

October 13, 2013

Mark Steyn continues with his look at the villainous behavior of the park service.

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But the one place where a full-scale shutdown is being enforced is in America's alleged "National Park Service," a term of art that covers everything from canyons and glaciers to war memorials and historic taverns. The NPS has spent the last two weeks behaving as the paramilitary wing of the DNC, expending more resources in trying to close down open-air, unfenced areas than it would normally do in keeping them open. It began with the war memorials on the National Mall — that's to say, stone monuments on pieces of grass under blue sky. It's the equivalent of my New Hampshire town government shutting down and deciding therefore to ring the Civil War statue on the village common with yellow police tape and barricades.

Still, the NPS could at least argue that these monuments were within their jurisdiction — although they shouldn't be. Not content with that, the NPS shock troops then moved on to insisting that privately run sites such as the Claude Moore Colonial Farm and privately owned sites such as Mount Vernon were also required to shut. When the Pisgah Inn on the Blue Ridge Parkway declined to comply with the government's order to close (an entirely illegal order, by the way), the "shut down" Park Service sent armed agents and vehicles to blockade the hotel's driveway.

Even then, the problem with a lot of America's scenic wonders is that, although they sit on National Park Service land, they're visible from some distance. So, in South Dakota, having closed Mount Rushmore the NPS storm troopers additionally attempted to close the view of Mount Rushmore — that's to say a stretch of the highway, where the shoulder widens and you can pull over and admire the stony visages of America's presidents. Maybe it's time to blow up Washington, Jefferson & Co. and replace them with a giant, granite sign rising into the heavens bearing the chiseled inscription "DON'T EVEN THINK OF PARKING DOWN THERE." ...

Jonathan Last with more on the park service's performance during the shutdown.

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Even so, consider the actions of the National Park Service since the government shutdown began. People first noticed what the NPS was up to when the World War II Memorial on the National Mall was "closed." Just to be clear, the memorial is an open plaza. There is nothing to operate. Sometimes there might be a ranger standing around. But he's not collecting tickets or opening gates. Putting up barricades and posting guards to "close" the World War II Memorial takes more resources and manpower than "keeping it open."

The closure of the World War II Memorial was just the start of the Park Service's partisan assault on the citizenry. There's a cute little historic site just outside of the capital in McLean, Virginia, called the Claude Moore Colonial Farm. They do historical reenactments, and once upon a time the National Park Service helped run the place. But in 1980, the NPS cut the farm out of its budget. A group of private citizens set up an endowment to take care of the farm's expenses. Ever since, the site has operated independently through a combination of private donations and volunteer workers.

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The farm's administrators appealed this directive—they explained that the Park Service doesn't actually do anything for the historic site. The folks at the NPS were unmoved. And so, last week, the National Park Service found the scratch to send officers to the park to forcibly remove both volunteer workers and visitors.

Think about that for a minute. The Park Service, which is supposed to serve the public by administering parks, is now in the business of forcing parks they don't administer to close. As Homer Simpson famously asked, did we lose a war? ...

Ed Morrissey says federal workers have become the president's private army.

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The result was rampant abuses of power, payoffs and kickbacks, and unaccountable performances at the federal level. It took nearly 40 years to transform the federal workforce into an independent and professional corps, and almost 70 years before Congress formally forbade civil-service workers from conducting political activities, through the Hatch Act of 1939.

Seventy-four years later, the civil-service system has been exposed as a failure – at least in this administration. Instead of an independent workforce of professionals who implement federal regulation in an even-handed and competent manner, we have returned to the era of partisan retribution and politically-motivated malevolence.

This goes far beyond the simple incompetence of government eminently displayed by the Department of Health and Human Services in its rollout of the Affordable Care Act exchanges. Despite having three and a half years between the passage of the ACA and the start date of the exchanges, the federal and state websites launched on October 1st – and promptly crashed.

Media outlets tried finding someone, anyone, who successfully navigated the system, only to come up with one person who just happened to be a volunteer at Organizing for America – which spent all year promoting Obamacare. CBS News called this a "unicorn" hunt, while USA Today ripped the Obama administration for the "inexcusable mess" and "nightmare" of the exchanges.

Michael Ramirez, who we see most often as a cartoonist has more. And the first few cartoons today are his also.

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National Review

Park Service Paramilitaries

The government has King John's idea of public lands.

by Mark Steyn

If a government shuts down in the forest and nobody hears it, that's the sound of liberty dying. The so-called shutdown is, as noted last week, mostly baloney: Eighty-three percent of the supposedly defunded government is carrying on as usual, impervious to whatever restraints the people's representatives might wish to impose, and the 800,000 soi-disant "non-essential" workers have been assured that, as soon as the government is once again lawfully funded, they will be paid in full for all the days they've had at home.

But the one place where a full-scale shutdown is being enforced is in America's alleged "National Park Service," a term of art that covers everything from canyons and glaciers to war memorials and historic taverns. The NPS has spent the last two weeks behaving as the paramilitary wing of the DNC, expending more resources in trying to close down open-air, unfenced areas than it would normally do in keeping them open. It began with the war memorials on the National Mall — that's to say, stone monuments on pieces of grass under blue sky. It's the equivalent of my New Hampshire town government shutting down and deciding therefore to ring the Civil War statue on the village common with yellow police tape and barricades.

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Park Ranger setting up Barricades at Grand Teton National Park in Wyoming.

Even then, the problem with a lot of America's scenic wonders is that, although they sit on National Park Service land, they're visible from some distance. So, in South Dakota, having closed Mount Rushmore the NPS storm troopers additionally attempted to close the *view* of Mount Rushmore — that's to say a stretch of the highway, where the shoulder widens and you can pull over and admire the stony visages of America's presidents. Maybe it's time to blow up Washington, Jefferson & Co. and replace them with a giant, granite sign rising into the heavens bearing the chiseled inscription "DON'T EVEN THINK OF PARKING DOWN THERE."

But perhaps the most extraordinary story to emerge from the NPS is that of the tour group of foreign seniors whose bus was trapped in Yellowstone Park on the day the shutdown began. They were pulled over photographing a herd of bison when an armed ranger informed them, with the insouciant ad-hoc unilateral lawmaking to which the armed bureaucrat is distressingly prone, that taking photographs counts as illegal "recreation." "Sir, you are recreating," the ranger informed the tour guide. And we can't have that, can we? They were ordered back to the Old Faithful Inn, next to the geyser of the same name, but forbidden to leave said inn to look at said geyser. Armed rangers were posted at the doors, and, just in case one of the wily Japanese or Aussies managed to outwit his captors by escaping through one of the inn's air ducts and down to the geyser, a fleet of NPS SUVs showed up every hour and a half throughout the day, ten minutes before Old Faithful was due to blow, to surround the geyser and additionally ensure that any of America's foreign visitors trying to photograph the impressive natural phenomenon from a second-floor hotel window would still wind up with a picture full of government officials. The

following morning the bus made the two-and-a-half-hour journey to the park boundary but was prevented from using any of the bathrooms en route, including at a private dude ranch whose owner was threatened with the loss of his license if he allowed any tourist to use the facilities.

At the same time as the National Park Service was holding legal foreign visitors under house arrest, it was also allowing illegal immigrants to hold a rally on the supposedly closed National Mall. At this bipartisan amnesty bash, the Democrat House minority leader Nancy Pelosi said she wanted to “thank the president for enabling us to gather here” and Republican congressman Mario Diaz-Balart also expressed his gratitude to the administration for “allowing us to be here.”

Is this for real? It's not King Barack's land; it's supposed to be the people's land, and his most groveling and unworthy subjects shouldn't require a dispensation by His Benign Majesty to set foot on it. It is disturbing how easily large numbers of Americans lapse into a neo-monarchical prostration that few subjects of actual monarchies would be comfortable with these days. But then in actual monarchies the king takes a more generous view of “public lands.” Two years after Magna Carta, in 1217, King Henry III signed the Charter of the Forest, which despite various amendments and replacement statutes remained in force in Britain for some three-quarters of a millennium, until the early Seventies. If Magna Carta is a landmark in its concept of individual rights, the Forest Charter played an equivalent role in advancing the concept of the commons, the public space. Repealing various restrictions by his predecessors, Henry III opened the royal forests to the freemen of England, granted extensive grazing and hunting rights, and eliminated the somewhat severe penalty of death for taking the king's venison. The NPS have not yet fried anyone for taking King Barack's deer, but it is somewhat sobering to reflect that an English peasant enjoyed more freedom on the sovereign's land in the 13th century than a freeborn American does on “the people's land” in the 21st century.

And we're talking about a lot more acreage: Forty percent of the state of California is supposedly federal land, and thus officially closed to the people of the state. The geyser stasi of the National Park Service have in effect repealed the Charter of the Forest. President Obama and his enforcers have the same concept of the royal forest that King John did. The government does not own this land; the Park Service are merely the janitorial staff of “we the people” (to revive an obsolescent concept). No harm will befall the rocks and rivers by posting a sign at the entrance saying “No park ranger on duty during government shutdown. Proceed beyond this point at your own risk.” And, at the urban monuments, you don't even need that: It is disturbing that minor state officials even presume to have the right to prevent the citizenry walking past the Vietnam Wall.

I wonder what those Japanese and Australian tourists prevented from photographing bison or admiring a geyser make of U.S. claims to be “the land of the free.” When a government shutdown falls in the forest, Americans should listen very carefully. The government is telling you something profound and important about how it understands the power relationship between them and you.

The National Park Service should be out of the business of urban landmarks, and the vast majority of our “national” parks should be returned to the states. After the usurpation of the people's sovereignty this month, the next president might usefully propose a new Charter of the Forest.

Weekly Standard

The Park Police

by Jonathan V. Last

"We are a nation that has a government—not the other way around."

—Ronald Reagan

The conduct of the National Park Service over the last week might be the biggest scandal of the Obama administration. This is an expansive claim, of course. Benghazi, Fast and Furious, the IRS, the NSA, the HHS mandate—this is an administration that has not lacked for appalling abuses of power. And we still have three years to go.

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We're not done yet. The parking lot at Mount Vernon was closed by the NPS, too, even though the Park Service does not own Mount Vernon; it just controls access to the parking lots from the George Washington Parkway. At the Vietnam Memorial—which is just a wall you walk past—the NPS called in police to block access. But the *pièce de résistance* occurred in South Dakota. The Park Service wasn't content just to close Mount Rushmore. No, they went the extra mile and put out orange cones to block the little scenic overlook areas on the roads *near* Mount Rushmore. You know, just to make sure no taxpayers could catch a glimpse of it.

It's one thing for politicians to play shutdown theater. It's another thing entirely for a civil bureaucracy entrusted with the privilege of caring for our national heritage to wage war against the citizenry on behalf of a political party.

This is how deep the politicization of Barack Obama's administration goes. The Park Service falls under the Department of the Interior, and its director is a political appointee. Historically, the directorship has been nonpartisan and the service has functioned as a civil, not a political, unit. Before the current director, Jonathan Jarvis, was nominated by President Obama, he'd spent 30 years as a civil servant. But he has taken to his political duties with all the fervor of a third-tier hack from the DNC, marrying the disinterested contempt of a meter maid with the zeal of an ambitious party apparatchik.

It's worth recalling that the Park Service has always been deeply ambivalent about the public which they're charged with serving. In a 2005 *Weekly Standard* piece about the NPS's plan to reconfigure the National Mall, Andrew Ferguson reported:

The Park Service's ultimate desire was made public, indiscreetly, by John Parsons, associate regional park director for the mall. In 2000 Parsons told the *Washington Post* he hoped that eventually all unauthorized traffic, whether by foot or private car, would be moved off the mall. Visitors could park in distant satellite lots and be bused to nodal points, where they would be watered and fed, allowed to tour a monument, and then reboard a bus and head for another monument. "Just like at Disneyland," Parsons told the *Post*. "Nobody drives through Disneyland. They're not allowed. And we've got the better theme park."

Yes, yes. They must protect America's treasures from the ugly Americans. No surprise then that one park ranger explained to the *Washington Times* last week, "We've been told to make life as difficult for people as we can."

"To make life as difficult for people as we can"—that would be an apt motto for the Obama worldview. And now even the misanthropes at the National Park Service have been yoked to his project. This is the clearest example yet of how the president understands the relationship between his government and the citizenry.

Fiscal Times

How Federal Workers Became Obama's Private Army

by Edward Morrissey



The United States established the Civil Service 142 years ago, in response to the massive corruption that followed from the previous “spoils system” in Washington DC. Prior to that, all federal employees served at the pleasure of the President, and jobs got handed out to those who boosted the fortunes of the party in power.

The result was rampant abuses of power, payoffs and kickbacks, and unaccountable performances at the federal level. It took nearly 40 years to transform the federal workforce into an independent and professional corps, and almost 70 years before Congress formally forbade civil-service workers from conducting political activities, through the Hatch Act of 1939.

Seventy-four years later, the civil-service system has been exposed as a failure – at least in this administration. Instead of an independent workforce of professionals who implement federal regulation in an even-handed and competent manner, we have returned to the era of partisan retribution and politically-motivated malevolence.

This goes far beyond the simple [incompetence of government](#) eminently displayed by the Department of Health and Human Services in its rollout of the Affordable Care Act exchanges. Despite having three and a half years between the passage of the ACA and the start date of the exchanges, the federal and state websites launched on October 1st – [and promptly crashed](#).

Media outlets tried finding someone, *anyone*, who successfully navigated the system, only to come up with one person who just happened to be a volunteer at Organizing for America – which spent all year promoting Obamacare. CBS News called this [a “unicorn” hunt](#), while [USA Today ripped the Obama administration](#) for the “inexcusable mess” and “nightmare” of the exchanges.

Not that the administration didn’t try to make excuses. HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and President Obama both cited heavy site traffic as the reason for the failures, as well as demonstration of the pent-up demand for health-care coverage. That explanation fails to acknowledge that this is not a private-sector commercial web portal selling voluntary products or services, but a government site set up to impose and enforce a mandate to buy required insurance policies. The traffic levels – eight million hits over the first three days – barely surpasses the Drudge Report, and the ACA collected billions in taxes over the last three years to prepare for the rollout.

This, however, pales in comparison to the politicization of the civil service exposed over the last few months at the IRS, and perhaps even more so in the shutdown. In May, the Inspector General for the IRS found that the agency had targeted groups applying for tax-exempt status on the basis of their political beliefs, especially those groups that referenced the Tea Party. Those target lists continued to be used as IRS officials such as Commissioner Douglas Shulman testified to Congress that the agency conducted no such targeting.

Nor was that that the only way in which the IRS scrutinized President Obama’s opposition. [USA Today reported three weeks ago](#) that the IRS specifically targeted groups that had “anti-Obama rhetoric” in their literature.

In one case, with an application from the Patriots of Charleston, the IRS flagged “negative Obama commentary” on their website as a reason to hold up approval for their tax-exempt application. For the Tea Party of North Idaho, “significant inflammatory language, highly emotional language” was enough to start peppering the group with demands to release information on their donors and the companies owned by those donors.

Even this pales in comparison to the example shown by the National Parks Service during the shutdown. There is nothing new about the [Washington Monument strategy](#), of course, which dates back to a 1969 attempt to trim the NPS budget. George Hartzog, then director of the NPS, closed the Washington Monument and the Grand Canyon National Park ostensibly as a cost-saving measure, but really to force the public to pressure Congress to restore NPS funding. Congress relented two weeks later, but Hartzog resigned.

When the shutdown went into effect last week, NPS reacted not by going off the job or closing national parks alone, but by actively blocking access to areas normally accessible 24/7 without impediment. That included putting up signs and guards at the World War II Memorial on the National Mall, despite the fact that (a) the memorial was built with private funds, and (b) there are no gates or barriers under normal conditions at the memorial – nor at the Lincoln Memorial, nor at the Martin Luther King Memorial, both of which were similarly shut down by the National Parks Service.

When people simply moved the barricades to access the memorials, the supposedly shut down NPS arrived on scene to [wire them together](#). When people gathered anyway, the [US Park Police arrived on horseback to disperse them](#). Stephen Hayes asked an NPS spokesperson who ordered these actions, and was told that the Office of Management and Budget – a White House agency – ordered them to barricade the memorials.

It gets even worse than that. Unknown at the time but reported this week, the National Parks Service [chased down a group of senior citizens at Yellowstone National Park](#) when the shutdown commenced on October 1st. After informing the busload of tourists, some of whom were tourists from other countries, that the park was no longer accessible, the rangers locked them into a closed hotel for several hours with armed guards posted at the exits. When finally allowed to get back on the bus and leave Yellowstone, rangers stopped the tourists from pausing to take pictures, chasing after them for “recreating.”

That arguably constitutes kidnapping or false arrest, especially conducted under color of authority for no other reason than to score political points in the shutdown. One of the tourists called it “Gestapo tactics,” and an NPS ranger anonymously [confirmed this as a deliberate strategy by NPS](#). “We’ve been told to make life as difficult for people as we can,” the anonymous ranger told *The Washington Times*. “It’s disgusting.”

It certainly is, and it’s part of a disturbing pattern emerging in the second term of Barack Obama. When law enforcement and tax enforcement become rankly political, Americans can no longer trust in their federal government, even when it’s not shut down – and that won’t stop after Obama leaves office, either. We are getting a clear lesson on the risks of larger government and regulatory overreach, and those risks go far beyond incompetence. Let’s hope this serves as a wake-up call – and let’s demand that Congress hold those accountable in the IRS and National Parks Service for their uncivil service.

Investor's Business Daily

Harry Reid Wants Americans To Suffer From Shutdown

by Michael Ramirez

Word came this week that the National Institutes of Health has suspended therapy-dog visits to sick children at its clinical center because of a 25% reduction in staff, even though volunteers run the program.

Seems the veterinarians who evaluate the dogs have been furloughed. So how about the frequently used dogs that have already been evaluated? No deal.

Last week, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid refused to fund NIH clinical trials for children with cancer. When asked why, if it could mean saving a single child, Reid replied: "Why would we do that?"

These are just kids, after all. Who cares if they're in pain or die because of his intransigence and lack of compassion?

It's comforting to know, however, that the House and Senate gyms are still open, that the government had enough money to buy a mechanical bull and, while the feds barricaded the open-air National Mall and threatened to fine and arrest those who walk there, they'll let an immigration amnesty rally take place on those same grounds.

Growing Debt

After all, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Democratic Sen. Bob Menendez will be in attendance. Apparently, as with ObamaCare, they are exempt from the rules the rest of us must follow.

Then there are reports of the National Park Service kicking families out of campgrounds in the middle of the night and keeping drivers from stopping at turnouts that have views of Mount Rushmore, even though the turnouts are not part of the national park

The House has passed bills to fund the NIH, including its clinical trials and cancer treatments and programs that allow dogs to provide a moment of relief and temporary comfort to suffering children.

The House has also funded the national parks, so they can stay open, vacations won't be spoiled and Americans can visit monuments they fund with their tax dollars and park fees.

But Reid will have none of it. He wants the American people to suffer. It's not his sick child or his vacation or even his money.

We are where we are because the Senate has refused to do its job properly. We have added more than \$6 trillion to our national debt in the last five years, not including the \$80 trillion to \$110 trillion in unfunded liabilities from entitlements before factoring in ObamaCare.

We continue to spend more money than we take in by almost \$1 trillion a year even while revenues are reaching record levels.

How'd He Get Elected?

Reid and President Obama blame the GOP (and it certainly deserves its share), but let's look at the real numbers. The last time Republicans controlled both houses was the 109th Congress under President George W. Bush in 2007. Expenditures then totaled \$2.73 trillion, the deficit was a whopping \$161 billion and the national debt was \$8.95 trillion.

Last year, federal expenditures totaled \$3.54 trillion, the deficit was \$1.089 trillion and the national debt just before we hit the prior debt ceiling was \$16.3 trillion. Expenditures the year before were even worse — \$3.6 trillion — with a deficit of \$1.3 trillion. No wonder Reid refused to pass a budget.

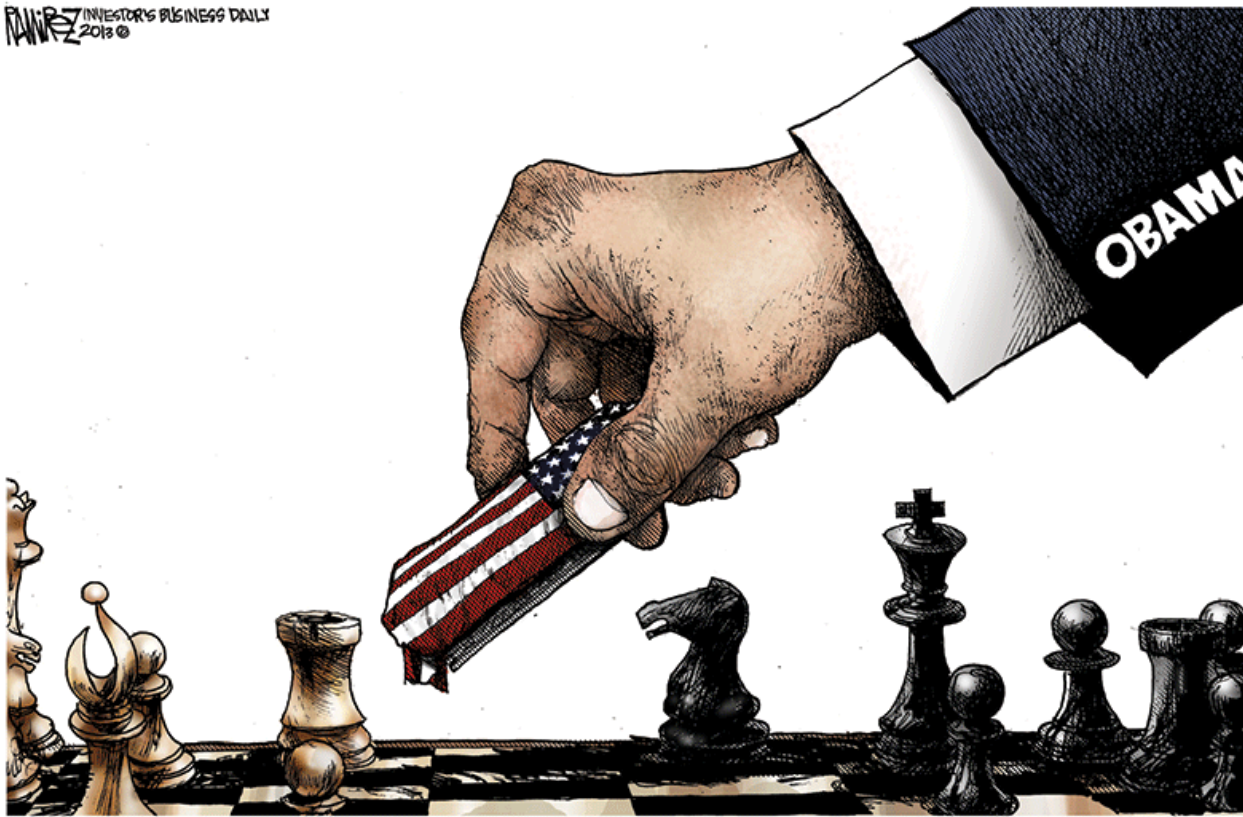
How does someone such as Reid, with questionable judgment and ethics, ever get elected senator, let alone majority leader? What were the other senators thinking? So much for the world's greatest deliberative body.. .

For that matter, how did Reid quadruple his wealth after he became a politician? His income is around \$193,000 a year, yet his net worth has increased from about \$1 million in 1982 to somewhere between \$3 million to \$10 million now.

He must just be a good investor. How many of us can make \$700,000 on land we don't technically own? How many of us can anticipate a bridge paid for with federal funds would be built near 160 acres of our own property, causing its value to soar?

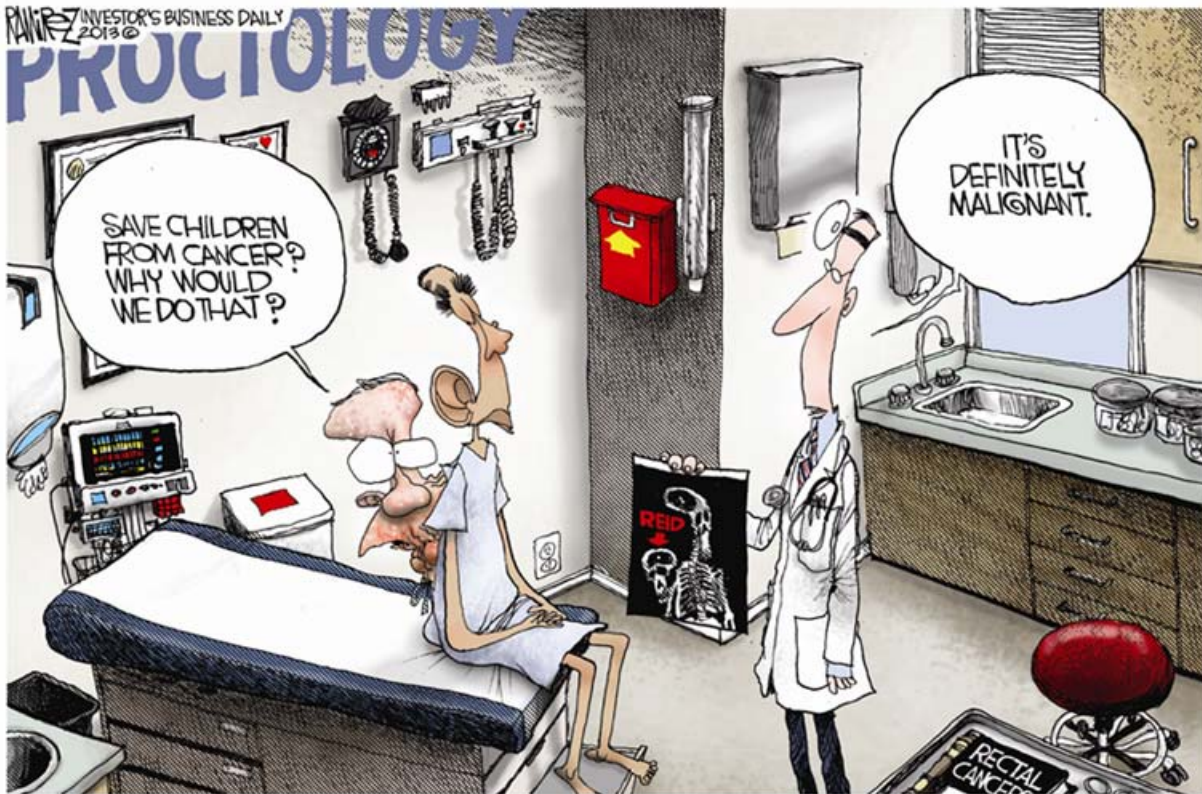
But then, no one knows for sure what Reid's real wealth is because, unlike Mitt Romney, Reid refuses to release his own tax returns. He must be another one of those exempt from the rules everyone else must follow.

Ramirez is IBD's cartoonist and a senior editor.



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