation” can consist of the government keeping the company alive and restructuring it by use of an FDIC-created “bridge financial company.”

In fact, that is the approach endorsed by the FDIC’s acting chairman, Martin J. Gruenberg. The FDIC will not wind down troubled SIFIs, as President Obama promised; instead, as Gruenberg explained in a May 10 speech, the FDIC’s “most promising resolution strategy” will be to take the SIFI parent company into

When the Financial Stability Oversight Council designates large financial institutions as ‘systemically important,’ it will be making official a status that before Dodd-Frank was strictly conjectural.



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receivership, transfer its assets to a bridge company, operate its subsidiary banking units, and ultimately keep the SIFI alive—an outcome that, Gruenberg suggested, will not just “mitigate systemic consequences” but also “preserve the franchise value of the firm.”

And in that process, the FDIC will be able to exploit a section in Dodd-Frank that gives regulators extraordinary power to ignore the rules of bankruptcy and favor certain creditors over others. The transparency of normal bankruptcy is replaced with a black-box process that empowers regulators and favors the most influential stakeholders, including, most likely, other government-designated SIFIs.

In short, Dodd-Frank’s “liquidation” provisions will not actually end too big to fail—they will sustain it. Dodd-Frank has “ended” too big to fail only in the same sense that the 1928 Kellogg-Briand Pact “ended” war.

Nor can it truthfully be said that “taxpayers” will not fund the liquidation process. Under Dodd-Frank, the Treasury Department and FDIC can fund liquidations by imposing fees on financial institutions—fees that ultimately are passed through to the taxpayers and others who own the stock of those fee-paying companies or who are the companies’ customers.

Accordingly, the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank’s 2011

annual report concluded that “the pretense of toughness on [too big to fail] sounds the right note for the aftermath of the financial crisis,” but, “for all its bluster, Dodd-Frank leaves TBTF entrenched.” The Dallas Fed’s president, Richard Fisher, has issued similar indictments of Dodd-Frank in a number of speeches. So have three other sitting Federal Reserve Bank presidents, according to *Bloomberg Businessweek’s* report, “Big Banks: Now Even Too Bigger To Fail.”

Fisher and the other critical Fed presidents are joined by Anginer and Warburton, the aforementioned economists who studied the implicit subsidy afforded to big banks by SIFI status. “The passage of Dodd-Frank in July 2010 did not eliminate investors’ expectations of government support. In fact, expectations of support rose in 2010,” they write.

But perhaps the most damning criticism comes from Neil Barofsky, the Treasury Department’s former special inspector general in charge of oversight of TARP, in his new memoir, *Bailout*:

From the front-row seat that I enjoyed during my tenure at SIGTARP, Treasury was and continues to be an institution that has been captured by Wall Street’s core ideology. ... The same political and procedural barriers make it similarly unlikely that a future administration will seriously challenge the structure—and therefore the power—of the

largest banks. Dodd-Frank didn't change the postcrisis status quo of too-big-to-fail banks; it cemented it.

If Wall Street SIFIs are the beneficiaries of Dodd-Frank's Titles I and II, then small community banks—which will never be deemed too big to fail—are the losers. Investors will be much less inclined to invest in small banks when they can invest with less risk in bigger banks enjoying government protection.

This point was made by none other than Fed chairman Ben Bernanke in a speech delivered while Dodd-Frank was still pending in Congress:

Having institutions that are too big to fail . . . creates competitive inequities that may prevent our most productive and innovative firms from prospering. In an environment of fair competition, smaller firms should have a chance to outperform larger companies.

Too-big-to-fail status is a “pernicious problem,” Bernanke stressed, “one of the greatest threats to the diversity and efficiency of our financial system.” Yet President Obama and Dodd-Frank's other supporters made it the centerpiece of modern financial regulation.

In addition to the subsidies that big Wall Street firms will receive from “systemic importance” status, Dodd-Frank further subsidizes them by creating a regulatory environment that gives big banks inherent advantage over small banks. Those advantages harm small banks, local communities, and ultimately the economy at large.

Dodd-Frank's Title X created the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, an agency with unprecedented independence and an open-ended mandate to litigate or regulate against “unfair,” “deceptive,” and “abusive” lending practices. Led by Richard Cordray, a former Ohio attorney general appointed by President Obama without the Senate's advice and consent, the CFPB is poised to impose heavy new regulatory burdens on consumer lenders.

Because the CFPB wields such power—not just to define and punish “unfair,” “deceptive,” and “abusive” practices, but also to administer many statutes long committed to other agencies' jurisdiction—the CFPB is capable of wreaking regulatory havoc in the consumer banking industry.

For that reason, even Elizabeth Warren, a leading advocate of the CFPB's creation, urged that the agency define its new standards up front, through “nuanced regulations that account for product innovation.” It would be a mistake, she argued, to try to define the law on a case-by-case basis through enforcement actions, because “regulation of consumer credit markets is not amenable to ex post judicial review”; regulation-by-litigation, rather than

through public rulemaking proposals, would be a tool “too blunt to provide a comprehensive regulatory response to unsafe consumer credit products.”

But so far, Cordray has largely eschewed Warren's advice. In a hearing before a subcommittee of the House Oversight Committee in January, shortly after his appointment, he asserted that Dodd-Frank's central term—“abusive”—would “have to be a fact and circumstances issue; it is not something we are likely to be able to define in the abstract.” By refusing to lend any meaningful content to the statute's operative terms before actually bringing enforcement actions, Cordray's CFPB injects dangerous uncertainty into the banking industry. Community banks' ability to offer “character loans”—loans justified at least in part on the character of the borrower, rather than on strictly quantitative data—for example, may no longer be tenable when the banks can't be certain that such loans won't be deemed “abusive” and prosecuted as such after the fact.

Cordray only exacerbated that uncertainty when he announced, in a recent Senate hearing, that the CFPB might also effectively rewrite standards already prescribed by federal statutes. At a hearing before the Senate Financial Services Committee in September, Cordray indicated to chairman Richard Shelby that the CFPB believes Dodd-Frank gives it “exception authority” to waive statutes and impose the agency's own new standards.

By writing new law through case-by-case enforcement, and by asserting “exception authority” to effectively re-write statutes, the CFPB is substantially increasing bankers' compliance costs. The absence of clear, simple, up-front rules will force banks to hire ever more lawyers and regulatory compliance officers to keep up with changing laws—an outcome that inherently favors big banks over smaller ones. “Bank of America can fill a skyscraper with attorneys to comply with all the rules and regulations, but a community bank can't do that,” Iowa's banking superintendent told *USA Today* last year. “I know some bankers that are probably just going to quit making mortgage loans. I mean, what's the point?”

James Hamby, president of a locally owned Oklahoma bank, testified to such effects before the House Oversight Committee in July:

The calculus is fairly simple; more regulation means more resources devoted to regulatory compliance, and the more resources we devote to regulatory compliance, the fewer resources we can dedicate to doing what banks do best—meeting the credit needs of our local communities. Every dollar spent on regulatory compliance means as many as 10 fewer dollars available for creditworthy borrowers. Less credit in turn means businesses can't grow and create new jobs. As a result, local economies suffer, and the national economy suffers along with them.

Another community banker, Jim Purcell of the State National Bank in Big Spring, Texas, testified before another committee that Dodd-Frank would inevitably direct customers away from small community banks and toward the local branches of big banks. The CFPB's new rule on international wire transfers, for example, requires banks to disclose information that small banks simply cannot know, such as the fees or exchange rates to be charged by the foreign bank on the other end of the wire; those disclosure requirements inherently favor big banks with international branches, because the same bank is on both ends of the wire.

Purcell quoted the blunt conclusion of the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency's senior deputy for mid-size and community banks: "Regardless of how well community banks adapt to Dodd-Frank Act reforms in the long-term, in the near- to medium-term these new requirements will raise costs and possibly reduce revenue for community institutions." In the long run, the deputy added, banks will have to adjust by passing new regulatory costs along to customers, by focusing on "the least risky customers as a way to manage their regulatory costs," or by simply "exit[ing] businesses where they find that associated regulatory costs are simply too high to sustain profitability."

Another possibility is that smaller banks will merge, to spread the burden of regulatory compliance. The *Washington Post* warned of this in August, reporting that Dodd-Frank's compliance costs are among the factors that will spur mergers among small and medium-sized banks in the near future.

As community banks have increasingly withdrawn from the mortgage business, their market share is being absorbed by big banks, at great cost to customers. In a speech last week, Bill Dudley, president of the New York Fed, warned that mortgage originations are increasingly concentrated among "a few key financial institutions," and that the lack of competition was preventing low interest rates, spurred by the government's purchase of mortgage-backed securities, from passing through to actual mortgage borrowers.

The *Financial Times*'s account of Dudley's speech put the point more bluntly: While "tougher regulation [is] leading many banks to pull back from arranging mortgages," both Wells Fargo and JPMorgan "reported record profits last week because of a surge in mortgage loans." In turn, the big banks' "failure to pass on low mortgage rates"

means that "consumers have less money left in their pockets, and fewer people can afford to buy a house."

As Mitt Romney might say, those inflated profits, and the underlying lack of competition in the mortgage business, are just another gift—another kiss—from the government to the big banks.

If President Obama, Barney Frank, and other Democrats are puzzled by the fact that Dodd-Frank's new regulatory regime actually helps big banks instead of hurting them, then their puzzlement owes to an ignorance of well-established economic theories of regulatory capture and rent-seeking—problems recognized by Adam Smith more than two centuries ago, no less than by James Buchanan and other proponents of economic "public choice theory" today.

Perhaps even more surprising, their puzzlement reveals their ignorance of the Democratic party's own intellectual heritage. A century ago, progressive icon Louis Brandeis opposed Theodore Roosevelt's "New Nationalism" precisely because it was premised upon the regulators' cooperative relationship with incumbent monopolies, to the detriment of smaller companies and the public at large. As Brandeis urged in a memorandum to Woodrow Wilson on the eve of the 1912 election,

Roosevelt's Progressive party did "not fear commercial power, however great, if only methods for regulation are provided." Brandeis, on the other hand, believed "that no methods of regulation ever have been or can be devised to remove the menace inherent in private monopoly and overweening commercial power." Some two decades later, Brandeis reiterated these beliefs when he joined the Supreme Court's unanimitous decision in striking down the National Industrial Recovery Act, an early New Deal statute premised on the need for cooperation between regulators and big business, rather than competition among businesses. To assume, as Dodd-Frank's proponents often do, that regulation is necessarily the enemy of large corporations—and necessarily the friend of smaller competitors, let alone their customers—is to ignore not just the present, but the past as well.

Mitt Romney was right in that first debate: Dodd-Frank is a gift to big banks, a fact that would have been as obvious to Louis Brandeis a century ago as it is to Neil Barofsky and other whistleblowers today. ♦

The absence of clear, simple, up-front rules will force banks to hire ever more lawyers and regulatory compliance officers to keep up with changing laws—an outcome that inherently favors big banks over smaller ones.



Nick Nolte, Thandie Newton in 'Jefferson in Paris' (1995)

Reasonable Doubt

A closer look at the Sally Hemings saga. BY EDWARD ACHORN

Just how awful was Thomas Jefferson? In an academic and media culture that sometimes seems determined to trash all things that hint at the magnificence of America, pretty awful. Jefferson, the brilliant Founder and chief author of the Declaration of Independence, that essential document of the dignity of the individual in defiance of the bullying state, has been found guilty of being the ultimate cad and hypocrite. He had, we are assured, an inherently abusive sexual relationship with his young slave Sally Hemings, who bore several of his children.

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The Jefferson-Hemings Controversy
Report of the Scholars Commission
 edited by Robert F. Turner
 Carolina Academic Press, 432 pp., \$45

This very old idea—advanced by the corrupt scandalmonger James Callender during Jefferson’s first term as president—was dismissed for centuries, we are told, only because of the racism and closed-mindedness of white male historians. An assistant professor at New York Law School who championed this idea, Annette Gordon-Reed, has been showered with just about every tribute that can be bestowed on a historian: the National Book Award, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Pulitzer Prize, the \$50,000 George Washington’s Book

Prize, an appointment to Rutgers as professor of history, a subsequent appointment to the Harvard faculty, a \$500,000 “genius grant” from the MacArthur Foundation, a National Humanities medal from President Obama, and more.

Other forms of cultural pressure have helped enforce conformity on this point, including accusations of bigotry against doubters. DNA evidence proving that a Jefferson fathered one of Sally’s children supposedly sealed the case. Even thoughtful and careful historians have taken to referring to Hemings as “Jefferson’s concubine” without an “allegedly” before the phrase.

But is it true?

Against the prevailing headwinds, it takes guts even to ask. But a team of scholars headed by Robert F. Turner

EVERETT COLLECTION

of the University of Virginia School of Law have done so, poking holes in the case and laying out the strong possibility that Jefferson may indeed be innocent of the charges. The scholars' investigation seems fair and thorough. And in the spirit of intellectual inquiry, they were willing to debate their findings with anyone who might challenge them. This is all explained in their 432-page report, a surprisingly punchy and straightforward analysis that those who have a serious interest in Jefferson owe it to themselves to read.

There are obvious difficulties with the "open-and-shut" case that Thomas Jefferson carried on a long-term affair with Sally Hemings and fathered one or more of her children:

Surviving records suggest she was a very minor figure in Jefferson's life, and that other slaves were treated more favorably than her children.

DNA analysis establishes that it is almost certain *some* Jefferson fathered Hemings's son, Eston. But there are approximately 25 known potential male candidates. Meanwhile, DNA has also established that Thomas Woodson, thought by some to have been conceived by Hemings and Jefferson in Paris, could *not* have been the son of Thomas Jefferson.

Hemings's known births closely followed a pattern of Jefferson's returns to Monticello, a strong argument for his paternity. Yet those are also the very times he opened the house to relatives throughout the region for protracted visits, which raises the possibility that others might have been involved.

Jefferson's younger brother Randolph, a widower and regular visitor to Monticello who was ignored in the initial research of Annette Gordon-Reed, was in better health than Jefferson and said to "play the fiddle and dance half the night" with the slaves, while the president was not known to do so. A tradition among descendants of Eston Hemings held that an "Uncle Randolph" was Eston's father—that being a name by which Randolph Jefferson was known at Monticello. A surviving letter from Thomas invites

Randolph to come to the house shortly before Hemings became pregnant with Eston. Randolph was reported to have fathered children with other slaves: Might he be a more probable father than Thomas?

Thomas Jefferson had little privacy, as the focus of all eyes when he was at Monticello. Noises in his room (including conversation) could be heard one flight above. Yet there is no evidence that family members had any inkling of a decades-long affair with the slave.

Jefferson tended to be drawn to cultured women, according to the historical record. Abigail Adams, who met the 14-year-old Hemings when the latter accompanied Jefferson's daughter Polly to Paris, described Sally to Jefferson as "quite a child" and warned she "wants more care" than the 8-year-old Polly, "and is wholly incapable of looking properly after her, without some superiour to direct her." Yet advocates ask us to believe that Jefferson became smitten with this immature 14-year-old in Paris, risked his reputation (especially within his family, since Polly would surely have known) to conduct an affair with Sally when any number of women were available, and was tricked by her to enter into a "treaty" to free her future children. All this is possible, but is it probable? And how much must we leap from the known facts and embark on flights of imagination to arrive at that destination?

Ominously, Gordon-Reed, for all the rewards and adulation she has received from politically sympathetic peers in academia, seems to have either deliberately doctored the record or made errors in transcribing quotes in ways that advanced her case (she insists they were simply honest mistakes). This *Report* argues that the "mistakes" do not appear to be random.

There is more, much more, packed into this volume raising questions about the theory.

Ultimately, of course, no one can prove a negative, and the *Report* leaves open the possibility that our third president could have conducted

such an affair. But while reasonable people can disagree,

it is our unanimous view that the allegation is by no means proven; and we find it regrettable that public confusion about the 1998 DNA testing and other evidence has misled many people into believing the issue is closed.

Of course, it is easy to understand why many hearts yearn to believe the story. Historians are increasingly exploring the story of the rise of black Americans, bringing back to life countless African-American heroes. But the ironic notion that the author of the Declaration fell under the spell of a slave who used her power over him to ensure her children's freedom exerts a special charm. Many want this Sally Hemings to be part of the American pantheon, and many want to see Thomas Jefferson, who was certainly duplicitous at times in his political dealings, taken down a peg. Others want to trash the Founders, exposing their maintenance of an institution that virtually condoned rape, as part of a long campaign of scorn for the ideas of limited government and individual liberty. Finally, the idea that one of America's iconic presidents sexually preyed on a slave took off as the Clinton administration was waning, offering a helpful they-all-do-it rationalization for Bill Clinton's sexual conduct toward a White House intern.

It is important, however, to judge the record as honestly and dispassionately as possible, and to encourage vigorous debate. When all is said and done, Jefferson's sometime friend/sometime enemy John Adams (who preceded him as president) offered one of the wisest statements about the Hemings controversy. In Adams's view, the cruelty of slavery inevitably raised such questions: "[James] Callender and Sally [Hemings] will be remembered as long as Jefferson, as blots on his character. The story of the latter is a natural and almost unavoidable consequence of that foul Contagion in the human Character, Negro Slavery." ♦

The Blago File

Now the question is: When will the caged bird sing?

BY BARBARA F. HOLLINGSWORTH



Barack Obama, Jesse Jackson, Rod Blagojevich, 2007

One of my minor triumphs as a cub reporter at the City News Bureau of Chicago was snagging the first jailhouse interview with convicted former Democratic governor Otto Kerner. So I eagerly looked forward to reading this book by *Chicago Tribune* reporters Jeff Coen and John Chase, intended to be the definitive account of the rise and fall of my home state's latest gubernatorial bad boy: Milorad "Rod" Blagojevich, the mop-haired, loquacious son-in-law of a Chicago Democratic ward boss whose political scheming took him all the way to the summit of Illinois politics—and then down to federal prison in disgrace.

As the authors note in their prologue, "Rod Blagojevich belongs to Chicago." Indeed, he exemplifies the often banal corruption at the heart of Windy City politics, and readers

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Golden

How Rod Blagojevich Talked Himself out of the Governor's Office and into Prison

by Jeff Coen & John Chase
Chicago Review, 496 pp., \$27.95

looking for amusing anecdotes about the former two-term governor will not be disappointed. The book tells how his aides used the word "football"—the same term for the nuclear codes that constantly accompany the president—to refer to the vain Blagojevich's hairbrush. They also quote the beleaguered governor trying to console his two young daughters, who were upset that their father might be sent away to prison: "Worst case scenario . . . you can get another dog and call him 'Daddy.'" You can't make this stuff up.

But more serious readers seeking answers to questions raised about former U.S. attorney Patrick Fitzgerald's multiyear, multimillion-dollar investment will not find them here. Major

omissions in Coen and Chase's otherwise meticulously detailed narrative regarding the *Tribune's* own role in tipping off Blagojevich that he was under wiretap surveillance ultimately render their account incomplete.

For example, of the dozens of pay-to-play corruption charges brought against Blagojevich, the sleaziest of them all was the accusation that he tried to sell the U.S. Senate seat vacated by the newly elected President Barack Obama in 2008 to the highest bidder. The title of the book comes from a quote in which Blagojevich, unaware that he was being wiretapped, said of his power to appoint a new senator: "I've got this thing and it's f—ing golden. And I, I'm just not giving it up for f—ing nothing."

Blagojevich had been caught on tape saying that agents of Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr. (D-Ill.) had offered "tangible, concrete, tangible stuff" (i.e., a bribe) in return for the Senate appointment, and he planned to meet with Jackson on December 8. But that meeting, and another set for December 5 between Blagojevich's brother, Robert, and Raghu Nayak, a wealthy friend of Jackson's who had allegedly promised \$1.5 million in "accelerated fund-raising" if JJ Jr. got the coveted seat, never happened.

At about 10:30 P.M. on December 4, Chase "was chosen [by the paper's top editors] to contact the governor's press team and try to get some kind of comment," prematurely spilling the beans on Fitzgerald's ongoing criminal investigation to its main target. Chase's story, "Feds Taped Blagojevich," which ran in the *Tribune* the following day, noted that Blagojevich aide John Wyma had been cooperating with authorities and that the federal probe had expanded to include the Senate seat. Four days later, the 40th governor of Illinois was arrested at his Chicago bungalow before actually consummating the deal.

Coen and Chase readily admit that their newspaper had been secretly cooperating with Fitzgerald's office for months by not publishing certain information, and "was aware of the possible arrest date." But such sensitive information could only have come

from one source: the government. So why did the *Tribune* suddenly stop cooperating and tip off Blagojevich that he was being wiretapped days before his planned arrest? Incredible bloggers, particularly those at Illinoispaytoeplay.com, likened it to spending months watching a suspected drug dealer and then arresting him before he actually hands over the contraband and pockets the cash.

There is no question that the *Tribune* story prematurely derailed Fitzgerald's probe: "Had there been no *Tribune* story," acknowledge Coen and Chase, "the federal government might have run their recording effort longer, hoping to see if they could somehow net an actual deal for the seat with someone in the Jackson camp."

But at the press conference announcing Blagojevich's "political corruption crime spree," Fitzgerald expressed no desire to track down the source of the leak that had just compromised the biggest case of his career. This was a curious reaction by the prosecutor who had previously become a household name by jailing *New York Times* reporter Judith Miller for 85 days when she refused to reveal sources Fitzgerald already knew about in the Valerie Plame affair.

In a phone interview, Coen and Chase repeatedly declined to comment on the source of the leak, saying it was "the *Tribune's* business." Nor would they say how they had gotten access to "all tapes in which Rod himself was talking"—hundreds of hours from which they quoted extensively, even though the tapes had never been played in court or made part of the public record and were, in fact, under a court seal while they were writing this book.

They referred me to the protective order—entered into court records on April 19, 2009—that specifically forbade Blagojevich's defense team from disseminating the transcripts of his recorded conversations, but leaving the government free to do so. "We don't want to go down that road," they said when I pointed out that they had to be aware of the rampant speculation that Chase's late-night call to Blagojevich had, in effect, turned the *Tribune* from objective observer

to actor in a melodrama of national interest, because it also involved high-level members of the fledgling administration, such as Rahm Emanuel and Valerie Jarrett.

Another glaring omission: Although Coen and Chase provide a lengthy account of how the Syrian-born developer Antoin "Tony" Rezko wormed his way into Blagojevich's inner circle by raising campaign cash for him, they give short shrift to Rezko's claim, revealed by prosecutors in a closed-door session with the judge overseeing Blagojevich's trials, that he had also tried to influence Obama with illegal campaign contributions. Fitzgerald didn't pursue it—and neither did Coen and Chase.

All of which leaves the reader still wondering why a U.S. attorney with a record of not tolerating leaks would be

so sanguine about this one, even going so far as to thank the *Tribune* and then, presumably, grant it exclusive access to hundreds of hours of wiretap evidence. Was Blagojevich's arrest—occurring, as it did, before any quid pro quo was finalized—a surgical strike intended to warn Jesse Jackson Jr. and, perhaps, Obama's top aides that they, too, were under surveillance? Coen and Chase don't even raise the possibility.

"The birds always sing after the storm," Blagojevich declared while signing autographs during his second trial, after which he was sentenced to 14 years in prison. In mobbed-up Chicago, a singing bird is a synonym for snitch, and his message seems to be that the chess game is not over, and that the definitive account of Blago's self-inflicted fall from grace has yet to be written. ♦

BCA

Dancing Siblings

Before Fred and Ginger, there was Fred and Adele.

BY AMY HENDERSON

One of the best reasons film was invented was to capture the elegance, glamour, and sheer beauty of Fred and Ginger dancing across a Bakelite stage. But the first time Fred Astaire performed in public wearing a top hat came almost 30 years before he and Ginger Rogers were teamed at RKO Pictures in *Flying Down to Rio* in 1933.

Fred's first and longest-lasting dance partner was his sister Adele, who was two-and-a-half years older than Fred and can be credited with leading him into the dancing life. As the Australian theater historian Kathleen Riley writes in this joint biography, the siblings were, despite

highly unlikely circumstances, born to dance. Their parents were Austrian immigrants who settled in Omaha, the father taking work at a brewery and the mother emerging as a model "stage mother" determined to get her children into vaudeville. Adele had been the first to be sent to dance school, and Fred, as Riley notes, "literally

followed in her footsteps."

Driven by their instructor's enthusiasm over the siblings' "gift," Mrs. Astaire moved the children to New York in 1905, when Fred was 5 and Adele was 8. One of their first appearances on the small-time vaudeville circuit was in a confection called "The Wedding Cake Act," in which Adele wore a bridal gown and, yes, Fred was costumed in white tie, top hat, and tails.

Since most of us who are Fred and

The Astaires

Fred & Adele
by Kathleen Riley
Oxford, 266 pp., \$27.95

Amy Henderson is a writer and museum curator in Washington.

Ginger fans know little about these early chapters of Fred's life, it is fascinating to learn details about how important a partner Adele was: Riley tells us that she was an exuberant gamine who delighted audiences with her sense of rollicking madcap mischief. She was the one with star quality, while Fred was the workhorse. Even in his youth, he was emerging as a perfectionist intent on getting the steps "just right." Riley explains that Fred supplied "the creative energy [and] choreographic brilliance" that was the perfect foil to Adele's radiance.

In his memoir, *Steps in Time* (1959), Fred describes how "for performers of our age, Adele and I must have been pretty good. But the appeal of our act was that we were a pair of amusing youngsters with a novelty. Maybe they thought we were cute kids." They experienced middling success, but a high point for Fred came when he was 14 and met the 15-year-old George Gershwin, then earning \$15 a week plugging other people's songs. From the beginning, the boys dreamed of collaborating, and their friendship would soon fuel the rise of a genuinely American musical theater, first on Broadway and later in Hollywood.

Fred and Adele got their Broadway break in 1917 in a revue called *Over the Top*. The show itself got mixed reviews, but the Astaires were singled out. (One critic wrote, "The girl, a light, spritelike little creature, has really an exquisite floating style in her caperings, while the young man combines eccentric agility with humor.") This success attracted the attention of the Broadway impresario Charles Dillingham, who launched them into the fame pipeline. Their appearance in *The Passing Show* (1918) was embraced by Heywood Broun, who wrote:

In an evening in which there was an abundance of good dancing, Fred Astaire stood out. He and his partner, Adele Astaire, made the show pause early in the evening with a beautiful loose-limbed dance. It seemed as if the two young dancers had been poured into the dance.

Another reviewer exulted: "Fred

Astaire . . . is a master dancer, a rattling eccentric comedian, and in his biggest scenes was assisted by a dancing girl, Adele Astaire." Riley's use of such contemporary notices adds an authentic ring to Fred and Adele's success and gives weight to her judgment that what "truly distinguished the Astaires as dancers and as a unified stage presence was sheer likeability, and an almost tangible sense of delight in what they were doing."



The Astaires, ca. 1925

While Adele still provided the zip, Fred was increasingly spotlighted for his dancing, and together they emerged as real Broadway stars. In 1922, they stole the show in a production called *For Goodness Sake*. One critic rhapsodized: "As they amble into view . . . they don't look as though they were anything more than somebody's children. But when they dance—oh, boy, and likewise girl! With ease, grace, rhythm, charm and humor, youth becomes a wonderful thing."

Their dance style was becoming more distinctive as well by the early 1920s. In *Life* magazine, Robert Benchley exclaimed that "when they dance, everything seems brighter." And although Fred was earning plaudits as the dancing star, Adele was emerging as a prototypical flapper. Riley explains

that she didn't fit any of the current showgirl or musical star molds but had a personality that resonated with the twenties' emerging roar. A Boston critic described her as "the freedom of youth and grace personified, an airy bubble of personality from her agile toes to her wildly tossing curls."

By the mid-1920s, the Astaires were appearing both on Broadway and on the London stage, notably in such Gershwin shows as *Lady, Be Good* (1924) and *Funny Face* (1927). Alexander Woollcott wrote that Fred's feet and Gershwin's music "were written in the same key." They wowed postwar London when they first appeared in 1923 in *Stop Flirting*. Their effervescence made them the toast of the town, and they were swept up in the remarkable young coterie that included Noel Coward, Gertrude Lawrence, and John Gielgud, who wrote that they "perked up the whole season." As Riley perceptively notes, they "were the sweet voice of life and hope and thus symbolically distant from both the horror of the Great War and the ennui of its aftermath." Their popularity soared:

It is difficult in our "celebrity"-sated era to appreciate what a sensation the Astaires were in London throughout the 1920s. They were photographed by Cecil Beaton and caricatured by Sava. Their social activities were written up in all the smart periodicals. . . . They were invited to contribute articles . . . under such headings as "Hoofing It to Fame by Adele Astaire" or "Shall We Tango or Jazz?" by Fred Astaire."

Their names and images endorsed toothbrushes, shampoo, cold cream, shoes, and Waterman pens. Royalty endorsed them as well, and Fred and Adele soon made appearances at St. James's Palace to show off such popular steps as the Charleston to the Prince of Wales and Louis and Edwina Mountbatten. Adele was captivated by George Bernard Shaw, whose voice she thought "could melt ice." (Ultimately, her heart was captured by Lord Charles Cavendish, whom she would marry in 1932.)

Fred and Adele's last appearance together was in *The Band Wagon* (1931), which triumphed both on Broadway and in London. In his memoir, Fred

seems to write diffidently of Adele's departure: "She retired from theatrical life on the evening of 5 March 1932, at the Illinois Theatre, Chicago. It was not a sad affair." When he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Film Institute in 1981, he was more forthcoming: "My sister Adele was mostly responsible for my being in show business. . . . In all the vaudeville acts we had and the musical comedies we did together, Delly was the one that was the shining light and I was just there pushing away."

Happily, Fred Astaire heard Hollywood's siren call after Adele retired—although he was not smitten by RKO's plans to make him part of another team. David O. Selznick, head of production, was a great fan and had lobbied for Fred to be cast, but his screen test was not a crashing success (although Riley says the legendary critique, "Can't act. Slightly bald. Also dances," is probably apocryphal). But when RKO teamed him with Ginger Rogers, Astaire wrote his agent Leland Hayward in capital letters on February 9, 1934: "WHAT'S ALL THIS TALK ABOUT ME BEING TEAMED WITH GINGER ROGERS? I WILL NOT HAVE IT LELAND—I DID NOT GO INTO PICTURES TO BE TEAMED WITH HER OR ANYONE ELSE."

What if Leland Hayward had listened to Fred Astaire?

The bigger what-if posed at the beginning of this delightful volume is: What if Fred Astaire had been an only child? What a profoundly less interesting world it would have been, as Riley explains that "the shows written for the Astaires' singular talents changed the very shape of the American musical."

The Astaires' story can be chronicled in photographs, reviews, and a few recordings, notably from *Funny Face* in the late 1920s. But there is no footage of them performing together except for a few tantalizing seconds from the end of a 1930 short entitled *Backstage on Broadway*. Now, by illuminating the formative decades of Fred's life, Kathleen Riley gives us a sense of how, before Ginger and Hollywood, Adele helped create the icon known as Fred Astaire. ♦

BCA

Suite Charity

Where the Bright Young Things escaped from World War II. BY EDWARD SHORT

Now, wherever we turn, the cry has become incessant: *The rich are not doing enough.*

Many, no doubt, find this puzzling: There are, after all, many of us who are friendly with the rich. Indeed, we might be rich ourselves. Still, whether it is we or our friends who have the resplendent homes, flunkies, trust funds, glorious old cars, massive private libraries, cellars pullulating with the best vintages imaginable, closets bursting with bespoke glad rags, and (not incidentally) thriving businesses, the fact remains that the rich seem to be going about their exorbitant lives as usual.

What are they not doing that they ought to be doing? My advice to anyone wrestling with this vexing question would be to go out and get a copy of this volume, which takes up the tale of how London's grand hotels—the Ritz, the Savoy, the Dorchester, Claridge's, the Berkeley—and their flush clientele fared during World War II. Afterwards, the perplexed will see that, compared with the rich of yesteryear, our own rich are clearly *not* doing enough. They are not being frivolous enough, reckless enough, or extravagant enough.

Examples abound here, although one will suffice. Apropos César Ritz, one of the founders of the famous hotel whose name is synonymous with the sort of luxury that the world does not seem to be able to buy anymore, the author remarks:

A certain kind of behavior went with that word. You could have observed it on the June night in 1905 when the American financier George Kessler

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The West End Front
The Wartime Secrets of London's Grand Hotels
by Matthew Sweet
Faber & Faber, 362 pp., \$10.49

arranged to flood the courtyard of the Savoy, fill it with swans, surround it with twelve thousand fresh carnations, four thousand lamps and a canvas simulacrum of Venice—and dine with his guests on a large silk-lined gondola moored at its centre. (The blue dye in the water killed the swans, but there was compensation in the form of a performance by Caruso, a phalanx of Gaiety Girls bearing bottles of Moët & Chandon and the appearance of a baby elephant with a five-foot birthday cake strapped on its back.)

Now that is partying worthy of a plutocracy. And if we compare it with what our own rich get up to when they celebrate, we can see how those whom President Obama and his man David Axelrod call the "1 percent" utterly fall down. They have let once unassailable standards lapse.

Nevertheless, *The West End Front* is not just interested in helping readers see how negligent the rich have become in the arduous business of being rich. Author Matthew Sweet deplores how Prime Minister Winston Churchill and the Home Office rounded up and detained many hapless Italians and Germans in the hotel trade, suspected as they were, often quite groundlessly, of being spies and saboteurs—though many might concur with Churchill's better-safe-than-sorry policy, despite its ruthlessness.

In another chapter, the author relates how Brian Howard, the prototype of Evelyn Waugh's Ambrose Silk

and Anthony Blanche, an aging Bright Young Thing and *habitué* of the homosexual “Lower Bar” beneath the Ritz Hotel, was recruited into MI5, presumably because of his easy access to the wealthy traitors who were such staples of London’s grand hotels. Besides this access, though, there was not much to recommend him. As Sweet puts it, “By 1940 he had squandered everything but his money and his talent to offend.” After talking too freely in his cups he was eventually thrown out of MI5—no easy feat in such a forgiving institution.

Sweet also describes how rife the Dorchester was with anti-Semitic toffs (including Cyril Connolly’s chum Lady Cunard) who were convinced that Hitler and his army would rid England of its Jewish problem just as efficiently as they were ridding Germany of its own. Of course, this is not a new story, but Sweet tells it well.

If you had settled yourself in the lobby on a night in 1940, you might have spotted Margaret Greville—the red-haired illegitimate daughter of a millionaire Scottish brewer, unrestrained in her enthusiasm for Hitler or anyone else who took a dim view of Jews—trundling across the marble in her wheelchair. Conversely, you might equally have encountered Chaim Weizmann, the president of the British Zionist Federation, who turned Suite 210 into a Yeshiva where his supporters discussed how to persuade the National Government to establish an official Jewish Fighting Force in Palestine. Jew baiters and Zionist radicals—these people would have encountered each other in the public spaces of the hotel on a daily basis.

Then there is a chapter on Phil Piratin, a zealot Communist who led an embassy of bombed-out East Enders to the lobby of the Savoy, where he made a simple but compelling speech:

“These men, women, and children, many of them homeless, have come from Stepney to seek shelter—the newspapers have widely advertised the comfortable shelter facilities that exist in the West End hotels.”

The Savoy manager heard Piratin out, took his point, and admitted him and his associates to the hotel’s well-appointed basement shelter, where, after wrangling with the waiters, they were served tea (in silver pots) with bread and butter. One week later, the War Office

England,” and this would have been followed by the country’s banknotes featuring “a rosy image of that night beneath the Savoy” with “East End children in scuffed shoes and utility knitwear; Brylcreemed waiters abandoning the rules of the house”—and Piratin and his fellows “negotiating tea and bread and butter for all.” Which gives away the extent of the author’s left-wing sympathies.

Nonetheless, there is an excellent chapter on how displaced European royals found homes-away-from-home in many of these grand hotels, especially Claridge’s in Brook Street, which became known as the “royal hostelry.” (In 1942, the dapper film star Douglas Fairbanks Jr. was at a reception there and, needing a refill, called out for “his old lifesaver of a headwaiter, King”—only to find that he had summoned King George of Greece.) After fleeing embattled or confiscated homes, not all royals had time to make their way to



Frances Day celebrates New Year’s 1942 with an RAF officer at the Ritz.

transformed the Aldwych tube station near the Savoy into a public shelter, boarding over the tracks and installing toilets. As Sweet puts it, “Three hundred and twenty yards of Piccadilly Line tunnel were transformed into a refuge for 2,500 people.” The Stepney Communists had made their point, and soon many underground tunnels were opened for shelter.

That Phil Piratin won a parliamentary constituency for the Communists in the 1945 election leads Sweet to wonder what might have happened if “Britain’s shift to the left had gone further than Attlee and Morrison and the National Health”—not a scenario that most people in postwar England, least of all Evelyn Waugh, would have found attractive. For Sweet, Piratin’s victory could have constituted “the first step on the road to Soviet

London. When the Romanians threw in their lot with Hitler and the Axis, their king did all he could to save the family arms, among other prized possessions.

Carol II of Romania and his mistress, Magda Lupescu, fled Bucharest in September 1940, escaping with nothing but five railway carriages packed with Titians, Rembrandts, and Rubenses, the armorial contents of the palaces of Pelisor and Peles, the world’s most valuable stamp collection, and six of their favorite dogs. Romania’s indigenous Fascisti, the Iron Guard, sprayed the royal carriages with bullets, but Carol and Magda took cover in the bathtub, fled south via Spain to the Copacabana Palace Hotel in Rio de Janeiro, and spent the rest of their lives drinking tequila and ignoring the contempt of the nation they had abandoned. ♦

SSPL / GETTY IMAGES

Pay Per Venue

A new attraction for the movie palaces of old.

BY ELI LEHRER

As multiscreen stadium-seating theaters with huge parking lots, endless rows of seats, anonymous lobbies, \$12 popcorn, and annoying pre-movie ads have sprouted throughout the country, the act of going to the movies has become homogenized. In an objective sense, the sound, picture, concessions stands, and selection of films are better than they were in the “sticky-floor sixes” buried in most 1970s shopping malls, or even in the movie palaces of the 1920s. But the experience, the vibe, and the entertainment onscreen are all the same, whether one is in Manhattan or Boise.

But that’s all changing. And one company has, largely by accident, produced the quirkiest and most potentially disruptive forces to strike moviegoing in a long time: the ability to bring real “events” to movie theaters.

The company is called Fathom Events, and it produces multimedia versions of performing arts, concerts, and sporting events, bringing them to cinema settings. Fathom is a division of NCM Media Networks, the company founded by the major theater chains that’s responsible for the overwhelming majority of ubiquitous pre-movie advertising. Fathom’s technology, a modified and improved version of the hardware used to deliver advertising to theaters, has now made its way onto about 1,500 of the nation’s 39,000 movie screens, although a typical event would appear on only a third of them. With Fathom’s service, NCM has figured out a way to extract more revenue from parts of this existing advertising network by provid-

ing events that draw people into theaters during weekdays, afternoons, and other off-peak hours. Ticket prices are higher than those for movies, but lower than those for performing arts and sporting events.

Fathom’s programming covers a wide range of tastes. Its mainstay—advertised heavily in the lobbies of theaters in the wealthier parts of metropolitan areas like Washington, Chicago,



Anna Netrebko, Mariusz Kwiecien in The Met’s Live in HD presentation of ‘L’Elisir d’Amore’

and Boston—is higher-brow-than-thou Metropolitan Opera performances. But it also ventures into the middlebrow (Andrew Lloyd Webber musicals and *Prairie Home Companion* special events), lowbrow (Ultimate Fighting), and plain old geeky (*Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes and a satirical showing of the notoriously bad movie *Manos: The Hands of Fate*). Fathom appeals to niche groups, and a majority of its events are one-time-only. Outside of its own webpage, the company itself is virtually invisible: Only people with the most diverse cultural tastes would possibly be interested in more than a fraction of what streams across its network.

Nonetheless, the technology generally works well. Live broadcasts from

the Met, where Fathom has a lot of experience, truly hold your attention on the big screen thanks to creative camera angles and excellent you-are-there sound quality. The relatively simple blocking and lush costumes also help operas, in particular, to come alive in a movie theater. There are dozens of Internet message-board discussions devoted to every Fathom opera production; one got more than a thousand posts within 24 hours of the performance.

To be sure, not everything the company tries works this well. A production last year of Stephen Sondheim’s *Company*, starring Neil Patrick Harris, used too many static long shots and left parts of the audience snoozing. On the other hand, a carefully recorded version of an Australian production of Andrew Lloyd Webber’s *Love Never Dies* worked much better, perhaps because of its gaudy pyrotechnics and lavish production values. Plain old classic movies and television episodes aren’t always successful, either, because the digital technology Fathom uses tends to degrade image quality or reveal difficult-to-see flaws in master prints. Fathom’s experiments with 3-D sporting events, such as Wimbledon, can induce dizziness, although more static boxing works better. Additionally, Fathom head Shelly Maxwell reports that events targeted towards children and their stay-at-home parents haven’t worked out for the company.

Overall, though, the technology, and Fathom itself, have to be considered a huge cultural gift: Bringing world-class opera to midsized cities on big screens works much better than showing it on TV, where it gets lost, even in high definition. Likewise, productions such as *Love Never Dies*—which arouse interest, but never actually get shown on stage in the United States—offer new cultural experiences to just about everyone. And while they aren’t high art, *Star Trek* episodes and so-bad-they’re-good movies certainly have their fans who couldn’t (or wouldn’t) be able to get together to watch them anywhere else.

But the real difference is that Fathom’s shows provide true diversity to the

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moviegoing experience. Older couples in the less-populated parts of North Carolina actually dress to the nines to attend opera performances at the movie theater, and people too young to remember *Star Trek: The Next Generation* on television wear surprisingly professional Starfleet uniforms to the showings.

But the sheer quirkiness of the enterprise may not last forever. NCM executive Dan Diamond confidently predicts that technology such as Fathom's will

soon supplant the hard drives and film spools that studios now ship to theaters. It is possible that, in time, Fathom's network will be given over entirely to standard mass-market fare, and its decision to bring oddball entertainment to all corners of the country will be forgotten.

At least for now, however, a division of a big company best known for annoying moviegoers has brought variety to America's increasingly homogenous moviegoing experience. ♦

in Iran? Or as agricultural specialists when there is snow on the ground? There seems to be no workable plan until Mendez catches a glimpse of a *Planet of the Apes* movie on television and is seized with an idea: What if the six pose as location scouts for a Canadian science-fiction film?

He enlists the help of an Oscar-winning makeup artist named John Chambers (John Goodman), who has aided the CIA in the past. Chambers, in turn, recruits a veteran producer named Lester Siegel (Alan Arkin, who is a complete joy playing the only wholly invented character in the movie), and they set up a phony production company, rent office space, buy a lousy script, and have a public reading of it covered by *Variety*.

Then it's time to put the plan into play.

This being a movie, Affleck (as director) and screenwriter Chris Terrio simplify the tale in many ways and kick up the melodrama in others, at least if the tale told in the 2007 *Wired* article from which the movie springs is accurate. For example, the Hollywood stuff we see, zippy and hilarious though it is, is actually less colorful than the reality: The fake production generated real excitement, and the phone at the phony production office rang off the hook for months with eager jobseekers hoping to get in on the nonexistent movie.

And the story of the extraction makes the six Americans in Tehran seem far more passive than they were in actuality, in part to boost the heroics of Affleck's character. The six didn't just escape the embassy, but took heroic countermeasures to elude detection—and were the ones who told the State Department that they had to be removed lest their presence become a danger to their Canadian hosts and the American hostages.

Meanwhile, Terrio's wisecracking and whip-smart screenplay (his first) features a portrait of Carter administration shenanigans that, while it certainly gladdens the heart of this old Reagan speechwriter, seems to have overstated the degree of conflict over the mission.

BCA

Escape from Tehran

A good movie might have been great without the polemics. BY JOHN PODHORETZ

The new Ben Affleck film—an efficiently told piece about a crazily brilliant CIA operation to get six Americans out of Iran during the hostage crisis more than three decades ago—could almost have

been a docudrama made for network television in the early 1980s, except that the rescue mission it depicts was classified and remained a secret until 1997. Which is to say, *Argo* is kind of a little movie that could easily fit on an old 19-inch color television. And in a different age, it might have worked better on television. But there's something wonderful about the fact that it's right up there on the big screen at a time when an adult looking for something to hold his attention at the movie theater is almost certain to come away disappointed.

Not this time.

The movie *Argo* most closely resembles is *Raid on Entebbe*, the understated behind-the-scenes story of the daring Israeli rescue of the airline passengers who were hijacked

and taken to Idi Amin's Uganda in 1976. *Raid on Entebbe* aired on NBC in 1977, and it remains the best fact-based television film ever made. Its verisimilitude and painstaking eye for detail contribute to the overwhelming

force of *Raid on Entebbe*'s final half-hour: You know as you're watching it that the mission was a success, but your heart is lodged in your throat and the passengers' final

escape results in a shocking flood of grateful tears.

Much the same thing happens when you watch *Argo*, which tells a true story even more unlikely than the one in *Raid on Entebbe*. When, in November 1979, six of the employees from the American embassy in Tehran manage to escape as it is being overrun by the radicals who would take 52 remaining Americans hostage for 444 days, they find refuge at the residence of Canadian ambassador Ken Taylor. They have to be extracted before the Iranians figure it out, and the task falls to Tony Mendez (Ben Affleck), a clandestine CIA officer who specializes in "exfils" (short for "exfiltration").

Might they pose as teachers when there are no more Canadian teachers



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Ben Affleck as Tony Mendez

Even with these elisions and simplifications, *Argo* is never less than thrillingly realized. The movie's painstaking art direction and design get the look and feel of 1970s Washington exactly right, just as they get the awful facial hair and ugly cars to a T—even before *Argo* moves on to its skin-crawling depiction of the waking nightmare that was Tehran after the fall of the shah. (In a great closing end-title sequence, perhaps the best I've ever seen, production designer Sharon Seymour and art directors Peter Borck and Deniz Gökürk take deserved bows when the movie shows actual documentary footage and matches it to the movie's meticulous re-creations.) There's even a terrific bit in which a veteran CIA operative figures out a way to trick the White House operator into getting him on the phone with Carter's chief of staff Hamilton Jordan (played eerily well, for those who remember Jordan, by Kyle Chandler of *Friday Night Lights*).

Credit for the movie's look and feel and approach must go to Affleck, who is fast proving himself to be his generation's successor to Clint Eastwood—

a director whose work behind the camera may prove far more distinctive and memorable than his standing as a movie star. His performance here is nothing special, but this is an Oscar-worthy directorial achievement. *Argo* is his third attempt at directing, after *Gone Baby Gone* and *The Town*, and with the exception of some drippy domestic stuff designed, unnecessarily, to humanize his character, he does not take a false step.

Yet there's still something not-major about *Argo*, something that doesn't quite resonate as much as it might. This is a story about the good guys winning, a story about Islamist monsters being denied the blood they wished to spill—a nationalist story with a unique twist, because the American triumph it depicts had to be kept secret to give credit to the Canadians and to ensure the safety of the Americans still held in Iran.

But Affleck, a devotee of the leftist American counterhistory proffered by the egregious Howard Zinn, decided to frame the events in Iran, in an opening montage, as the deserved result of American imperialist malfeasance

dating back to the removal of the nationalist prime minister Mohammad Mossadegh from power in 1953. The movie treads lightly on this point afterward, and it certainly offers no exculpatory message about the Ayatollah Khomeini or his berserk followers. But this self-abnegating perspective does seem to play a role in keeping this superb movie limited to a minor key when it could have exploded into a glorious major.

There is no moment here that matches the impact of the sequence in *Raid on Entebbe* when the Israeli commando team quietly begins to sing the Hebrew song "Hinei Ma Tov" as they begin their rescue mission. The movie does not offer a translation—the lyrics are "how good, how pleasing it would be if we all could live like brothers"—but the sense of community among the team, and with those they will be attempting to save, is conveyed nonetheless.

Affleck doesn't want to wave the flag, and in failing to do so, he loses the emotional wallop that could have made *Argo* a movie for the ages rather than the best fall release of 2012. ♦

“President Barack Obama, who hasn’t done a full White House press conference since March, is taking questions from the celebrity magazine Us Weekly.”
—Politico, October 16, 2012

faces & places

The President—
He’s Just Like Us!

He plays golf!
A lot!

“Fore” more years!
Obama fights for women’s rights by playing a round of golf at newly coed Augusta National.



He hangs out with Justin Bieber!

“Romney’s out of touch,” Obama told Bieber in the limo on the way to Madonna’s house after the show.

Reset? Whatever you say, Vlad!



He defers to Putin!

NEWS.COM

He delegates responsibility for the security of our diplomatic personnel!



After cursory remarks about a movie, Obama heads to Las Vegas for a star-studded celebrity fundraiser.