

October 21, 2013

**Mark Steyn** found one item worth celebrating from the shutdown theatre. Then he gets back to Armageddon as usual.

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**WSJ Editors** think the HHS Sec and her aides should be available to answer questions posed by congressional committees.

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**John Hinderaker** posts on the hopelessness created by this administration.

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*Republicans need to have at the very least a proposal to help those for whom Obamacare is unaffordable. They can start with a proposal to allow individuals to escape the insurance that they're being told they must have and is more expensive than their existing insurance. The promise of Obamacare — keep your insurance if you have it — wasn't "lose your coverage and pay more." Republicans should be the heroes of the lower- and middle-class Americans who are being punished by a horribly designed program. (And if sign-ups stay low, the subsidy from healthy young people to poorer, older people will only worsen.)*

*And for those uninsured Americans at or below the poverty line, Republicans should propose that in exchange for states covering individuals up to the poverty line (or higher), the feds would give governors waivers to reduce costs, fight fraud and provide better coverage for less. Reform Medicaid before you expand it. Let the Democrats insist that people who can't afford the Affordable Care Act must sign up or be fined. Let the Democrats be the ones to refuse to improve the Medicaid program. ...*

**National Review** looks askance at the Nobel Peace award.

*The Norwegian Nobel Committee awarded the Nobel Peace Prize today to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The justification for the prize was largely the anti-chemical-weapons group's work in Syria. "Recent events in Syria, where chemical weapons*

have again been put to use, have underlined the need to enhance the efforts to do away with such weapons,” said the Committee.

While there is no doubt that the OPCW is a professional and important organization, it's premature to issue an award before the results can be obtained about the fate of Syrian president Bashar Assad's 1,000 tons of chemical weapons scattered around the country. It is worth recalling that the OPCW and the international community apparently failed to confront Turkey about its alleged use of chemical weapons to target the militant Kurdish group PKK.

This is just the latest episode in a long tradition of the Nobel Committee showering recipients with the Peace Prize before concrete results materialized (e.g., President Obama, the European Union).

The award this year — a kind of mirror image of last year's prize to the EU — is a sign of self-congratulatory failure. The overwhelming deaths (now believed to be near 120,000) and the conflict that's tearing Syria and the region apart were caused by Assad's conventional weapons, supplied by the Russians, Iranians, and Hezbollah.

Here's the problem in a nutshell: Chemical weapons have killed over 1,000, and conventional weapons have murdered over 100,000. Disturbingly, the West and members of the OPCW have played a role in helping Assad gain his chemical capability, anyway. Germany delivered “dual-use” chemical agents to Assad's regime over the years, selling military usage agents to the country as late as 2011, including chemicals that can be used for the deadly nerve gas sarin. The U.S. accused Assad of killing over 1,400 people on August 21 with sarin gas.

My preference, however utopian given the left-leaning tendencies of the Noble Committee, would have been to award the U.S. armed forces the prize. After all, the U.S military has achieved remarkable counterterrorism successes over the years — and its threat, not the OPCW's authority, has made the elimination of Assad's chemical warfare stockpile possible.

The award to OPCW is a feel-good action without substance. It will be interpreted by Secretary of State Kerry, Russian President Putin, and Syria's Assad as their victory. The losers are the Syrian people.

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## National Review

### [Potemkin Parliament](#)

**Washington's governing systems are in a bad way.**

by Mark Steyn

The least dispiriting moment of another grim week in Washington was the sight of ornery veterans tearing down the Barrycades around the war memorials on the National Mall, dragging them up the street, and dumping them outside the White House. This was, as Kevin Williamson wrote at National Review, “as excellent a gesture of the American spirit as our increasingly docile nation has seen in years.” Indeed. The wounded vet with two artificial legs balancing the

Barrycade on his Segway was especially impressive. It would have been even better had these disgruntled citizens neatly lined up the Barrycades across the front of the White House and round the sides, symbolically Barrycading him in as punishment for Barrycading them out. But, in a town where an unarmed woman can be left a bullet-riddled corpse merely for driving too near His Benign Majesty's palace and nobody seems to care, one appreciates a certain caution.

By Wednesday, however, it was business as usual. Which is to say the usual last-minute deal just ahead of the usual make-or-break deadline to resume spending as usual. There was nothing surprising about this. Everyone knew the Republicans were going to fold. Folding is what Republicans do. John Boehner and Mitch McConnell are so good at folding Obama should hire them as White House valets. So the only real question was when to fold. They could at least have left it for a day or two after the midnight chimes of October 17 had come and gone. It would have been useful to demonstrate that just as the sequester did not cause the sky to fall and the shutdown had zero impact on the life of the country so this latest phoney-baloney do-or-die date would not have led to the end of the world as we know it. If you're going to place another trillion dollars of debt (or more than the entire national debts of Canada and Australia combined) on the backs of the American people in one grubby late-night deal, you might as well get a teachable moment out of it.

The GOP was concerned about polls showing their approval ratings somewhere between Bashar Assad and the ebola virus, but it's hard to see why capitulation should command popularity: The late Osama bin Laden's famous observation about the strong horse and the weak horse has some relevance to domestic politics, too. Republicans spent a lot of time whining that, if Obama was prepared to negotiate with the Iranians, the Syrians, and the Russians, why wouldn't he negotiate with the GOP? Well, the obvious answer is Rouhani, Assad, and Putin don't curl up in a fetal position at the first tut-tut from Bob Schieffer or Diane Sawyer.

The thesis of my recent book *After America* is stated on page six thereof — “that the prevailing political realities of the United States do not allow for any meaningful course correction.” That's what the political class confirmed yet again this week. Which brings me to the sentence immediately following: “And, without meaningful course correction, America is doomed.”

Washington's governing systems are in a bad way. Government by “continuing resolution,” a term foreign to most foreigners, ought to be embarrassing to any self-governing, not to say self-respecting, people. Instead, in the course of the “shutdown,” this repugnant phrase advanced to acronymic status — “CR,” as cable news had it, the pundit class lovingly caressing this latest insider jargon with their customary onanistic shiver. Presented as a resolution of the Obamacare/debt-ceiling standoff, the “CR” came, as the car dealers say, fully loaded — including a \$174,000 payment to the widow of New Jersey's multimillionaire senator Frank Lautenberg. Because, even when you're saddling the next generation of Americans with another trillion bucks of debt, six-figure payouts to the relicts of the most exclusive rich man's club in America is just the way it is.

How can you “control” spending under such a system? Congress has degenerated into a Potemkin parliament, its ersatz nature embodied by those magnificent speeches senators give to themselves, orating for the benefit of TV sound bites into the cavernous silence of an empty room, an upper chamber turned isolation chamber. The “law of the land” means machinations and procedural legerdemain culminating in a show vote on unread omnibus fill-in-the-blanks pseudo-legislation to be decided after the fact by the regulatory bureaucracy.

This structural degeneration is a big part of the problem. My friends on the American right fret that if we're not careful we'll end up like Europe. But we're already worse than many parts of Europe, and certainly than the non-European West — by any measure you care to use. According to the IMF, the Danish government's net debt is 10.3 percent of GDP, Australia's is 12.7 percent, New Zealand's 28.8 percent, the Netherlands' 35.5 percent, Canada's 35.9 percent, Germany's 56.2 percent, France's 86.5 percent — and the United States' 89 percent. If you take America's total indebtedness, it averages out to three-quarters of a million dollars per family: We are on course to becoming the first nation of negative-millionaires. But let's just stick with the federal debt, the figure for which those bipartisan schmoozers are officially responsible: In Australia, each citizen's share of the debt is \$12,000; in New Zealand, it's \$15,000 per person; in Canada and Spain, \$18,000; in the United Kingdom, \$28,000; in Germany and France, \$38,000; Italy, \$44,000. And in the United States it's \$54,000 per person — twice as much as Britain, thrice as much as Canada, closing in on five times as much as Oz. On this trajectory, America is exiting the First World.

And that's before counting the "unfunded liabilities" that Washington keeps off the books but which add another million bucks per taxpayer. Nor does it include Obamacare, with which the geniuses of the "technocracy" have managed to spend a fortune creating the Internet version of a Brezhnev-era Soviet supermarket.

I think of recent "left-wing" governments among our allies. Up north, Jean Chrétien was a thuggish wardheeler presiding over a regime of repellent industrial-scale cronyism; Down Under, Kevin Rudd was a uniquely loathsome specimen of a human being, who communicated through a blizzard of effing asterisks and in idle moments ate his ear wax live on camera. Yet Australia was the only Western nation not to go into recession in 2008, and Canada spent the "fat" years of the Nineties paying down the national debt. Imagine that! As my old comrade Kate O'Beirne put it, "If only we could get American conservatives to be as fiscally responsible as Canadian liberals." When I met Kevin Rudd a few years ago, he said to me, "I'm part of the pro-American Left." "Crikey," I replied, "America doesn't have a pro-American Left, and in Europe they don't even have a pro-American Right." I didn't know the half of it: These days, it's not clear to me that the Republican party functions as a pro-American Right. That's to say, Chrétien and Rudd, ghastly as they were, not only did less damage to their national finances than Obama, Reid, and Pelosi but they also did less damage than the GOP. I'm sure they dreamed the usual crazy dreams of wild-eyed lefties, but the system imposed disciplines on them that Washington doesn't — on left or right.

That's the problem. Either you think those numbers above are serious or you don't. And, if you do think they're serious and you're a "lawmaker" (as the *New York Times* quaintly insists on calling our rubber-stampers), when are *you* going to get serious? Next month? Next year? Or shall we all sportingly agree to leave it till 2015 after the bipartisan deal on a \$20 trillion debt ceiling?

## WSJ - Editors

### Sebelius on the Run

#### *The HHS Secretary refuses to testify about ObamaCare's rollout.*

The Affordable Care Act's botched rollout has stunned its media cheering section, and it even seems to have surprised the law's architects. The problems run much deeper than even critics expected, and whatever federal officials, White House aides and outside contractors are doing to fix them isn't working. But who knows? Omerta is the word of the day as the [Obama](#) Administration withholds information from the public.

Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius is even refusing to testify before the House Energy and Commerce Committee in a hearing this coming Thursday. HHS claims she has scheduling conflicts, but we hope she isn't in the White House catacomb under interrogation by Valerie Jarrett about her department's incompetence.

The department is also refusing to make available lower-level officials who might detail the source or sources of this debacle. Ducking an investigation with spin is one thing. Responding with a wall of silence to the invitation of a duly elected congressional body probing the use of more than half a billion taxpayer dollars is another. This Obama crowd is something else.

What bunker is Henry Chao hiding in, for instance? He's the HHS official in charge of technology for the [Affordable Care Act](#), and in March he said at an insurance lobby conference that his team had given up trying to create "a world-class user experience." With the clock running, Mr. Chao added that his main goal was merely to "just make sure it's not a third-world experience."



*HHS Secretary Kathleen Sebelius on Capitol Hill in Washington in April.*



He didn't succeed. Whatever is below third-world standards would flatter the 36 federally run exchanges as they've started up. But perhaps Mr. Chao or someone else, if not Mrs. Sebelius, can answer even the simple question of how many Americans have managed to enroll for coverage. HHS could easily resolve any confusion but it won't even talk to Democratic allies, friendly reporters and what it calls the insurance industry "stakeholders" that it will need to make [ObamaCare](#) work.

No doubt a hearing would be a spectacle—with TV cameras on hand—but Mrs. Sebelius can't hide forever. Even pro-entitlement liberals want to know about what went wrong and why, how much if any progress is being made, and whether the [ObamaCare](#) website Healthcare.gov will be usable in a matter of months—or years.

More disclosure might also help HHS preserve a scrap of credibility, given that none of its initial explanations has held up. Right now, no one trusts a word that emerges from Fortress ObamaCare.

To take one example, this week the Associated Press obtained an internal HHS memo from September 5, 2013 specifying the Administration's monthly enrollment targets—a half-million sign-ups in October, 3.3 million by December 31, and so on. Asked about this by AP, HHS not only declined to say if it is meeting its projections. The department issued a statement claiming that "The Administration has not set monthly enrollment targets." The spokesman did not cite the classic Marx Brothers line, "Who are you going to believe, me or your own eyes?"



Eventually Mrs. Sebelius will have to make a real accounting of this government failure to someone other than the TV comic [Jon Stewart](#), and perhaps she can also explain why the people who can't build a working website also deserve the power to reorganize one-sixth of the U.S. economy. For now, the Administration that styles itself as the most transparent in history won't reveal the truth—perhaps because it is afraid of what the public will find.

## Power Line

### Barack Obama's Era of Hopelessness

by John Hinderaker

Of all the bitter fruit of the Barack Obama disaster, the most bitter may be the sense of hopelessness that has descended on Americans, especially the young. Has there ever been anything like it in our history? Even on the eve of the Civil War, was there this much pessimism about our future? Gallup wasn't around in those days, but I wonder.

For a simple measure of how the Obama administration has crushed any sense of hopefulness in the American people, take a look at the survey that Rasmussen Reports does periodically on whether America's best days are behind her, or still in the future. It's a great question that tells a lot about how Americans are feeling.

Rasmussen last asked the question before Barack Obama took office in August 2008, while the presidential campaign that resulted in Obama's election was in progress. The [result](#):

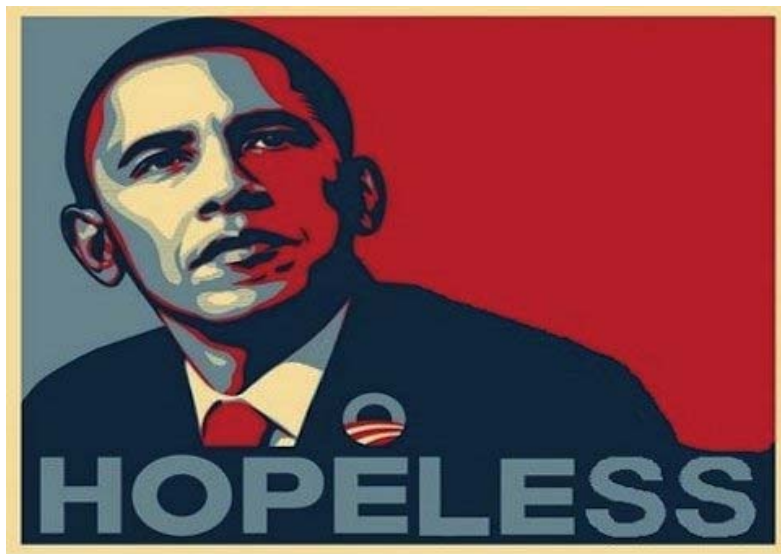
45% of voters think America's best days lie ahead, while 37% think they have come and gone.

That was after nearly eight years of the supposedly disastrous Bush administration—which, by the way, looks more like a golden age every day, compared with what has followed.

Fast forward to [today](#), after nearly five years of the Obama administration. How are Americans feeling about the future?

31% of Likely U.S. Voters think America's best days are still to come... Just over half (52%) think the nation's best days are in the past.

So the Age of Obama has brought the percentage who think America's best days are still ahead down from 45% to 31%, while the number who think our best days are gone has risen from 37% to 52%. Great work, Barry. This is your true legacy: hopelessness.





## Right Turn

### [It's not too late to sink Obamacare](#)

by Jennifer Rubin

In an mortifying display of political cluelessness, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-Fla.) yesterday [pronounced](#) on the topic of Obamacare: “We have missed a golden opportunity to do something about it. But we haven’t given up the fight. The one thing I want people to understand is: They should not feel depressed about this or discouraged about the long term of it. We are going to prevail on this issue. It is just a matter of time. We will prevail because Obamacare is going to be a disaster. And it won’t be long before many people in this town will be scrambling to try to fix it.” *Thunk*. This was the argument for keeping the focus directly on the Obamacare rollout and structural flaws *instead* of the shutdown and debt ceiling.

Maybe it is not too late, however, despite the Republicans’ unnecessary loss, for the GOP to shine the spotlight on Obamacare, convince the public that this is an irreversible mess and compel its delay and even reworking. Republicans should give Rep. Paul Ryan (R-Wis.) the chance to scrape together a micro-bargain on a few items in the budget while the party engages in a nonstop campaign against Obamacare with an eye toward 2014.

[The Post reports](#): “Health and Human Services predicted 500,000 people would enroll in health coverage this month, according to an internal memo obtained by the Associated Press. . . . Achieving that milestone looks, at this point, unlikely.” It sure does, because “state-run marketplaces have recorded just about 150,000 people turning in applications for health coverage. That’s around one-third of the coverage that the administration hoped to see by the end of this month.”

The problem isn’t merely a few stray computer problems. USA Today [reports](#), “The federal health care exchange was built using 10-year-old technology that may require constant fixes and updates for the next six months and the eventual overhaul of the entire system, technology experts told USA TODAY.” The report quotes an information technology executive as warning, “The application could be fundamentally flawed. They may be using 1990s technology in 2.0 world.” The result is a frustrating, time-consuming ordeal for most users: “Recent changes have made the exchanges easier to use, but they still require clearing the computer’s cache several times, stopping a pop-up blocker, talking to people via Web chat who suggest waiting until the server is not busy, opening links in new windows and clicking on every available possibility on a page in the hopes of not receiving an error message. With those changes, it took one hour to navigate the HealthCare.gov enrollment process Wednesday.”

In a wide-ranging examination of the computer issues, healthcare guru Yuval Levin finds that the agency running the exchanges “did not hire a general contractor to manage the exchange project but handled that overall technical management task itself. . . [I]t was a very bad idea and was at the core of the disaster they have so far experienced.” The problems range from the cumbersome system requiring purchasers to first create an account before shopping for plans to the flawed subsidy calculations. (“It’s pretty clear that some actual consumers have made actual purchases with bad information, which will become apparent to them when they get their first

bills.”) And then it seems the exchanges don’t interface with insurance companies. Only four state-run exchanges are properly working. The result is a problem that goes to the heart of the entire undertaking:

People who are highly motivated to get coverage in a community-rated insurance system are very likely to be in bad health. The healthy young man who sees an ad for his state exchange during a baseball game and loads up the site to get coverage—the dream consumer so essential to the design of the exchange system—will not keep trying 25 times over a week if the site is not working. The person with high health costs and no insurance will. The exchange system is designed to enable that sick person to get coverage, of course, but it can only do that if the healthy person does too.

But that is not the only set of problems. If you manage to get through to look at the insurance options, the sticker shock is striking, upsetting the conviction (held by both liberal advocates and conservative opponents) that the Obamacare deal was so attractive that Americans would get “hooked” on the benefits and then rise up in fury if they were curtailed. It might be that this is a rotten deal only liberal welfare staters could impose on the country.

First, there are millions of [uninsured](#) at or below the poverty line for whom subsidies are not available or for whom the Obamacare gold-plated insurance is too costly. Then there are the stories [like this one](#):

Andy Mangione, who lives in Louisville, Ky., with his wife Amy and their two boys, is doing the same thing millions of people are doing — trying to figure out how much his insurance will cost under ObamaCare. Before the exchanges opened, his insurance company said his rates would soar. But now that there are subsidies, he’s been trying for days to find out how much he would get.

“To logically compare plans, I’ve been calling them every day since October 1st,” says Mangione, “several times a day on some occasions. Sometimes enduring 45, 50 minute holds, half an hour holds.” Although Kentucky officials were unable to give him a firm number on his subsidy because of repeated IT problems, they did refer him to a Kaiser Family Foundation site, which suggests his subsidy will be \$414 a month — on a premium of \$868. “What I’m concerned about is our doctor visits, our emergency room visits, and what I’m paying in my premium,” says Mangione. The problem is the plan closest to what he has now will mean a 24 percent increase over his current payment — after subsidies. And his co-pay for emergency room visits almost tripled — from \$125 to \$350 — an important factor for a family with two young boys.

That doesn’t even get to the young, healthy people who would rather self-insure, just as they have been doing all along.

With some direction from leadership, Republicans previously at each other’s throats can unite around the common goal of showing *why* Obamacare is untenable. They’ve made the philosophic and economic arguments but now they have the goods, the evidence. That — and the Ryan negotiations — should occupy the lion’s share of Congress’s time until the end of the year.

Republicans need to have *at the very least* a proposal to help those for whom Obamacare is unaffordable. They can start with a proposal to allow individuals to escape the insurance that

they're being told they must have and is more expensive than their existing insurance. The promise of Obamacare — keep your insurance if you have it — wasn't "lose your coverage and pay more." Republicans should be the heroes of the lower- and middle-class Americans who are being punished by a horribly designed program. (And if sign-ups stay low, the subsidy from healthy young people to poorer, older people will only worsen.)

And for those uninsured Americans at or below the poverty line, Republicans should propose that in exchange for states covering individuals up to the poverty line (or higher), the feds would give governors waivers to reduce costs, fight fraud and provide better coverage for less. Reform Medicaid *before* you expand it. Let the *Democrats* insist that people who can't afford the Affordable Care Act must sign up or be fined. Let the *Democrats* be the ones to refuse to improve the Medicaid program.

It would be nice if Republicans had thought strategically before embarking on the idiotic shutdown gambit, if leadership had a six-month or one-year plan for taking out Obamacare and tackling the debt, if the GOP had used its governors to highlight the Obamacare misery inflicted on the public, and if the contrast had been made between right-wingers urging political suicide (from the safety of their think tanks and political action committees) and the smart, capable lawmakers who make the case against Obamacare while offering voters something better.

The good news is that it's not too late. The facts favor the Republicans; Democrats should be defensive and scrambling to clean up their mess. The way one beats the Dems and saps the strength of the destructive right wing is by filling the political vacuum with good policy, smartly offered and relentlessly repeated. It sure beats the catastrophe of the last few weeks.

## National Review

### [Did Assad Just Win the Nobel Peace Prize?](#)

by Benjamin Weinthal

The Norwegian Nobel Committee [awarded the Nobel Peace Prize today](#) to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). The justification for the prize was largely the anti-chemical-weapons group's work in Syria. "Recent events in Syria, where chemical weapons have again been put to use, have underlined the need to enhance the efforts to do away with such weapons," said the Committee.

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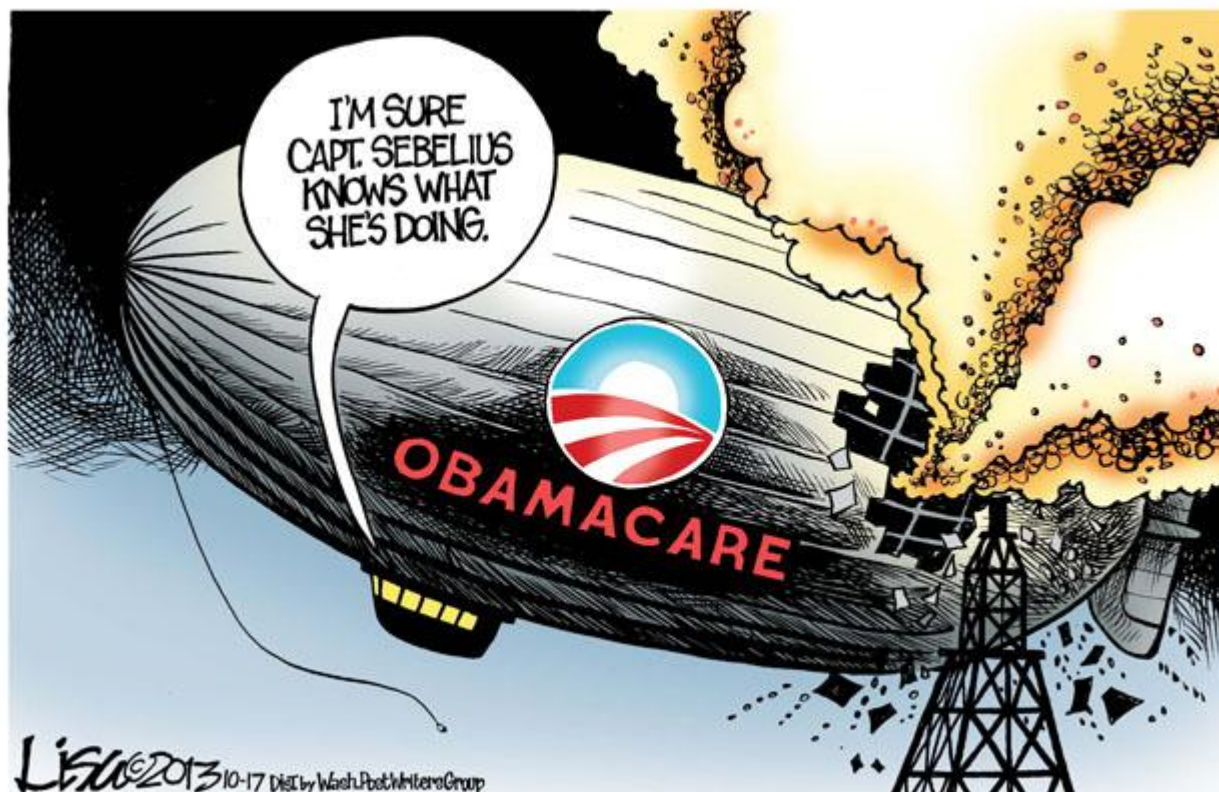
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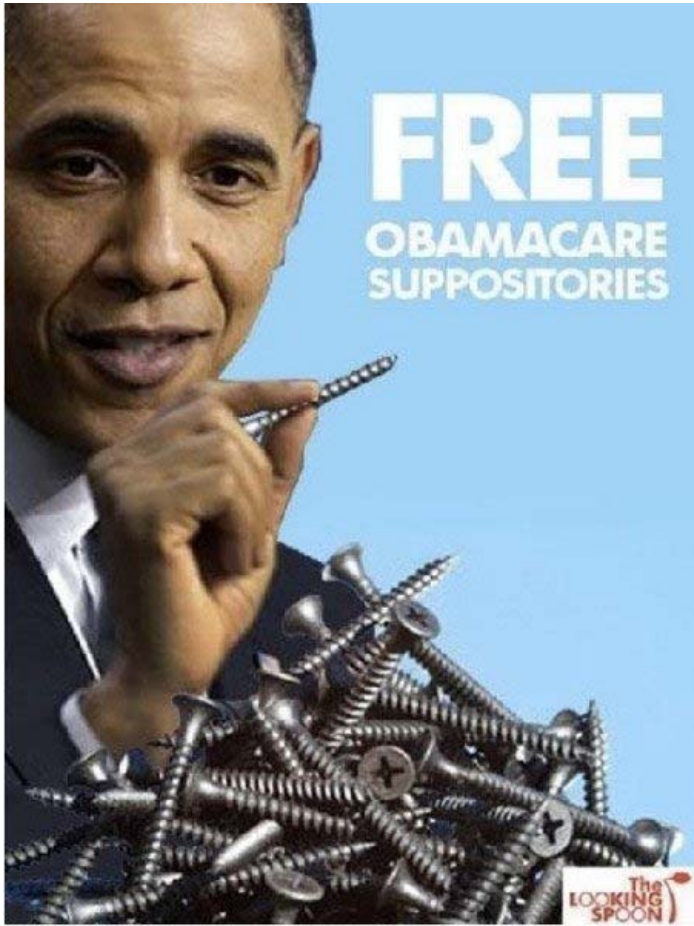
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*Benjamin Weinthal is a Berlin-based fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. Follow Benjamin on Twitter @BenWeinthal.*







FUTURE ACHIEVEMENT-Free NOBEL PRIZES