

June 19, 2013

Niall Ferguson on the Regulated States of America.

In "Democracy in America," published in 1833, Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at the way Americans preferred voluntary association to government regulation. "The inhabitant of the United States," he wrote, "has only a defiant and restive regard for social authority and he appeals to it . . . only when he cannot do without it."

Unlike Frenchmen, he continued, who instinctively looked to the state to provide economic and social order, Americans relied on their own efforts. "In the United States, they associate for the goals of public security, of commerce and industry, of morality and religion. There is nothing the human will despairs of attaining by the free action of the collective power of individuals."

What especially amazed Tocqueville was the sheer range of nongovernmental organizations Americans formed: "Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations . . . but they also have a thousand other kinds: religious, moral, grave, futile, very general and very particular, immense and very small; Americans use associations to give fetes, to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools."

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Voting present yet again, the administration is now in a Keystone fix according to **Kim Strassel**.

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The ultimatum was expressed clearly in an open letter to Mr. Obama on June 3 from Thomas Steyer, the billionaire climate activist. Mr. Steyer has been a loyal Obama ally, speaking at the Democratic National Convention in 2012 and donating generously to the president and his party.

In his letter, Mr. Steyer nonetheless made clear that he and his NextGen political action committee will turn their force on the president if he approves Keystone. ...

According to the **Weekly Standard** and the NY Times, President Present laid an egg in Berlin today.

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The stage for the president's speech is set up on the East side of the Brandenburg Gate, in the old East Berlin. The sun is pounding down and there are around 6,000 invited guests according

to German authorities. There are bleachers set up either side of the square, with a big two storey riser facing the stage which has a row of bullet proof glass and 12 US, German and EU flags and the grand backdrop of the Gate. There is a large standing crowd between the bleachers.

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Bloomberg News reveals how college sports are subsidized by students.

As parents and students struggle to keep up with rising college tuition and take on greater burdens of debt, universities are being challenged to justify the ballooning athletic fees they tack on to the bill.

In the 2010-11 academic year, the 227 public institutions in Division 1 of the National Collegiate Athletic Association collected more than \$2 billion in athletic fees from their students -- or an average of more than \$500 per enrollee -- according to research by Jeff Smith at the University of South Carolina Upstate.

These fees, which can exceed \$1,000 a year, are often itemized as a "student activity" or "general" expense. That may explain why separate research, by David Ridpath of Ohio University, found that students were only dimly aware of the extent of the fees, and weren't pleased once they found out how much they were paying.

Worse yet, institutions with high proportions of poorer students carrying substantial education debt appeared to be charging the highest fees. While all students must pay the costs of maintaining athletic programs, few actually benefit from the services they subsidize. In this sense, the fees are comparable to a regressive tax -- and one that is more onerous for lower-income students than for the more affluent, who are able to attend schools where athletic fees are lower.

For the six public schools in the Big South conference, Smith shows that the average athletic fee was \$1,512, about 25 times more than the average \$61 paid by students at the Big Ten conference schools. ...

And the **Gothamist** reveals how NYU profs have their housing subsidized by students.

NYU students pay at least \$40,000 in tuition (and over \$10,000 for on-campus housing-PDF) for the academic year—an insane amount. But it makes sense when you consider that NYU not only forwards mortgages for star professors but also **helps buy vacation houses** for star professors and other esteemed administrators.

The NY Times has the depressing details today. For instance, NYU President John Sexton has a place on Fire Island—"an elegant modern beach house that extends across three lots... bought with a \$600,000 loan from an N.Y.U. foundation that eventually grew to be \$1 million, according to Suffolk County land records." ...

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Conan: *Everyone please turn off your phones. I've got some jokes I don't want the government to hear.*

Leno: *Eliot Spitzer and John Edwards both have birthdays the other day. Which explains why no strippers were available for other parties.*

NBC News Cosmic Log with an ode to duct tape.

Over the past half a century, duct tape has been keeping NASA's astronauts alive, putting airplanes back together, making race cars speedier and patching up millions of fix-it projects. It's even been used to remove warts. But the makers of duct tape aren't resting on their sticky, gray laurels: On the contrary, engineers and designers are adding some new twists to the decades-old standby.

"Ten years ago, I used to hear kids say, 'Oh, my dad uses that to fix everything,'" Scott Sommers, director of marketing for ShurTech Brands, told NBC News. "Now I hear the dads say, 'Oh, my kids make everything out of that stuff.'"

ShurTech makes one of the best-known brands of duct tape, known as Duck Tape, and is the motive force behind this weekend's Duct Tape Festival in Avon, Ohio, the company's corporate headquarters. The annual event is scheduled to coincide with Father's Day — which is apt, considering how many dads have gotten out of a tough fix thanks to those silvery rolls of adhesive.

"I hope that women never find out about duct tape," humorist Dave Barry joked, "because once they do, men will no longer serve any useful purpose." ...

WSJ

The Regulated States of America

Tocqueville saw a nation of individuals who were defiant of authority. Today? Welcome to Planet Government.

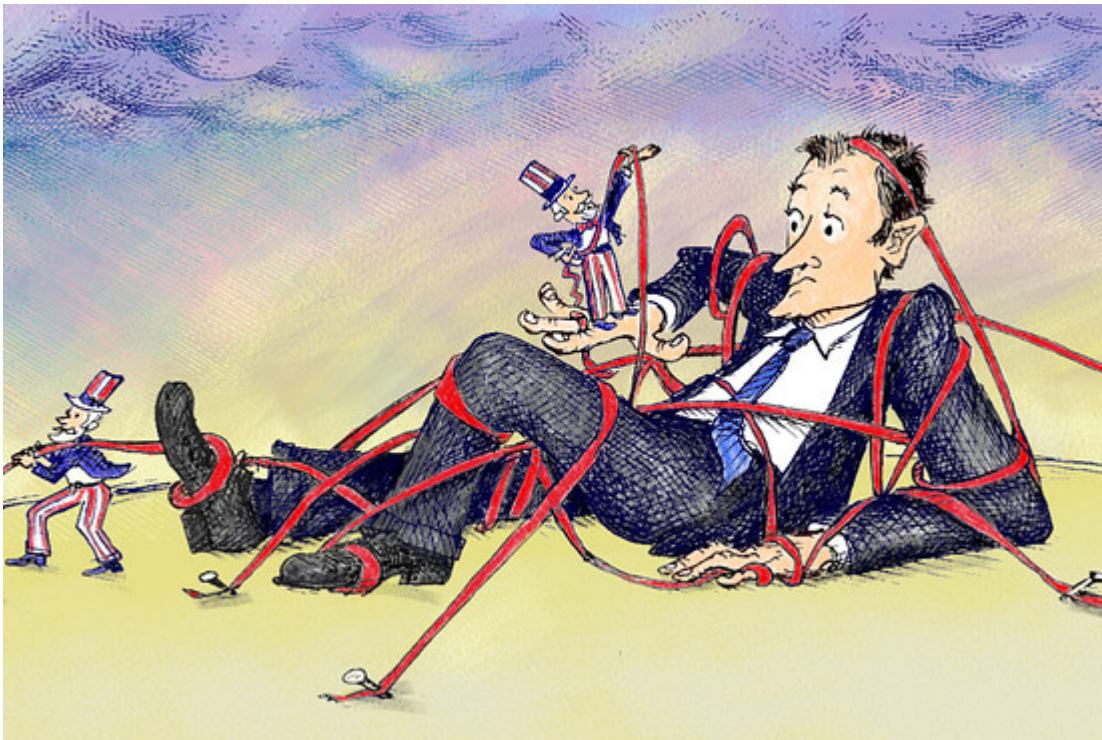
by Niall Ferguson

In "Democracy in America," published in 1833, Alexis de Tocqueville marveled at the way Americans preferred voluntary association to government regulation. "The inhabitant of the United States," he wrote, "has only a defiant and restive regard for social authority and he appeals to it . . . only when he cannot do without it."

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What especially amazed Tocqueville was the sheer range of nongovernmental organizations Americans formed: "Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations . . . but they also have a thousand other kinds: religious, moral, grave, futile, very general and very particular, immense and very small; Americans use associations to give fetes, to found seminaries, to build inns, to raise churches, to distribute books, to send missionaries to the antipodes; in this manner they create hospitals, prisons, schools."

Tocqueville would not recognize America today. Indeed, so completely has associational life collapsed, and so enormously has the state grown, that he would be forced to conclude that, at some point between 1833 and 2013, France must have conquered the United States.



The decline of American associational life was memorably documented in Robert Puttnam's seminal 1995 essay "Bowling Alone," which documented the exodus of Americans from bowling leagues, Rotary clubs and the like. Since then, the downward trend in "social capital" has only continued. According to the 2006 World Values Survey, active membership even of religious associations has declined from just over half the population to little more than a third (37%). The proportion of Americans who are active members of cultural associations is down to 14% from 24%; for professional associations the figure is now just 12%, compared with more than a fifth in 1995. And, no, [Facebook](#) [FB +0.78%](#) is not a substitute.

Instead of joining together to get things done, Americans have increasingly become dependent on Washington. On foreign policy, it may still be true that Americans are from Mars and Europeans from Venus. But when it comes to domestic policy, we all now come from the same place: Planet Government.

As the Competitive Enterprise Institute's Clyde Wayne Crews shows in his invaluable annual survey of the federal regulatory state, we have become the regulation nation almost imperceptibly. Excluding blank pages, the 2012 Federal Register—the official directory of regulation—today runs to 78,961 pages. Back in 1986 it was 44,812 pages. In 1936 it was just 2,620.

True, our economy today is much larger than it was in 1936—around 12 times larger, allowing for inflation. But the Federal Register has grown by a factor of 30 in the same period.

The last time regulation was cut was under Ronald Reagan, when the number of pages in the Federal Register fell by 31%. Surprise: Real GDP grew by 30% in that same period. But Leviathan's diet lasted just eight years. Since 1993, 81,883 new rules have been issued. In the past 10 years, the "final rules" issued by our 63 federal departments, agencies and commissions have outnumbered laws passed by Congress 223 to 1.

Right now there are 4,062 new regulations at various stages of implementation, of which 224 are deemed "economically significant," i.e., their economic impact will exceed \$100 million.

The cost of all this, Mr. Crews estimates, is \$1.8 trillion annually—that's on top of the federal government's \$3.5 trillion in outlays, so it is equivalent to an invisible 65% surcharge on your federal taxes, or nearly 12% of GDP. Especially invidious is the fact that the costs of regulation for small businesses (those with fewer than 20 employees) are 36% higher per employee than they are for bigger firms.

Next year's big treat will be the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, something every small business in the country must be looking forward to with eager anticipation. Then, as Sen. [Rob Portman](#) (R., Ohio) warned readers on this page 10 months ago, there's also the Labor Department's new fiduciary rule, which will increase the cost of retirement planning for middle-class workers; the EPA's new Ozone Rule, which will impose up to \$90 billion in yearly costs on American manufacturers; and the Department of Transportation's Rear-View Camera Rule. That's so you never have to turn your head around when backing up.

President Obama occasionally pays lip service to the idea of tax reform. But nothing actually gets done and the Internal Revenue Service code (plus associated regulations) just keeps growing—it passed the nine-million-word mark back in 2005, according to the Tax Foundation,

meaning nearly 19% more verbiage than 10 years before. While some taxes may have been cut in the intervening years, the tax code just kept growing.

I wonder if all this could have anything to do with the fact that we still have nearly 12 million people out of work, plus eight million working part-time jobs, five long years after the financial crisis began.

Genius that he was, Tocqueville saw this transformation of America coming. Toward the end of "Democracy in America" he warned against the government becoming "an immense tutelary power . . . absolute, detailed, regular . . . cover[ing] [society's] surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way."

Tocqueville also foresaw exactly how this regulatory state would suffocate the spirit of free enterprise: "It rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one's acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces [the] nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd."

If that makes you bleat with frustration, there's still hope.

Mr. Ferguson's new book "The Great Degeneration: How Institutions Decay and Economies Die" has just been published by Penguin Press.

WSJ

Obama's Keystone Regrets

by Kimberley A. Strassel

If President Obama once thought it politically savvy to kick the Keystone XL pipeline decision down the road, he's surely ruing that strategy today. The delay has allowed the environmental community to elevate the project into a litmus test of his environmental fealty—so much so that some of Mr. Obama's biggest supporters are now vowing to turn his base against him if he moves ahead with a win-win project that will boost the economy.

The ultimatum was expressed clearly in an open letter to Mr. Obama on June 3 from Thomas Steyer, the billionaire climate activist. Mr. Steyer has been a loyal Obama ally, speaking at the Democratic National Convention in 2012 and donating generously to the president and his party.



An environmental activist holds a sign in New York in May protesting the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.

In his letter, Mr. Steyer nonetheless made clear that he and his NextGen political action committee will turn their force on the president if he approves Keystone. "NextGen Action is going to be working with friends and allies who are opposed to the development of Keystone XL to intensify our efforts in communicating what is the right policy choice for your Administration," the letter reads. "On June 20, in Washington, D.C. we will announce a campaign that will specifically focus on communicating to those Americans across the country that supported your re-election in 2012."

That vow comes alongside the green community's plans to launch a new phase of rowdy summer activism against the project. The group 350.org is planning "mass action," including a demonstration at the White House on July 27 to pressure the president to keep climate "promises" that have "fallen by the wayside." Groups like CREDO Action and the Rainforest Action Network are pushing a "Keystone XL Pledge of Resistance," asking Americans to "engage in serious, dignified, peaceful civil disobedience that could get you arrested." More than 20 activists were arrested on Monday in Chicago, where the Rainforest Action Network deliberately organized a protest in Mr. Obama's hometown. Environmentalists have also—amusingly—been blasting Mr. Obama's Organizing for America group, furious that it hasn't jumped into the pipeline fight.

One clear message to the president is that the environmental community won't be placated by the administration's expected July announcement of a climate policy. Quite the opposite, many green groups are now claiming the only measure of Mr. Obama's climate devotion is his willingness to kill the pipeline.

This puts Mr. Obama in a tough position. The vast majority of Americans are supportive of Keystone, seeing it as a sensible and obvious job-creation project. Yet the Obama strategy for success in next year's midterms—in which he hopes to reclaim the House—is to use his special-

interest supporters (including environmentalists) to get his base out to vote. Maybe if he'd green-lighted Keystone back before it became a household term, he could have avoided all this.

Weekly Standard

[Berlin Speech: 200,000 for Obama in 2008; Only 6,000 Today](#)

by Daniel Halper

The White House pool report reveals that only 6,000 will be in attendance for Obama's Berlin speech today:

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As the [New York Times](#) reports:

The last time President Obama paid a visit here, as a candidate in 2008, he was [cheered on](#) by 200,000 Germans eager to see the back of George W. Bush and, as one member of that crowd recalled Tuesday, “full of wholly unrealistic expectations of what kind of miracles Obama could work.”

When he arrived here on Tuesday evening ahead of a full day of talks — capped by a speech at the Brandenburg Gate — the reception was far more restrained.

Almost five years later, Germans have undergone “a brutal sobering up” with regard to Mr. Obama, said Ralf Fücks, who heads the board of the Heinrich Böll Foundation, a nonprofit political organization in Berlin. It is, he said, as overdone as the euphoria of 2008, but also a bit alarming.

Bloomberg News

How Poor Students Subsidize Unworthy College Sports

by Richard Vedder

As parents and students struggle to keep up with rising college tuition and take on greater burdens of debt, universities are being challenged to justify the ballooning athletic fees they tack on to the bill.

In the 2010-11 academic year, the 227 public institutions in Division 1 of the [National Collegiate Athletic Association](#) collected more than \$2 billion in athletic fees from their students -- or an average of more than \$500 per enrollee -- according to research by [Jeff Smith](#) at the University of South Carolina Upstate.

These fees, which can exceed \$1,000 a year, are often itemized as a “student activity” or “general” expense. That may explain why separate research, by [David Ridpath](#) of Ohio University, found that students were only [dimly aware](#) of the extent of the fees, and weren’t pleased once they found out how much they were paying.

Worse yet, institutions with high proportions of poorer students carrying substantial education debt appeared to be charging the highest fees. While all students must pay the [costs](#) of maintaining athletic programs, few actually benefit from the services they subsidize. In this sense, the fees are comparable to a regressive tax -- and one that is more onerous for lower-income students than for the more affluent, who are able to attend schools where athletic fees are lower.

Big South

For the six public schools in the Big South conference, Smith shows that the average athletic fee was \$1,512, about 25 times more than the average \$61 paid by students at the Big Ten conference schools. Dan Garrett, my assistant, showed that at schools belonging to the five conferences with the highest athletic fees, more than 60 percent of the students received federal loans, and more than 36 percent received [Pell grants](#). At schools belonging to the five conferences with the lowest fees, 41 percent of students received loans, and 23 percent had Pell grants.

Moreover, the schools in low-athletic-fee conferences typically had better academic reputations, mostly in the top one-third in [Forbes magazine](#)’s ranking of 650 colleges and universities; the high-fee conferences schools were typically below average in those rankings. The low-fee conference schools included Stanford, Duke, Northwestern, the [University of California](#) at Berkeley, the University of California Los Angeles, as well as the highly ranked state universities of [Michigan](#), North Carolina and [Virginia](#). By contrast, the very high-fee Big South conference schools included small to midsized state institutions, such as the University of [North Carolina](#) at Asheville or Radford University and private, religious-affiliated ones such as Liberty University and Presbyterian College.

The low-fee conferences feature powerhouse football and basketball teams -- at schools with athletic budgets often exceeding \$100 million -- that generate huge ticket and television revenue to defray costs. By contrast, at the Mid-American conference schools (where the average

student athletic-fee subsidy was \$831), sports [budgets](#) were typically about \$20 million to \$25 million, and were funded through subsidies that often exceeded \$15 million per school.

None of this would matter as much if students were affluent, enthusiastic about collegiate athletics and willing to pay for high-quality sporting entertainment. Yet Ridpath's study shows that this may not be the case for the 275,000 students of the Mid-American conference schools.

Questionable Value

For starters, about 41 percent of respondents either didn't know, or were highly uncertain about, whether they paid the fees. The students said they might be willing to pay more for services such as student centers and health care, though, on average, they favored sharp reductions in the [cost](#) of intercollegiate athletics. The vast majority of students, 72 percent, said athletics had an "extremely unimportant" or "unimportant" part in their school choice or as a priority for their student fees; less than 10 percent ranked the athletic programs as "important" or "extremely important."

At Mid-South conference schools, most students don't graduate in four years. Let's assume that student athletic fees average \$1,500 and are paid for five years: They would amount to \$7,500 over the college career, compared with zero for non-intercollegiate athletic schools or perhaps \$300 in the Big Ten.

Such fees could increase the level of student debt in the Mid-South schools upon graduation to \$32,500 from \$25,000, or about 30 percent. More typically, the incremental debt burden associated with intercollegiate athletics is probably closer to 10 percent, still a consequential amount.

University trustees, who are often alumni themselves, seem to view intercollegiate athletics as a way to generate school pride. Funding these programs with fees may please influential sports fans, but it often ignores the wishes of the students themselves. And more spending on sports doesn't necessarily confer greater prestige. The [University of Chicago](#), [Harvard University](#), the [Massachusetts Institute of Technology](#), [Emory University](#) and [Washington University](#) in [St. Louis](#) are doing just fine.

(Richard Vedder, a contributor to Bloomberg View, directs the Center for College Affordability and Productivity, teaches economics at Ohio University and is an adjunct scholar at the [American Enterprise Institute](#).)

Gothamist

[Congrats, NYU Students: You're Paying For Your Faculty's Million-Dollar Vacation Homes](#)

by Jen Chung



NYU President John Sexton last fall

NYU students pay [at least \\$40,000 in tuition](#) (and over \$10,000 for on-campus housing-[PDF](#)) for the academic year—an insane amount. But it makes sense when you consider that NYU not only [forgives mortgages for star professors](#) but also **helps buy vacation houses** for star professors and other esteemed administrators.

The [NY Times has the depressing details today](#). For instance, NYU President John Sexton has a place on Fire Island—"an elegant modern beach house that extends across three lots... bought with a \$600,000 loan from an N.Y.U. foundation that eventually grew to be \$1 million, according to Suffolk County land records."

It is one of a number of loans that N.Y.U. has made to executives and star professors for expensive vacation homes in areas like East Hampton, Fire Island and Litchfield County, Conn., in what educational experts call a bold new frontier for lavish university compensation.

...Universities in similar circumstances, like Columbia and Stanford, also have helped professors and executives with home loans. Aid for vacation properties, however, is all but unheard-of in higher education, several experts in university pay packages say.

"That's getting to be a little too sexy even for me, and I have a good sense of humor about these things," said Stephen Joel Trachtenberg, a former president of George Washington University who has publicly defended high salaries for professors and university executives. "That is entertaining, actually. I don't think that's prudent. I don't mind paying someone a robust salary, but I think you have to be able to pass a red-face test."

Let's talk about that red-face test: According to the times, NYU Law School dean Richard Revesz lives "in a handsome West Village town house that was financed by N.Y.U. They also have a home on more than 65 acres near the Housatonic River in Litchfield County, also helped by an N.Y.U. loan, according to land records in both locales. **According to the university's most recently available tax return, they owe the university \$5.7 million altogether.**"

Andrew Ross, President of the NYU chapter of the American Association of University Professors, told [Wall Street On Parade](#) earlier this month, "When our students are often working two jobs and piling up debt on their credit cards just to scratch together tuition, it's highly questionable for the proceeds to be distributed as extravagant compensation packages and multimillion dollar loans to top administrators. In fact, for a non-profit educational institution, it's quite offensive."

Sexton didn't comment to the Times, so the paper ran this quote he gave them in March (when news of Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew's crazy generous bonus were disclosed), "Faculty housing loans on which interest is paid and appreciation is enjoyed by the university actually produce additional revenue. **They're probably the best-performing parts of our portfolio, so as to reduce the amount of tuition that we require.**" Plus, it's awesome to [kick back in your own vacation house](#).

Investors.com

Late Night Humor

by Andrew Malcolm

Fallon: Last week Obama asked China's president to stop spying on Americans. And the Chinese leader responded, "You first."

Conan: Everyone please turn off your phones. I've got some jokes I don't want the government to hear.

Leno: Eliot Spitzer and John Edwards both have birthdays the other day. Which explains why no strippers were available for other parties.

Fallon: Hillary Clinton finally joined Twitter and got more than 200,000 followers in five hours. They were like, "Hillary in 2016!" and "Washington needs Hillary!" "Hillary for the White House!" That's not her followers. Those were her tweets.

Leno: A new article says online readers rarely finish what they're reading online. At least I think that's what it said. It was two pages long.

Conan: Marco Rubio announced a new bill to require immigrants to learn English to become citizens. Many Americans say it's the good news they have heard all year.

Conan: The new Playstation 4 will allow gamers to record video footage of their gaming and share it with friends. All the gamers would need is an Internet connection and friends.

Conan: An anonymous bidder paid \$1 million for a private lunch with billionaire investor Warren Buffett. The first tip Warren Buffett gave him is, "Stop paying \$1 million for lunch — you moron."

Conan: We're learning more about the NSA leaker who started this whole scandal. Edward Snowden's girlfriend is a pole-dancer. I guess that settles the debate over whether or not he's a hero.

Leno: The good news is Tim Tebow got a job playing for Boston. The bad news is, it's the Patriots. So now the IRS is investigating him.

Leno: The NSA leaker said he exposed the scandal because he felt he was part of something doing far more harm than good. Why can't we convince the Kardashians of that?

Letterman: The old Secy. of State Hillary Clinton is on Twitter now. A politician on Twitter. What could possibly go wrong?

Letterman: We had a terrible show last night. Tell you how bad it was. Halfway through, the Obama White House stopped listening in.

Conan: Sen. Marco Rubio has proposed a measure requiring that all immigrants must know English. Opposing the bill are civil rights advocates, immigrants rights' groups and Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Conan: Booming sales for George Orwell's famous book '1984.' So the scandal fallout is worse than we feared. Americans are reading again.

Fallon: Apple introduces a new laptop that has an all-day battery. Here's how it works — don't turn on your laptop all day.

Fallon: This week, a man was arrested for jumping over the White House fence and trying to spray paint a political message. Though if that guy really wanted to get a message to the president, he could have just written it in an e-mail to literally anyone.

Conan: I'm excited about this Father's Day. I'm a dad. I don't know what I'm getting yet, but I have a feeling the government knows.

Conan: In Japan, the oldest man in recorded history has died. He is survived by 14 grandchildren, 25 great grandchildren and his college roommate, Larry King.

Letterman: This weekend's big blockbuster is Superman's 'Man of Steel.' Very exciting because a superhero movie hasn't opened since Friday.

Letterman: When peoples' privacy is violated, that's illegal surveillance. When your privacy is violated, that's illegal surveillance. When people violate their own privacy, that's Facebook.

Letterman: Superman movie spoiler alert--The whole movie he's complaining about having to fly friends to the airport.

Letterman: For my money, the best Superman was Sean Connery.

Fallon: Many Americans are upset over the Obama family's Africa trip this month because it could cost up to \$100 million in taxpayer dollars for travel, security, hotels. Plus Biden wants a giraffe.

Fallon: Since the government's spying scandal was exposed, sales of the novel "1984" have jumped 6,000% on Amazon. "1984" shows how scary it would be if authorities tracked everything you do. And if you want to read it, just buy it on a website that tracks everything you do.

Leno: President Obama tells his annual White House LGBT party as long as he's president, all Americans regardless of sexual orientation will be spied on equally.

Leno: You know that 97-year-old New York City man who just graduated from high school? There's a problem. Seems he can only read at a 95-year-old level.

Leno: A Danish supermarket got a big surprise when workers opened banana boxes and found 220 pounds of cocaine. Even more shocked was the drug mule who found out all those condoms he swallowed were filled with bananas.

NBC News Cosmic Log

[How duct tape patched up the world – and why we're still sticking with it](#)

by Alan Boyle



A photo from the Apollo 17 mission to the moon in 1972 shows a makeshift fender on the crew's lunar rover, constructed from laminated maps and duct tape. "Just call me the little old fender maker," mission commander Gene Cernan said.

Over the past half a century, duct tape has been keeping NASA's astronauts alive, putting airplanes back together, making race cars speedier and patching up millions of fix-it projects. It's even been used to remove warts. But the makers of duct tape aren't resting on their sticky, gray laurels: On the contrary, engineers and designers are adding some new twists to the decades-old standby.

"Ten years ago, I used to hear kids say, 'Oh, my dad uses that to fix everything,'" Scott Sommers, director of marketing for ShurTech Brands, told NBC News. "Now I hear the dads say, 'Oh, my kids make everything out of that stuff.'"

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[NBC News Travel: Thousands rock the roll at Duct Tape Festival](#)

Duct tape's triumphs add up to a list that would make [TV's MacGyver](#) envious:

- The plastic-coated tape first came into its widespread use during World War II, when the U.S. military used it as a waterproof sealant. During the Vietnam War, it was used to patch up helicopter rotor blades — earning it the nickname "100-mph tape."
- When the Apollo 13 spacecraft suffered a crippling explosion in 1970, ground controllers came up with a plan to have the crew [build improvised air filters using duct tape](#). Without that fix, "the crew would not survive," one of the Apollo engineers said. Two years later, Apollo 17 commander Gene Cernan used what he called "good old-fashioned American gray tape" to [fix a fender on the lunar rover](#).
- When an Alaska bush pilot discovered that a brown bear had [ripped his plane virtually to shreds](#), he had to call on friends to help put it back together with [sheets of plastic wrap and a case of duct tape](#). A few days of work made the plane airworthy enough to fly back to civilization. "I think that's as close as you can get to MacGyver without going to outer space," said Jeff Malmer, a member of the research and development team for [3M, which makes Scotch-brand duct tape](#).
- NASCAR race crews routinely use duct tape to [hold things together or modify airflow for peak performance](#) — earning it the upgraded nickname "200-mph tape." It's especially cool if the crew uses color-coordinated tape.
- Some experts have touted duct tape as a [wart-removal therapy](#). Supposedly, the adhesive tape works by irritating the skin and stimulating the body's immune system to attack the virus that causes the warts. Or maybe it just [covers up the skin](#) in such a way that makes it less hospitable to the virus. Does it really work? ShurTech's Sommers shies away from the question: "For legal reasons, I can't say we promote it," he said.

Today, duct-tape manufacturers are reluctant to mess too much with success. "The majority of people who buy duct tape buy it to have around, just in case, and therefore we remain focused on making as much of a universally focused product as possible," Sommers said. But ShurTech is introducing some manufacturing innovations, such as a technique called "co-extrusion" that casts the plastic film at the same time that the rest of the tape (cloth mesh and rubber-based adhesive) is made.

The basic formula occasionally gets tweaked to respond to the marketplace: ShurTech offers different grades of tape for different applications. 3M has its own heavy-duty tape, called "Scotch Tough," as well as transparent duct tape and a type of tape that doesn't leave a rubbery residue when you rip it off.

And then there are the colors and patterns: Both companies have capitalized on duct tape's growing popularity as a craft item. "The kids have started to make fun things, and fashion things," Sommers said. 3M's marketing manager for Scotch duct tape, Laura Maciejewski, told NBC News that "it's really the girls who are using it." ShurTech offers [Duck Tape designs with college themes](#), while 3M has marketing deals for Barbie, [Batman](#) and [Superman](#) tape.

Is there anything duct tape *can't* do? Well ... yes.

"What's ironic about duct tape is that it's really not the best product for sealing duct work," Malmer said.



