

September 17, 2013

Mark Steyn takes us back to Putin's star turn at the NY Times OpEd.

For generations, eminent New York Times wordsmiths have swooned over foreign strongmen, from Walter Duranty's Pulitzer-winning paeans to the Stalinist utopia to Thomas L. Friedman's more recent effusions to the "enlightened" Chinese Politburo. So it was inevitable that the cash-strapped Times would eventually figure it might as well eliminate the middle man and hire the enlightened strongman direct. Hence Vladimir Putin's impressive debut on the op-ed page this week.

It pains me to have to say that the versatile Vlad makes a much better columnist than I'd be a KGB torturer. His "plea for caution" was an exquisitely masterful parody of liberal bromides far better than most of the Times' in-house writers can produce these days. He talked up the U.N. and international law, was alarmed by U.S. military intervention, and worried that America was no longer seen as "a model of democracy" but instead as erratic cowboys "cobbling coalitions together under the slogan 'you're either with us or against us.'" He warned against chest-thumping about "American exceptionalism," pointing out that, just like America's grade-school classrooms, in the international community everyone is exceptional in his own way.

All this the average Times reader would find entirely unexceptional. Indeed, it's the sort of thing a young Senator Obama would have been writing himself a mere five years ago. Putin even appropriated the 2008 Obama's core platitude: "We must work together to keep this hope alive."

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... When the president's an irrelevant narcissist and his secretary of state's a vainglorious buffoon, Marco Rubio shouldn't be telling the world don't worry, the other party's a joke, too.

Charles Krauthammer thinks we got a bad deal in Syria last week.

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Yet consider what's happened over the last month. Assad uses poison gas on civilians and is branded, by the United States above all, a war criminal. Putin, covering for the war criminal, is exposed, isolated, courting pariah status.

And now? Assad, far from receiving punishment of any kind, goes from monster to peace partner. Putin bestrides the world stage, playing dealmaker. He's welcomed by America as a constructive partner. Now a world statesman, he takes to the New York Times to blame American interventionist arrogance — a.k.a. "American exceptionalism" — for inducing small states to acquire WMDs in the first place.

And Obama gets to slink away from a Syrian debacle of his own making. Such are the fruits of a diplomacy of epic incompetence.

Responding to the new Putintate, [Peggy Noonan](#) has good ideas about what is exceptional in our country.

... America is not exceptional because it has long attempted to be a force for good in the world, it attempts to be a force for good because it is exceptional. It is a nation formed not by brute, grunting tribes come together over the fire to consolidate their power and expand their land base, but by people who came from many places. They coalesced around not blood lines but ideals, and they defined, delineated and won their political rights in accordance with ground-breaking Western and Enlightenment thought. That was something new in history, and quite exceptional. We fought a war to win our freedom, won it against the early odds, understood we owed much to God, and moved forward as a people attempting to be worthy of what he'd given us.

We had been obliged, and had obligations. If you don't understand this about America you don't understand anything.

I don't know why the idea of American exceptionalism seems to grate so on Mr. Putin. Perhaps he simply misunderstands what is meant by it and takes it to be a reference to American superiority, which it is not. Perhaps it makes him think of who won the Cold War and how. Maybe the whole concept makes him think of what Russia did, almost 100 years ago now, to upend and thwart its own greatness, with a communist revolution that lasted 75 years and whose atheism, a core part of its ideology, attempted to rid his great nation of its faith, and almost succeeded. Maybe it grates on him that in his time some of the stupider Americans have crowed about American exceptionalism a bit too much—and those crowing loudest understood it least.

But I suspect on some level he's just a little envious of the greatness of America's beginnings. The Russian Revolution almost killed Russia—they're still recovering. The American Revolution has been animating us for more than two centuries. ...

Wait until you see the example of media protecting president bystander provided by [Power Line](#).

Congress (Dems included) was mugged by minimum-wage reality last week. [Kate Bachelder](#) has the story in WSJ's Political Diary.

Members of Congress sometimes bump into economic reality. Take Tuesday's vote on a bill to delay federally mandated minimum-wage increases in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa, U.S. territories in the South Pacific. Congress agreed, 415-0, that a minimum-wage requirement can worsen economic mobility, though apparently only on small islands.

The government has historically granted the territories an exemption from minimum-wage requirements under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The last federal increase in 2007, to \$7.25 from \$5.15, required CNMI and American Samoa for the first time to raise their minimum wage by \$0.50 per year until it reached parity with the states. The bill included American Somoa only after Nancy Pelosi came under attack for granting an exemption to a place that had factories for companies headquartered in her district.

Even with the minimum wage currently only at \$5.55 in CNMI after three increases, the requirement has caused so much economic tumult that Congress has now passed two pieces of legislation, in 2010 and on Tuesday, to extend the transition period for the islands.

That's because the minimum-wage hikes have slammed local economies, which were already reporting years of declining GDP when the increases began. Government Accountability Office studies have shown that wage floors tend to do precisely the opposite of what their supporters purport. ...

Michelle Malkin celebrates the gun control loss in CO.

Quick, call the CDC. We've got a Rocky Mountain outbreak of Acute Sore Loser Fever. After failing to stave off two historic recall bids on Tuesday, two delusional state legislators and their national party bosses just can't help but double-down and trash voters as dumb, sick, criminal and profligate.

The ululations of gun-grabbing Democrats here in my adopted home state are reverberating far and wide. Appearing on cable TV Thursday to answer the question "What happened?" Pueblo State Sen. Angela Giron sputtered that she lost her seat due to "voter suppression." Giron whined to CNN anchor Brooke Baldwin that voters "weren't able to get to the polls" and that there was "voter confusion."

"Voter confusion"? My goodness. You'd think there were no public libraries, local television stations, talk radio, newspapers, blogs, Facebook, Twitter or government websites to get information about the elections. (Oh, and pay no attention to the massive 6-to-1 spending advantage that Giron and her fellow recall target John Morse, formerly the president of the state Senate, enjoyed.)

"Voter suppression"? Dios mio! You'd think there were New Black Panther Party thugs standing outside the polls shouting racist epithets and waving police batons!

But no, there was no "voter confusion" or "voter suppression." In fact, as the Colorado Peak Politics blog pointed out, the "majority of turnout in (Giron's) district was Democrat, by a large margin. And she still lost. Voter suppression (is) not even believable."

Giron lost in her Obama-loving Democratic Senate District 3 by a whopping 12 points. ...

For what it's worth, turns out it was Sec. Clinton who first proclaimed the "red line." At least that is the story from [Daily Caller](#).

.. On August 11, 2012, ten days before Obama's statement, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had a joint press conference in Istanbul. During that press conference the following exchange happened:

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, for you, can you tell us a little bit more in detail about your meeting with the opposition activists? Did you get a better sense of whether they are really prepared to be able to be involved in leading a transition? What kind of questions did you ask them about who is actually doing the fighting on the ground? And what kind of answers did you get?

And then, for both of you, there has been a lot of talk about this common operational picture. What exactly is that common operational picture? Does it involve the potential of this corridor from Aleppo, north to the border here, turning into some kind of safe haven? And does it include anything on how to deal with the chemical weapons that everyone has expressed concern about? Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: [yadda yadda] And both the minister and I saw eye to eye on the many tasks that are ahead of us, and the kinds of contingencies that we have to plan for, including the one you mentioned in the horrible event that chemical weapons were used. And everyone has made it clear to the Syrian regime that is a red line for the world, [italics mine] what would that mean in terms of response and humanitarian and medical emergency assistance, and of course, what needs to be done to secure those stocks from every being used, or from falling into the wrong hands.

It appears that where Obama deviated from script was in omitting "for the world" and substituting "for us." ...

National Review

[American Ineffectualism](#)

Every American ally is cringing with embarrassment at the amateurishness of the last month.

by Mark Steyn

For generations, eminent *New York Times* wordsmiths have swooned over foreign strongmen, from Walter Duranty's Pulitzer-winning paeans to the Stalinist utopia to Thomas L. Friedman's more recent effusions to the "enlightened" Chinese Politburo. So it was inevitable that the cash-strapped *Times* would eventually figure it might as well eliminate the middle man and hire the enlightened strongman direct. Hence Vladimir Putin's impressive debut on the op-ed page this week.

It pains me to have to say that the versatile Vlad makes a much better columnist than I'd be a KGB torturer. His "plea for caution" was an exquisitely masterful parody of liberal bromides far better than most of the *Times*' in-house writers can produce these days. He talked up the U.N. and international law, was alarmed by U.S. military intervention, and worried that America was

no longer seen as “a model of democracy” but instead as erratic cowboys “cobbling coalitions together under the slogan ‘you’re either with us or against us.’” He warned against chest-thumping about “American exceptionalism,” pointing out that, just like America’s grade-school classrooms, in the international community everyone is exceptional in his own way.

All this the average *Times* reader would find entirely unexceptional. Indeed, it’s the sort of thing a young Senator Obama would have been writing himself a mere five years ago. Putin even appropriated the 2008 Obama’s core platitude: “We must work together to keep this hope alive.” In the biographical tag at the end, the *Times* editors informed us: “Vladimir V. Putin is the president of Russia.” But by this stage, one would not have been surprised to see: “Vladimir V. Putin is the author of the new memoir *The Audacity of Vlad*, which he will be launching at a campaign breakfast in Ames, Iowa, this weekend.”

As lowahawk ingeniously summed it up, Putin is “now just basically doing donuts in Obama’s front yard.” It’s not just that he can stitch him up at the G-8, G-20, Gee-don’t-tell-me-you’re-coming-back-for-more, and turn the leader of the free world into the planet’s designated decline-and-fall-guy, but he can slough off crappy third-rate telepromptered mush better than you community-organizer schmucks, too. Let’s take it as read that Putin didn’t write this himself any more than Obama wrote that bilge he was drowning in on Tuesday night, when he took to the airwaves to argue in favor of the fierce urgency of doing something about gassed Syrian moppets but not just yet. Both guys are using writers, but Putin’s are way better than Obama’s — and English isn’t even their first language. With this op-ed Tsar Vlad is telling Obama: The world knows you haven’t a clue how to play the Great Game or even what it is, but the only parochial solipsistic dweeby game you do know how to play I can kick your butt all over town on, too.

This is what happens when you elect someone because he looks cool standing next to Jay-Z. Putin is cool mainly in the sense that Yakutsk in February is. In American pop-culture terms, he is a faintly ridiculous figure, with his penchant for homoerotic shirtlessness, his nipples entering the room like an advance security team; the celebrities he attracts are like some rerun channel way up the end of the dial: Goldie Hawn was in the crowd when Putin, for no apparent reason, sang “I found my thrill on Blueberry Hill,” which Goldie seemed to enjoy. In reality, Putin finds his thrill by grabbing Obama’s blueberries and squeezing hard. Cold beats cool.

Charles Crawford, Britain’s former ambassador in Serbia and Poland, called last Monday “the worst day for U.S. and wider Western diplomacy since records began.” Obama set it in motion at a press conference last year by drawing his famous “red line.” Unlike, say, the undignified scums around the Canadian and Australian prime ministers, Obama doesn’t interact enough with the press for it to become normal or real. So at this rare press conference he was, as usual, playing a leader who’s giving a press conference. The “red line” line sounds like the sort of thing a guy playing a president in a movie would say — maybe Harrison Ford in *Air Force One* or Michael Douglas in *The American President*. It never occurred to him that out there in the world beyond the Republic of Cool he’d set an actual red line and some dime-store dictator would cross it with impunity. So, for most of the last month, the bipartisan foreign-policy establishment has assured us that, regardless of whether it will accomplish anything, we now have to fire missiles at a sovereign nation because “America’s credibility is at stake.”

This is diplomacy for post-moderns: The more you tell the world that you have to bomb Syria to preserve your credibility, the less credible any bombing raid on Syria is going to be — especially when your leaders are reduced to negotiating the precise degree of military ineffectiveness

necessary to maintain that credibility. In London this week, John Kerry, America's secretary of state, capped his own impressive four-decade accumulation of magnificently tin-eared sound bites by assuring his audience that the military devastation the superpower would wreak on Assad would be "unbelievably small." Actually, the problem is that it will be all too believably small. The late Milton Berle, when challenged on his rumored spectacular endowment, was wont to respond that he would only take out just enough to win. In London, Kerry took out just enough to lose.

In the Obama era, to modify Teddy Roosevelt, America chatters unceasingly and carries an unbelievably small stick. In this, the wily Putin saw an opening, and offered a "plan" so absurd that even Obama's court eunuchs in the media had difficulty swallowing it. A month ago, Assad was a reviled war criminal and Putin his arms dealer. Now, Putin is the honest broker and Obama's partner for peace, and the war criminal is at the negotiating table with his chances of survival better than they've looked in a year. On the same day the U.S. announced it would supply the Syrian rebels with light arms and advanced medical kits, Russia announced it would give Assad's buddies in Iran the S-300 ground-to-air weapons system and another nuclear reactor.

Putin has pulled off something incredible: He's gotten Washington to anoint him as the international community's official peacemaker, even as he assists Iran in going nuclear and keeping their blood-soaked Syrian client in his presidential palace. Already, under the "peace process," Putin and Assad are running rings around the dull-witted Kerry, whose Bototoxicated visage embodies all too well the expensively embalmed state of the superpower.

As for Putin's American-exceptionalism crack, he was attacking less the concept than Obama's opportunist invocation of it as justification for military action in Syria. Nevertheless, Democrats and Republicans alike took the bait. Eager to mend bridges with the base after his amnesty bill, Marco Rubio insisted at National Review Online that America was still, like, totally exceptional.

Sorry, this doesn't pass muster even as leaden, staffer-written codswallop. It's not the time — not when you're a global joke, not when every American ally is cringing with embarrassment at the amateurishness of the last month. Nobody, friend or foe, wants to hear about American exceptionalism when the issue is American ineffectualism. On CBS, Bashar Assad called the U.S. government "a social-media administration." He's got a better writer than Obama, too. America is in danger of being the first great power to be laughed off the world stage. When the president's an irrelevant narcissist and his secretary of state's a vainglorious buffoon, Marco Rubio shouldn't be telling the world don't worry, the other party's a joke, too.

Washington Post

The fruits of epic incompetence

by Charles Krauthammer

The president of the United States takes to the airwaves to urgently persuade the nation to pause before doing something it has no desire to do in the first place.

Strange. And it gets stranger still. That "strike Syria, maybe" speech begins with a heart-rending account of children consigned to a terrible death by a monster dropping poison gas. It proceeds

to explain why such behavior must be punished. It culminates with the argument that the proper response — the most effective way to uphold fundamental norms, indeed human decency — is a flea bite: something “limited,” “targeted” or, as so memorably described by [Secretary of State John Kerry](#), “unbelievably small.”

The mind reels, but there’s more. We must respond — but not yet. This “[Munich moment](#)” (Kerry again) demands first a pause to find accommodation with that very same toxin-wielding monster, by way of negotiations with his equally cynical, often shirtless, Kremlin patron bearing promises.

The promise is to rid Syria of its chemical weapons. The negotiations are open-ended. Not a word from President Obama about any deadline or ultimatum. And utter passivity: Kerry said hours earlier that he [awaited the Russian proposal](#).

Why? [The administration claims](#) (preposterously, but no matter) that Obama has been working on this idea with Putin at previous meetings. Moreover, the idea was first publicly enunciated by Kerry, even though his own State Department immediately walked it back as a slip of the tongue.

Take at face value Obama’s claim of authorship. Then why isn’t he taking ownership? Why isn’t he calling it the “U.S. proposal” and defining it? Why not issue a U.S. plan containing the precise demands, detailed timeline and threat of action should these conditions fail to be met?

Putin doesn’t care one way or the other about chemical weapons. Nor about dead Syrian children. Nor about international norms, parchment treaties and the other niceties of the liberal imagination.

He cares about power and he cares about keeping Bashar al-Assad in power. Assad is the key link in the anti-Western Shiite crescent stretching from Tehran through Damascus and Beirut to the Mediterranean — on which sits Tartus, Russia’s only military base outside the former Soviet Union. This axis frontally challenges [the pro-American Sunni Arab Middle East](#) (Jordan, Yemen, the Gulf Arabs, even the North African states), already terrified at the imminent emergence of a nuclear Iran.

At which point the Iran axis and its Russian patron would achieve dominance over the moderate Arab states, allowing Russia to supplant America as regional hegemon for the first time since Egypt switched to our side in the Cold War in 1972.

The hinge of the entire Russian strategy is saving the Assad regime. That’s the very purpose of the “Russian proposal.” Imagine that some supposed [arms-control protocol is worked out](#). The inspectors have to be vetted by Assad, protected by Assad, convoyed by Assad, directed by Assad to every destination. Negotiation, inspection, identification, accounting, transport and safety would require constant cooperation with the regime, and thus acknowledgment of its sovereignty and legitimacy.

So much for [Obama’s repeated insistence that Assad](#) must go. Indeed, [Putin has openly demanded](#) that any negotiation be conditioned on a U.S. commitment to forswear the use of force against Assad. On Thursday, [Assad repeated that demand](#), warning that without an

American pledge not to attack and not to arm the rebels, his government would agree to nothing.

This would abolish the very possibility of America tilting the order of battle in a Syrian war that Assad is now winning [thanks to Russian arms](#), Iranian advisers and Lebanese Hezbollah shock troops. Putin thus assures the survival of his Syrian client and the continued ascendancy of the anti-Western Iranian bloc.

And what does America get? Obama saves face.

Some deal.

As for the peace process, it has about zero chance of disarming Damascus. We've spent nine years disarming an infinitely smaller arsenal in Libya — in conditions of peace — and we're still finding [undeclared stockpiles](#).

Yet consider what's happened over the last month. Assad uses poison gas on civilians and is branded, by the United States above all, [a war criminal](#). Putin, covering for the war criminal, is exposed, isolated, courting pariah status.

And now? Assad, far from receiving punishment of any kind, goes from monster to peace partner. Putin bestrides the world stage, playing dealmaker. He's welcomed by America as a constructive partner. Now a world statesman, he takes to the New York Times to blame American [interventionist arrogance](#) — a.k.a. "American exceptionalism" — for inducing small states to acquire WMDs in the first place.

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WSJ

[Vladimir Putin Takes Exception](#)

A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an op-ed piece.

by Peggy Noonan

He twisted the knife and gloated, which was an odd and self-indulgent thing to do when he was winning. [Vladimir Putin](#), in his essay in the New York Times, may even to some degree have overplayed his hand, though that won't matter much immediately. As a public posture, grace and patience would have brought him a lot further, impressing people and allowing them to feel some confidence in the idea that he's seriously trying to offer an actual path out of the Syrian mess.

But maybe he doesn't think he has to win anyone over anymore—and maybe that's the real news. In any case, the steely-eyed geopolitical strategist has reminded us that he's also the media-obsessed operator who plays to his base back home by tranquilizing bears, wrestling alligators and riding horses shirtless, like Yul Brynner in "Taras Bulba."

Clearly he is looking at President Obama and seeing weakness, lostness, lack of popularity. His essay is intended to exploit this and make some larger points, often sanctimoniously, about how the U.S. should conduct itself in the world. And so he chided American leadership, implicitly challenged its position as world leader, posited the U.N. Security Council, where Russia has done so much mischief, as the only appropriate decision-making body for international military action, and worried the U.N. will "suffer the fate" of the League of Nations if "influential countries" continue to take action without authorization.

He does not doubt chemical weapons were used in Syria but doubts it was the government that used them. It was probably the rebels, he asserts, in an attempt to "provoke intervention by their powerful foreign patrons."

Still, in general, Mr. Putin made a better case in the piece against a U.S. military strike than the American president has for it. And he did so, in a way, by getting to the left of the president, who he implies is insufficiently respectful to international bodies. Mr. Putin was candid about his primary anxiety—a spillover from Syria that could threaten Russian stability.

The Syrian civil war, he both conceded and cleverly noted for a U.S. audience, is in no way "a battle for democracy." He made no moral claims for his ally, Bashar Assad. The war, he said, is a battle between government and opposition, with the latter composed of militants and mercenaries including al Qaeda fighters and "extremists of all stripes." He sees what is happening as a danger to his country. Some of the rebels are from the West, and some from Russia itself. He does not want them returning home with the training they've acquired. "This threatens us all," he said. True enough.

Mr. Putin's challenge to the idea of American exceptionalism was ignorant and tone-deaf. The president had thrown in a reference to it at the end of his speech. Mr. Putin, in his essay, responded: "It is extremely dangerous to encourage people to see themselves as exceptional, whatever the motivation." After all, he said, God made us all equal.

My goodness, that argument won't get you very far in America, and it's a little worrying that Mr. Putin either wouldn't know this or wouldn't care. (Here it must be noted: The Times is reporting Mr. Putin's essay was placed by an American public-relations firm. Really? This is the kind of work you get from a big ticket, big-time communications outfit? Can't America even do PR anymore?)

America is not exceptional because it has long attempted to be a force for good in the world, it attempts to be a force for good because it is exceptional. It is a nation formed not by brute, grunting tribes come together over the fire to consolidate their power and expand their land base, but by people who came from many places. They coalesced around not blood lines but ideals, and they defined, delineated and won their political rights in accordance with groundbreaking Western and Enlightenment thought. That was something new in history, and quite exceptional. We fought a war to win our freedom, won it against the early odds, understood we owed much to God, and moved forward as a people attempting to be worthy of what he'd given us.

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But I suspect on some level he's just a little envious of the greatness of America's beginnings. The Russian Revolution almost killed Russia—they're still recovering. The American Revolution has been animating us for more than two centuries.

The irony of course is that Mr. Putin used the exceptionalism argument against Mr. Obama, who himself barely believes in the idea and no doubt threw it into his speech the way he often throws things like that in at the end: He thinks Americans like it, that the nationalist ego of the clingers demands it. But he doesn't *mean* it. Asked about American exceptionalism once, he said sure he believes in it, just as the Greeks believe in Greek exceptionalism. Thank you for that rousing historical endorsement.

After Mr. Putin's comments, New Jersey's Sen. Bob Menendez was asked for his response. "I almost wanted to vomit," he said. This was the best thing Bob Menendez has ever said, and really did sum up U.S. reaction.

A mystery of the Syrian crisis, and the Putin essay, is this. Mr. Putin obviously feels considerable disdain for the president, in spite of what *he* threw in at the end of his essay—that he and Mr. Obama have a personal and professional relationship marked by "growing trust." Sure. But I keep thinking of Mr. Obama's meeting with then-President Dmitry Medvedev in May 2012 and Mr. Obama's famous hot-mic comment that after the election he would have "more flexibility" and hoped Mr. Putin understood that. Why didn't Mr. Obama's promised flexibility earn him any gratitude from Mr. Putin? Why didn't it earn him Mr. Putin's discretion, especially at a difficult moment like this?

One thing is certain. Mr. Putin's essay was not Nikita Krushchev slamming his shoe on the desk at the U.N. and saying, "We will bury you!" Those were bad days. We'll see, in retrospect, what these days are. It's not a cold war between the U.S. and Russia, and it's not a hot one, but there's a new chill in the air, isn't there?

Power Line

[The Media Protect Obama Where It Counts](#)

by John Hinderaker

President Obama and his media enablers are trying to spin the Syria fiasco or, failing that, distract attention from it. Via [Mark Steyn](#), [Ace of Spades](#) makes a nice catch. Time magazine publishes four editions: Europe/Middle East/Africa, Asia, South Pacific and United States. This week's foreign editions all acknowledged the big news story of the week, and if their covers are a guide, didn't try to paper over the disaster. This is the Europe/Middle East/Africa cover:



Note that the cover text doesn't pull any punches:

America's weak and waffling, Russia's rich and resurgent—and its leader doesn't care what anybody thinks of him.

The Asia edition:



The South Pacific edition:



And, finally, the U.S. edition:



No “America’s weak and waffling” for American readers! Nope, that might be a little more truth than they are prepared to handle. You wouldn’t want to take any chances with those pesky voters. Historically, the purpose of the press was to inform people. But the principal purpose of our laughably misnamed mainstream media is to prevent people from learning things that might not be good for them. Or, rather, for the Democratic Party.

WSJ - Political Diary **Minimum-Wage Realities**

by Kate Bachelder

Members of Congress sometimes bump into economic reality. Take Tuesday's vote on a bill to delay federally mandated minimum-wage increases in the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands and American Samoa, U.S. territories in the South Pacific. Congress agreed, 415-0, that a minimum-wage requirement can worsen economic mobility, though apparently only on small islands.

The government has historically granted the territories an exemption from minimum-wage requirements under the Fair Labor Standards Act. The last federal increase in 2007, to \$7.25 from \$5.15, required CNMI and American Samoa for the first time to raise their minimum wage by \$0.50 per year until it reached parity with the states. The bill included American Samoa only after Nancy Pelosi came under attack for granting an exemption to a place that had factories for companies headquartered in her district.

Even with the minimum wage currently only at \$5.55 in CNMI after three increases, the requirement has caused so much economic tumult that Congress has now passed two pieces of legislation, in 2010 and on Tuesday, to extend the transition period for the islands.

That's because the minimum-wage hikes have slammed local economies, which were already reporting years of declining GDP when the increases began. Government Accountability Office studies have shown that wage floors tend to do precisely the opposite of what their supporters purport. Employment in CNMI fell by 35% between 2006 and 2009, while average inflation-adjusted earnings remained largely unchanged. In American Samoa, employment dropped 19% from 2008 to 2009 after just one increase. The GAO said employers took "cost-cutting actions," including "laying off workers and freezing hiring."

Congress upheld the GAO's findings—at least for now. Conspicuously absent from Tuesday's debate were the usual defenders of minimum-wage laws. Rep. George Miller (D., Calif.), who sponsored the 2007 federal increase, voted yes to giving the islands a break. So did Rep. Hank Johnson (D., Ga.), who voiced his concern for island territories in a 2010 remark that Guam might capsize. The bill flew through Harry Reid's Senate by unanimous consent, an odd contrast with the vicious Congressional fight over raising the minimum wage in 2007.

Congress's little experiment in the South Pacific has gone poorly, and it would do well to call the whole thing off instead of just delaying more damage. But that might put members of Congress in the awkward position of explaining why some struggling American cities and towns don't deserve similar consideration.

Human Events

[The epic meltdown of the gun-grabbers](#)

by Michelle Malkin



COLORADO SPRINGS — Quick, call the CDC. We've got a Rocky Mountain outbreak of Acute Sore Loser Fever. After failing to stave off two historic recall bids on Tuesday, two delusional state legislators and their national party bosses just can't help but double-down and trash voters as dumb, sick, criminal and profligate.

The ululations of gun-grabbing Democrats here in my adopted home state are reverberating far and wide. Appearing on cable TV Thursday to answer the question "What happened?" Pueblo State Sen. Angela Giron sputtered that she lost her seat due to "voter suppression." Giron whined to CNN anchor Brooke Baldwin that voters "weren't able to get to the polls" and that there was "voter confusion."

"Voter confusion"? My goodness. You'd think there were no public libraries, local television stations, talk radio, newspapers, blogs, Facebook, Twitter or government websites to get information about the elections. (Oh, and pay no attention to the massive 6-to-1 spending advantage that Giron and her fellow recall target John Morse, formerly the president of the state Senate, enjoyed.)

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But no, there was no "voter confusion" or "voter suppression." In fact, as the Colorado Peak Politics blog pointed out, the "majority of turnout in (Giron's) district was Democrat, by a large margin. And she still lost. Voter suppression (is) not even believable."

Giron lost in her Obama-loving Democratic Senate District 3 by a whopping 12 points. The only significant complaint about voter suppression came after the polls closed — and not from anyone in the district, but from out-of-state Democratic National Committee Chairwoman Debbie Wah-wah-wah-sserman Schultz of Florida. The majority of constituents who signed the recall petitions against her were, um, Democrats. Would Giron care to argue that voters from the same party that put her in office are too dumb and confused to comprehend her state's own Constitution and election process?

Giron was defeated not by elite Republicans and nefarious NRA bigwigs, but by a former Clinton supporter/police chief/campaign neophyte and a couple of upstart citizen activists who make a living as plumbers.

Grassroots organizers in both Pueblo and El Paso counties with little to no previous electoral experience researched the state constitution's recall provisions and put in the hard nose-to-the-ground work of gathering thousands of petition signatures in a brief period. They did their homework, adhered to the law and made their voices heard. As I've reported in my column over the past several months, it was a David vs. gun-grabbing Goliath battle from the start.

Only after the local citizens got the ball rolling — catching flack from establishment GOP types who initially opposed the disruptive process — did national organizations weigh in with help. And the campaign cash they provided was still no match for nosybody Bloomberg, Vice President Joe Biden (who personally lobbied state Democratic legislators) and their gun control-freak company.

The significance of this unprecedented battle cannot be overstated. Self-government won. Demagoguery lost. All the Bloomberg bucks in the world couldn't buy immunity for his water-carriers in Colorado. The role of Second Amendment-supporting, limited-government-advocating local women in pushing back against false smears was invaluable. The "reproductive rights" fear-mongering failed. And the use of social media to organize echoed other successful tea party efforts.

The problem for the gun-grabbers wasn't that the voters were uninformed. It was that they were *too* informed. Voters paid close attention when state Democrats rigged the game during the legislative debate over extreme gun and ammo restrictions that will do nothing to stop the next Aurora, Columbine or Newtown. They watched fellow citizens being blocked from testifying, pushed aside for out-of-staters. They heard Morse accuse gun owners of having a "sickness in their souls." They heard him brag to liberal zealots that he was ignoring their "vile" e-mail.

They rejected Giron's sneering at grassroots organizers as "special interests." They didn't buy that their birth control would disappear. They weren't swayed by shooting victim Rep. Gabby Gifford's husband's emotional appeals or distracted by Bill Clinton's last-minute robocalls.

"What happened?" The reasons these petty tyrants lost are as simple as ABC: arrogance, bitterness and contempt for the people. As more and more self-empowered citizens are learning, you can't fix this stupid hubris. But you can vote it out.

Michelle Malkin is the author of "Culture of Corruption: Obama and his Team of Tax Cheats, Crooks and Cronies" (Regnery 2010).

Daily Caller

Obama's Red Line Was Not A Gaffe

by streiff

It is becoming part of the conventional wisdom that Obama committed a gaffe when he set a "[red line](#)" on the use of chemical weapons in Syria:

"We have been very clear to the Assad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation."

The [New York Times](#) went so far as to report:

Moving or using large quantities of chemical weapons would cross a "red line" and "change my calculus," [the president declared](#) in response to a question at a news conference, to the surprise of some of the advisers who had attended the weekend meetings and wondered where the "red line" came from. With such an evocative phrase, the president had defined his policy in a way some advisers wish they could take back.

"The idea was to put a chill into the Assad regime without actually trapping the president into any predetermined action," said one senior official, who, like others, discussed the internal debate on the condition of anonymity. But "what the president said in August was unscripted," another official said. Mr. Obama was thinking of a chemical attack that would cause mass

fatalities, not relatively small-scale episodes like those now being investigated, except the “nuance got completely dropped.”

Recently, the White House spokes-urchin, Jay Carney, tried to claim Obama had [not made a mistake](#):

“The president’s use of the term ‘red line’ was deliberate and was based on U.S. policy,” press secretary Jay Carney told reporters at his daily briefing.

As much as it pains me to say it, Jay Carney is correct and the New York Times account is totally false. The use of “red line” to describe chemical weapons use in Syria did not originate with Obama going off message, it reflected a calculated use of the term.

On August 11, 2012, ten days before Obama’s statement, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu had a [joint press conference in Istanbul](#). During that press conference the following exchange happened:

QUESTION: Madam Secretary, for you, can you tell us a little bit more in detail about your meeting with the opposition activists? Did you get a better sense of whether they are really prepared to be able to be involved in leading a transition? What kind of questions did you ask them about who is actually doing the fighting on the ground? And what kind of answers did you get?

And then, for both of you, there has been a lot of talk about this common operational picture. What exactly is that common operational picture? Does it involve the potential of this corridor from Aleppo, north to the border here, turning into some kind of safe haven? And does it include anything on how to deal with the chemical weapons that everyone has expressed concern about? Thank you.

SECRETARY CLINTON: [yadda yadda] And both the minister and I saw eye to eye on the many tasks that are ahead of us, and the kinds of contingencies that we have to plan for, including the one you mentioned in the horrible event that chemical weapons were used. *And everyone has made it clear to the Syrian regime that is a red line for the world*, [italics mine] what would that mean in terms of response and humanitarian and medical emergency assistance, and of course, what needs to be done to secure those stocks from every being used, or from falling into the wrong hands.

It appears that where Obama deviated from script was in omitting “for the world” and substituting “for us.” Small wonder then that our answer to Metternich insisted that he had meant the [world had set the red line](#), not him:

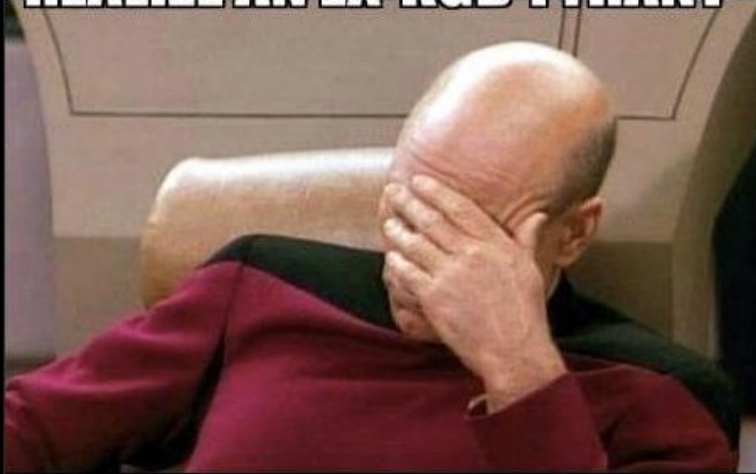
“I didn’t set a red line. The world set a red line.”

So, the red line was not a gaffe it was the considered policy of the United States. This, if anything, makes the whole incident more egregious as the nation was consciously committed to acting militarily (see Clinton’s statement about “contingencies” and “response”) in case of chemical weapons use in Syria and yet it is obvious no planning was ever accomplished in anticipation of such an event. Yet another blunder by the administration comes home to roost.



U.S SYRIAN POLICY

**THE MOMENT YOU
REALIZE AN EX-KGB TYRANT**



**HAS STYMIED A NOBEL PEACE
PRIZE WINNER'S ATTEMPT AT WAR**

**"THE UNITED STATES HAS NO CHOICE BUT
TO ATTACK SYRIA BECAUSE DICTATOR
BACHAR ASSAD IS KILLING HIS OWN
PEOPLE WITH CHEMICAL WEAPONS.**



**BEFORE HE WAS JUST KILLING THEM WITH
BULLETS, BUT IF AMERICA CARED ABOUT
SHOOTING PEOPLE WE WOULD BE INVADING
CHICAGO." COLBERT REPORT 9/3/13**



BENGAZI: One Year Later

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“Anyone know if President Obama intends to perform background checks on the Syrian rebels before providing them weapons?”

- Sen. Ted Cruz