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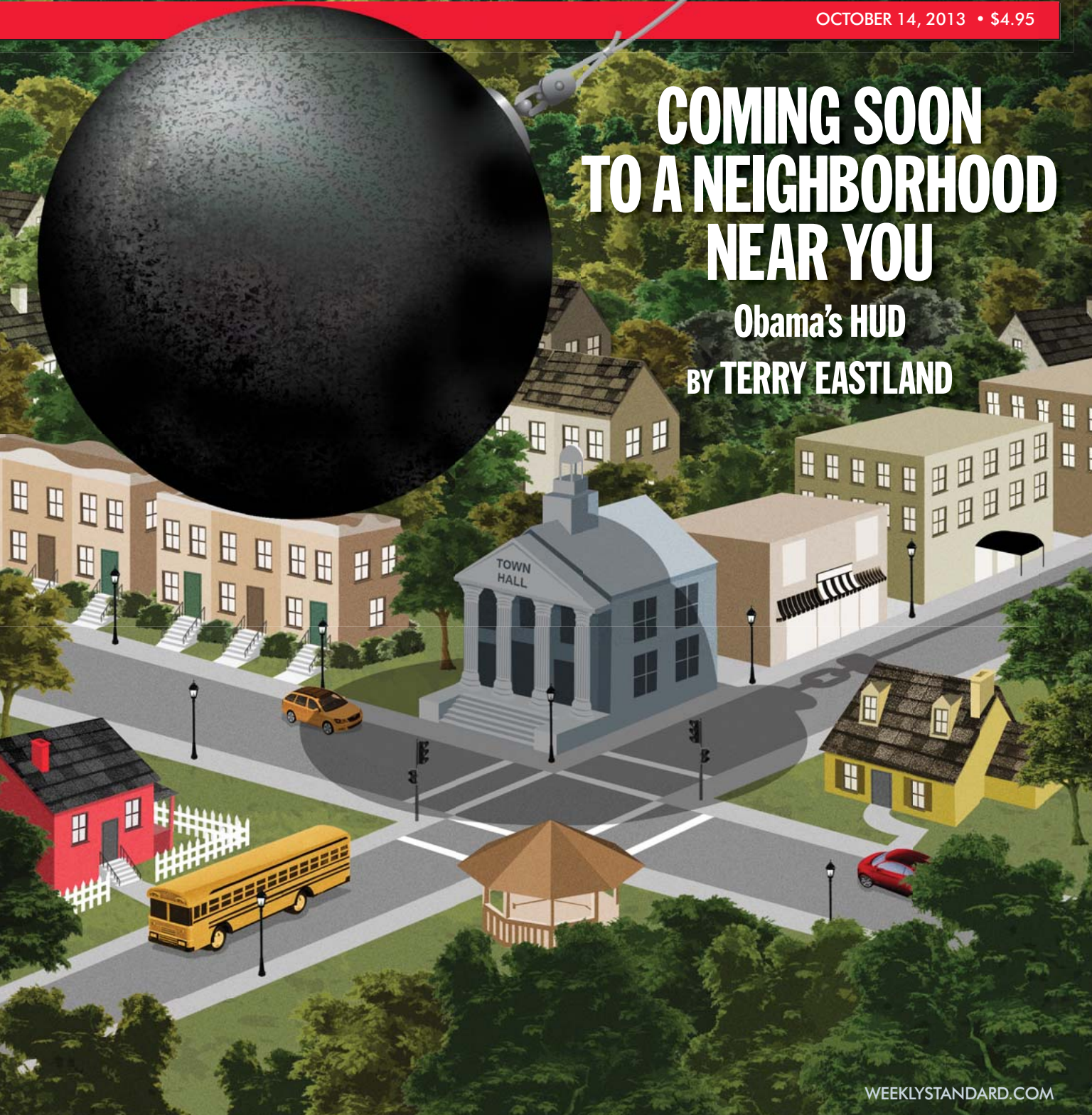
the weekly

# Standard

OCTOBER 14, 2013 • \$4.95

**COMING SOON  
TO A NEIGHBORHOOD  
NEAR YOU**

**Obama's HUD  
BY TERRY EASTLAND**



# Contents

October 14, 2013 • Volume 19, Number 6



LANDOV

2

2 The Scrapbook *The battle for the war memorial, in iPads we trust, & more*

5 Casual *Ethan Epstein, cold caller*

7 Editorials  
*Standing Alone* BY WILLIAM KRISTOL & MICHAEL MAKOVSKY  
*Duties of the President* BY GARY SCHMITT

## Articles

9 Pay No Attention to the Bad Data *Behind the curtain at the IPCC* BY STEVEN F. HAYWARD

10 Boehner in Charge *How the House speaker rallied his restive troops* BY FRED BARNES

13 Not So Nice for the GOP *Declining Republican fortunes in Minnesota* BY BARRY CASSELMAN

15 Is Cory Booker Overrated? *Yes* BY SCOTT BEYER

16 Europe Leads the Way? *In reducing the role of government in the economy, the U.S. is a laggard* BY IKE BRANNON

17 The Decline of the Military He Loved *Tom Clancy, 1947-2013* BY MAX BOOT

## Feature

22 HUD's Power Grab *The Obama administration plots a wholesale federal intrusion into local housing policy* BY TERRY EASTLAND

## Books & Arts

26 Master of the Games *The shrewd eye, and elegant prose, of Red Smith* BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

30 Leader Dearest *How the Kim dynasty preserves its power* BY GORDON G. CHANG

32 Vein of Irony *The world as the poet sees it, through a glass lightly* BY JULIANNE DUDLEY

33 The Money Men *How immigrants invented an American economy* BY KEVIN R. KOSAR

35 Jersey? Sure . . . *A California vision of love in the Garden State* BY JOHN PODHORETZ

36 Parody *Fun gets furloughed for the president*



9



30

# The Battle for the War Memorial

All politics is local, the late Tip O’Neill is alleged to have said. THE SCRAPBOOK isn’t quite sure if that’s true. But it has certainly been true during the “shutdown” of the federal government, in which President Obama has used metropolitan Washington, D.C., as a stage on which to dramatize his talking points.

To begin with, the administration has been, shall we say, remarkably selective about what gets shut down, and why. Before the Internet, for example, the interruption of postal service would have grabbed the nation’s attention; but not so much nowadays, which probably explains why the mail was delivered while other functions ceased. And of course, the White House knew that the television networks would need good visuals to accompany their stories, especially since the stories were largely told from the White House point of view. So there were images of rangers closing the gates at Yosemite, and epidemiologists on furlough at the Centers for Disease Control. The Smithsonian Institution, which boasts a colossal endowment and largely subsists on private contributions and commercial marketing, ostentatiously closed its doors.

Most egregious, however, was the National Park Service. THE SCRAPBOOK has noted with dismay, in years past, the extent to which the Park Service has evolved from a minor agency administering parks and

presidential homesteads into a virtual government-within-a-government. It is the Park Service which decides when, how, and—most important—if you can visit those properties that theoretically belong to the American people. Indeed, in downtown Washington, motorists can be stopped and ticketed by Park Service police.

Moreover, the Park Service is corruptible. When Bill and Hillary Clinton wanted to make sure that the official investigation into the 1993

Park Service official said that, since the National Mall itself is federal property, it is officially “closed” as well, and that trespassers—that is to say, citizens and visitors strolling along the Mall—might be subject to arrest.

Most dramatic was the spectacle at the World War II Memorial. The memorial is, of course, federal property on the Mall, and Park Service rangers can occasionally be seen strolling in the vicinity. But it is also a sizable, open structure, deliberately accessible to pedestrians, who ordinarily may traverse the premises day or night.

On the first day of the shutdown, a group of visiting World War II veterans from Mississippi—some in wheelchairs—were met with barricades and glowering rangers. With the assistance of a handful of sympathetic congressmen, the veterans breached the barricade. “Normandy was closed when we got there, too,” read one popular sign. But that merely prompted the Park Service to employ more federal workers to erect bigger barricades, and union groups friendly to the Obama White House to pay for anti-GOP protesters to picket at the memorial and disrupt the visits by veterans.

The “shutdown” federal government remained open for the business of politics, and as visiting veterans discovered on the Mall, nothing trumps politics in Barack Obama’s Washington. ♦



*Reps. Michele Bachmann and Bill Huizenga help an Honor Flight volunteer remove barriers at the World War II Memorial, October 2.*

suicide of White House aide Vincent Foster went smoothly, they handed the task to forensic investigators at, yes, the National Park Service. Now the Park Service is doing the bidding of the Obama White House, and in its customarily heavy-handed fashion: Monument grounds in Washington—the Jefferson Memorial and the new Martin Luther King site, among others—have been closed and barricaded. So have pocket parking lots along the George Washington Parkway. One

## Honor Flights

While it was inevitable that a government shutdown would involve vindictive theatrics

designed to make life irksome for ordinary Americans, the directive from the White House’s Office of Management and Budget to close off the World War II Memorial on

the National Mall was remarkable in that it was designed to punish some of our most extraordinary citizens. Since 2005, the organization Honor Flight has had as its mission

UPI/LANDOV

to get as many World War II veterans as possible to Washington, D.C., to visit their memorial, at no cost to them. These trips naturally require a good deal of advance planning. So the Obama administration's efforts to blockade the memorial place in jeopardy the only opportunity some of these men will ever have to see the memorial.

It is to America's considerable shame that a national World War II memorial wasn't finished and dedicated until 2004. Since then, Honor Flight has been in a race against time. The 18-year-olds who stormed the beaches at Normandy turned 87 this year. The Department of Veterans Affairs estimates that some 640 World War II veterans die every day.

While we hope the cause of Honor Flight is near and dear to all Americans, it takes on special resonance here in the offices of *THE WEEKLY STANDARD*. Dan Hayes, the younger brother of our colleague Stephen F. Hayes, is a talented young filmmaker whose crowning achievement thus far has been to direct a remarkable documentary, *Honor Flight*, that tells the story of the brave World War II vets and their moving experiences as a result of their trips to the memorial. The film is well worth seeking out, available for just \$3.99 as a digital rental on Amazon.com.

As Will Rogers once said, "We can't all be heroes. Some of us have to stand on the curb and clap as they go by." Maybe you'll be seated on your couch instead of standing on the curb, but *THE SCRAPBOOK* guarantees that viewing *Honor Flight* will move you to applause. Further, the Honor Flight organization is always in need of volunteers and financial assistance. So visit [HonorFlight.org](http://HonorFlight.org) to see what you can do for the men who did so much for us. ♦

## In iPads We Trust

It was almost sad last June when the Los Angeles Unified School District announced its intention to buy an iPad for every one of its more



THE WWII MEMORIAL IS CLOSED DURING THE SHUTDOWN. A TEMPORARY MEMORIAL HAS BEEN SUBSTITUTED.

than 600,000 students in a deal valued in the hundreds of millions of dollars. The scheme carried more than a whiff of desperation—education bureaucrats overseeing a school district where fewer than half of enrolled students can read or do math at grade level evidently thinking (hoping? praying?) that a technological *deus ex machina* would save the day.

It's unlikely to. For one, the problems facing schools go much deeper—and are different in character—than a supposed dearth of touch-screen technology. Moreover, if there's one thing that kids today don't need to learn in school, it's how to use computers and tablets. Today's youth are so-called digital natives—they grow up surrounded

by technology, and learn to use computers, smartphones, and tablets almost through natural acquisition, as they do, say, their native language. Indeed, there's little doubt that most Los Angeles students are more adept at using iPads than their teachers.

And it's not as if there's a precedent for such a move working. For instance, in South Korea, a perennial high-achiever in international comparisons whose stellar education system Americans have been exhorted to emulate, schools still rely on good old-fashioned chalkboards and textbooks (and corporal punishment, but that's a discussion for another day). And it's not as if L.A. got a great deal on its digital playground equipment either; the school district announced that

it would spend \$678 for each device, which is more than basic iPads sell for in retail stores.

The results have been predictable. So far, iPads have been distributed at 47 L.A. schools. They were installed with various pieces of education software, and also tools to block popular social networking and gaming sites. Nonetheless, “less than a week after getting their iPads, almost 200 . . . high school students found a way to bypass software blocks on the devices that limit what websites the students can use,” reported NPR last week. (Ironically, that could actually be an encouraging sign of students’ smarts and savvy.) Already the school district has taken to confiscating thousands of iPads that have been hacked.

But the district is forging ahead with the plan. Last week, L.A. school superintendent John Deasy defended the iPad program, saying, “This is a civil rights issue.” We’re sure Apple Inc. couldn’t agree more. The program is certainly a hefty transfer of wealth from the taxpayers of the city

of Los Angeles (median household income: \$46,000) to the coffers of Apple (market capitalization: \$440 billion). ♦

## Sentences We Didn’t Finish

“What is at stake in this government shutdown forced by a radical Tea Party minority is nothing less than the principle upon which our democracy is based: majority rule. President Obama must not give in to this hostage taking . . .” (Thomas L. Friedman, *New York Times*, Oct. 1). ♦

## More Sentences We Didn’t Finish

“I’ve watched politicians for decades and have seen any number of backstabblings, scandals, vituperations, and Machiavellian machinations. But I can’t think of the last time a major political party undertook a serious campaign to damage the American economy . . .” (Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times*, Oct. 2). ♦

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## The Other End of the Line

A purportedly funny photo ricocheting around the Internet popped into my inbox last week, apparently courtesy of the right-wing blog *RedState*. The Photoshopped image is a play on the famous Dos Equis beer campaign built around the bearded, debonair “Most Interesting Man in the World,” who says, “I don’t always drink beer, but when I do, I prefer Dos Equis.” The “joke” version features a picture of said interesting man, only this time he says, “I don’t always talk to Obama voters, but when I do, I ask for large fries.”

This bothered me for a couple of reasons. For one, it equates Obama voters with fast-food workers, whereas professors, investment bankers, Hollywood grandees, and Silicon Valley cool guys are also Democrats. For another, conservatives are supposed to believe in the inherent dignity of work, no matter how humble. Why act as if there’s something embarrassing about food service work? That’s mean-spirited, elitist, and just plain wrong.

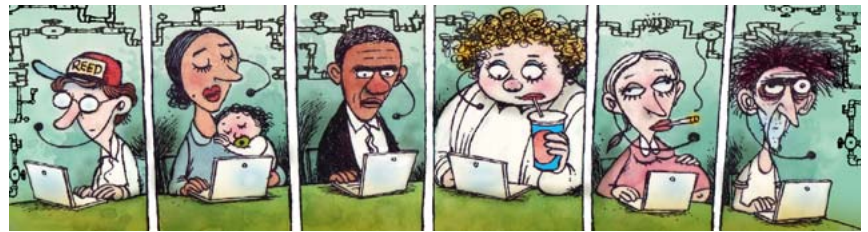
And besides, if you’re going to single out an occupation for scorn, food service isn’t the clear choice; telemarketing is.

I should know. For a couple of years while I was in college, I worked 20 hours a week making cold sales calls on behalf of a major arts institution, pitching annual subscriptions. The sales campaign was outsourced, of course, meaning that my paychecks bore the deliciously trashy insignia of SD&A Teleservices. (That’s one of the nation’s foremost telemarketing companies, which is something akin to being the most toxic drug on the streets or the most polluting major industry.)

Our offices, which resembled a boiler room more than a little, were located in the same stately downtown building as our overlord orga-

nization, but our call room was at the end of a lonely hall, far, far away from the other administrative offices. It was a windowless, airless, soulless space. And our shifts started at 5:00 P.M., just as the real employees were going home. “You are not allowed to talk to any of the actual employees here,” our boss often exhorted, with the utmost seriousness.

Many of my coworkers were people who are described in the economics literature as “marginally attached to the labor force.” Their life-stories could provide enough material for Charles Murray’s next opus. There was



a pregnant 16-year-old who smoked and hadn’t told her ex-boyfriend that he was the father; a middle-aged man who hobbled in every day smelling like he had held up the local liquor store; and a recovering heroin addict who worked there dutifully . . . until he stopped recovering. On a lazy summer afternoon, a friend and I found through some research on the Internet that fully half of my coworkers were under “community supervision.” For you upstanding members of society, that means on probation.

The work was demanding. We were expected to bring in \$50 of revenue per hour. With the cheapest subscription coming in at about \$200, this meant we had to make one sale per four-hour shift. That may not sound like much, but it’s a challenge in a world of caller ID and the general presumption that telemarketers are scum. The people we called often cussed us out.

On the wall of our office was the

infamous “board.” The board—which was a white board, tacked next to brightly colored sheets of paper bearing words like PHENOMENAL and UNPRECEDENTED (words we were supposed to use in our pitches)—had all of our names written on it. When you made a sale, you went up and wrote the dollar amount next to your name, and tried to ignore the murderous glances from your coworkers. If you failed to make the sales goal for more than a few consecutive days, you were, as our boss elegantly put it, “terminated.”

Despite all this, some of my coworkers managed to take pride in their work. There was a gray-haired fellow who had worked some 16 years in nonprofit cold calling who told me without irony that he “work[ed] in

the arts and entertainment business.” There was a plainly uneducated but friendly middle-aged woman who told me how much she appreciated it when I suggested she might pronounce the composer Wagner’s name as if it began with a “V” and make the “a” sound like the one in “wan,” not the one in “wag.” Our boss, for all his bluster, was a kind-hearted, boisterous black man from Alabama who had once been homeless. He credited SD&A Teleservices with giving him the chance and the tools that he needed to succeed in life.

Telemarketing may be a scourge; the phone may ring at dinnertime. But the people who do the work deserve respect. I dare say they work harder than some comfortable pundit sitting in his basement churning out “funny” images on his computer. I don’t always talk to telemarketers, but when I do, I do my best to be polite.

ETHAN EPSTEIN

# Standing Alone

In the midst of media coverage of the government shutdown (it's the Republicans' fault!) and the glitch-filled rollout of Obamacare (it's not Obama's fault!), Americans may not have noticed the October 1 speech by Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the United Nations General Assembly. But Netanyahu's declaration that Israel was prepared to act alone to prevent the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons may well prove of more lasting significance than the developments in Washington that overshadowed it.

Netanyahu tried to puncture the wishful thinking that has made the Obama administration so eager to succumb to the charm offensive of Hassan Rouhani, the new Iranian president. Netanyahu pointed out that Rouhani has done nothing, and almost certainly will do nothing, that warrants trusting that the Iranian regime will yield in its pursuit of nuclear weapons (a pursuit Rouhani still denies in the face of mountains of incontrovertible evidence). Netanyahu warned against a relaxation of pressure on that regime and against being dragged into endless negotiations or, even worse, a bad deal with it.

As Netanyahu said, Rouhani "definitely wants to get the sanctions lifted; I guarantee you that. But he doesn't want to give up Iran's nuclear weapons program in return." Netanyahu laid out the terms for an acceptable agreement: "The only diplomatic solution that would work is the one that fully dismantles Iran's nuclear weapons program and prevents it from having one in the future." And he explained the dangers of a "partial deal" that would permit Iran "a residual capability to enrich uranium" in exchange for lifting international sanctions that took years to put in place and likely wouldn't be reestablished. But this is, unfortunately, the kind of deal toward which the Obama administration is heading—that, or endless negotiations while the Iranian nuclear program moves toward a successful conclusion.

The most dramatic part of his speech was Netanyahu's declaration: "I want there to be no confusion on this point. Israel will not allow Iran to get nuclear weapons. If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone." Netanyahu, who has a photo of Winston Churchill on his office wall behind his desk, was echoing Churchill's remark on July 14, 1940, during the Battle of Britain: "And now it has come to us to stand alone in the breach."

Will Israel in fact be forced to stand alone? Many informed Israelis, including those who are by no means supporters of Netanyahu or on the right side of the political spectrum, are now convinced he will have to, after wit-

nessing last month's appalling spectacle of President Obama squirming out of his pledge to retaliate against the regime of Syrian president Bashar al-Assad if Assad crossed a "red line" by using chemical weapons. We were each in Israel recently, and it's clear that the confidence of some current and former senior security officials that Obama would strike Iran has evaporated. We've also spoken with Arab government officials, and none believes any longer in the credibility of a U.S. military threat. In fact, it's hard to find any serious person in allied capitals—or in enemy capitals—who takes Obama at his word when he talks about keeping "all options on the table" to prevent a nuclear Iran. Everyone assumes that President Obama will find any excuse the Iranians give him to leave the military option right there, on the table—and that if the Iranian regime doesn't give him a plausible excuse, President Obama will find one anyway.

No one likes the truth-telling skunk at the appeasement party. The *New York Times* clucked editorially that Netanyahu was "sabotaging diplomacy" before "Iran is tested" by angering the Iranians, making the use of force more likely—which "would be the worst result of all." But he knows that an Iran with nuclear weapons is the worst result of all—that bombing Iran is better than Iran with a bomb. He sees that behind the Obama administration's façade of hard-headed diplomacy is a soft-headed, even desperate, desire for some sort of deal, any deal, and that such a deal will be rationalized by foreign policy elites who know it's a bad deal but who have talked themselves into accepting the case for containment rather than prevention of a nuclear Iran. And Netanyahu understands that behind all of this lies a failure of nerve and a collapse of will in much of the West that deserves to be compared to what Churchill faced in the 1930s.

There are those who believe Netanyahu was being overly dramatic and indeed was blustering when he made his unequivocal statements at the United Nations about the Iranian regime and nuclear weapons. It's true that the U.N. is a place of much drama and bluster. But we believe Netanyahu meant what he said.

Of course, an Israeli prime minister can't decide to launch a strike alone. Netanyahu will require the approval of his security cabinet, and he will also likely need the support of the top ranks of the Israeli military establishment. The Israeli national security apparatus has been cautious about a strike against Iran, believing there was time and hoping that sanctions or the United States would take care of this issue. The Syrian fiasco has virtually eliminated the last option in

the minds of many military leaders. And now there's a consensus that time is growing short. Almost no Israeli security expert believes Israel should resign itself to live with a nuclear-armed Iranian regime dedicated to the destruction of Israel. Furthermore, current and former senior military officials consistently claim they have a viable military option, even though they have less military capacity than the United States. So an Israeli strike is likely.

Netanyahu said at the U.N. that "in standing alone, Israel will know that we will be defending many, many others." This too echoes Churchill in his July 1940 speech: "We are fighting by ourselves alone; but we are not fighting for ourselves alone." Churchill asserted that London, "which enshrines the title deeds of human progress," was defending civilization itself. So today, if Israel—an outpost of human progress in the Middle East—decides that she has no choice but to attack Iran's nuclear facilities, Israel will not be fighting for herself alone.

—William Kristol & Michael Makovsky

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# Duties of the President

Who's really to blame for the federal government's shutdown? According to President Obama, it's those ideologically obstinate congressional Republicans who will do anything to undermine the Affordable Care Act, the signature achievement of his presidency. For those same Republicans, it's the president who deserves blame by refusing to compromise one iota on a policy measure that even the administration admits is less than ready for prime time.

One is inclined to say we're in a classic D.C. he-said-she-said moment—except in this case polls show the American public siding with the president in blaming Republicans. Like most serious policy disputes in American history, however, this argument has a constitutional dimension that shouldn't go without comment.

The president has argued that the Affordable Care Act was duly enacted—passed by the legislature and signed into law by him—and confirmed in its constitutionality by a decision of the Supreme Court. As such, it's a law of the land and should be carried out.

What's missing is that the law was passed by a House and Senate both controlled by one party, the party of the chief executive. In the normal course of things, this would be of no consequence and is unobjectionable constitutionally.

But poll after poll indicates that considerably more

Americans find the law itself objectionable than approve of it. Indeed, the public's reaction to the passage of the law was a key reason for the stunning electoral victory by House Republicans in 2010—and a good reminder of one reason the Constitution provides for staggered elections.

Certainly, a measure with such profound implications for the country should have more support than a bare majority made up exclusively of one party. House Republicans have every right to try and press the case that a law of this magnitude should have a broader base of support than the Affordable Care Act has at the moment.

This is particularly true given how uncertain the meaning is of various parts of the law and whether the administrative elements necessary to carry it out are actually in place. Under the Constitution, it's the president's obligation to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed," meaning, among other things, that it's his task to soundly administer the laws. If that's not possible—and clearly in this case it isn't—then the House's proposal to postpone the law's enforcement for a year should have been acceptable to a president who takes his constitutional duties as the nation's chief executive seriously.

And while House Republicans might carry the majority of the blame for the government shutting down, it's also obvious that the president is ignoring his own responsibility for preventing it from happening.

Section 3 of Article II lists a series of duties of the president, in addition to faithfully executing the laws. He's to provide an account of the state of the country, recommend measures to fix existing problems, appoint officials, receive foreign officials, and call Congress back into session when necessary.

Now, on its face, this appears to be a kind of laundry list of responsibilities—some significant, some less so—with no particular overarching logic. If one steps back, however, and looks at Section 3 as a whole, the underlying point of the list becomes clear.

Together, these particulars are meant to ensure that the president keeps the government going. He kick-starts the policy process, makes sure there are officials in place to carry out the policies, executes the laws on the books, and handles the country's day-to-day foreign affairs. In a system of separated powers, as the Framers themselves noted, it was the independent, unitary executive that was to give "energy" to the government.

In short, there is a reason the president was the only constitutional official the founding generation decided should have his own house. It's only the executive that operates 24/7 and is never "in recess."

Shutting down the government should be anathema to any president who takes his oath of office seriously. It also shows why simply blaming Republicans for the current predicament is constitutionally shortsighted.

—Gary Schmitt

# Pay No Attention to the Bad Data

Behind the curtain at the IPCC.

BY STEVEN F. HAYWARD



**T**hought experiment: Imagine you are a national security reporter, covering the release of a massive, 2,000-page report on domestic intelligence gathering activities and future threat assessment from the National Security Agency. But instead of issuing the full report,

*Steven F. Hayward is the visiting scholar in conservative thought and policy at the University of Colorado at Boulder.*

the NSA issues a 30-page “Summary for Policymakers” (SPM) written by political appointees at the Justice Department, promising that the full 2,000-page report will be released a few days later. Would you print a front-page story based only on the 30-page summary, or would you demand to see the full report?

If you’d go with the politically massaged summary, then congratulations—you too can be an environmental

reporter. Because that’s exactly what the U.N.’s Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) did on Friday, September 27, in Stockholm, releasing only the SPM while withholding the full report. And the media played along, generating predictable headlines over the weekend about the increasing certainty of climate scientists that humans are warming the world.

To be fair, if they had waited until Monday’s release of the full Working Group I report on the current state of climate science, they’d have had to make sense of a jargon-filled report that Dutch scientist Arthur Petersen told the BBC “is virtually unreadable!” Churchill once quipped about a massive bureaucratic report that “by its very length, it defends itself against the risk of being read.” The IPCC appears to be following this example.

It is important to understand that the IPCC report is not an original scientific inquiry but a wide-ranging literature review and “synthesis.” The technical nature of climate science is such that only other scientists can possibly follow it, and even that is doubtful, as the specialized nature of so many aspects of climate science is beyond the grasp of scientists who work in widely scattered subfields. Whether the domain of climate science can be “synthesized” in this way is a debatable question.

A close reading of some of the key passages shows that it cannot bear the weight of the sensationalized parts of the SPM, at least as rendered in the media. One of the most misleading aspects of this story is the way in which the SPM conveys a “95 percent confidence” or certainty of its findings, as though this figure represented a rigorous or robust test familiar to first-year students of statistical correlation. The IPCC’s methodology behind these conclusions is thoroughly opaque. When you strip away the fog, the IPCC admits these conclusions are “qualitative,” and based essentially on a poll of the self-selecting participants in the IPCC review process itself.

This is like polling the Romney

DAVE MALAN

campaign staff about how confident they are their candidate will win the election, and representing it as the firm “consensus” of all political scientists. The IPCC’s main report finally admits that the methodology for their confidence calibrations is derived from social science, and that “confidence should not be interpreted probabilistically, and it is distinct from ‘statistical confidence.’” You won’t see this admission reflected in any of the breathless news reports about the IPCC’s high confidence of our future doom.

The late James Q. Wilson argued that social scientists should quit trying to predict the future because they can’t predict the past. The climate science community might heed this advice. While the domain of climate science is highly complex, the heart of the enterprise is the calibration of climate models to explain the modest warming we have observed, mostly from 1960-98, which in turn is supposed to enable us to predict the future. Much was made in the media in recent weeks of how some governments were pressuring the IPCC to offer an explanation of the current 15-year “pause” in warming that is confounding the models. (This raises a curious question: Why do we need a “Summary for Policymakers” if policymakers determine what’s emphasized in the summary? Clearly the SPM should be called by its true name: Summary for Headline Writers.) The “pause” is glossed over in the SPM, because the underlying chapters in the full report do their best to skip over this inconvenient fact.

This conundrum is what makes Chapter 9 of the full report (“Evaluation of Climate Models”) fascinating reading. Out of the dense prose a reader can make out increasing confidence that by twisting the computer knobs (called “parameterizing”) we can match up models to the observed temperature record and other empirical data on clouds, oceans, and a multitude of other variables. But there are admissions of serious limitations of the models. Many of the models still produce results that match up poorly with the observational data, and some aspects of

the models can’t be validated at all. The IPCC can’t even agree on a method for singling out the most accurate models. Our understanding of clouds—one of the most important variables for understanding climate—remains very low: “There remain significant errors on the model simulation of clouds,” the chapter says. Among other problems, our grasp of what’s going on in the oceans is still severely limited, and our ability to simulate the dynamics of the Amazonian basin is very poor.

But more important is the carefully worded concession that all this computer knob-twisting to make the models match the temperature record may not work for the future—or the past. An early draft of Chapter 9 included this startling sentence: “The ability of a climate model to make future climate projections cannot be directly evaluated.” This has been dropped from the final draft; now the chapter includes an embarrassing excuse for the failure of the models to

match up with the current temperature “pause”: “[T]hese projections were not intended to be predictions over the short time scales for which observations are available to date.” Translation: Pay no attention to our models behind the curtain; just trust our judgment that the end is nigh.

The 12 chapters of the report are full of anomalous findings and admissions of scientific weaknesses that are not reflected in the SPM. Not to worry: the report is not final. The fine print on the IPCC’s website says that “following copy-editing, layout, final checks for errors, and *adjustments for changes for consistency with the Summary for Policymakers*, it will be published online in January.” (My emphasis.)

In other words, this supposedly authoritative product of international scientific consensus will be reverse-engineered to match up with the politically determined SPM. No wonder skepticism of the climate science community is on the rise. ♦

## Boehner in Charge

How the House speaker rallied his restive troops.

BY FRED BARNES

After the reelection of President Obama, House speaker John Boehner was disappointed, dispirited, and wary of a new round of clashes with the president. House Republicans had planned a fresh effort to repeal Obamacare, but, he told NBC News, “the election changes that.” He negotiated with Obama to raise taxes and spending by \$1 trillion each before backing off. And with the Bush tax cuts about to expire and plunge the nation over a “fiscal cliff,” Boehner endorsed a deal to limit higher tax rates to those making more than \$400,000.

In January, he didn’t get the usual unanimous support from his party

in his reelection as speaker. Three Republicans voted for Majority Leader Eric Cantor and two for Allen West of Florida (who’d just lost his seat). Congressmen Raúl Labrador of Idaho, Jim Jordan of Ohio, and Justin Amash of Michigan each got a vote, as did ex-comptroller general David Walker. Rep. Steve Stockman of Texas voted present, and Labrador and Mick Mulvaney of South Carolina didn’t vote. For Boehner, this was humiliating.

His ability to corral Republican votes was in doubt. He had lost 66 GOP members on raising the debt limit in 2011. But the vote on the “fiscal cliff” in late December was worse: 151 of the 233 Republicans, including Cantor and House majority whip Kevin McCarthy, voted against the

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Boehner-blessed deal. This raised doubts about his future as speaker.

Now all that has changed. Republicans are united behind him. When the Republican Study Committee (RSC), the stronghold of House conservatives, met last week, Stockman was among those who rose to praise Boehner. And Mulvaney had nothing but kind words for the speaker. "I have been very pleased with his leadership since January," Mulvaney told me. "I have no complaints."

The votes since Labor Day on continuing resolutions (CRs) to block Obamacare while continuing government spending reflect the wave of unity behind Boehner. On defunding Obamacare only Scott Rigell of Virginia voted no. On delaying the health care law's implementation, Republicans were unanimous. On delaying the individual mandate and eliminating the insurance subsidy for members of Congress and their staff, just 12 Republicans voted no. And on postponing the mandate and requiring a House-Senate conference to negotiate a compromise on spending and Obamacare, only 9 Republicans balked.

In mid-January, House Republicans gathered in Williamsburg, Virginia, for a retreat that turned out to have far-reaching consequences. Republicans still talk glowingly about the "Williamsburg spirit." They regard it as historic. Indeed, it was.

Two things happened. Republicans had lost only eight House seats in the 2012 election, but with Obama's victory the national mood seemed to have swerved in a liberal direction. Boehner and the House leadership, however, took the party in the opposite direction. It was a startling change, an unexpected but near-total victory for House conservatives. And along with that, opposition to Obama's agenda was significantly stiffened.

The effects of Williamsburg were not felt immediately. Now they are. Boehner unleashed conservatives more than he could have imagined. He's repeatedly tried to follow a cautious approach in opposing Obama, only to be forced to give way to a

more confrontational strategy. It's a strategy that has resuscitated the drive to kill Obamacare and led to the government shutdown.

In Williamsburg, Boehner sought advice from five senior House members, nicknamed "the Jedi Council." The group consists of Jordan, Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, Tom Price of Georgia, Jeb Hensarling of Texas, and Steve Scalise of Louisiana. Jordan, Price, and Hensarling are former RSC chairmen. Scalise is the current chairman. This means they are dependable conservatives, as is Ryan.

Scalise describes the RSC's job as one-pronged: pushing the House to the right. Before this year, he says, GOP leaders often promoted centrist bills that morphed into liberal legislation in the Senate. Scalise wants to "advance conservative causes." Oddly enough, he was the preferred candidate of Boehner and company in the election of a new RSC chairman last November.

For months, the Jedi group had been meeting for breakfast in the basement of the Capitol Hill Club, a Republican hangout adjacent to the congressional office buildings. What they told Boehner and the GOP leadership was unsurprising—unless one assumed conservative Republicans were condemned to cozy up to Obama. They recommended specific conservative policies that were later given the somewhat inflated title of the Williamsburg Accord.

Republicans would back budgets that reached balance in 10 years. Rather than soften the mandatory spending cuts of the 10-year "sequester," they would enforce it fully. They would insist on "regular order" rather than CRs to fund the government—that is, pass spending bills, then resolve House-Senate differences in conferences. They would mandate "no budget, no pay" for members of Congress.

The impact of the "no pay" rule was instant. Under Majority Leader Harry Reid, the Democratic Senate hadn't passed a budget in four years. Soon after the House rule was announced, Reid promised to pass one. And did.

Holding the line on the sequester was important for strategic reasons.

It gives Republicans an advantage over Obama. The sequester was a brainstorm of the White House, but the president has grown to loathe its cuts in social spending. He's eager to replace it, at least partially with tax hikes.

To the delight of Republicans, the sequester turns the tables on Obama. He had the upper hand in the "fiscal cliff" talks. If no deal were reached, higher tax rates would have gone into effect for all taxpayers, a nightmare Republicans wanted to avert. Now, since the sequester's spending reductions are automatic, it's Obama who wants a deal with Republicans. Thus, Republicans have a strong card to play in any negotiations.

As sweet as Williamsburg was, getting Boehner to follow through hasn't been a snap. In Williamsburg, he said he wanted to hear policy ideas from Republican members rather than develop them at the top. This was dubbed the "bubble up" approach. The problem is Boehner hasn't liked some of the ideas that are bubbling up.

In June, Rep. Marlin Stutzman of Indiana proposed to split the farm bill into two parts, one for farm programs, the other for food stamps. Boehner was opposed and kept the Stutzman proposal from consideration on the House floor. He relented after the undivided farm bill was defeated. Once separated, both a farm bill and a scaled-back food stamp program passed.

That was just the beginning. In July, another group of House conservatives destined to win Boehner over went public. The "Cajun Caucus" had been meeting since early 2011 at the townhouse of Rep. Steve Southerland of Florida a few blocks from the Capitol. Rep. Jeff Landry of Louisiana cooked Cajun food for dinner, thus the name. Landry lost in a 2012 primary.

The class of 2010 dominates the group: Southerland, Labrador, Mulvaney, Jeff Duncan of South Carolina, Tom Graves of Georgia. Jordan, a Jedi, also attends. A few elected in 2012 joined the group, notably Mark Meadows of North Carolina. He was invited to a caucus dinner, but missed several subsequent ones. His staff thought Meadows, who isn't Cajun, had been

invited by mistake and declined several invitations.

Meadows, a real estate developer who won his first bid for elective office last year, is an ardent Reaganite. The former president, he says, “was a principled conservative who had a conservative world view and could articulate it compassionately and always find common ground to accomplish it.” That’s Meadows’s ideal.

In July, Meadows circulated a letter to Boehner and Cantor “encouraging” them to defund Obamacare. The letter quickly got 80 signers. But Boehner balked, preferring to add Republican amendments to the debt limit bill, not the CR. Cantor came up with a different approach that would have allowed the Senate to reject defunding without shutting down the government. A whip count found it lacked enough votes.

So Boehner adopted defunding. It was a smart, bold, and necessary move. But it was the result of what he set in motion at the Williamsburg retreat and what House Republicans heard at town

hall meetings during the August congressional recess.

There were “major, major issues such as the IRS, Benghazi, Syria, the NSA,” that Tom Graves thought would be raised, but “our town halls were mainly about Obamacare.” Graves, who narrowly lost to Scalise in the election of an RSC chairman, concluded his highest priority is do all he can “to protect our citizens from Obamacare.”

Jordan, elected against a Democratic tide in 2006, believes the struggle over Obamacare was inevitable. “We won in 2010 on the issue of Obamacare,” he told me. Then the issue was sidelined, first by the Supreme Court case in 2011 and then by the Romney campaign in 2012. “There’s no one else to do the job except the people who were sent to do it, House Republicans,” says Jordan. “This had to happen.”

What have we learned about Boehner and Republicans from all this? Five things.

One, Boehner is more adept and

clever than his reputation in the media would lead one to believe. In moving to the right, he acknowledged that smart but impatient conservatives are the majority in the Republican caucus. Those labeled “chuckleheads” last year by retiring Rep. Steve LaTourette of Ohio—perhaps as many as 20 libertarians, loners, and oddballs—are peripheral actors. And the notion that an amorphous “Tea Party” or various right-wing lobbies call the shots is absurd.

Two, it takes conservative policy initiatives to unify House Republicans. True, a few dozen moderates and old bulls are upset about the government shutdown and the blame Democrats and the media are heaping on Republicans. Their angst is understandable. But if they are permitted to rule the roost, GOP unity collapses, and Boehner will be on his way out.

Three, the very partial government shutdown is not the end of the world for Republicans. The shutdowns in 1995 and 1996 weren’t either. Obama’s

## Trade: A Bright Spot and a Big Opportunity

By **Thomas J. Donohue**

President and CEO  
U.S. Chamber of Commerce

It’s easy to look at our divided and dysfunctional political system and conclude that our problems are intractable and our opportunities will fall by the wayside. It’s tempting to be dispirited by the rate of our economic recovery—the slowest in generations.

But rather than be discouraged, we should be determined to actively seize opportunities, like trade, that can help turn the situation around. Overseas buyers hungry for “made in the USA” goods and services have made the difference between stagnation and modest growth here at home. And given that trade has been a rare area of bipartisan agreement over the past several years, it presents new prospects for consensus among lawmakers.

The biggest opportunity before us is the Trans-Pacific Partnership, or TPP, an ambitious agreement between 12 nations

that accounts for nearly two-fifths of global GDP and one-third of all world trade. The TPP was a major topic at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Summit in Bali, which drew business and government leaders from around the globe, including President Obama and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

The TPP would enable the United States to secure a better foothold in the Asia-Pacific, where American companies have been losing market share. The number of trade accords between Asian countries surged from 3 in 2000 to more than 50 today. Meanwhile, the United States has just 3 trade agreements in Asia.

American workers and businesses must be able to access the world’s most dynamic and fastest-growing region—and the TPP is the ticket. One study estimates that it could boost U.S. exports by \$124 billion by 2025, generating hundreds of thousands of American jobs.

Beyond the TPP, the Chamber is helping build support and momentum for other game-changing opportunities. One

is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which would unleash commerce between the United States and Europe and rekindle badly needed growth and job creation on both sides of the pond. We’re pushing for a U.S.-China bilateral investment treaty, which could pave the way for a broader trade pact between the world’s two largest economies. And we need to renew Trade Promotion Authority to ensure effective executive-legislative cooperation on trade.

Such policies and agreements afford us the chance to overcome the seemingly insurmountable challenges we face. A forward-leaning U.S. trade agenda, beginning with completion and ratification of the TPP, could help us defy the trends of slow growth and government gridlock and show the world that the United States can act boldly to reassert its leadership, competitiveness, and prosperity.



**U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE**  
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insistence on not rising to the occasion—his unpresidential passivity—means he'll share any political damage. By refusing to negotiate, he acts as if dealing with the crisis in Washington isn't in his job description. Most Americans, who expect a lot from their president, wouldn't agree. Can you think of any other president who neglected his duty in this fashion? I can't.

Four, the shutdown hasn't paralyzed Republican leaders. Boehner, Cantor, and McCarthy have proved to be quite resourceful in responding to Democratic claims of hardship and cruelty in the shutdown. Medical trials at the National Institutes of Health have been postponed? Okay, the House passed a bill to continue NIH funding. National parks are closed? The House voted to open them. Veterans are suffering? The House funded their benefits. The National Guard and reserves have been sidelined? The House voted to reactivate them. Democratic leaders Harry Reid and Nancy Pelosi have pressured their underlings to vote against these bills, but 57 have broken ranks. That's progress, but not enough to overcome the Democratic Senate. Compare that with Republican unity. And when CNN's Dana Bash asked Reid about possible harms to a child with cancer, he had an anxiety attack. Rep. Lee Terry of Nebraska, among others, was an early advocate of this tactic.

Five, leading with a strong yet unattainable proposal can make a fallback position quite acceptable. Defunding Obamacare was a bridge too far for most Americans. Guess what? While 53 percent in a Fox News poll oppose defunding, a 57 percent majority believe Obamacare "should be delayed for a year until more details are ironed out."

That Boehner has capitulated to right-wing noisemakers is the *ide-du-jour* in political and press circles. It's half true. He's caved, but it's to Republican reality, which is closer to the beliefs of most Americans than what is emerging these days from the Obama-Reid-Pelosi axis. Boehner may have jumped on a train as it was leaving the station. But he did it in time to steer the train where it needs to go. ♦

# Not So Nice for the GOP

## Declining Republican fortunes in Minnesota.

BY BARRY CASSELMAN

*Minneapolis*

While most states outside the liberal bastions of the Northeast and the West Coast are, or have been, moving to the center-right, there's one notable exception: Minnesota is shifting decidedly to the left.

Minnesota Democrats (the state affiliate is the Democratic-Farmer-Labor party or DFL) under Governor Mark Dayton have raised taxes in the Gopher State by \$2.1 billion a year. In addition to hiking income taxes and instituting an unpopular business-to-business tax on commercial warehouses, the DFL-controlled legislature has passed numerous new regulations on businesses small and large, even enabling mandatory unionization of private day-care workers in a transparent payback to unions for their long-time support of the DFL.

For over half a century after gaining statehood in 1858, Minnesota was dominated by Republican and conservative leaders. It shifted along with the rest of the country in the 1930s, and many outside the state still hold the image of it in the liberal heyday of Hubert Humphrey and Walter Mondale later in the century. But the state had made a dramatic right turn in the elections of 1978, putting two Republican senators and a Republican governor in office.

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Conservatives such as Rudy Boschwitz, Al Quie, and Vin Weber took control of the state GOP, and they and their political offspring, including Norm Coleman, Tim Pawlenty, and John Kline, gave Minnesota politics a strong center-right character. It was only when much more conservative figures surfaced that voters turned back to the

DFL. The emergence of a significant third party, the centrist Independence party (IP), in 1998 added to the political identity confusion in the state.

IP candidate Jesse Ventura actually won the governorship in 1998, following the two terms of moderate Republican Arne Carlson. In 2002 and 2006, the conservative

Pawlenty won, but only with pluralities. In 2010, an otherwise Republican year, GOP gubernatorial candidate Tom Emmer made a major blunder early in his campaign and never fully recovered. Thanks to Emmer's missteps, Mark Dayton, a one-term state auditor and single-term U.S. senator, narrowly won the governorship running a very liberal campaign. Republicans did, however, take control of both houses of the state legislature. But two years later, GOP legislative leadership signed on to a referendum campaign to make same-sex marriage unconstitutional and their efforts backfired. The governor who had campaigned on raising taxes on the rich and other progressive policies then gained the political resources—that is, control of the state legislature—to put them into law. And



*Mark Dayton*

that's exactly what took place in the 2013 legislative session.

Governor Dayton's agenda in Minnesota in many ways resembles President Barack Obama's national agenda, which culminated in the unpopular health care reform bill. Other governors and legislatures, meanwhile, have been taking their states in the opposite direction. Next door in Wisconsin, for instance, conservative governor Scott Walker and a Republican legislature are reducing taxes, spending, and the power of public-labor unions. Similar measures, in various forms, are taking place in Indiana (by former governor Mitch Daniels and his successor, Mike Pence), New Jersey (rising GOP star Chris Christie), Louisiana (Bobby Jindal), Texas (Rick Perry), South Carolina (Nikki Haley), New Mexico (Susana Martinez), Ohio (John Kasich), Virginia (Bob McDonnell), Florida (Rick Scott), Iowa (Terry Branstad), and Michigan (Rick Snyder).

The question now is whether or not the very liberal policies put into place by Governor Dayton and the Minnesota legislature are working—and politically popular. It is too early to judge their effectiveness, but the promised increased income taxes on high-earners have turned out to be higher taxes in general for almost everybody. Minnesotans probably won't be fully aware of the hikes until 2014 and 2015, when voters will see the increased taxes and fees.

Public policy gurus, such as Peter Nelson of the Minnesota think tank Center of the American Experiment, persuasively argue that many high-income residents of states, like Minnesota, that levy increased taxes simply move and take up residence in low-income-tax states. As the tax and regulatory costs for small businesses and other corporations rise, so too many companies leave such states entirely or reduce their employment presence in them. Minnesota, in spite of its winter weather, had been attracting high-tech businesses, but that is unlikely to continue under the new tax and regulatory conditions.

Next year, the entire state house of representatives is up for reelection. A

good case can be made that the legislature, acting with the governor, has overreached with the many new taxes, fees, and regulations (as the previous GOP-controlled legislature did with its conservative social policy initiatives). Fortunately for the Democrats, no state senators must face reelection in 2014. Otherwise, the DFL could lose the legislature as abruptly as the GOP did in 2012.

One factor working in the DFL's favor in the short term, however, is the virtual collapse of the state Republican party organization, which has been troubled by financial and other controversies. The state GOP's prospects in 2014 don't look promising. The bench of Republican candidates for statewide office is likewise limited. New and young GOP leaders not hampered by controversies who are seeking higher office are few and far between. Thus, while both Governor Dayton and Senator Al Franken are potentially vulnerable (a recent SUSA-KSTP poll showed Dayton at 47 percent), there is so far no indication that either of them will face a truly competitive opponent next year.

The potentially most formidable GOP statewide candidate, Hennepin County sheriff Rich Stanek, has told supporters he will run for reelection for sheriff in 2014. Stanek is the only recent Republican who has performed well in the state's largest liberal base—Minneapolis is the county seat—winning with 70 percent of the vote in the nonpartisan race. (In a party-identified election for governor or senator, he might not carry this area, but his popularity means he would do much better than any other Republican could.)

Former senator Norm Coleman has chosen not to run for governor, saying he enjoys his work in the private sector, although he remains a political force behind the scenes. Congressmen John Kline and Erik Paulson both hold powerful roles in the GOP-ruled House of Representatives and have little incentive to run for the Senate.

The House races don't look much more promising, except for Minnesota's 8th Congressional District. With chain-store executive Stewart Mills III seeking the GOP nomination there,

the Republicans have a good chance to win back this seat lost in 2012. In the 7th District, conservative DFLer Colin Peterson has reportedly decided to run for another term; if he retired, this would likely be another GOP pickup. Incumbent Tim Walz has disappointed many in the 1st District, which is mostly a conservative farm district, but so far does not face a strong GOP opponent. Walz ran as a centrist in the mold of long-time DFL congressman Tim Penny, but has turned out to be one of Nancy Pelosi's most dependable liberal votes in the House. Republican prospects in the 6th District were greatly improved when colorful but controversial incumbent Michele Bachmann announced her retirement. She had barely won reelection in 2012 in the heavily GOP district and would have faced a well-financed challenge in 2014. With Tom Emmer favored to win the Republican nomination there next year, serious DFL opposition has evaporated.

So even if 2014 turns out to be a national conservative "wave" election like 2010, the GOP in Minnesota will likely gain only a single seat in the House.

It's not just the disarray of the party organization that's limiting Republican chances, either, but a fundamental division within the party. There's now a split between traditional conservatives and Ron Paul libertarians. The latter faction nominated one of their own to contest the Senate seat held by Amy Klobuchar in 2012. That GOP candidate was crushed by the resulting intra-party discord, as well as the superior Democratic get-out-the-vote effort for President Obama and voter opposition to the marriage referendum.

Senator Klobuchar is now frequently mentioned as a possible 2016 Democratic presidential candidate, and Minnesota seems destined to be the exception and not the rule in the 2014 elections. Republicans might make major gains in the state house of representatives next year. But until it resolves its identity as a party, the Minnesota GOP won't see a return of the control and regard it enjoyed for much of the previous three decades. ♦

# Is Cory Booker Overrated?

Yes.

BY SCOTT BEYER

A five-minute tirade recently unleashed by a Newark resident against Mayor Cory Booker may not have surprised anyone had it remained a local TV news clip. “We are hurting here, this crime is killing us, blood runs on our streets,” the woman moaned to a reporter, responding to a late-summer murder spree. “The sham that has been portrayed about this city, that we’re getting better . . . that is a lie!”

But her accurate charge that murder in Newark “has gotten worse under Booker’s tenure” may have come as a shock to the national audience watching on YouTube. After all, the narrative told about the mayor by the media, even after two terms, has been a ceaselessly positive one of urban revival. Journalists have remained smitten with a man who seems so well-meaning and whose personal story—as a mixed-race, Yale-educated Rhodes Scholar who replaced corrupt longtime mayor Sharpe James—is so attractive. The result is that important questions have been ignored during Booker’s race for the U.S. Senate seat left open by the death in June of his fellow Democrat, Frank Lautenberg. Foremost is whether Booker has even been a good mayor.

When entering office in 2006, Booker took over a city that, despite being a short commute from Manhattan, had been declining since the 1967 riots. His first reforms looked

promising: He cut city hall patronage and partnered with the Manhattan Institute on a job reentry program for ex-offenders. He broke ground on several charter schools and convinced his friend Mark Zuckerberg, the Facebook founder, to donate \$100 million for future ones. Over time he



*Cory Booker: the man and the myth*

managed to secure an additional \$300 million in philanthropy for other Newark causes.

Perhaps most important were his police reforms. Recognizing New York City’s success at crime-prevention, he hired as director of the force a former NYPD officer, who boosted enforcement on narcotics and fugitives. This, mixed with Booker’s well-advertised willingness to personally patrol the city at night, helped slash murders in 2008 to 67, a six-year low.

But Newark’s success dipped when Booker cut the police force by 13 percent in 2010. Already on the rise again, murders shot up to nearly 100 the next year, and have remained around there since. Indeed, during

Booker’s seven years as mayor, Newark has suffered a violent crime rate slightly lower than during the previous seven years but a murder rate slightly higher. Per capita, it’s still America’s seventh-deadliest city.

Along with the reduction in the police force, cuts were made under Booker to numerous services, from elder care to the fire department to parks and libraries. Together they amounted to a 25 percent cut in city employment, which might have seemed laudable to small-government types had it not come as property taxes rose by nearly half.

So where did all this new revenue go? Largely into Newark’s wasteful bureaucracy. City councilors earn more than anywhere else in New Jersey and enjoy a greater personal budget than some of the state’s largest cities. Aging water and sanitation utilities have resisted privatization and run annual deficits in the tens of millions. And like other cities, Newark has an enormous employee benefits system, spending \$17,000 per-worker annually for health care, for instance. State aid—which once came in at three-quarters of a billion dollars a year—was cut substantially. Booker, to his credit, attempted to rein in spending on the municipal workforce but largely failed, because of city hall and union resistance.

Booker’s building legacy—always important to mayors—has fared better, with billions in new development. But while some of this was driven by his ability to sell private investors on Newark, a majority has been state-subsidized. His economic development czar told the *New York Times* that much of it would not exist without these subsidies.

Meanwhile, Newark under Booker has underperformed in the more reliable indicators for economic health—unemployment has risen from 8.5 percent when he began to the mid-tens throughout the recession (currently 14.2 percent); population has remained stagnant; and job growth is

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among the worst for large U.S. cities.

With this said, it's hard not to commend Booker's spirited effort—which has been the subject of admiring documentaries and reality shows—to save a troubled city. But what kind of senator would he make? This will depend less on his enthusiasm and leadership skills than on his policy views, which seem deliberately vague. Some have argued that he will resemble a “New Democrat,” comfortable with the role business can play in spurring growth and alleviating poverty. Others—including Republican opponent Steve Lonegan—tag him as just another urban machine politician, prone to corruption and overspending.

This first view is supported by Booker's early reputation as a budget hawk and reformer. But along with his tax increases, information that has surfaced during the Senate campaign lends credence to the latter. Not only have his dramatic personal tales deflated under scrutiny, such as the one where he watched a gunshot victim die in his arms (police reports later confirmed the boy died in the hospital), or his oft-told encounters with a supposed Newark drug-dealer named “T-Bone” (Booker supposedly admitted to inventing the character). Ethical questions have also arisen.

Several weeks ago the *New York Post* reported that Booker received \$689,000 in severance pay from his former law firm, only to steer millions in city contracts to them. Booker also appeared to have an odd relationship with tech startup Waywire. He had a multimillion-dollar stake in the ill-defined young company, which employed a family member of a campaign supporter. When this raised suspicion that the enterprise amounted to an indirect payment from tech donors, Booker quit the company and gave his shares to charity.

Of course none of this will likely keep Booker from Capitol Hill, given his lead over Lonegan in what remains a very Democratic state. But it does show how myth-making narratives about likable leaders, once believed by the press, can remain impervious to facts on the ground. ♦

# Europe Leads the Way?

In reducing the role of government in the economy, the U.S. is a laggard. **BY IKE BRANNON**

**F**or much of the last century the United States was the world's beacon for capitalism, but these days we're far from such a lofty perch. Since the end of the Cold War, countries on both sides of the Iron Curtain have moved to reduce the role of government in the economy by changing the tax code as well as by privatizing government activities.

Neither has happened in the United States. The tax code's complexity has metastasized to give the government more levers with which to influence the economy, and neither party has seen fit to push any significant government activity into the private sector.

The problem with the tax code is well documented: Since 1993 every single country in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has reduced its corporate tax rate, save the United States. Most have cut their rate multiple times. Today, the United States has the highest corporate tax rate in the OECD.

Naysayers respond that this is misleading because myriad deductions, credits, and the like mean the corporate tax raises much less money here than elsewhere, despite the high statutory rate. But this retort nicely illustrates the problem—namely, that Congress uses the tax code to prod and shape behavior in hundreds of ways rather than trust taxpayers to do what's best for them.

The personal side of the tax code has even more nudges, fewer of which

can be rationalized, along with high top marginal rates. While liberals point to our 39.6 percent statutory top tax rate—compared to European rates that breach 50 percent—to argue that our wealthy remain undertaxed, this is a misleading comparison. A more accurate picture of the marginal tax rate facing upper-income households would add the Medicare tax of 3.8 percent, the phaseout of various deductions for upper-income workers, and state and local taxes. In places like California or New York City such a calculus arrives at an effective federal/state/local tax rate over 55 percent—not terribly conducive to investment and risk taking and certainly nothing to brag about.

Transforming public pensions into personal retirement accounts has been occurring elsewhere as well: For instance, Sweden and the U.K. recently reformed their social security systems so that workers have a portion of their earnings put into an investment vehicle that they own and can invest, with certain restrictions. In an environment where declining birth rates and growing longevity make government pension promises less than certain, giving workers ownership over their retirement income provides a level of security Americans may soon come to envy.

Of course, nothing like that will occur in the United States anytime soon: The biggest opponents of the Bush administration's 2005 Social Security reform plan were the boosters of personal accounts who felt it didn't go far enough and decided to hold out for a better political and economic environment that would allow for a more radical reform. They're still waiting, while demographics and longevity gains inexorably push the

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system towards bankruptcy, precluding such radical reforms.

More egregious—and less noticed—than the problematic tax code and bankrupt Social Security system is the reluctance of the federal government to privatize economic activities the federal government has no business doing anymore (if it ever did). It is here where the United States truly lags our European counterparts.

For instance, a number of ostensibly left-leaning EU countries, such as Sweden, Finland, and the Netherlands, have completely privatized their post offices. The U.K.'s recent announcement of the forthcoming sale of the Royal Mail actually makes them a laggard in this regard. The EU will soon end mail monopolies in its member countries, which will force the rest of its members to get serious about reforming or selling their postal services. Of course, neither political party in the United States would countenance such a thing despite U.S. Postal Service losses of \$22 billion over the past two years. Congressional pushback was intense when the Postal Service tried to eliminate Saturday delivery and close little-used offices.

Europe also lets the private sector manage a good deal of the transportation infrastructure, something else that is well-nigh unthinkable here. A significant proportion of European airports are run by a private concessionaire, as well as most of their transportation security. And most countries use a market to allocate the takeoff and landing slots at airports and keep runway traffic manageable. Our failure to do so is the reason that every major airport in the United States becomes congested mid-mornings and late afternoons, rendering airline schedules little more than a joke. Such a sorry state of affairs is uncommon elsewhere, because market forces allocate scarce resources better than the combination of historical accident and government planning used in U.S. airports.

Countries all over the world have opened up their roads to pricing schemes and private management. Despite experiments here and there, American liberals and conservatives

have by and large resisted such a move, despite the potential to greatly reduce congestion, air pollution, and the need to build more infrastructure.

The little-known uranium enrichment industry may best exemplify the difference between the European embrace of markets and America's uneasiness with them. Nuclear power plants need to use uranium that's been enriched so that it has a higher proportion of the lighter and more reactive uranium-235 isotopes. The U.S. market for enriched uranium has long been dominated by USEC, a company created in 1992 ostensibly to privatize uranium enrichment. But it has been hemorrhaging money and relying on government loan guarantees and Department of Energy subsidies to avoid bankruptcy. Keeping it afloat has cost the U.S. government billions, most of which gets justified by a blunt appeal to Congress to help save the well-paying jobs at the company.

Its European counterpart is Urenco, a company formed by the British, Dutch, and West German governments in the early 1970s. Unlike USEC, it has come to operate without government subsidies. Being in a heavily regulated industry with access to technology not widely available helps, of course, but

with the Japanese tsunami and Angela Merkel's pledge to end nuclear power in Germany, it's not exactly a growing market. Despite falling demand, Urenco continues to improve its productivity and profitability, and the Dutch and U.K. governments, which have held onto their ownership stakes, recently announced their intent to sell their stakes to take advantage of this. Meanwhile, Urenco formed an American offshoot, investing a few billion dollars in an enrichment plant in New Mexico, and since then it has been eating USEC's lunch.

For now the hopes and dreams of pro-growth policy wonks in the United States hang on achieving tax reform, but fixing the tax code will be tough: Not only are there nearly as many losers as winners for every major change, but the party lines are staked out much more clearly in the tax world than almost anywhere else.

But there's a whole other realm where the U.S. government could—and should—cede its authority to private actors, which would improve the economy, the federal budget, and people's satisfaction with government. Political parties of all stripes managed to make that happen in Europe. They could do the same here. ♦

# The Decline of the Military He Loved

Tom Clancy, 1947-2013.

BY MAX BOOT

Tom Clancy's premature death is rich in unfortunate symbolism, because the U.S. armed forces, whose renaissance he celebrated in the 1980s and beyond, may be heading back

to the "hollow," pre-Clancy days of the 1970s. Although he kept writing up until the end, and continued to sell scads of books and video games, Clancy is mostly associated with the Reagan years, and for good reason. He was part of a pop culture outpouring, which also included the Tom Cruise movie *Top Gun* and Clint Eastwood's *Heartbreak Ridge*, that marked an

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inflection point in American attitudes towards the military.

Largely gone were the antiwar depictions common in *MASH* (1970), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), and *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and in books such as *Born on the Fourth of July* (1976) and *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). One of the last gasps of this mindset was Oliver Stone's 1986 film *Platoon*, which depicts soldiers shooting Vietnamese civilians and even each other.

There was a kernel of reality in these harsh depictions. The armed forces in the 1970s were a mess. Drug use, racial tensions, alcoholism, and other problems were rife. After the end of the draft in 1973, the military had a hard time making the transition to an all-volunteer force. The problems were symbolized by the disastrous mission to rescue the hostages in Iran, which ended with a fiery aircraft accident at an improvised landing strip codenamed "Desert One." In 1980 the army chief of staff, General Edward "Shy" Meyer, warned: "Basically what we have is a hollow army."

Ronald Reagan and his first defense secretary, Caspar Weinberger, building on work begun under Jimmy Carter's underrated defense secretary Harold Brown, revitalized the American armed forces and made them stronger than ever. New weapons systems were introduced—F-15, F-16, and F-18 fighters, F-117 and B-2 stealth aircraft, AWACS and JSTARS surveillance aircraft, Abrams tanks and Bradley armored personnel carriers, Blackhawk and Apache helicopters. So too were new personnel. Drug use declined because of widespread drug testing, while the quality of recruits increased. By 1990, 97 percent of incoming soldiers were high school graduates.

This new competence—displayed on a small scale in the invasions of Grenada in 1983 and Panama in 1989 and on a much bigger scale in the 1991-92 Gulf war—made the American people proud of their military again. Vietnam-era depictions of drugies and psychos in uniform gave way to a new archetype of professional, dedicated, patriotic warriors.

Tom Clancy was smart enough to

sense this new attitude and to lead it further in a positive direction, beginning with his well-researched 1984 thriller *The Hunt for Red October*, the first novel ever published by the Naval Institute Press. Its verisimilitude was widely praised even though its author, then still an insurance agent in Maryland, had never served in any branch of the armed forces.

This was followed by *Red Storm Rising* (1986), *Patriot Games* (1987), *The Cardinal of the Kremlin* (1988), *Clear and Present Danger* (1989), and a slew of hot sellers to come. There were an astonishing 17 No. 1 *New York Times*



Tom Clancy

bestsellers in all, the most recent of which, *Threat Vector*, came out less than a year ago. Several of his novels were turned into popular movies that made Clancy's hero, swashbuckling CIA operative Jack Ryan, almost as familiar as James Bond, though much, much squarer—no skirt-chasing, no drinking, no gambling.

Critics sniffed; readers loved it.

A *New York Times* review of *Red Storm Rising*, by a self-identified socialist professor named Robert Lekachman, expressed the (understandable) horror of highbrows at Clancy's writing: "His characterizations are on a Victorian boys' book level. All the Americans are paragons of courage, endurance and devotion to service and country. Their officers are uniformly competent and occasionally inspired. Men of all ranks are faithful

husbands and devoted fathers." Moreover: "There is particularly good news here for Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. With exceedingly minor exceptions, American technology works—spy satellites, Stealth aircraft, advanced tanks and sonar, the lot." But even Lekachman, author of *Visions and Nightmares: America After Reagan*, had to concede the book was a "rattling good yarn," nearly the same words that Ronald Reagan used to praise *The Hunt for Red October*.

One suspects that his glowing depiction of the U.S. armed forces—combined, of course, with a thriller writer's ability to keep the pages turning—was the essence of Tom Clancy's appeal. He produced the fictional version of the real-life Reagan defense buildup.

Naturally, reality and make-believe blurred, so that before long Clancy was producing nonfiction accounts of various corners of the military, such as *Airborne* (about the 82nd Airborne Division and an obscure colonel named David Petraeus), *Armored Cav*, *Carrier*, *Submarine*, and so forth. Some of his nonfiction books were written in cooperation with retired generals Fred Franks, Chuck Horner, Carl Stiner, and Anthony Zinni, who were happy to share a byline with someone who had become much more famous than they were and whose very name could guarantee mega-sales. Military personnel loved Clancy's work; indeed, many testified that he helped to get them interested in military service in the first place.

Unfortunately, the military buildup that Clancy championed started to be undone after the end of the Cold War and the Gulf war, when force levels were cut by a third. Now even more draconian cuts are under way, totaling a trillion dollars over the next decade. Sequestration and the budget show-down are forcing ships not to sail, aircraft not to fly, and troops not to train. If this trend continues unabated—and odds are it will—we risk a return to a hollow military. Tom Clancy will be spared watching the military he loved at risk of being dismantled, but the rest of us will have to live with the dire consequences. ♦

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# HUD's Power Grab

*The Obama administration plots a wholesale federal intrusion into local housing policy*

BY TERRY EASTLAND

President Obama may have been distracted by Syria, but his domestic presidency proceeds apace, seeking what he heralds as “the transformation of the United States.” Especially is this true at the Department of Housing and Urban Development, which aims to remake neighborhoods all across America, starting, as we’ll see, in Westchester County, N.Y.

Established in 1965 at the height of the last unambiguously progressive presidency, HUD enforces, among other laws, the Fair Housing Act of 1968, which forbids discrimination in housing on the basis of race and ethnicity. That act, together with other statutes, says HUD, also directs “program participants”—local governments and states that receive federal housing grants, and also public housing agencies—to go beyond simply combating discrimination. They are to take “proactive steps” to “address significant disparities in access to community assets, . . . overcome segregated living patterns and support and promote integrated communities, [and] . . . end racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty.” HUD has a name for all this proactive step-taking: Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing, also known in HUD circles by its acronym, AFFH.

It so happens, however, that the transformation of America by means of AFFH has been a bit too slow in coming. Says HUD: “The current practice of affirmatively furthering fair housing as carried out by HUD grantees . . . has not been as effective” as it should have been. Indeed, housing secretary Shaun Donovan has called it “a meaningless paper exercise without any teeth,” a difficult metaphor to conceptualize, but you get the point.

Under Donovan, HUD has now crafted a toothier AFFH policy. It can be found in a proposed rule that was published on July 19 in the Federal Register (not on my

list of recommended reading, but still where you often have to go to find out what government is planning). The 60-day period for public comment ended last month, and by December the rule likely will have entered the Code of Federal Regulations. It’s titled—what else?—“Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing.”

Bear with me as I report the basics of the new policy, beginning with the purpose of AFFH, which the rule says is “to improve fair housing choice for all.” People possess improved choice when they “have the information, options, and protection to live where they choose without unlawful discrimination and other barriers related to race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin, or handicap.” And while “all” people should have such choice, the focus of the rule is on accomplishing better choice for blacks and Hispanics in particular.

Grantees—the states, localities, and public housing authorities mentioned above—are required to improve choice, through “planning, strategies, and actions.” And HUD promises to help by providing data on “patterns of integration and segregation; racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty; [and] access to education, employment, . . . transportation, and environmental health, among other critical assets.”

From the data, statistically expressed in terms of race and other protected classes, grantees are directed to identify “fair housing issues” in their communities. “Fair housing issue” is a technical term for a segregated living pattern, a racial concentration of poverty, or disparate access to some community asset. Grantees are to determine what accounts for the “fair housing issues” they have identified as they prepare, under a process involving community participation, an “assessment of fair housing” (AFH, by the way).

And that’s what they are to submit to HUD for approval. The AFH is to include goals that “will inform housing and community development policy and investment planning.” The proposed rule gives as an example of such a goal “promoting greater mobility and access to areas offering vital



Shaun Donovan

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assets such as quality schools, employment, and transportation.” A program participant whose AFH is not approved could lose its federal housing dollars. In other words, you satisfy HUD, or you do without your grants.

**I**ts tedious terminology notwithstanding, the proposed rule signals a momentous change in policy. When the Fair Housing Act was passed, “fair housing” meant “non-discrimination” in the various transactions that housing encompasses, from selling a house to securing a home mortgage loan. Over the years, however, fair housing has evolved in the law such that it now means something far more ambitious: “fair housing choice,” with its focus on “fair housing issues,” which include not only “evidence of illegal discrimination” but also, and more important, various “barriers” that the rule says are “related” to race, color, and national origin, and explain segregated living patterns.

In an interview, Paul Compton, chair of the Affordable Housing and Community Development group at the law firm Bradley Arant Boult Cummings, summarized the change in policy this way: “It’s a real shift in emphasis from ensuring that the private sector and participants in federal programs don’t unlawfully discriminate to defining the existence of racially and ethnically ‘segregated’ neighborhoods to be in themselves a violation of fair housing.” Likewise, “if a neighborhood is not integrated in some vaguely defined ratio, then that in itself is a fair housing issue.”

Programs affecting neighborhoods must be “reoriented,” as Compton put it, in order to make them more integrated and also more livable—incubators of opportunity, in HUD’s vision of America.

As Secretary Donovan told the NAACP at its annual convention in July, “It’s about more than . . . access to the housing itself. It’s also about giving every community access to important neighborhood amenities that can make a tremendous difference in a person’s life outcome. I’m talking about good schools, safe streets, jobs, grocery stores, health care, and a host of other important factors.”

For this vision of America to become a reality, Donovan emphasized to the conventioners, HUD must “maximize the impact [that federal grants] have on communities.” Municipalities may find that they have to modify zoning and other land-use decisions in order to accommodate construction of affordable housing units in the communities, mostly white, that HUD wants remade. And because HUD is seeking to leverage decisions involving a community’s

assets, it appears ready to intrude far more deeply than it already has into state and local governance.

This intrusion from Washington is one reason to take issue with the rule. And there are others. The rule states that “tenant selection and assignment policies *should be designed* to reduce racial and national origin concentrations, including racially or ethnically concentrated areas of poverty, and to reduce segregation and promote integration.” (Emphasis added.) In 2009 the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional race-based public school assignments made in order to achieve or maintain integration. It’s hard to see how race-based tenant selection and assignment decisions, made for similar reasons, could survive judicial review.

In a letter sent to Donovan last month, three members of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights—Abigail Thernstrom, Peter Kirsanow, and Todd Gaziano—point out that the rule repeatedly uses the term “segregation” to describe housing patterns in which members of racial or ethnic groups are concentrated in particular areas. They observe that legal segregation was ended more than 40 years ago. In consequence, “geographic clustering of racial and ethnic groups is not in and of itself an invidious phenomenon.” The rule takes the opposite view of such clustering and fails to recognize that multiple

factors usually account for it. The rule also makes the dubious assumption that people who live in a racial or ethnic cluster will be eager to exercise “fair housing choice” and escape to what HUD considers a better neighborhood.

That assumption is open to doubt, because—quoting the three commissioners—“many members of racial and ethnic minorities prefer to live in communities predominantly peopled by fellow members of their racial or ethnic group.” The reasons are evident: They have family and friends there, and they may work and have other involvements there—in churches and community groups. The commissioners write that the common preference for not moving out of a racially or ethnically clustered area “is particularly likely in communities primarily comprised of recent immigrants.”

With its new policy, HUD is seeking to use the power of the national government to create communities of a certain kind, each having what the department regards as an appropriate mix of economic, racial, and ethnic diversity. But HUD may be frustrated in this effort if only because, as Abigail and Stephan Thernstrom wrote in *America in Black and White*: “Neighborhoods are not arbitrary packages of

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**Municipalities may find that they have to modify zoning and other land-use decisions in order to accommodate construction of affordable housing units in the communities, mostly white, that HUD wants remade.**

housing whose occupancy benevolent social engineers can rearrange with predictable and positive consequences.”

Here, perhaps, it is worth noting that in undertaking such a massive, neighborhood-engineering policy, HUD will require the submission of AFFHs by 4,550 municipalities, counties, and states, and by 3,400 public housing authorities. HUD concedes that it cannot quantify the benefits and costs of policies influenced by the rule, identifying only annual compliance costs on the part of program participants, which it estimates at \$3 million to \$9 million.

**N**ow, let us move from the Federal Register to a real place: prosperous Westchester County, just north of New York City, population 941,113, the fourth most racially and ethnically diverse county (out of 62) in the state of New York, where housing patterns historically have been driven by economics, with people living where they can afford to live, and “moving up” as they are able and want to.

In 2006, however, a “whistleblower” suit was filed against Westchester, alleging that since 2000 the county had received federal housing grants and thus was obligated to “affirmatively further fair housing” but hadn’t done so, thus rendering false the certifications the county made to Washington to receive those funds.

This false claims suit seemed weak, especially since none of the county’s submissions to HUD regarding its fair housing efforts during those years had been disapproved or rejected. Moreover, in 2005 HUD officials hailed the county for its grant-management practices. Eventually, the county, wanting a more reasonable party at the table, asked HUD to intervene, and it did. With Westchester admitting no wrongdoing, the parties settled in August 2009 on terms agreed to by Democrat Andrew Spano, then the county executive.

At the press conference announcing the settlement, HUD deputy secretary Ron Sims hailed it as the “way forward” for AFFH. “[T]here has been a significant change in the Department of Housing and Urban Development,” he said. In retrospect, it’s apparent that the “change” would be fully expressed four years later in the new AFFH rule. “We’re going to ask [other jurisdictions] to pursue similar goals as well,” declared Sims.

Under the settlement, Westchester agreed to spend \$51 million to build, in 31 mostly white communities and by the end of 2016, some 750 affordable-housing units, 650 of which would be located in municipalities with fewer

than 3 percent African-American residents and fewer than 7 percent Hispanic residents. HUD sees the construction and location of those units as measures that will reduce patterns of racial and ethnic segregation and help overcome discrimination, of which, by the way, the county has not been accused, neither by the party that brought the false claims suit nor by the government. What the settlement will achieve, if nothing else, is the location of more minority renters and homeowners than otherwise might be the case in communities that currently have few minority residents.

Toward that end, the settlement requires the county to “affirmatively market affordable housing” not just within the county but also “in geographic areas with significant non-white populations outside, but contiguous with or within close proximity to, the county.” The county thus must spend some of its marketing budget for the benefit of people who don’t live in Westchester. The outside-county marketing represents a wider casting of the net, to increase the likelihood that applicant pools are more diverse than they might be otherwise.

One county official explained to me the way the pools are expected to work: “If you create a diverse pool of candidates [for the affordable-housing units] having a preponderance of blacks and Hispanics in it, then you’ll get a similarly diverse group of applicants when they pull balls out of bins in the lottery,” which is used by Westchester County (and endorsed by HUD), the point of a lottery being to ensure a random selection. But, this official added, “We all know that there are anomalies in the law of probability. So what happens if we have this pool that’s highly diverse but we randomly select a pool that’s not as diverse as HUD likes? That’s not our fault.”

It’s not, but were that to happen, the county might have to develop new, even more targeted marketing plans, which could discriminate against those lacking the “right” race or ethnicity, though finding a plaintiff, and bringing a case, would not seem an easy task.

A notable irony of the marketing and pool-making efforts is not lost on Westchester County officials. “A classic discriminatory practice in housing,” said one, “is where realtors ‘steer’ people from one neighborhood to another depending on where the realtor thinks they should live, based on race.” In its way, “HUD is trying to steer people to certain neighborhoods. Their social engineering is just another form of steering.”

And it may be steering in the wrong direction, from

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**‘A classic discriminatory practice . . . is where realtors “steer” people from one neighborhood to another,’ says a county official. In its way, ‘HUD is trying to steer people to certain neighborhoods. [It’s] just another form of steering.’**

the standpoint of many of those whom it seeks to help. In an interview, Stuart Gerson, who represented the county in the false claims case, said, “The demand in Westchester [from minorities] has always been not just for better housing but that it be placed in or contiguous to the neighborhoods where minorities are living now—and not in the far suburban or semi-rural places where the federal government wants it.”

Not that the settlement units have failed to attract comers. As of this writing, 10 of the new affordable housing developments have effectively completed their marketing. They include 180 rental units and 60 houses. Of the 2,215 applicants for the rentals, 41.5 percent were black, 34.7 white, and roughly 24 percent were Hispanic. Of the 165 applicants for homes, 32.2 percent were black, 40.6 white, and 23.8 Hispanic. Finally, of the 122 units that have been built and are now occupied—105 rentals and 17 homes—60 of the occupants are white, 46 African American, 4 multiracial, and 8 declined to indicate their race. Twenty-two of the occupants said they were Hispanic.

And Westchester is ahead of schedule. Of the 750 units the county agreed to build, 300 were to have financing by the end of the year. Already some 395 have it. The number of units now occupied—122—also exceeds the year-end goal.

HUD, though, is hardly satisfied with Westchester’s effort. Indeed, the county and the agency have sharp differences. Last month county executive Robert Astorino, the Republican who defeated Spano in 2009 and is seeking reelection this fall, wrote a column in the *Wall Street Journal* with the provocative headline: “Washington’s Fair Housing Assault on Local Zoning.”

HUD wants—to use the language of the new AFFH rule—more “fair housing choice” for more minorities. Specifically, it wants more affordable housing units built in mostly white communities—some 5,000 more. For those additional units to be built, more land would have to be zoned to accommodate them. And that means localities, which under the New York state constitution are empowered to make zoning decisions, would have to change ones still in force and, going forward, make ones that otherwise they would

not make, under common zoning practices, which place limits on the size, type, height, and density of buildings.

HUD regards such limits as standing in the way of progress. For HUD, they are racially and ethnically “exclusionary” and must be opposed on that ground. Indeed, the department has told the county to sue localities over exclusionary zoning—which the county has declined to do. “Not a good way to build good will,” Astorino wryly observed, in an interview.

In February 2012, in response to a HUD request, the county analyzed all of its 853 local zoning districts for evidence of exclusionary practices based on race and ethnicity, and found none. Since then, it has made seven more

such analyses, each time including consideration of more data, as requested by HUD. And each time the county has found no evidence of exclusionary practices, a conclusion supported by an independent authority. HUD, however, has disagreed with the county. And in 2011 it began cutting off housing grants. The total amount withheld through this year amounts to \$17 million.

In the *Journal*, Astorino recounted how last month HUD “finally demanded—without presenting any facts—that the county accept its

conclusion that there is exclusionary zoning in Westchester as a condition of releasing the funds.” The county declined, but neither will HUD withdraw its demand.

“Until we reach the conclusions they give us,” Astorino told me, “which have no relationship to actual facts, they will continue to deny our analysis . . . and continue to watch everything we do. And withhold money. It’s not about 750 units. That’s the starting point, not the ending point. It’s about changing the world.”

And so it is.

And what Westchester County has been experiencing in its dealings with HUD is what other housing grantees can expect once the new AFFH policy begins to be enforced. Will that enforcement effort also ignite state and local opposition? Will it lead jurisdictions to consider doing without federal housing money entirely—as is happening now in Westchester County? In three years we’ll find out. ♦



*Above, some of 750 affordable housing units required by the settlement of a 2009 fair housing lawsuit against Westchester County. At right, county executive Robert Astorino.*

TOP AP / WESTCHESTER COUNTY EXECUTIVE'S OFFICE, CARL PAGANO; BELOW, AP / JIM FITZGERALD



Red Smith at ringside, Ali-Liston fight, Lewiston, Maine, 1965

# Master of the Games

*The shrewd eye, and elegant prose, of Red Smith.* BY JOSEPH EPSTEIN

**T**he best writing in newspapers, it used to be said, was in the sports pages. Various known as the toy department or the playpen or the peanut stand, its interest restricted to matters of supreme inconsequence, the sports pages allowed the people who filled them more latitude for the prose equivalent of fancy footwork. In sports, after all, not that much was at stake: men in funny costumes batting a ball around—or, as in football and

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**American Pastimes**  
*The Very Best of Red Smith*  
 edited by Daniel Okrent  
 Library of America, 560 pp., \$29.95

boxing, batting one another around—or running round tracks, on foot or in machines or atop horses. Sportswriters, not lashed to journalism's deadly troika of *when*, *where*, and *why*, had the latitude to be jokey, dramatic, stylish, even gaudy.

Sportswriting was lent a certain literary imprimatur by some of its former practitioners. Ernest Hemingway began his newspaper career on the

sports pages, and Ring Lardner went from writing about sports for newspapers to writing novels about the uneducated who often had sports as their background. Many American writers carried unrealized sports fantasies as part of their psychic cargo their life long. F. Scott Fitzgerald claimed that the two biggest disappointments in his life were not having seen combat overseas in World War I and not having been big enough to play football at Princeton.

Most of us who grew up with athletic aspirations will understand Fitzgerald's disappointment about not playing football in college. I myself would rather have been an all-city high school

SPORTS ILLUSTRATED / GETTY IMAGES

basketball player, or won the Illinois state singles tennis championship, than have written “Moon River” or turned out a flawless translation of Dante—which I didn’t do, either. Most men who have not achieved the athletic glory they longed for would, I suspect, feel much the same way. In sad compensation, we watch games on television or read about them in our local newspapers.

I long ago reached the stage of jaded sophistication in watching sports on television where having the sound turned on is not required. The few bits of information or rare insights offered by sportscasters, as they are called, are not worth the heavy price they exact in cliché or empty babble. I only read the sports pages in the local press when I go to the barber shop, and I now check scores online or on television crawls on ESPN.

Reading about sports has become dispiriting. Endless are the stories of that continuing sad saga of athletes cheating through chemistry. Contract negotiations, with their vast sums being bandied about, are another glum-making regular item. Articles about concussions in football figure to sweep the boards (to use a basketball metaphor) this autumn—and perhaps for years to come. The never-ending personal scandals, from wife-beating to murder, of young men unable to cope with the heavy cash and adulation that come their way do not lighten the spirit. Hold that Tiger, as Mrs. Woods might say.

As a boy, the first newspaper sportswriter I read was Jerome Holtzman, who covered prep sports for the *Chicago Sun-Times*. I later came to know Jerry Holtzman, who arranged to have me invited to a dinner that included James T. Farrell, an ardent White Sox fan and author of the *Studs Lonigan* trilogy, and another Chicago sportswriter named Bill Gleason. Holtzman, who later wrote for the *Tribune*, became the official historian of baseball, which meant that every year he wrote a lengthy article for the *Sporting News* summarizing the past baseball season. Holtzman invented the category of relief pitching known

as “the save.” He was also a nice man.

The one sportswriter considered indispensable throughout my boyhood, and well beyond, was the columnist Red Smith (1905-1982). Smith didn’t begin his professional life as a sportswriter, but drifted into it as a reporter on the *St. Louis Star*. His editor, after canning half the six-man sports department for being on the take from a local boxing promoter, asked Smith to shift to the sports desk. He never saw it as a demotion. “Sports constitutes a valid part of our culture, our civilization,” he would later write, “and keeping the public informed and, if possible, a little entertained about sports is not an entirely useless thing.”

After stints on papers in Milwaukee, St. Louis, and Philadelphia, in 1945 Smith was brought to the *New York Herald Tribune* by Stanley Woodward, the paper’s legendary sports editor. Of Smith, Woodward wrote that “he was a complete newspaper man [who] had been through the mill and come out with a high polish.” After the *Herald Tribune* went under in 1966, Smith transferred to the *New York Times*. His columns were widely syndicated.

Red Smith was considered the thinking man’s sportswriter. He abhorred clichés. He commanded an impressive, sometimes bordering on the ornate, vocabulary. He specialized in striking similes. He called in irony when the occasion required it, which in sports was frequently. And he did all this within the confines of plain style—without the excessive use of subordinate clauses or dashes, and without any semicolons whatsoever. As a prose stylist, Smith could, as they say about the great infielders, pick it.

Unlike so many of the talented newspaper writers among his near-contemporaries—James Thurber, E. B. White, John O’Hara, A. J. Liebling—Red Smith had no wish ever to rise above writing for newspapers. He thought of himself as essentially a reporter. He once claimed that he’d rather go to the dentist than write a book. Of the difficulty of writing, he remarked that “all you do is

sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.” When asked how long it took him to write a column—and it is estimated that he wrote roughly 10,000 of them—he answered: “How much time do I have?”

Walter Wellesley Smith was born in 1905 in Green Bay, Wisconsin, 14 years before the Packers came to town and put the place on the map. He went to Notre Dame and then directly into journalism. A Midwesterner by birth and upbringing, he eventually became what I think of as a naturalized New Yorker: one of those people who, whatever their geographical origins, found their spiritual home in New York and, with it, a comfortable seat at the bar at Toots Shor’s.

Red Smith wrote on all the standard sports, following the calendar of the country’s sports seasons and major events. Every fourth year he broke his normal rhythm by going off to the Olympics. He wrote a lot about boxing in the day when no sporting event had greater interest than that of a heavyweight title fight. He thought boxing “a rough, dangerous, and thrilling sport, the most basic and natural and uncomplicated of athletic competitions, and—at its best—one of the purest of art forms.” (Today, of course, boxing is considered the purest form of barbarism, and attracts minimal interest.) He was also excellent on thoroughbred racing, and he wrote a fair amount about fishing for trout and bass, a sport he loved and the only one in which he acknowledged participating.

He wrote most on baseball, which he loved, and on which he was splendid. He was good on track and field and golf, but not quite so fine on football. His view of hockey was implicit in the old joke: “Went to a fight last night and a hockey game broke out.” Basketball he loathed, once remarking that he would rather drink a Bronx cocktail (a martini with orange juice and maraschino cherry added) than go to a basketball game. He was wrong about this, I believe, and might have felt differently had he lived into the era of the graceful giants, the Magics and Michaels and LeBrons.

How does the best of Red Smith’s

writing, all written for the next day's paper, ultimately to be used for wrapping fish, hold up? This handsome collection of his writings—the earliest of which is dated September 30, 1934, the latest January 11, 1982, or four days before his death—has been assembled with skill and care by Daniel Okrent. A literary man of all work, Okrent has supplied a useful introduction to the volume; the author's son, Terence Smith, a former CBS and *New York Times* journalist, has written a gracious afterword. With the exception of an opening article called "My Press-Box Memories," none of the columns in this book runs to more than 800 or 900 words. (What might the result have been, one wonders, if Red Smith had extended himself to compositions of 5,000 or 10,000 words?) Some of the columns are organized by decade, some by particular sport, and others by simple chronology.

Of the legendary American sportswriters—Grantland Rice, Jimmy Cannon, Frank Graham, John Lardner—Red Smith holds up best. Part of this is owing to his temperament: He knew how best to distance himself from his subject; he understood that he was writing about sports, not the world economy. And unlike A.J. Liebling writing about boxing, Smith, in his coverage of sports, never seemed to be slumming. When he came up against hypocrisy or chicanery—the former on the part of baseball owners, the latter on the part of basketball point-shavers and others—he was properly stern in his condemnations. When he was sentimental, as in describing the installation of old ballplayers in the Baseball Hall of Fame, he recognized it. "Even a toad would be moved," he noted in describing the privilege of election to the hall.

Reading Red Smith's columns in bulk, as opposed to having read him in the regular rhythm of his daily col-

umns, one gets a firmer notion of his strengths, weaknesses, and general point of view. He was a man of good sense. One finds nothing nutty, over the top, or in the least outré in any of the columns collected in *American Pastimes*. In his writing, he generally maintained the detachment bordering on skepticism proper to an



Joe DiMaggio, 1939

observer of events in which he had no true stake.

Smith could use his impressive vocabulary to comic effect:

Joe DiMaggio relaxed in the home club's gleaming tile boudoir and deposited at length in defense of Pete Reiser, the Brooklyn center fielder, who had narrowly escaped being smitten upon the isthmus rhombencephali that day by sundry fly balls.

He referred to boxing legends and wisdom as "the cauliflower gospel," called Wembley Stadium in London "a cooked gaboon of concrete," cited the use of water to "emasculate scotch."

It's difficult to know how educated Red Smith was. Often writing as many as six columns a week, and attending the various events that served as the fodder for these columns, he couldn't have had much

time for reading serious books. In one of his columns, he mentions "David Wark Griffith, Federico Fellini, and Ingmar Bergman." In another, he quotes Ernest Newman, the *London Times* music critic, on the subject of genius. In a column on the fuss made when Carl Yastrzemski got his 3,000th hit, he notes that when Cap Anson (1852-1922), the Chicago Cubs first baseman, got his 3,000th hit, little fuss was made because "in those days Media was where the Medes and Persians came from." Baseball, he declares in one column, is "as ceremonious as a Graustarkian court." He had, in short, a wide enough culture to elevate his column and give it tone.

The charming little touches in Smith's writing caught his more careful readers' attention and gained their admiration. The British middleweight Randy Turpin, late in his fight against Sugar Ray Robinson, "was weaving like a cobra dancing to a flute." The knees of the heavyweight Archie Moore, in his fight against Rocky Marciano, "were wet spaghetti." He called the Yankees pitcher Allie Reynolds, a member of the Creek Indian nation, "that estimable aborigine." The fight promoter Don King shows up in a pair of "brown pants with a crease that could draw blood." There is scarcely a column in this book that is without one or more of these fine touches.

Sometimes, true enough, they go awry. The Yankees pitcher Bob Turley comes out of a game "like a loose tooth." In a fight against Sugar Ray Robinson, the welterweight Carmen Basilio's left eye closed up "like a purple clam." Joe DiMaggio catches a Gene Herman-ski long line-drive "like a well-fed banquet guest." A lake is described as "flat as a fried egg"; fog at the 1978 World Cup tournament in Fort Lauderdale looks as if "a grey soufflé garnished the fairway." He refers to a 12-pound trout he himself caught

IMAGES: ASSOCIATED PRESS

as “broad-shouldered, magnificently colored, and splendidly deep, like Jane Russell”—which, even if it doesn’t quite work, is amusing nonetheless.

Many of these columns were written before the age of television, when sportswriters can assume that readers have already seen the game being written about, so Smith had to expend much of his space on recounting games. In a column from 1944, he felt the need to describe every touchdown in Army’s 59-0 win over Notre Dame. He chronicled action more than personalities. Thus, he spells out the trajectory of a Jim Hickman homer in a 1963 Mets-Braves game: “A high fly to left, curling toward the foul line, arching toward the stands, sailing, sinking—in for a grand slam.”

Many of his best columns were tributes to older ballplayers: Walter Johnson, Lefty Grove, Honus Wagner, Napoleon Lajoie, Babe Ruth. Some turned on an anecdote or joke. One such tells the old story about the punter who reverently asks God’s help to bring the horse he has bet on in a winner. As the horse comes down the stretch, leading by two lengths, the punter says, “Thank you, Lord. I’ll take him from here. Come on, you son of a bitch!”

A newspaper column is primarily an instrument of opinionation. Red Smith was never short of opinions, some of them unpredictable. He thought banning the beanball from baseball took an important weapon out of a pitcher’s arsenal. He had memories of Ty Cobb, whose violence on the basepath made Attila the Hun look like Mother Teresa, and felt that removing high slides and other rough play from baseball was in part responsible for the game’s declining attendance. The advent of the designated hitter, he thought, took the element of managing out of the game. He knocked the hype of Super Bowl

games, and thought the baseball All Star game a nonevent and “a sorry exercise in huckstering.”

He admired Curt Flood, the man who made free-agency in baseball possible, and sided against the owners in every dispute they entered into with players. He felt much the same about the International Olympic



“The knees of Archie Moore ‘were wet spaghetti.’”

Committee, whose insensitivity and instinct for always making the wrong decision was flawless. He was never blind to the corruption in college sports, and, quite properly, blamed “the college presidents, the coaches, the registrars, [and] the alumni, who compounded the felony.”

Although he wrote with great admiration for Joe DiMaggio and Yogi Berra and called Willie Mays “the most exciting player of his time,” Red Smith’s candidate for the greatest athlete of his day was the jockey Willie Shoemaker (1931-2003). Smith thought thoroughbred racing the most dangerous of all sports, with the possible exception of rodeo, which he called “the world’s most violent sport.” Shoemaker brought not only bravery but intelligence to horse racing; he was also an all-round athlete, unbeatable at tennis and golf. He also happened to be a gent, which

always counted significantly in Red Smith’s reckoning.

He doesn’t come out and say it, but Muhammad Ali may well have been Smith’s candidate for the most overrated athlete of his time. “The boy braggart,” Smith called him. He disliked Ali’s running at the mouth, degrading his opponents, pumping himself up. “If there is any decency in him,” Smith wrote in connection with Ali’s third bout against Joe Frazier (“The Thrilla in Manila”), “he will not badmouth Joe Frazier again, for Frazier makes him a real champion. In the ring with Joe, he is a better and braver man than he is with anybody else.” When Ali elected conscientious-objector status in 1966, Smith wrote, in the one jarring political note in the more than 500 pages of *American Pastimes*, that he made “himself as sorry a spectacle as those unwashed punks who picket and demonstrate against the war.” What Smith would have made of Muhammad Ali today, dragging his Parkinson’s-bummed body to the Olympics and other sport-

ing spectacles, would have made the subject for a powerful column.

Among the pleasures of *American Pastimes* is the tour of sports history—in effect, a decade-by-decade highlights show—that the book provides. Red Smith wrote during a time when sports fans knew not only the names of the great racehorses—Whirlaway, Seattle Slew, Citation, Secretariat, War Admiral—but knew their athletic personality as expressed through racetrack performance. His columns record the great prizefights and prizefighters: Joe Louis, Rocky Graziano, Tony Zale, Jersey Joe Walcott, Archie Moore, and others. Writing out of New York, he often wrote about the Yankees and their winning ways: “The dreary, weary, yawning ennui of it.”

The older columns remind one how vastly the money in sports has changed. First prize for the Masters

golf tournament in 1946 was \$2,500. Smith's column on Walter Johnson includes a reference to the 1912 Philadelphia Athletics' "hundred thousand dollar infield," whereas today, two season box-seat tickets to Yankees games might cost that much. Had he been alive, Red Smith might have put the astonishing sums now earned by athletes in perspective, if that is possible. And it is hard to believe that he would have been anything other than unflinching in his denunciation of athletes who use steroids and other drugs.

Smith was said to have been highly irritated when, in 1956, the

first Pulitzer Prize for sportswriting went to Arthur Daley of the *New York Times*. The Pulitzer Prize committee must have been puffing on the same stuff the Nobel Prize committee did when, in 1901, it passed over Leo Tolstoy for the prize in literature and gave it to Sully Prudhomme. Smith won a Pulitzer Prize in 1976. But he also won something much greater. Through his carefully crafted prose, always turned out under deadline pressure, he won for his best columns a life that has lasted long after he, much to the regret of his readers, departed the planet. ♦

power. As Bechtol points out, these "forcible removals" looked as if they were staged to open up vacancies in the regime; in fact, the number of executions tripled in 2010 over 2009, with at least 60 performed in public.

To be sure, peace did not come with the ascension of Kim Jong-un in December 2011, after his father's fatal heart attack. And the new dictator—perhaps 27 at the time—was ruthless, even ordering the assistant chief of staff of the Ministry of the People's Armed Forces to be obliterated with a mortar round, "to leave no trace of him behind down to his hair." The purges continued in less dramatic fashion into the fall of 2012.

Regime instability is the defining feature of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Kim Il-sung, the founder of the country's horrific system, spent more than two decades preparing his son Kim Jong-il for the Communist world's first dynastic succession. Kim Jong-il, in comparison, spent about two years preparing *his* son, and he did not even begin the process until after he had recovered from his 2008 stroke.

Bechtol pegs the beginning of Kim Jong-un's succession training to sometime early in the following year. The ailing Kim Jong-il speeded up the transition by eliminating officials who stood in his way, and the resulting turbulence eroded support for Jong-un in North Korea's "cadre society." Bechtol writes: "Sections of the elite have felt increasingly betrayed because of the large number of purges and executions that have occurred, presumably because of succession issues." Young Kim may not be able to count on the support of the various factions that make up the regime.

In addition to the tight Kim family circle, the regime is, generally speaking, composed of three elements: the security apparatus, the People's Army, and the party. All three parts have always fed into the one man—a Kim—in the center. But Kim Jong-un has yet to gain control by placing his supporters in positions of power. More important, he has not had time to learn how to balance and rule an



# Leader Dearest

*How the Kim dynasty preserves its power.*

BY GORDON G. CHANG

Team venting from the complex that houses the Soviet-era reactor in Yongbyon, spotted in satellite imagery taken at the end of August and released last month, tells us that the rogue regime of Kim Jong-un is about to go back into the business of producing plutonium. Weapons specialists and arms-control advocates uniformly expressed concern in the days following the unwelcome news, but followers of Bruce Bechtol know that Pyongyang's program for enriching uranium is far more consequential than its small-scale plutonium efforts.

In *The Last Days of Kim Jong-il*, Bechtol outlines the progress North Korea has made in weaponizing uranium, the scope of this multidecade project, the sale of technology to Iran, and the response of the international community. Yet this is more than an exercise in description. At the heart of Bechtol's analysis is an explanation

## The Last Days of Kim Jong-il

*The North Korean Threat in a Changing Era*

by Bruce E. Bechtol Jr.  
Potomac, 224 pp., \$29.95

of why these weapons, whether filled with plutonium or uranium cores, are so dangerous in the hands of the Kim family regime.

As he tells us, the ruling group is unstable, headed by a young leader constantly struggling with willful individuals, some of whom are scheming relatives and all of whom are rivals. And in the never-ending contest for power in Pyongyang, Bechtol explains, losers often come to a bad end. Beginning in 2010, senior North Korean officials started dying "under mysterious circumstances." Some were killed in suspicious traffic accidents; others were simply executed. The deaths appear to have been arranged by Kim Jong-il, then the North's leader, to assure the eventual succession of his youngest son, Jong-un, to ultimate

Gordon G. Chang is the author of *Nuclear Showdown: North Korea Takes On the World*.



*Kim Jong-un (second from left) takes a salute, September 9, 2013.*

inherently unstable structure. The result is that he is now guided by his aunt, Kim Kyong-Hui, and her husband, Jang Song-Thaek.

We get an insider's look at the shifting coalitions in Pyongyang. Those behind the scenes are now wielding extraordinary influence. He reports that, last year, powerbrokers did exactly what Kim Jong-un told them to do, but what Kim told them to do "was exactly what they told him he should tell them to do." In short, Kim was in charge in name only. Kim Jong-nam, the ruler's eldest brother, is on-record saying that "the existing ruling elite" will keep Jong-un "as a symbolic figure." To attain real power, Kim Jong-un will have to do what his father did: rely on the nation's strongest institution, the military. Yet the army is not a monolith. It has, for instance, three separate chains of command to prevent it from moving against the Kim family, and commanders are not allowed to congregate in groups of threes or fours, "lest they plan for factional power."

The never-ending intrigue and struggle inside the army is a major factor in making the North so volatile, and troubles in the military undercut the

prevailing view among Korea-watchers that Kim Jong-un has consolidated power faster than anticipated.

Bechtol's main contribution—and it is a critical one—is drawing the line from Pyongyang's ugly succession politics to its belligerent external behavior. He starts with Kim Jong-il's final years: In a detailed chapter, he discusses the fateful year of 2010, when the North lashed out along the Northern Limit Line, the disputed Yellow Sea border between the two Koreas. In March, a North Korean submarine torpedoed the South Korean navy ship *Cheonan*, killing 46 sailors. Two soldiers and two civilians died when the North shelled Yeonpyeong Island in November.

These deadly incidents were executed to gain support among Kim Jong-un's young, hardline "guardian cadres." Attacks will probably continue, he argues, because provocations along the Northern Limit Line are not only part of the North's asymmetric tactics to intimidate Seoul, but they help consolidate the succession, which is clearly Kim's top priority.

Moreover, the author's general view of the regime—that its institutions and basic ideological framework have

not changed and cannot evolve as long as the Kim family rules—leads to his conclusion that Pyongyang will continue its provocative and violent behavior. Kim cannot act peacefully because to do so would undermine the beliefs, developed by his grandfather and father, that hold the ruling group together. This explains why North Korea has remained belligerent no matter who resides in the White House.

Kim Jong-un is bound by the conventions established by his predecessors, which means that he cannot easily divert North Korea from its unsustainable path. In his final years, Kim Jong-il pursued "defiant" policies, especially in his development of nuclear warheads and proliferation of weapons, and the North will continue this aggressive behavior. Because Kim Jong-il refused to change course, Bechtol believes that the country is at risk—especially if Kim Jong-un fails to exert his authority at the center. In that case, the military might splinter, and factional struggle could intensify. Kim Jong-il continued his father's misguided policies, and Kim Jong-un does not appear strong enough to hold a failing state together. ♦

# Vein of Irony

*The world as the poet sees it, through a glass lightly.*

BY JULIANNE DUDLEY

**T**he savoring of unintended ironies” could well be the tagline for this clever and enjoyable collection of poems. The phrase, appropriated by George Green from the *New Yorker* art critic Peter Schjeldahl, cogently sums up the underlying theme of the verse compiled here: Green delights in overturning our assumptions about everything, from pop stars to historical events to the meaning and significance of art.

The title poem has the singsong quality of a children’s nursery rhyme, and the repetitive, though slightly varying, refrain gives it an almost ridiculous feel:

*You stood there on the quarter deck  
beglavored,  
but we were all distracted by your foot.  
Your foot, your foot, your lordship’s gimpy  
foot,  
your twisted, clubbed and clomping foot,  
your foot.*

Of course, the irony here is that Lord Byron was known for his serious, often melodramatic, poetry, and a personal appearance that would have been more readily compared to the Don Juan of his epic poem than to Quasimodo. Byron’s clubfoot certainly did not hinder his success with women (or men, for that matter), and his contemporaries consistently made note of his extraordinary physical beauty. Two centuries later, he is remembered not as a cripple but as a playboy.

So when Green states, *It’s all we think about—your stupid foot*, we know that we are in on a joke. He says the opposite of what we all know to be

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## Lord Byron’s Foot

Poems

by George Green

St. Augustine Press, 80 pp., \$22



George Green

true—and this is the intended irony. The unintended one lies in the fact that Byron actually did have a lame foot, a deformity that, had Byron been a different man, could have been his defining feature.

In “The Searchers,” Green uses a more contemporary example to illustrate the irony of fame.

*Hangovers helped John Wayne evince  
deep torment  
In The Searchers, when he comes  
unglued  
while tracking the Comanches who’ve  
abducted  
Natalie Wood.*

While we, as viewers, might think that Wayne, who plays a tortured Confederate veteran in the 1956 John Ford film, gives a nuanced, emotional performance, Green tells us that we are being duped. On the other hand,

Jeffrey Hunter, the young star who played Wayne’s fellow searcher, *went on to play the role of Christ, / as well as anyone has, in King of Kings.*

No one can portray the Son of God very accurately, though, and Hunter was no exception. He *shaved his armpits / for the Crucifixion, knowing well / the Lord must suffer in ideality.* But Hunter himself died in “obscure circumstances” just 10 years later, his career largely down the tubes and his fame a fading memory.

In a historical bend, “Confederates Try to Burn New York” characterizes John Wilkes Booth as a lonely actor whose thwarted love for a beautiful actress is his main driving force. Green takes us from an 1864 performance of *Julius Caesar*, in which Booth is momentarily upstaged while trying to impress said actress, to the assassin’s bloody demise five months later. Using factual accounts of the months leading up to Booth’s death, Green unearths, in a few short stanzas, the ultimate irony of Booth’s assassination plot.

Booth, apparently determined never again to be upstaged, leapt onstage at Ford’s Theatre after shooting Lincoln in the head, shouting, “*Sic semper tyrannis!*”—a phrase attributed to Brutus at the assassination of Julius Caesar. Which leaves us wondering: Had Booth lost the ability to distinguish between life onstage and off? Was the assassination even about Lincoln, or was it simply a young actor’s ultimate act of bravado?

Green’s occasional forays into personal narrative don’t strike quite the same note as his more referential poems, much to their detriment. His strength as a poet lies in his ability to make us question our assumptions, an ability made all the clearer when dealing with topics, people, and situations with which the reader is familiar. At times, he chooses to focus on lesser-known subjects—Rose Poe and Hartley Coleridge, for example—but even then he relies on our knowledge of their more famous relatives (Edgar Allan and Samuel Taylor) to communicate the full significance of their stories.

The impact of these poems comes not from their descriptive quality but

from their serious, ruminative undertones. Beneath the witty, often hilarious, surface runs a philosophical discourse on the quandaries of human existence: Why do we struggle? Why do we fall? How do we reconcile the enormous inconsistencies of human nature?

Ultimately, George Green encour-

ages us to enjoy these inconsistencies, the “unintended ironies” that make life interesting. While recognizing their full weight, he does not pretend to have any answers. Reading these poems is rather like having a late-night conversation with a good friend—laughs included. ♦



# The Money Men

*How immigrants invented an American economy.*

BY KEVIN R. KOSAR

**T**he past few years have brought a steady stream of awful news about America’s finances.

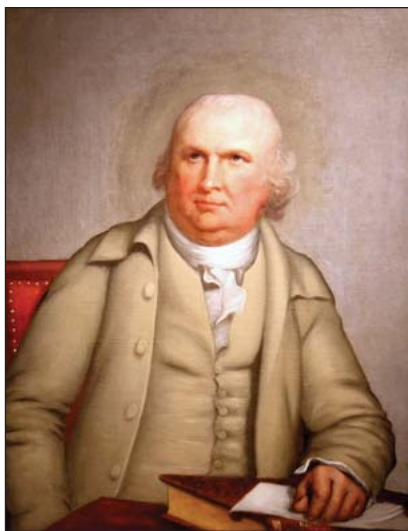
The federal deficit topped a trillion dollars in 2009—a first. The nation’s debt is approaching \$17 trillion. Tax revenue is less than it was five years ago. Government spending has been rising rapidly. Annual national defense spending jumped from \$350 billion to \$670 billion in the past 10 years, while nondefense spending also has spiked. The future, we are told, is an endless ocean of red ink. “Mandatory spending,” the grim term the Congressional Budget Office employs to refer to Medicare and all the must-pay entitlements, is projected to rise from \$2 trillion to \$3.6 trillion by 2023.

The fiscal gore is not limited to the federal government. State governments are billions of dollars in hock to employee pension funds, and municipalities have declared bankruptcy. Detroit has reduced police station hours, abandoned parks, and shuttered schools.

Terms such as “debt ceiling,” “fiscal cliff,” and “sequestration” are part of our lingua franca. All this bad financial news has brought bizarre ideas out of the woodwork. Eggheads have advocated the minting of trillion-dollar

*Kevin R. Kosar is the author, most recently, of Ronald Reagan and Education Policy.*

**The Founders and Finance**  
*How Hamilton, Gallatin, and Other Immigrants Forged a New Economy*  
by Thomas K. McCraw  
Belknap Press, 496 pp., \$35



Robert Morris

coins; paranoiacs have advocated abolishing the Federal Reserve. Virginia has even considered issuing its own currency. It is enough to drive one to despair—and beyond strong drink, about the only thing that has leavened my mood is the knowledge that things have been worse in American history. Much worse.

As Thomas K. McCraw relates

here, America lurched from one financial crisis to another between 1780 and 1840. At many times, it was entirely plausible that the young nation’s financial troubles might disintegrate it:

The War of Independence not only impoverished the country, but also left it burdened with the highest public debt it has ever experienced, measured against the income of the government. Unpaid interest on the debt grew larger and larger by the year, during the deep depression that persisted throughout the 1780s.

The war debt amounted to the total budget of the federal government 20 times over. Foreign creditors and merchants frequently demanded that Americans pay them in specie: They did not trust the paper money issued by states, cities, and private firms. Gold and silver flowed out, and more and more paper currency was printed. Hyperinflation ensued. While America had won independence, it remained closely linked to the Mother Country by trade. The young government received the vast bulk of its revenues from tariffs, meaning that Great Britain could choke it of funds by interrupting trade.

As told by McCraw, America’s efforts to get out of this financial mess, and ultimately get the nation on sturdy footing, were incalculably aided by immigrants. No, he is not speaking of the unnamed many who braved the Atlantic crossing to come to America to work the land and engage in commerce. McCraw eschews bottom-up social history in favor of old-fashioned Great Man history, and the heroes in this story are the earliest stewards of the government’s money, particularly Robert Morris, Alexander Hamilton, and Albert Gallatin.

McCraw notes that “during the first fifty years under the Constitution, only six of the sixty persons appointed to presidential cabinets had been born abroad. Five of those six became secretaries of the treasury.” That number would be six of seven were Morris counted. (He served as America’s superintendent

of finance prior to the ratification of the Constitution.) The author attributes this demographic peculiarity to the limited talent pool among earlier arrivals to North America: “That so few native-born Americans in the late eighteenth century understood finance reflected both the agrarian nature of the society and a broad aversion to indebtedness.”

the way Robert Morris, Alexander Hamilton, and Albert Gallatin thought about the American economy and the way John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison did. Credit, if managed well, holds the key to almost unlimited economic growth.”

Morris, Hamilton, and Gallatin came to America from England, the West Indies, and Switzerland, respec-

Indeed, borrowing money is part and parcel of daily government operations, be they road-building, harbor-dredging, or war-making.

Taxation provides a means to repay these debts—and repayment is critical, for a government’s access to credit depends on its trustworthiness. Morris, who spent inordinate amounts of time jawboning states to contribute their fair share to retire the Revolutionary War debts, wrote:

No treason has operated, or can operate, so great an injury to America, as must follow from a loss of reputation. The payment of debts may indeed be expensive, but it is infinitely more expensive to withhold payment. The former is an expense of money, when money may be commanded to defray it; but the latter involves the destruction of that source from which money can be derived when all other sources fail. That source, abundant, nay almost inexhaustible, is public credit.

The achievements of Morris, Hamilton, and Gallatin cannot be overstated. They erected America’s “basic capitalist framework” by establishing a steady national currency and loosed gushing wells of both private and public credit. These immigrants also fashioned a system of taxation and collection, tamed the nation’s debt, and fostered the development of a manufacturing economy. And these astonishing achievements came despite ardent political opposition: All three men were nastily denounced throughout their 23 years of collective Treasury service. Morris was called a crook; Hamilton was tarred as a royalist and a shill for bankers; poor Gallatin was accused of being a French foreign agent and endured Presidents Jefferson and Madison, both of whom hated banks and little understood macroeconomics.

So the lessons of *The Founders and Finance* are that America’s finances have been far worse than they are today, and that good policies can triumph over political stupidity. Pity that Thomas McCraw died late last year. One wonders if he believed America would ever see the equal of a Morris, Hamilton, or Gallatin again. ♦

MICHAEL REYNOLDS / EPA / NEWS.COM



*Albert Gallatin at the Treasury Department*

Trained in law, history, and the classics, many of the Founders were forward-thinking in politics and retrograde in economic theory. They clung to a simple mercantilist zero-sum notion about wealth creation or dreamt of an America comprised of virtuous yeomen. Thomas Jefferson was particularly thick on this count. In his *Notes on the State of Virginia*, he declared, “Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God.” He likened the factory workers in cities to “sores” on the body politic. Being former colonists did not help; British administrators had staffed America’s major public finance positions, depriving locals of positions that would have trained them in finance.

Capitalism’s “distinctive traits” include a market system, rule of law, the easy purchase and sale of property, labor mobility, stable currency, and credit. “And therein,” McCraw underscores, “lies a key difference between

tively, and made their fortunes here. As *arrivistes* who toiled in commerce, real estate, and manufacturing, they understood finance and avidly promoted the creation of good banks. Morris used his own money to start the Bank of North America in 1782. Two years later, Hamilton chartered the Bank of New York, of which Gallatin later became president. Banks create credit by lending funds in excess of their deposits; this increases the supply of money and fuels both consumption and investment.

Morris, Hamilton, and Gallatin further recognized that credit was key to forging and strengthening the young nation. If a government is “to provide for the common defense,” as the Constitution instructs, then it needs the power to borrow money on good terms. The Revolutionary War had been made much tougher to fight because the government could not access funds to buy the weapons and material required.

# Jersey? Sure . . .

*A California vision of love in the Garden State.*

BY JOHN PODHORETZ



*Tony Danza, Joseph Gordon-Levitt*

**D**on Jon is a movie about Italian people living in New Jersey made by a person who has apparently never met an Italian person in real life, or ever been to New Jersey except perhaps on the way to and from the airfield in Teterboro, where private planes fly him and other celebrities from New York to Hollywood.

Nonetheless, writer-director Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who was born and raised in Los Angeles and has been a television and movie star since his early teens, thinks he has the whole Italian/New Jersey thing covered. What he did (I think) was watch several episodes of *Jersey Shore* and *The Real Housewives of New Jersey* and have his costar Scarlett Johansson do the same—and that was basically it. Her performance consists primarily of chewing gum, dropping her “r”s, and being mean—just like a *Real Housewife*. His performance consists of working out a lot so that his body might resemble the one sported by “The Situation” on *Jersey Shore*. But don’t think he didn’t go for some

*John Podhoretz, editor of Commentary, is THE WEEKLY STANDARD’s movie critic.*

## Don Jon

Directed by Joseph Gordon-Levitt



authenticity. To play his father, who is mostly seen in a wife-beater T-shirt, Gordon-Levitt hired Tony Danza, whose entire acting career has basically consisted of him saying, “Aaaaaay.”

Jon, the title character, is a 28-year-old bartender who never finished college and has nothing of interest to say—but he’s catnip to the ladies at one of those mythical clubs you see in movies, where all it takes is a close-up of his face and a close-up of her face and then smash-cut to the two of them having sex. He goes to these clubs with his “boys,” of course, one of whom is a fellow goombah and the other (because, you know, diversity) is a charming African-American guy who has nothing in common with his friends and surely has better things to do.

Despite the fact that Jon is a wildly successful ladies’ man, he is obsessed with porn. He watches it constantly on his laptop, even to the point of doing so after he’s brought a woman home

and left her asleep in his bed. This only becomes a problem after he meets Barbara, the sexiest gum-chewer in all of Jersey. This woman does nothing but chew gum, watch romance-heavy dramas, chew gum some more, and tease Jon relentlessly. When he follows her wishes and goes back to college, she finally lets him into her bed. They’re in love, although he still watches porn and she is occasionally really nasty to him when he doesn’t live up to the fantasies she has breathed in from the movies the way he has breathed in sexual fantasies from pornography.

She catches him at it; he promises to quit; he doesn’t. Meanwhile, he strikes up a peculiar relationship with a woman in his college class—a mysterious, pot-smoking sophisticate 15 years his senior who discovers his obsession and turns him on to artistic-style 1970s porn. This is how he knows she is a person of many parts, because (evidently) *that* porn was so much better than the porn we have today.

*Don Jon* works hard to be exuberant and catchy, even as it dips its toe into rather dark territory. The end result is that the exuberant and catchy stuff seems forced and hysterical, and the dark stuff seems altogether too light. Gordon-Levitt is a fluent actor, but not a particularly interesting one; as a writer, he’s even less interesting. What Jon learns, it seems, is not how to be a better person or how to cope with what appears to be a serious case of obsessive-compulsive disorder, but rather how to have better sex by doing so with someone you don’t really love but who is *very honest*.

Well, that’s nice for him, but it’s a pretty odd lesson, let’s face it. Most people don’t have sex the way Jon does, though perhaps celebrities who have been stars since their teenage years do. Most people aren’t obsessed with porn the way Jon is, so learning how to cope with the problem by substituting meaningless sex for it doesn’t quite impart the lesson I think Gordon-Levitt wants it to. Though, to be honest, I don’t really know what lesson he wants us to take from it, except maybe that Italians are just, you know, so delightfully, hilariously over the top.

**“Last night, President Obama called Prime Minister Najib of Malaysia to inform him that, due to the government shutdown, he will not be able to go forward with his planned travel to Malaysia.”**

**—White House press release, October 2, 2013**

**PARODY**



October 1, 2013

OFFICIAL TRANSCRIPT: Telephone conversation between the President of the United States and Prime Minister Najib of Malaysia

NAJIB: Hello?

WHITE HOUSE OPERATOR: Please hold for the President of the United States.

NAJIB: Wait. Who is this? Hello?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Najib! How's it going?

NAJIB: What is happening? Who are you? How did you get this number?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: It's me, Najib. Barack Obama. The President of the United States.

NAJIB: Oh my goodness! Hello Mr. President! I'm so glad you called. We are in the midst of planning your welcome party, but my wife wasn't sure if you like coconut. She was going to make a coconut candy cake with dried coconut. So do you like coconut?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Actually—

NAJIB: No, no. You need not say more! She will make a Lo Mai Fun—steamed glutinous rice, which, by the way, does not contain any gluten.

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Najib, the reason why I'm calling is I have to cancel my trip. The Republicans have shut down the government, and I simply cannot leave.

NAJIB: I see. So you do not like the Lo Mai Fun?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: No, I'm sure it's delicious. But the government is shut down.

NAJIB: I do not understand. How can government shut down? What happens?

PRESIDENT OBAMA: Terrible things. The IMAX at the Smithsonian is closed. That adorable panda camera at the zoo is turned off. And the person who tweets for my

PAGE 1 OF 3