

September 23, 2013

The president said we're not "some banana republic." [Mark Steyn](#) reacts. *This is the United States of America," declared President Obama to the burghers of Liberty, Mo., on Friday. "We're not some banana republic."*

*He was talking about the Annual Raising of the Debt Ceiling, which glorious American tradition seems to come round earlier every year. "This is not a deadbeat nation," President Obama continued. "We don't run out on our tab." True. But we don't pay it off either. We just keep running it up, ever higher. And every time the bartender says, "Mebbe you've had enough, pal," we protest, "Jush another couple trillion for the road. Set 'em up, Joe." And he gives you that look that kinda says he wishes you'd run out on your tab back when it was \$23.68.*

*Still, Obama is right. We're not a banana republic, if only because the debt of banana republics is denominated in a currency other than their own — i.e., the U.S. dollar. When you're the guys who print the global currency, you can run up debts undreamt of by your average generalissimo. As Obama explained in another of his recent speeches, "Raising the debt ceiling, which has been done over a hundred times, does not increase our debt." I won't even pretend to know what he and his speechwriters meant by that one, but the fact that raising the debt ceiling "has been done over a hundred times" does suggest that spending more than it takes in is now a permanent feature of American government. And no one has plans to do anything about it. Which is certainly banana republic-esque. ...*

[Joel Kotkin](#) says there is bipartisan distrust of the government. Is this a glimmer of hope?

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recent CNN poll found that seven in 10 would oppose attacking Bashar al-Assad's regime without congressional approval, which about 60 percent think Congress should not give.

*This is not a partisan consensus, but an outside-the-Beltway one. Liberals, who might be expected to rally behind their president, have remained deeply divided. At the grass-roots level, both left-wing groups, like Moveon.org, and those on the right, notably Tea Party factions, have opposed entering the Syrian quagmire. One liberal writer, utterly confused by the new alignment, admitted he was looking to the “far-right fringe” with its “abominable” nativist and racist views, to “salvage our Syria policy.” ...*

Juan Williams of Fox News asks why the administration wants to send poor black kids back to failing schools. Because they're owned by the teachers' unions, Juan. And the teachers unions have no interest in serving the students.

*The Obama Justice Department filed a civil rights lawsuit last month to stop Louisiana from giving vouchers to poor students in failing schools. The Justice Department claims that the vouchers disrupt racial balance in schools.*

*School integration remains important. But the Justice Department's argument is weak at best.*

*At the two schools cited in the Justice Department suit there is no evidence that racial diversity has been hurt because of the voucher plan.*

*One is a school in which a white majority school lost black students. In the other example, a black majority school lost white students. But in both schools the use of vouchers resulted in less than one percent difference in the racial make-up of the schools.*

*In addition, 90 percent of the students receiving the vouchers are black students from families with incomes less than 250 percent of the poverty line. The voucher plan is not a return to the days of white flight from public schools.*

*And there is an even more important issue than school integration at stake: How can the Justice Department justify denying poor black students, the people with the lowest achievement record in U.S. schools, the rare chance to get out of failing schools and go to better schools? More than 80 percent of students in the voucher plan had attended poorly performing schools, rated 'D' or 'F.' ...*

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## National Review

### American Banana Republic

*The decay of a free society doesn't happen overnight, but we're getting there.*

by Mark Steyn

This is the United States of America,” declared President Obama to the burghers of Liberty, Mo., on Friday. “We’re not some banana republic.”

He was talking about the Annual Raising of the Debt Ceiling, which glorious American tradition seems to come round earlier every year. “This is not a deadbeat nation,” President Obama continued. “We don’t run out on our tab.” True. But we don’t pay it off either. We just keep running it up, ever higher. And every time the bartender says, “Mebbe you’ve had enough, pal,” we protest, “Jush another couple trillion for the road. Set ’em up, Joe.” And he gives you that look that kinda says he wishes you’d run out on your tab back when it was \$23.68.

Still, Obama is right. We’re not a banana republic, if only because the debt of banana republics is denominated in a currency other than their own — i.e., the U.S. dollar. When you’re the guys who print the global currency, you can run up debts undreamt of by your average generalissimo. As Obama explained in another of his recent speeches, “Raising the debt ceiling, which has been done over a hundred times, does not increase our debt.” I won’t even pretend to know what he and his speechwriters meant by that one, but the fact that raising the debt ceiling “has been done over a hundred times” does suggest that spending more than it takes in is now a permanent feature of American government. And no one has plans to do anything about it. Which is certainly banana republic-esque.

Is all this spending necessary? Every day, the foot-of-page-37 news stories reveal government programs it would never occur to your dimestore caudillo to blow money on. On Thursday, it was the Food and Drug Administration blowing just shy of \$200 grand to find out whether its Twitter and Facebook presence is “well-received.” A fifth of a million dollars isn’t even a rounding error in most departmental budgets, so nobody cares. But the FDA is one of those sclerotic American institutions that has near to entirely seized up. In October 1920, it occurred to an Ontario doctor called Frederick Banting that insulin might be isolated and purified and used to treat diabetes; by January 1923, Eli Lilly & Co were selling insulin to American pharmacies: A little over two years from concept to market. Now the FDA adds at least half-a-decade to the process, and your chances of making it through are far slimmer: As recently as the late Nineties, they were approving 157 new drugs per half-decade. Today it’s less than half that.

But they’ve got \$182,000 to splash around on finding out whether people *really* like them on Facebook, or they’re just saying that. So they’ve given the dough to a company run by Dan Beckmann, a former “new media aide” to President Obama. That has the whiff of the banana republic about it, too.

The National Parks Service, which I had carelessly assumed was the service responsible for running national parks, has been making videos on Muslim women’s rights: “Islam gave women a whole bunch of rights that Western women acquired later in the 19th and 20th centuries, and we’ve had these rights since the seventh century,” explains a lady from AnNur Islamic School in Schenectady at the National Park Service website, nps.gov. Fascinating stuff, no doubt. But what’s it to do with national parks? Maybe the rangers could pay Dan Beckmann a quarter-

million bucks to look into whether the National Parks' Islamic outreach is using social media as effectively as it might.

Where do you go to get a piece of this action? As the old saying goes, bank robbers rob banks because that's where the money is. But the smart guys rob taxpayers because that's where the big money is. According to the Census Bureau's latest "American Community Survey," between 2000 and 2012 the nation's median household income dropped 6.6 percent. Yet in the District of Columbia median household income rose 23.3 percent. According to a 2010 survey, seven of the nation's ten wealthiest counties are in the Washington commuter belt. Many capital cities have prosperous suburbs — London, Paris, Rome — because those cities are also the capitals of enterprise, finance, and showbiz. But Washington does nothing but government, and it gets richer even as Americans get poorer. That's very banana republic, too: Proximity to state power is now the best way to make money. Once upon a time Americans found fast-running brooks and there built mills to access the water that kept the wheels turning. But today the ambitious man finds a big money-no-object bureaucracy that likes to splash the cash around and there builds his lobbying group or consultancy or social media optimization strategy group.

The CEO of Panera Bread, as some kind of do-gooder awareness-raising shtick, is currently attempting to live on food stamps, and not finding it easy. But being dependent on government handouts isn't supposed to be easy. Instead of trying life at the bottom, why doesn't he try life in the middle? In 2012, the top 10 percent were taking home 50.4 percent of the nation's income. That's an all-time record, beating out the 49 percent they were taking just before the 1929 market crash. With government redistributing more money than ever before, we've mysteriously wound up with greater income inequality than ever before. Across the country, "middle-class" Americans have accumulated a trillion dollars in college debt in order to live a less comfortable life than their high-school-educated parents and grandparents did in the Fifties and Sixties. That's banana republic, too: no middle class, but only a government elite and its cronies, and a big dysfunctional mass underneath, with very little social mobility between the two.

Like to change that? Maybe advocate for less government spending? Hey, Lois Lerner's IRS has got an audit with your name on it. The tax collectors of the United States treat you differently according to your political beliefs. That's pure banana republic, but no one seems to mind very much. This week it emerged that senior Treasury officials, up to and including Turbotax Timmy Geithner, knew what was going on at least as early as spring 2012. But no one seems to mind very much. In the words of an insouciant headline writer at *Government Executive*, "the magazine for senior federal bureaucrats" (seriously), back in May:

"The Vast Majority of IRS Employees Aren't Corrupt"

So, if the vast majority aren't, what proportion *is* corrupt? Thirty-eight percent? Thirty-three? Twenty-seven? And that's the good news? The IRS is not only institutionally corrupt, it's corrupt in the service of one political party. That's Banana Republic 101.

What comes next? Government officials present in Benghazi during last year's slaughter have been warned not to make themselves available to congressional inquiry. CNN obtained one e-mail spelling out the stakes to CIA employees: "You don't jeopardize yourself, you jeopardize your family as well."

“That’s all very ominous,” wrote my colleague Jonah Goldberg the other day, perhaps a little too airily for my taste. I’d rank it somewhere north of “ominous.”

“Banana republic” is an American coinage — by O. Henry, a century ago, for a series of stories set in the fictional tropical polity of Anchuria. But a banana republic doesn’t happen overnight; it’s a sensibility, and it’s difficult to mark the precise point at which a free society decays into something less respectable. Pace Obama, ever swelling debt, contracts for cronies, a self-enriching bureaucracy, a shrinking middle class preyed on by corrupt tax collectors, and thuggish threats against anyone who disagrees with you put you pretty far down the banana-strewn path.

## **Orange County Register** **[Bipartisan distrust of the Beltway](#)**

by Joel Kotkin

Much has been written and spoken about the deep divide between “red” and “blue” America, but the real chasm increasingly is between Washington and the rest of the country. This disconnect may increase as both conservatives and liberals outside the Beltway look with growing disdain upon their “leaders” inside the imperial capital. Indeed, according to [Gallup](#), trust among Americans toward the federal government has sunk to historic lows, regarding both foreign and domestic policy.

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Yet, out in the country, where people, even those who (like me) supported Iraq initially, know that that war was not worth the price, in blood, treasure or damage to national unity. The citizens are not remotely interested in getting a second shot of neoconservative disaster in Syria. A recent [CNN](#) poll found that seven in 10 would oppose attacking Bashar al-Assad's regime without congressional approval, which about 60 percent think Congress should not give.

This is not a partisan consensus, but an outside-the-Beltway one. Liberals, who might be expected to rally behind their president, have [remained deeply divided](#). At the grass-roots level, both left-wing groups, like Moveon.org, and those on the right, notably [Tea Party factions](#), have opposed entering the Syrian quagmire. One liberal writer, [utterly confused](#) by the new alignment, admitted he was looking to the “far-right fringe” with its “abominable” nativist and racist views, to “salvage our Syria policy.”

Similarly, most conservatives who in the past instinctively supported intervention have [turned decisively dovish](#). Increasingly, as [one conservative commentator](#) acidly put it, the support for war reflects “an insider urge to use U.S. military power,” which helps “advance the careers of government officials through bigger budgets, new departments and more exposure and influence.” It also helps the think tanks, consulting firms and others who benefit from foreign adventurism.

## **Syria suspicions**

This cynicism, felt on both sides of the political chasm, is what doomed the president's Syria adventure and left him to the tender mercies of Vladimir Putin. Americans in general, suggests the National Interest's Robert Merry, have concluded that “the country's elites – of both political parties and across the political spectrum – have been wrong on just about everything they have done since the end of the Cold War.”

This chasm between the ruled and the rulers has both widened and deepened during the Obama years. Initially, Democrats supported the idea of a strong federal expansion to improve the economy. Yet, as it turned out, the stimulus and other administration steps did little to help the middle and working classes. The Obama economic policy has turned out to be at least as much – if not more – “trickle down” than that of his Republican predecessor.

Similarly embarrassing, the administration's embrace of surveillance, as demonstrated by the National Security Agency revelations, has been no less, and maybe greater, than that of former vice president Dick Cheney and his crew of anti-civil libertarians. And it's been the Left, notably, the British Guardian newspaper, that has led the fight against the mass abuse of privacy. Americans as a whole are [more sympathetic](#) to leaker Edward Snowden and increasingly concerned about government intrusions on their privacy. A July Washington Post-ABC News poll found fully 70 percent of Democrats and 77 percent of Republicans said the NSA's phone and Internet surveillance programs intrude on some Americans' privacy rights. Nearly six in 10 political independents who saw intrusions said they are unjustified.

The Right intrinsically opposes expansion of the civilian part of the federal government, but it supported the national security state both during the Cold War and after 9/11. This has now begun to change. The revelations about IRS targeting of Tea Party and other grass-roots groups likely have not reduced their fears of Big Brother. Yet, by better than 2-1, Democrats, according to a [Quinnipiac survey](#), also supported appointing a special prosecutor to get to the bottom of this scandal.

## **Beltway boom-times**

Besides shared concerns over Syria, the NSA and IRS, grass-roots conservatives and liberals increasingly reject the conventional wisdom of their Washington betters. What increasingly matters here is not political “spin,” but the breadth of anti-Washington sentiment. After all, while most of the country continues to suffer low economic growth, the Washington area has benefitted from the expansion of federal power. The entire industry of consultants, think tanks, lawyers and related fields, no matter their supposed ideologies, has waxed while the rest of America has waned.

This has been a golden era for the nation's capital, perhaps the one place that never really felt the recession. Of the nation's 10 richest counties, seven are in the Washington area. In 1969, notes liberal journalist Dylan Matthews, wages in the D.C. region were [12 percent higher than the national average](#); today, they are 36 percent higher. Matthews ascribes this differential not so much to government per se, but on the huge increase in lobbying, which has nearly doubled over the past decade.

Matthews draws a liberal conclusion, not much different than one a conservative would make, that “Washington's economic gain may be coming at the rest of the country's expense.” Washington [may see itself as the new role model](#) for dense American cities but this reflects the fact that it's one of the few places where educated young people the past five years have been able to get a job that pays well.

This is intolerable to Americans of differing political persuasions. It is not just a detestation of government but also of the Washington-centered media, which has [sent some 20 of its top luminaries](#) into an Obama administration that, at least until recently, has managed to spin them better than any of its predecessors. Not surprisingly, along with that of Congress, the [media's credibility has been crashing](#) to historic lows, with 60 percent expressing little trust in the fourth estate.

### **New generation**

These trends might gain velocity as the millennial generation begins to shape American politics. Indeed, although they have supported Obama against his GOP opponents, their activism is more grass-roots than governmentally oriented. [Only 6 percent of recent college graduates](#) want to work for government at any level, down from 8 percent in 2008; barely 2 percent would consider joining the federal workforce.

As generational chroniclers Mike Hais and Morley Winograd point out, millennials – those born from 1983-2003 – tend to be liberal, but not strongly supportive of top-down, administrative solutions. “Millennials,” Winograd notes, “believe in solving national issues at the local, community level. They are as suspicious of large government bureaucracies as any libertarian but as dedicated to economic equality and social justice as any liberal.”

Winograd's notion of “pragmatic idealism” might include dispersing power and influence away from Washington. Perhaps, as [some have suggested](#), putting Congress “on the road,” for example, forcing it to legislate, say, at the convention center in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., or Ontario, Calif. Maybe lawmakers might have to confront what life is like for their subjects, who do not live privileged lives funded by our tax dollars. Instead of croissants in Georgetown, let them eat bread and tortillas.

*Register opinion columnist Joel Kotkin is R.C. Hobbs Professor of Urban Studies at Chapman University. He is the executive editor of [www.newgeography.com](http://www.newgeography.com).*

**Fox News**

## **Why does Obama's Justice Department want to send poor, black kids to failing schools?**

by Juan Williams

The Obama Justice Department filed a civil rights lawsuit last month to stop Louisiana from giving vouchers to poor students in failing schools. The Justice Department claims that the vouchers disrupt racial balance in schools.

School integration remains important. But the Justice Department's argument is weak at best.

At the two schools cited in the Justice Department suit there is no evidence that racial diversity has been hurt because of the voucher plan.

One is a school in which a white majority school lost black students. In the other example, a black majority school lost white students. But in both schools the use of vouchers resulted in less than one percent difference in the racial make-up of the schools.

In addition, 90 percent of the students receiving the vouchers are black students from families with incomes less than 250 percent of the poverty line. The voucher plan is not a return to the days of white flight from public schools.

And there is an even more important issue than school integration at stake: How can the Justice Department justify denying poor black students, the people with the lowest achievement record in U.S. schools, the rare chance to get out of failing schools and go to better schools? More than 80 percent of students in the voucher plan had attended poorly performing schools, rated 'D' or 'F.'

This suit is the latest example of the Obama administration's opposition to vouchers. The president has tried to eliminate funding for a Washington, D.C. voucher program more than once. Speaker of the House John Boehner had to make the D.C. plan a priority in budget negotiations to save it.

Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal is on target when he calls the Justice Department suit a "political ploy."

Concern over giving poor black students a chance to get out of bad schools is certainly not the issue so it must be politics. As the governor recently said: "The Department of Justice is filing suit against the state of Louisiana – now listen to this – to force these children to go back to failing schools."

The politics of teacher union support for the administration seems to be the only explanation for why the administration would take a stand against better educational opportunities for black students.

Politics can blind both the left and the right when it comes to school choice, including vouchers. But a clear-eyed look at research that shows no connection between school choice and racial segregation of schools.



A study done at the widely respected Brookings Institution found no connection between the growth of charter school enrollment and student segregation. Based on nine years of federal data the study found that the rise of charter schools has not made a difference in the level of segregation in public school.

Another study done at the University of Wisconsin analyzed test scores from 22,000 schools with 18,000 children and found that poverty, not skin color, is the hidden force driving most failing schools.

Black students do get better grades and test scores when attending racially integrated schools with middle and upper income white students. But that is directly tied to getting those poor black students out of schools dominated by the culture of poverty, surrounded by other poor students and the problems children of any color bring to school because they are poor.

The bottom line is that the research shows is that it makes no sense to judge schools as good or bad solely on the race of students.

The Louisiana voucher plan being targeted by the Justice Department obviously has little impact on the racial composition of the schools cited in the suit since it has less than a 1 percent impact on their racial composition. But it has major impact on helping a few poor black students into schools where they have a better chance to succeed.

And no proven connection exists in Louisiana to show that charter schools or schools accepting vouchers have more segregated student populations.

With nearly 60 years in the books since the Supreme Court's Brown decision to rule segregated schools an unconstitutional denial of equal rights, the nation remains aware of the persistent racial divide in public schools. And it true that black students in desegregated schools score better on tests. But that has more to do with escaping the stranglehold of poverty that with school choice.

In the years since Brown v. the Board of Education Supreme Court decision, school districts have used a variety of strategies to try to increase student integration, from busing students to creating magnet schools and charter schools to draws students of different races together.

But even with increased school choice the nation's schools remain largely segregated by both race and more importantly by class.

The average black, Hispanic and American Indian student attends a school that is more than two-thirds minority. And research shows if a student is poor enough to qualify for the federal free lunch program that student is in a school in which two-third of the other students are also poor and qualify for the free lunch.

That is why the administration's decision to tie school choice – specifically vouchers – to higher levels of school segregation is wrong on two counts.

First, school choice does not lead to higher levels of racial segregation in schools. And second, no parent, black or white, should be forced to keep their child in a failing school when there is another option.

# CANADIAN ARCHAEOLOGY



RAISING AMERICA'S DEBT LIMIT IS A SIGN OF LEADERSHIP FAILURE...



...THE RISING DEBT IS A HIDDEN DOMESTIC ENEMY...



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...A DEBT TAX THAT WASHINGTON DOESN'T WANT TO TALK ABOUT...



...INCREASING AMERICA'S DEBT WEAKENS US...



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...AMERICA HAS A DEBT PROBLEM...



...AND A FAILURE OF LEADERSHIP...



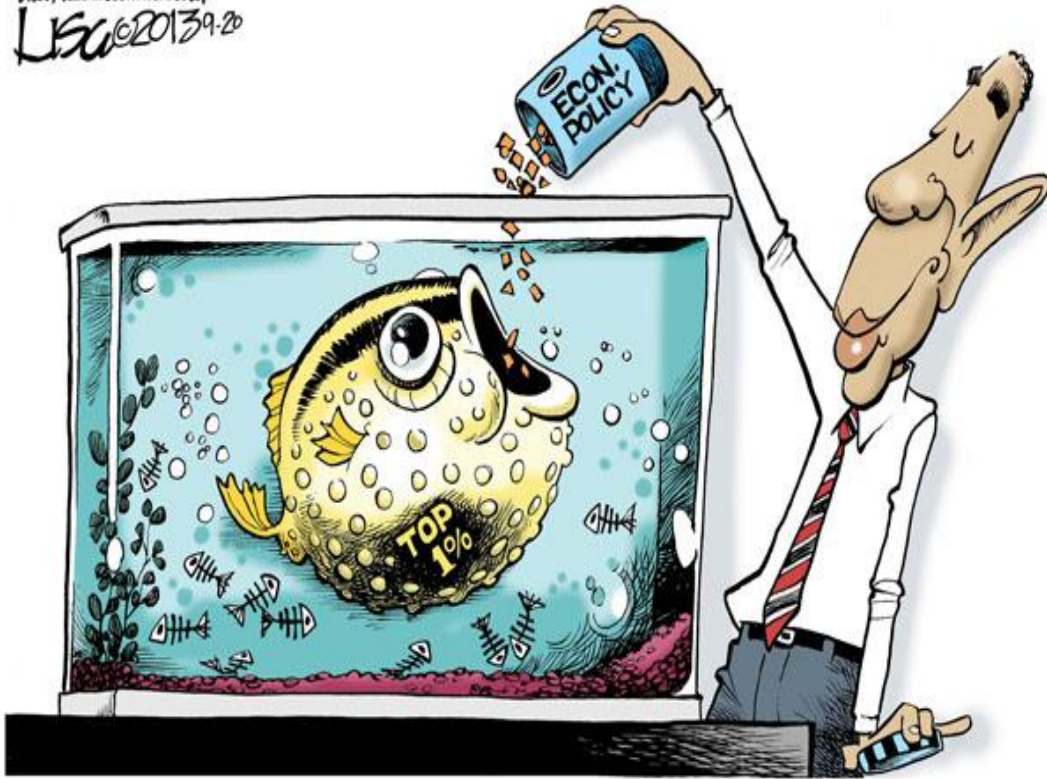
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